Talking Women. An Exploration Of Maltese Women's Discourse With Regards To Gender.

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Abstract

This research aimed to explore how Maltese women identify and define their gender whilst exploring the role of discourse in understanding and performing our gender. The analysis of the interplay between gender, identity and discourse was central in this study. Feminist post-structuralist and intersectional theoretical frameworks were, therefore, adopted so as to enable me to question and deconstruct taken-for-granted knowledge, especially about gender, whilst analysing the production, effect and perpetuation of dominant discourses.

A qualitative methodology was adopted, allowing me to explore the constructionist conceptualisation of gender, particularly the interplay between theory and practice, by looking at how the participants interpret their gender and how this interpretation is based on their social context. The latter was informed by adopting a combination of feminist post-structural, intersectional and symbolic interactionist epistemology. This research was an opt-in study, with the inclusion criteria being that the participants had to identify as women between the ages of 20 and 40, had to either be Maltese or have been brought up in Malta and be willing to sit for two interviews each. Twenty-four interviews were carried out with twelve women; unstructured interviews were used for the first round of interviews with the intent to create a discussion with each participant about their definition of what it means to be a woman. After the first interviews were transcribed and key notions identified, an interview guide was created for the second round of interviews; the aim behind the second interview was to gain more insight into concepts which were prominent in the first interviews, such as social expectations and the distinction in discourses used when referring to men/masculinity and women/femininity. Moreover, the second interview served to delve deeper into any other identities, be them social or role identities, that the participants held so as to further analyse the impact of intersecting identities on gender. The responses gathered from both interviews were analysed using feminist post-structuralist discourse analysis so as to be able to explore the discursive construction of subjectivity (Baxter, 2008) more deeply. The following notions were identified: how discourse acts as social practice, gender performativity, the intersectionality and multiplicity of participants' identities, participants' construction of meaning within the local context, and the deconstruction of taken-for-granted notions as well as the participants' reflexive process. The results centred around two main umbrella themes: dominant discourses and social expectations. For each theme, various other sub-themes were analysed whilst reviewing the role of the presented data in the participants' identification and construction of their gendered identity.

The main findings of the research suggest that the participants are very aware of the patriarchal constructs that still dominate our society; however, they felt as if nothing is being done to dismantle such patriarchal ideologies, which result in misogynistic behaviour. This finding did not come as a surprise since people working in the field of gender have been discussing and investing in activist work against such dominant behaviours; however, the interesting aspect of this finding is that even women who are not experts in the field and/or are not invested in feminist activism are aware of these dominant discourses and social constructs. This knowledge seems to have enabled the participants to engage in agentic behaviour whereby they resist dominant discourses in their own ways. Other findings revolve around gender performativity and the notion that not only trans* women have to pass but also cis-women have to be able to "pass" as a woman to be considered as such based on dominant ideologies of what a woman is and what a woman ought to do. A noteworthy finding of this study highlights the dominance of heteronormative discourses since even women who were in same-sex relationships, when speaking about relationships, especially about the household division of labour and rearing of children, spoke only about couples being in opposite-sex relationships. Social expectations related to childbearing and domesticity were highlighted within this research, with participants emphasising how women in most scenarios are caught in a double-bind, where they are shamed if they do and shamed if they do not.

Based on findings obtained from this study, several recommendations for research were drawn up, such as research with regards to everyday personal agency, which could shed light on how individuals resist and deconstruct dominant gender ideologies in their everyday performativity of gender. Another suggestion is that future research could focus on the role of heteronormative discourses and their impact on the formation and social expectations of same-sex couples. Furthermore, recommendations made for policy changes consisted of proposals to tackle patriarchal ideologies, which are still prevalent within institutions such as the legislative and judiciary.

Keywords: Womanhood, Gender Identity, Dominant Discourses, Gender Performativity, Feminist Post-Structuralist

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List of Abbreviations

LGBTIQ: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Queer

Cis: Cis-gender

Trans*: Individuals who do not identify as cis-gender, including but not exclusive to transgender and non-binary individuals.

FPDA: Feminist Post-structuralist Discourse Analysis

Chapter 1- Introduction

1.1 Introduction

"One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" is de Beauvoir's (1956, p. 273) response to a question that she poses, like many other feminist philosophers, "what is a woman?" (p. 13), while Butler asserts that this becoming is achieved and sustained through a "stylised repetition of acts" (1988, p. 519), acts which are moulded by dominant discourses and manifested through social constructs and expectations. Apart from alluding to the process of becoming, de Beauvoir, whilst answering the above question, highlights how the same processes that enable women to achieve their identity place us at a disadvantage since, on a social stance, men are seen as the norm, whereas women are placed as the "other". Decades after de Beauvoir's and Butler's statements, in a global climate which seems to be in a state of backlash towards women's rights (Radačić & Facio, 2020) and gendered identities, inquiring about the interplay between dominant discourses, especially those stemming from patriarchal ideologies and their role in creating social constructs and expectations, is still relevant. For better execution of the aforementioned inquiry, the role that intersecting social identities (Crenshaw, 1989) play in creating and sustaining the project of womanhood needs to be analysed.

This introductory chapter aims to set out the framework of this research by presenting the aim of the study and the theoretical standpoints adopted to explore the presented aims. My positionality and background will also be outlined since the latter had a major influence on the aims and execution of this study. Gender, discourse and identity were central in this thesis; hence, a brief overview of how these concepts were understood and approached will be presented so as to set the pace for the following chapters. Before describing the subsequent chapters, an overview of the major social issues which women were experiencing in Malta whilst conducting this research will be set out since these events were not only mentioned by the participants but also mark their lived experience and impact their gendered identity.

1.2 Aim of the Study

This research aims to explore how Maltese women identify and define their gender whilst it inquires about the role of discourse in understanding and performing our gender.

1.3 Positionality

My professional, activist, and academic career and interests informed the topic and area chosen for this research. Whilst growing up, I was always interested in and questioned why women were always regarded as being less than men or why society split its expectations of individuals based on their sex. However, when I started my social work training, I became more aware of the role that sex and gender have on one's place in society and how something as basic as one's biology gives a person privilege over another. One of the core social work values which I hold very dearly is to be a catalyst for social change, so eventually, when I came out as a lesbian, I became involved in local LGBTIQ activism and consequently was also involved in setting up and providing social work services for the same community. My personal journey, work and discussions with Transwomen and Queer individuals have enabled me to reflect on society's construction of what it means to be a woman, as well as who gets to tick the box or who is deemed to be unfit for the title. As we are aware, society can be quite rigid in its gender formulation at the expense of those who do not fit in the box; hence, these social constructs do not only limit trans* individuals but also cis-gender persons who might not be (or wish not to be) performing their gender according to dominant ideologies. Moreover, society sets out several social expectations based on one's gender, and once again, those who do not fulfil these expectations are shunned or viewed negatively. Whilst being aware that identifying as a woman can place one within a social group with some commonalities from the initial stages of this research, I was mindful that not all women experience the same reality and this reality is shaped by the intersection of gender with other social realities, such as social class, education, race, age and ability amongst others. Moreover,

even though I hold social identities which might place me in a disadvantaged position, I am conscious of my privilege, which was gained from the possibilities to further my academic knowledge.

My professional and academic experience led me to adopt a feminist post-structuralist standpoint when understanding gender and the construction of gendered identities; in the following section and more so during the literature review, the relevance of this theoretical framework for this research will be explored.

1.4 Theoretical Standpoint And Outline Of Prevailing Concepts

When doing initial literature research about the topic at hand, it was found that most studies dealing with discourse and gender identity either approached the subject from a socio-linguistic perspective or, if approached from a gender perspective, the main focus of the research was the formation of trans* or non-binary identities. On the other hand, those studies which focused on women's identities mainly addressed one aspect of discourse, for example, the impact of violence on women's identities. Since I did not want to limit my literary knowledge to specific discourses so as not to approach the study with further pre-conceived[1] ideas of the dominant discourses shaping women's gendered identity, it was decided that the literature review would focus on the theoretical underpinnings of the three main concepts (gender, discourse and identity).

[1] As a researcher I do asknowledge that I already have pre-concieved ideas about the possible social constructs which might be shaping Maltese women gender identities since I was also brought up and live within the participants' social context.

1.4.1 Feminist post-structuralist framework

According to Scott (1988), poststructuralism can assist feminists in several ways: by examining patriarchy in its various contemporary manifestations (institutional, ideological, organisational, and subjective) and how these expressions have evolved over time; by embracing a perspective that views the world as composed of "pluralities and diversities rather than unities and universals" (p. 33); by challenging hierarchies, particularly those connected to "masculine universals and feminine specificities" (p. 33); and by providing a new lens through which to comprehend and act on gender in various contexts and political arenas. Similarly, Weedon (1987) contends that feminist poststructural theory is valuable if it can "address the questions of how social power is exercised and how social relationships of gender, class, and race might be transformed" (p. 20).

To engage in the above-mentioned analysis, feminist post-structuralists adopted key concepts from poststructuralism, such as language, discourse, difference, and deconstruction. Language is a crucial concept for feminist post-structuralists, as it promotes the investigation of how social meaning is constructed (and in what context), how meanings change over time, how certain meanings become normalised while others fade away, and what this process reveals about the mechanisms of power creation and perpetuation (Scott, 1988). In poststructuralism, there is a clear distinction between language and discourse: "Discourse is not a language of a text but a historically, socially, and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories, and beliefs" (Scott, 1988, p. 35). Other philosophical standpoints view discourse as "outside of human invention" (Scott, 1988, p. 35); hence, it is regarded as objective knowledge beyond contestation. However, works like those of Foucault challenge dominant discourses and the assumptions underpinning them. This exposes the power of dominant ideologies and the lack of scrutiny of such discourses.

Difference, as understood in the post-structuralist analysis of language, implies that "meaning is made through implicit or explicit contrast, that a positive definition rests on the negation or repression of something represented as antithetical to it" (Scott, 1988, p. 37). To analyse the meaning of something, one must also inquire about what it opposes or negates to identify the social contexts in which it operates. Therefore, within the context of this research, one must analyse patriarchal discourses and how discourses related to sexual differences influence meanings that seem unrelated to gender or the body. In this way, the meaning of gender is perceived through various cultural representations, as these same cultural representations are re-creating and establishing how the relationships between men and women are structured and comprehended. Moreover, these oppositions are also hierarchical, with one meaning seen as dominant or primary and the opposing term seen as subordinate or secondary. Yet, "the first terms depend on and derive their meaning from the second to such an extent that the secondary terms can be seen as generative of the definition of the first terms"(Scott, 1988, p. 37); this is why deconstruction is necessary to expose how the meanings of both terms are constructed and operate, as the deconstruction process entails "the reversal and displacement of binary oppositions" (Scott, 1988, p. 37).

Adopting a feminist post-structuralist perspective allows one to recognise that identity categories like "woman" are fluid and ever-changing (Baxter, 2016). Even though in poststructuralism, the "subject" is constructed within discourse, Weedon (1987) emphasises that individuals are not mere products of discourse; they are also thinking, feeling, and acting agents with the capacity to challenge or subvert contradictory subject positions. This standpoint values "women's lived, embodied reality and their subjective, emotional and cognitive experiences since the ways in which individuals make sense of their lives is a necessary starting point for understanding ways in which gendered discourses continue to structure social realities" (Baxter, 2016, p. 43).

Subjectivity is not a fixed entity but is constantly being reconstructed through our thoughts and actions. As a result, different forms of subjectivity emerge within different cultural and historical contexts. The specific form of subjectivity we adopt depends on the discourse we are engaging with at any given time. This dynamic nature of subjectivity can lead to internal conflict as we become aware of alternative realities and perspectives that challenge our existing understanding of ourselves. This process of encountering conflicting discourses can motivate us to resist dominant narratives and social practices, particularly those related to gender identity and womanhood. This resistance, as conceptualised in post-structural feminism, is seen as an act of agency (McNay, 2016). Agency does not necessarily involve an overt rejection of oppressive norms or a public act of defiance. It can also manifest as an internal displacement, a subtle shift in how we perceive and position ourselves within the discourses that shape our lives. This internal transformation can lead to a sense of emancipation as we break free from the constraints of dominant narratives and embrace a more authentic sense of self.

While dominant social discourses constantly attempt to solidify the meanings of gender identities like femininity and masculinity, individuals are not solely bound by these narratives. Instead, they possess the agency to "adopt, negotiate, contest, or overturn dominant subject positions" (Baxter, 2016, p. 43). This agency enables individuals to navigate and adapt to shifting power dynamics within various discourse contexts. In particular, women and girls can leverage this flexibility to "escape victimhood" (Baxter, 2016, p. 43). This standpoint emphasises how gender discourses interact with other institutional discourses to reinforce women's subordinate positions. The primary concern is not the inherent power imbalance between genders but rather how these discourses entwine to create and maintain systems of power that disadvantage women.

1.4.2 Gender

Even though in the literature review, an exploration of gender as understood from different perspectives is addressed, the adopted theoretical framework within this research demarcates the notion that gender is created and enacted throughout our everyday experiences, which is impacted by dominant discourses, cultural representations and historical context. Within this study, the social and discoursive construction as well as the performative aspects of gender, are central.

Butler emphasises that gender performativity is not a matter of free choice but is constrained by prevailing cultural norms, laws, and taboos that define masculine and feminine identities (Jagger, 2008; Salih & Butler, 2004). De Beauvoir, in particular, highlights the role of the body in this process, suggesting that the body serves as a medium through which cultural expectations are embodied (De Beauvoir, 1956). This means that the body is not simply a passive vessel for gender but is actively shaped and moulded by societal norms. The biological aspects of the body are not denied, but de Beauvoir argues that they are interpreted and imbued with cultural meaning through this process of embodiment.

Butler concludes that what we perceive as "nature" or essential gender characteristics is, in fact, a consequence of how others respond to our gendered performances in relation to other aspects of our identities (Butler, 1990). This highlights the fluidity and social construction of gender identities. Butler contends that the social pressure to adhere to gender norms is immense, and individuals who deviate from these norms are often subjected to criticism and ridicule. This pressure stems from the deep-seated belief that gender is a fixed and essential aspect of human identity. As a result, questioning or challenging gender norms can be perceived as a threat to one's very existence (Salih & Butler, 2004).

The performance of gender is also intertwined with other aspects of our identity, such as class, race, and ability, and these factors influence how we express our gender (Butler, 1990). The way we perform

gender affects how others perceive and respond to us, which in turn reinforces or challenges our gendered identity (Butler, 1990). This dynamic interplay suggests that innate biological factors do not determine our understanding of gender, but gender is rather constructed through social interactions and the responses of others. Moreover, gender emerges through discourse, particularly in discussions about sexed identities. Discourse has the power to construct "sets of social relations in which sex or gender becomes a significant dividing line; those social relations, in turn, appear to be both natural and inevitable" (Brickell, 2003; Lawler, 2014, p. 129).

1.4.3 Discourse

Discursive practices are not merely ways of communication; they are social phenomena that shape our understanding of the world around us. Foucault (1978, p. 166) argued that discourse is "a system of ordered statements which construct an object"; these statements, in turn, inform our actions and beliefs, reinforcing social norms and hierarchies. Foucault recognised the close relationship between discourse, knowledge, and power, whereby he asserted that power is not a static entity but rather a dynamic force that operates through social interactions and discourse. Power is not centralised in a single institution but is dispersed throughout society, existing in all our interactions, "power is everywhere; not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another" (Foucault, 1978, p. 93). Those who control discourse hold power over knowledge production and dissemination, shaping our understanding of reality.

According to Foucault, knowledge is not something that individuals construct independently but rather an external force imparted to us through society and the social groups we belong to. This knowledge is presented in structured sets of "statements" or "claims" (Miller, 1990, p. 117) that are not objectively true or false but rather reflect the power dynamics within the society. Foucault emphasises that

knowledge is not imposed by an authoritative figure but rather becomes ingrained in our discourses, shaping our understanding of reality. This is where the true influence of power lies, as Foucault often uses the term "power/knowledge" to describe this symbiotic relationship. This pervasiveness of power makes it difficult to escape its influence. However, Foucault also recognised the potential for resistance. By challenging dominant discourses and creating new ones, individuals and groups can disrupt established power structures and shape a more equitable social order.

1.4.4 Identity

Identity within this study is understood and reviewed by looking at how the dialogical and social aspects impact its formation. The dialogical aspect was addressed by looking at theories such as dialogical self theory, which attests that the self is made up of multiple I positions which are autonomous, "the I has the possibility to move from one spatial position to another in accordance with changes in situation and time" (Hermans, Kempen and Van Loon, 1992, as cited in, Hermans, 2001, p. 248); the I shifts between different opposing positions and is also able to give each position a voice so that a dialogue between the different positions can be established.

Within the dialogical self-theory, the I-positions, apart from being dynamic, are multifaceted, reflecting both internal (reflexive) and external (social) positioning influences (Hermans & Gieser, 2012; Raggatt, 2011). The self develops through interactions with the social environment, resulting in the formation of I-positions that are situated in specific contexts and times. As I-positions are appropriated, they become integral components of the self, influencing our sense of identity and agency. The embodied I has the capacity to shift between I-positions, navigating the dynamics of social power and influence. On the contrary, the (dis)identification process reinforces positive I-positions and relegates negative I-positions to the periphery of self-conception (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). Internal conflicts among I-positions can lead to the formation of new personal positions, either through the creation of new I-positions or the reaffirmation of existing ones (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010; Raggatt,

2012). Under certain conditions, these conflicting positions can find a resolution in a third position that de-escalates the tension between them (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). This ability to navigate internal conflicts and find common ground among I-positions contributes to a more integrated and harmonious sense of self.

Hermans (2001) proposed the concept of the meta-position, which enables individuals to observe, reflect on, and evaluate their own I-positions. This meta-position facilitates self-awareness, critical reflection, and informed decision-making. Self-reflection can occur either in the moment (during an action) or after the action has concluded (Hermans & Gieser, 2012). In the former, individuals take a "helicopter view" to make immediate adjustments, while in the latter, they engage in deeper reflection to identify areas for improvement. This meta-position promotes personal growth and continuous self-improvement.

Stryker and Burke (2000) reviewed identity and identity formation from a more social perspective, and even though they saw the self as being formed of multiple identities, the impact of social expectations on identity formation was addressed further. For them, one's identity was made up of "distinct networks of relationships in which they occupy positions and play roles" (Stryker, S. & Burke, 2000, p. 286; Stryker, S., 2008). Identity could be divided into:

a) role identity that is internalised meanings attached to the different roles one has within the social structure; hence, a mother role identity may involve the meaning of care provider (Stets & Serpe, 2013);

b) group identities "are those meanings that emerge in interactions with a specific set of others like our family, work, group and clubs" (Stets & Serpe, 2013, p. 38). Group identities are different from social identities since the latter would categorise individuals according to their identification with social categories (Stets & Serpe, 2013);

c) and person identities as unique characteristics which one sees in themselves. Even though person identity distinctively defines the person, the individual would still be internalising culturally recognised characteristics (Stets & Serpe, 2013).

Stets and Burke (1996) emphasise the importance of examining gender both at the macro level (as a social structure) and the micro level (as an identity). Analysing gender solely at the macro level, as a position in society, fails to account for individual agency and the ways in which individuals interpret and enact gender roles. Conversely, focusing solely on gender as an identity without considering the broader social context overlooks the influence of societal norms and expectations on individual behaviour.

According to Carter (2014), a more comprehensive understanding of gender can be achieved by adopting a performative approach. This perspective recognises that gender is not a static trait but rather a dynamic process that is enacted through individual interactions and shaped by societal expectations. By incorporating both macro and micro levels of analysis, researchers can gain a more nuanced understanding of how gender is constructed and negotiated in everyday life.

1.5 Women's Socio-Political Context Whilst Conducting The Research

Our perceptions and the discourses we engage in are a product of our broader social, political and cultural context. Throughout this research, these contexts experienced significant shifts not only on the local level but also globally. When COVID-19 hit in 2020, the world as we knew it had to change, and for better or worse, this pandemic brought social, political, and cultural issues that had been lying idle for several years further to the forefront. The local context within which this research takes place has experienced several shifts over the past years; however, it is still somewhat conservative and very

much linked to a religious dogma when it comes to women's rights and the roles that women perform within society. In the past twelve years, Malta has shifted from an island where divorce was still illegal in 2011 to one with the most progressive LGBTIQ rights within the European Union. However, same progressive standpoint cannot be claimed for women's rights and freedoms. To frame the social contexts of when this research was being carried out and to give context to some of the responses received from the participants, the social, political and cultural context of Malta and Europe between 2018 and 2023 will be briefly outlined.

Since 2014, Malta has been granting more rights and civil liberties to LGBTIQ individuals, placing it as one of the top EU member states in such respects (ILGA Europe, 2023). However, granting these rights does not automatically mean a shift towards a more egalitarian society. For the purpose of this study the definition of patriarchy used is the one defined by Walby as "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (1990, p. 20). As per Walby, patriarchy is sustained through six structures, that is, patriarchal relations: in the mode of production, paid work, the state, male violence, sexuality and cultural institutions. All of these six structures can still be very much seen and felt within the Maltese context, as the following chapters will demonstrate.

Locally, the public sphere is still seen as the masculine sphere, whereas the private sphere is seen as the women's domain[2]. For instance, according to the Gender Equality Index (2019a), Malta was the 22nd country in the EU in the area of power, and even though there were more women elected in parliament in 2018 (15%) compared to 2005 (9%), fewer women were holding ministerial roles[3]. To mitigate this discrepancy and to encourage more women to participate further in the political sphere, the Gender Balance in Parliament reform was presented in 2019. Even though this reform was based

[2] 42% of women, as opposed to 25% of men, spend at least one hour per day providing care and education for their family members (European Institute of Gender Equality, 2019b)

[3] From 18% in 2005 to 12% in 2018 (European Institute of Gender Equality, 2019a)

on four pillars ranging from creating a strategy to promote gender mainstreaming in parliament to supporting parties in training and mentoring women who wish to start a political career, the most discussed was the constitutional reform, which would allow for a gender corrective mechanism. Even though this reform aimed to increase women's representation in parliament, it does not explicitly mention women but states that it aims to reach a 40% balance of the genders if only two parties are elected[4]. Both political parties agreed with this reform and it was adopted for the first time in the election which took place in February 2022. As highlighted in the report on the consultative document, Malta has had 72 years of status quo where only 26 women were elected; hence, a more significant change is needed not only on a political level but on a social and cultural level.

The status quo of male dominance can also be observed in the social context to the detriment of women, especially when these women are victims of power and control, leading to intimate partner violence or even femicide. Between 2018 and the beginning of 2023, there have been nine cases of femicide in Malta, with two of these cases shocking the nation more than the rest. Paulina Dembska's gruesome sexual assault and murder were carried out on the 2nd January 2022, in a public garden in Sliema (Times of Malta, 2022). As a result of this murder, an amendment was added to the criminal code that allows the judge to issue a sentence of imprisonment for life in case of femicide (Government of Malta, 2019). The same amendment addresses notions linked to the crime of passion, which are usually presented by perpetrators in order to attain a more lenient sentence (Government of Malta, 2019). Another femicide which had shocked the local community was that of Bernice Cilia (Cassar) on 22nd November 2022, even though she had made several reports to the police about her abusive husband, limited action was taken, leading to her being shot several times by the same perpetrator while she was on her way to work. Whilst the second round of interviews were taking place, the femicide of Sion Grech was being heard in court. Sion Grech was a transwoman who, in 2005, was stabbed seventeen times, and her body was dumped in a field close to a main road. Her case took

[4] Malta to date has a two-party system.

eighteen years to be prosecuted, even though the suspects were questioned by the police the same month the murder took place. The accused were found not guilty because the woman who witnessed the murder could not recall all the exact details while giving her testimony fifteen years after the event took place, and the medical examiner contradicted the witness's testimony of where the murder happened (Brincat, 2023; The Malta Independent, 2023). Notwithstanding these murders and other incidents which were prosecuted, the sentences given to perpetrators leave much to be desired, even when the court finds the perpetrator guilty of rape or intimate partner violence.

The notion of power and control is not only seen or felt in relationships but it is also seen in the way policies are enacted. Malta is still one of the only countries in the world where abortion is not legal, even though statistics show that women in Malta have abortions either by going abroad or by ordering abortion pills online[5]. Whilst this research was taking place, the debate about abortion gained some traction due to the case of Andrea Prudente, an American woman who travelled to Malta whilst pregnant in June 2022. During her holiday, Andrea started experiencing complications with her pregnancy which could have resulted in a deadly infection; however, since the fetus still had a heartbeat, the doctors refused to terminate the pregnancy, even though the fetus had a minimal chance of survival (Euronews, 2022). Eventually, Andrea was granted permission to go to Spain to receive the necessary treatment needed. As a result of this case, amendments to the criminal code with regard to the strict anti-abortion laws were proposed in parliament. These amendments would grant medical professionals legal protection by clarifying that terminating a pregnancy to safeguard the pregnant person's life would not be considered a crime (Bencharif, 2022). The latter led to several heated nationwide debates, which were characterised by the leader of the opposition party seemingly mocking Prudente[6] because she should have been prudent and not travelled 20 hours for a babymoon

[5] Dibben et al. (2023) found that in 2021, 261 individuals contacted Women on Web to request pills for at-home abortions. This study showed a significant increase in these requests during the COVID-19 period since women could not travel abroad for such services.

[6] Prudente means prudent in Italian, the Maltese translation of the word ("prudenti") sounds phonetically the same as the Italian word.

(Times of Malta, 2022). In November 2022, the government proposed a bill to amend the Criminal Code (Bill 28), making it legal for doctors to provide abortions to pregnant women whose lives or health are in immediate danger. However, abortion would remain illegal in all other circumstances. The proposed bill created several controversies and, as a result, was amended, leading to stricter procedures than the ones that were already in place. The amended bill, which passed into law in June 2023, states that in instances where a pregnant person's life is acutely imperilled, and the fetus has not yet reached the stage of viability, a doctor may legally terminate the pregnancy. However, doctors must first obtain approval from a three-doctor medical panel before proceeding with an abortion (Government of Malta, 2023).

These events were happening in tandem with one of the most recent life-altering experiences the world has experienced, a pandemic that continued to impact women's and marginalised groups' lived experiences further. The lockdowns that characterised this period placed women at more risk of abuse and additional isolation, leading to another type of pandemic, a shadow pandemic, which did not stop with the end of lockdowns or the release of COVID-19 measures. Victims of intimate partner violence during this period were at risk of further abuse due to several factors, such as: being forcefully confined in the same space as the perpetrator for an extended period of time; heightened stress levels as a result of the then-current social, economic and psychological factors; lack of opportunity to escape abuse and reduction in contact with the outside world (Sacco et al., 2020). Prior to the pandemic, one in three women were victims of intimate partner violence (UN Women, 2022). In an article published towards the end of 2020, statistics already showed that intimate partner violence had increased between 25 to 33% globally (Boserup et al., 2020) while local statistics show that reporting of domestic violence increased by 24% in 2020 (Crime Observatory Malta, 2022). Statistics published by UN Women show that COVID-19 impacted women's safety overall since more women think that sexual harassment in public has worsened, more women feel unsafe walking alone (even during the day), and more women say that household conflicts have increased (UN Women, 2021).

In various other situations, literature shows that the more intersectionalities one belongs to, the more vulnerable they are to falling victim to discrimination or marginalisation; hence, it stands to reason that gender and sexual minorities were also very much impacted by COVID-19. Studies carried out since the onset of the pandemic show it was another instance where individuals from gender or sexual minorities were disproportionately impacted compared to cis-gender and/or heterosexual individuals (Drabble & Eliason, 2021). The study by Nowaskie and Roesler (2022) shows that gender minority individuals[7] were the worst impacted by this pandemic, experiencing the highest impact on physical health, mental health, financial stability, the meeting of basic needs and social connectedness when compared to cisgender sexual minority individuals and cisgender heterosexual individuals[8]. Most of the statistical data compiled during COVID did not ask for gender identity and/or sexual orientation; hence, it seems that this intersectional aspect was ignored. The latter is especially concerning when one considers that prior to COVID-19, individuals belonging to these minorities already experienced health disparities when compared to their cis-gender and/or heterosexual counterparts, including underlying conditions such as asthma, hypertension and smoking (Nowaskie & Roesler, 2022). Moreover, pre-covid statistics already showed that LGBTIQ individuals have a higher rate of mental health issues, placing them at a further disadvantage since this pandemic exacerbated issues such as anxiety and depression (Nowaskie & Roesler, 2022). Apart from the chronic stress experienced by LGBTIQ+ individuals stemming from belonging to a minority, they now had to face added stressors resulting from losing their social support due to lockdowns and social distancing (Kidd et al., 2021). Additionally, lockdown might have meant that the latter would have to spend considerable time at home, which might expose them to further homophobia and transphobia (Drabble & Eliason, 2021).

[7] In the mentioned study gender minority individuals were taken to be individuals who do not identify as exclusively cis-gender.

[8] This cohort was the cohort with the least impact scores.

1.6 Overview of Chapters

While being aware that the literature about the subject at hand is extensive, I will present the literature reviewed that enabled me to build the background literary research to compile such a study in the following chapters. I made the decision to split the literature into three chapters so as to be able to focus my review of the literature which addresses the aims of this study; the first literature review chapter (Chapter 2) addresses gender; a distinction is made between perspectives which highlight biological or sexual differences and those which look at gender as socially constructed. Furthermore, this literature review chapter explores the two central standpoints adopted in this research: intersectionality and post-structural feminism. This chapter concludes by looking more closely at gender as performative by exploring in more detail how one does one's gender and the dynamics which impact such performativity. In chapter three, literature linked to discourse and gender is presented, where first discourse, as understood from a post-structuralist perspective, is discussed, followed by readings about queer linguistics. Whilst being aware that this study does not look at discourse from a linguistic perspective, the points presented by queer linguistic authors present notions which are very relevant in the deconstruction of gender and taken-for-granted discourses such as heteronormative discourses. Lastly, literature about the interplay between identity, gender and discourse focuses on the role of discourse in producing and reproducing both gender and identity. The third chapter of the literature review (Chapter 4) focuses on the self by first presenting theories that look at the self as being polyphonic by addressing perspectives such as pragmatism and dialogism; this is followed by a more thorough review of the dialogical self theory and social identity theory. The construction of identity as both an internal process and a social one are central to this study since the formation of gendered identities is both a personal as well as a social endeavour. This chapter is concluded by looking at the relevance of reflexivity to understanding one's gender, gendered identity, and their construction.

Chapter five presents the epistemological framework and methodology undertaken in the construction and execution of this research. A qualitative methodology was deemed the most appropriate data collection method to best address both the epistemological framework adopted and the nature of this study. Data collection methods are outlined by first describing purposive sampling and its relevance for this research as well as giving an in-detail account of the data collection methods used. This section describes how unstructured and structured interviews were used to inquire and gain in-depth insight into the participants' gender identity formation and definition and the impact of dominant discourses on such formation. This will be followed by an outline of feminist post-structuralist discourse analysis and an overview of how this analysis was adopted in this research. Moreover, the study's ethical considerations and methodological limitations are put forward. This chapter concludes by outlining the presentation of the results.

The data analysis is presented in chapters six and seven, where the participants' responses are presented and consequently analysed by linking them to studies about the subject matter. The data obtained from the participants shows a clear interplay between dominant discourses, social expectations and the impact of the latter notions on gender and gendered identities; hence, it is deemed fit to first present data analysis about discourses by addressing themes such as male privilege and patriarchal discourses, female objectification, especially sexual objectification and how the latter leads to stranger harassment and violence against women. The theme of self-surveillance is analysed by addressing self-surveillance and clothing, as well as the impact that victim blaming has on women and our safety concerns. Dominant discourses and female sexuality are analysed by looking at the dichotomous discourses used to describe and regard male versus female sexual activities; this is followed by an analysis of heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality, where participants' responses are presented about their perception of the ways through which patriarchal ideologies are detrimental not only to women but to anyone who does not fit into the rigidly constructed gender binary. This leads to further discussion and analysis about gender performativity and how the participants are doing their gender. The last theme within this chapter addresses agency and backlash

where the different ways in which the participants showed resistance or agency against dominant discourses is analysed; as well as what kinds of backlash women who resist dominant discourses experience and how they encounter this within our society. The second chapter of data analysis addresses social expectations and identity. Within this chapter, generational influence and the impact of gendered socialisation are scrutinised, followed by an analysis of the gender roles and social expectations which are still imposed on women, such as how women ought to behave; women are still perceived as being the main child rearers leading to a lack of balance between opposite-sex couples when raising children. It also examines the domestic and employment expectations upon women. Furthermore, the internalisation or rejection of the previously mentioned social constructs is analysed. In the theme of the identities held by the interviewed women, intersecting identities are analysed and an assessment of the impact of internal (personal) and external (social) positions on the women's I-positions is made.

In the concluding chapter, chapter eight, the key findings are presented which address: the social expectations experienced by women and how these impact our lived experience; how dominant discourses re-enforce patriarchal ideologies by posing limits on gender performativity as well as continuing to reproduce heteronormative constructs as the norm; and the correlation between gender identity and reflexivity. Moreover, recommendations for research and policy change are put forward, followed by limitations of the study and how these have been mitigated.

1.7 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, an initial presentation of the undertaken study is put forward by highlighting the aim of the study, my positionality within this study as well as how the latter led me to the chosen theoretical standpoint. Furthermore, a brief overview of the salient concepts of gender, discourse and

identity is presented, followed by an overview of the local socio-political context during the years this study was conducted, concluding with an overview of the following chapters.

Chapter 2- Literature Review: Gender

2.0 Overview of the Literature Review Chapters

As mentioned in the introduction chapter, during the initial search for the literature review, it was observed that most studies on discourse and gender identity either examined the topic from a socio-linguistic angle or focused on the formation of trans* or non-binary identities when viewed through a gender lens. Studies centred on women's identities often explored only specific aspects of discourse, such as the effects of violence. To avoid a narrow focus and preconceived notions about the dominant discourses shaping women's gendered identities, the literature review was instead directed towards exploring in quite some detail the theoretical foundations of the three key concepts: gender, discourse, and identity. This resulted in a lengthy literature review.

The following three chapters will explore pertinent literature to highlight prior research conducted in the area and indicate which areas need further research. The literature presented within the three literature review chapters (Chapters 2, 3 and 4) was first divided on a macro aspect; this was done by looking at three umbrella concepts that would best address the topic at hand. The identified macro concepts were Gender, Discourse, and the Self and each topic was further subdivided, allowing me to delve deeper into specific concepts and theories. The notion of gender was explored by looking at how womanhood or being a woman was defined through different perspectives; finally, intersectionality and feminist post-structural theories were analysed in further detail. The concept of discourse was reviewed from a post-structuralist perspective, leading to theories discussing identity, gender and discourse. The final chapter of this review deals with the self, examined from a pragmatic standpoint, where a thorough explanation of *dialogical self* is conveyed; after addressing the self from an introspective dimension, literature about the self as being formed through social interactions is presented, and finally, identity and reflexivity are addressed.

2.1 Introduction

The history of women and womanhood is a history that moves parallel to but also in opposition to mainstream history. As will be seen in this chapter, women, even though a central group of society, have been silenced, ignored, undermined and underrepresented. These statements do not solely represent times gone by; they resonate and are still valid even today. Women's history is a history that moved along with societal developments; however, it is also a history that moved or is still trying to move in opposition to society's practices, dichotomies and patriarchal practices.

Most of women's history is narrated and defined through a male narrator, whereby women, instead of being the protagonists of their story, are portrayed as 'the other', or a lesser being since being male was perceived as the norm. This situation persists even today, where women in several contexts are seen through labels ascribed to them over the years. Even though society claims it has moved past these dichotomous positions, they are still very evident when women do not perform their gender or gender roles according to society's expectations. One of such dualities ascribed to women is the image of woman as a virgin or a sinner, a duality stemming out of Judeo-Christian tradition, where women are seen either as saintly who can do no wrong (as the depiction of the Holy Mary) or the daughters of Eve, who are the weaker sex, who cannot resist evil and who are ready to lure men towards sin (Capern, 2008; LeGates, 2001). In this tradition, the good woman/ wife had to be the opposite of Eve, that is obedient and silent; however, it was assumed that women would resist this since they were naturally disobedient and prone to sin. This voicelessness also meant that women had/ have no say regarding their bodies, their reproduction and their indoctrination. Following the Judeo-Chrisitan tradition, one can see that women are not only created after men (Adam) but from him; hence, one might claim that this further justifies the subordination of women to men (LeGates, 2001). This notion of inferiority to men was already highlighted by Aristotle, who thought women's biology was the reason for their inferiority (LeGates, 2001). According to him, women lack prudence and judgment, two characteristics

essential to exercise authority, and a lack of judgment suggests a lack of self-control, hence a lack of control over passion.

Biology is another dualism attributed to women: being either emotional, hence lacking rationality, or manipulative, that is, manipulating men in doing their bidding. According to Aristotle, since women are driven by their emotions, they should not be the ones ruling the state but are more suited for the domestic sphere (Capern, 2008). The notion of men being suited for the public sphere, whereas women's place is within the private sphere, is one that we are still facing in this day and age. Looking at recent statistics (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022b), one can see that women are not the ones holding power in society and the balance of power is far from equal.

The persistence of these labels linked to women demonstrates that patriarchal concepts are so interwoven in the discourse and social structures that are still present even to this day. Furthermore, one cannot explore the notion of gender without acknowledging that how we see, speak about, and perform gender depends on the social constructs we live in.

To be able to address from where the above-mentioned dualities were constructed, one would need to take a closer look and inquire, What is a woman? What makes one a woman? Are women just a product of their biological characteristics? Is it a psychological factor that makes different sexes behave in different ways? Or is womanhood socially constructed? Can women be treated as equals, or will we remain a 'lesser' being because of the patriarchal society we live in? These are questions that have intrigued theorists from various fields for centuries, so much so that a whole movement was created to answer these questions and combat discriminatory ideologies against women. In the following sub-sections, different perspectives will be presented to address how women, womanhood and gender are viewed from different feminist perspectives by first looking at proponents who claim that the main

difference between males and females is a sexual one, whilst other theorists claim that the notion of womanhood and gender are socially constructed. Since this research adopts an intersectional and poststructuralist standpoint, these two perspectives are presented in more detail in their respective sub-sections. The last sub-section within this theme looks in more detail at gender identity especially the performance and performative aspects of our gender production.

2.2 Sex, Gender or Gender Identity

In the following paragraphs, the notion of gender or womanhood will be presented from different theoretical perspectives; a reference will also be made to the underlying principles of different feminist viewpoints about the subject matter. First, the notion of sexual difference, that is, gender, is seen as based on sexual/ anatomical differences will be presented by addressing theories such as psychoanalytical ones and their impact on women's studies, as well as their criticism and theories/ research which stemmed out and developed further the notions presented by the latter perspectives. In the second part of this sub-section, gender as a social construct will be presented by looking at the impact society and social interactions have on gender and on women's lived experience, as well as how society created and is still perpetuating patriarchal notions through the social construction of gender.

2.2.1 Sexual Difference

One of the earliest debates that have characterised the view of how we perceive sex and gender is the nature debate. According to Laqueur (2012), the way biological sex is perceived is the result of shifts within the early modern period. Before the Enlightenment period, sex was viewed through a one-sex model, that is, there is one sex (male), and female's bodies were seen as a lesser version; however as

of the eighteenth century, a two-sex model was adopted,[9] which sees female's bodies are disproportionately opposite to male's bodies (Laqueur, 1992). However, thinking of sex as a two-sex model (that is, male and female) is also not an accurate representation, since even if sex is defined on the basis of "chromosomes… hormones… gonads… internal morphology… external genitalia… or secondary sex characteristics" (Hawkesworth & Disch, 2016, pp. 5, 6) one would have a spectrum of at "least five sexes – and perhaps even more"[10] (Fausto-Sterling, 1993, p. 20). A theory that used sex differences as its starting point was psychoanalysis which was pivotal for our current understanding of the topic at hand.

One of the most notorious theorists who studied and influenced significantly the way women were viewed was Sigmund Freud, whose phallocentric theory revolved around the notion of women as lacking or as being inferior (Alsop et al., 2002; Chodorow, 2004; Turkel, 2000). This inferiority originated from the fact that they did not have a penis, and as a result, women were in constant penis envy, which was reduced only through marriage whereby they could 'gain' a penis through their husband or their male children (Chodorow, 2004; Hunter College Women's Studies Collective, 1995). Furthermore, this standpoint sees man as the norm, whilst women are a puzzle that needs to be explained (Moi, 2004). According to Stone (2016), there is a distinction between sexual difference and anatomical sex difference in Freud's work. Sex difference is given at birth, whereas sexual difference is acquired through a complex process of erotic development, through which boys and girls develop their desires, and includes the different ways that these desires are structured and the different ways "their psyches become organized around these desires"[11] (Stone, 2016, p. 876). It is important to note that sexual difference is not the same as gender because gender is the social expectations as well as roles

[9] Even though there was a shift to two-sex model the one-sex model did not disappear (Laqueur, 1992).
[10] Inquiring and challenging the notion of naturalisation of sex was one of the common characteristics amongst the feminist theories from the 70s onwards (Hawkesworth & Disch, 2016). This demonstrates that dimorphism is not a natural one but human made. These characteristics will be discussed in more detail further on in this chapter.
[11] This would mean that sex is fixed; however, sexed identities are 'volatile' due to their instability and lack of completeness since sexed identities are based on desires.

associated with being male and female. As a result, one's personality is shaped according to society's expectation of the perceived gender; on the contrary, "Freud's perspective is that the psyche has its own dynamics, possibilities, and pathways, whatever gender norms prevail socially" (Stone, 2016, p. 877). So, we take on masculine and feminine roles because we first attain the physical identity of male and female. According to Stone's (2016) interpretation of Freud, the psychical difference is not based on social difference; rather, society has to adapt to the psychical difference. In this perspective, the psyche is not solely part of the mind but a combination of physical and mental attributes.

Critics of the study of the psychology of the sexes state that this theory has been limited since the origin of such a perspective is male dominance, not a gender-neutral stance (Chodorow, 2004). Moreover, critics claim that this perspective states that sexes are seen as existing and distinguished with regards to the other; hence 'male' gains meaning when compared to 'female' so does masculine against feminine (Chodorow, 2004). Even though this theory depicts women as lesser, it acted as a catalyst for other theories and a starting point for other theorists, especially Feminist theorists. Their work moved away from Freud's and focused on the different aspects that lead women to have an inferior position in society, which is culturally and socially perpetuated, rather than solely based on their anatomy. Such theorists were Karen Horney and Clara Thompson, whose work focuses more on the cultural and social impact on women. Horney was the first to link women's position in society with culture (Lips, 2005). She moved away from the notion that instinctual drives are the source of human behaviour, and instead, she postulated that one's behaviour is a result of one's own experience within a cultural context (Chodorow, 2004; Kelman, 1967). According to Horney, children face two potential dangers within their environment, devaluation and sexualisation; Horney believes that in our culture, girls experience them both (Lips, 2005). Girls are more prone to devaluation since, culturally, boys are preferred over girls; furthermore, families tend to treat girls as if their sexuality was the most important aspect of their identity (Kelman, 1967). Hence, according to Horney, girls are more likely to develop neurotic personalities not because they are biologically different from boys, but because, culturally,

they are treated as lesser beings (Alsop et al., 2002; Lips, 2005). She also stated that women depended on men due to their lack of social and economic independence and that masochism resulted from this dependency rather than as a reaction to penis envy (Hunter College Women's Studies Collective, 1995). Hence, this seems to suggest that if society changes, these traits would also change (Hunter College Women's Studies Collective, 1995). On the other hand, Thompson stated that women saw that men had more power culturally, socially and economically, highlighting that women's envy was reality-based, that the penis is a symbol of social superiority, not a psychological or biological one (Turkel, 2000). Furthermore, women's unequal social position and lesser self-esteem is the result of their social devaluation and denial of their sexuality (Turkel, 2000).

Jacques Lacan, on the other hand, moved away from linking psychoanalysis and its interpretation of women through culture by shifting the focus on how women are interpreted or defined through language. For Lacan, the phallus is a sign of sexual difference; of absence (as it leads to one's separation from the mother); difference of exclusion from our parents' relationship; and, it is also a sign of the father whereby the father is a metaphor for society's rules and laws (Hunter College Women's Studies Collective, 1995; Moi, 2004). As a result of the phallus, we understand the notion of difference, exclusion and absence; hence we start to understand language, which is also based on differences, exclusion and absence (Moi, 2004). For Lacan, rational thinking is phallic hence 'masculine', whilst the 'feminine' is what is absent or lacking (Alsop et al., 2002). According to him, gender identity exists only through language or the symbolic realm, since it is through language that the inequality between masculinity and femininity or gender categories is shown (Stone, 2016), and where man is taken as the norm (Hunter College Women's Studies Collective, 1995). Lacan explains that women are absent in language and try to find themselves through the in-between of language, which is rational/masculine (Alsop et al., 2002; Moi, 2004). As a result of this search, 'masculinity' and 'femininity' emerge as unequal but still complementary (Alsop et al., 2002). Furthermore, for Lacan, women can become subjective or of significance through the phallus; through her desire for a man, a woman desires the

phallic term, the societal image and the power given to the phallus (Stone, 2016). Lacan's theory was very much critiqued by the French Feminist movement, especially by theorists such as Luce Irigaray, who states that Lacan fails to see women as an entity per se and sees women as defective versions of men (Stone, 2016).

According to Irigaray, women are either left out of theory or, when included, they are seen in comparison to men (where most of the time they are compared to the negative elements), which makes women be seen as the other (Burke, 1981). Irigaray (1985) states that women are buried in culture because they cannot represent difference or what she refers to as "the other of the other" (p.90); instead, they have to represent the reflections of men 'the other of the same'. Burke (1981) in citing Irigaray, stated that "the male sex has taken unto itself the privileged status of "oneness"" (Burke, 1981, p. 289). As a result, the 'symbol of subjectivity' is modelled after a male body part, and there is not something that is equivalent to the phallus, which represents a female body part that empowers women (Stone, 2016). This demonstrates how women are classified as objects rather than subjects, and any situation linked to speaking or thinking/rationality is linked to males (Irigaray, 1985). Irigaray states that the feminine has always been conceived of and constructed not only as in opposition to masculine but also as an inferior to him. The notions of male, female, masculine, feminine organise society in a hierarchical binary, and this binary is at the basis of Western culture's symbolic order. According to Stone's (2016) interpretation of Irigaray, all other constructs are based on this oppositional binary gaining a sexed meaning "mind/body, culture/nature, reason/emotion, reality/appearance, truth/deception, good/evil, active/passive and order/chaos" (p. 881). According to Irigaray (1985), the castration complex is about fear of the loss of identity, whereby women threaten men with disintegration and hence have to be controlled. Furthermore, for Irigaray, as read by Burke (1981), "a woman's language might articulate experiences that are devalued or not permitted by the dominant discourse" (p. 289), especially the relationships of women with their mothers and with other women since these have been condemned by psychoanalytic theory. For Irigaray, patriarchy can be challenged

by creating a feminine space which can create a revolution in language; she stresses the need to move away from a language of difference, which places women as inferior and more towards a language whereby women are recognised as the same (Burke, 1981). According to Stone's reading of Irigary, sexual difference is different from social gender on several accounts; firstly, since the symbolic order stems out of the psyche of the subject, it is not exactly linked to the social element. Additionally, "men and women assume different subject-positions by taking on these symbolic meanings" (Stone, 2016, p. 884), it is only after taking on these subject-positions and after assuming such identities that we take on gender norms. Moreover, our sexed identities are physical, whereas the mind adopts gender roles. The concept of sexual difference was adopted by English-speaking feminists for various reasons, mainly because it demonstrated that the "psyche is not reducible to society, and that masculinity and femininity have deep and enduring roots in our psyches" (Stone, 2016, p. 875). Another reason is that questioning sexual difference enabled feminists to question the symbolic order and how this is embedded in language; hence making language[12] not simply a neutral tool of communication. Lastly the notion of sexual difference has "helped feminists to rethinking embodiment beyond gender/sex distinction" (Stone, 2016, p. 875).

Even though psychoanalysis is mainly associated with sexuality, theorists such as Nancy Chodorow and Jean Baker Miller moved away from this notion. Their emphasis was more on relationships and issues of intimacy. Chodorow converts the oedipal crisis into an emotional one, not a sexual one (Chodorow, 2004). She inquires how, in modern society, women are still doing the mothering on their own (Chodorow, 2004). Furthermore, she states that this is the result of patriarchy since mothering is still seen as socially inferior (Alsop et al., 2002). Chodorow's work looks at the psychology of women from the internal object-relational world rather than from a focus on genital distinction (Chodorow, 2004). She moves away from biological theories, which state that women consciously choose to become mothers, but rather, she explains that this desire for motherhood is taught unconsciously to girls

[12] Language in this case is seen as anything that represents us, not only spoken language.

(Ehlers, 2016; Else-Quest & Shibley Hyde, 2018). She states that the different ways through which the mother love-object relationship with the child is resolved results in a different psychical structure in men and women (Chodorow, 2004). Chodorow defined the object-relational as "each person has a uniquely created internal world of unconscious fantasies, about self and other, mother, father, siblings, both whole object and part object, created through a history of projective and introjective affective fantasies" (Chodorow, 2004, pp. 187, 188). Chodorow believes that girls shift simultaneously within a triangular relational experience between the mother and father, whilst the boy has to repress his emotional attachment; therefore, he is not involved in the same emotional experience and lacks the emotional breadth (Alsop et al., 2002; Turkel, 2000). As a result of this repression, boys do not identify themselves through relationships like girls (Ehlers, 2016; Turkel, 2000). Boys achieve masculinity by distancing themselves emotionally from the mother, a process which leaves them unable to deal with emotional matters, especially since society sees men who are in touch with their emotional side as not 'real men' or effeminate (Alsop et al., 2002). Furthermore, for men to counteract the fear of the oedipal mother, women have to be dominated so as to enable them to fully repress and detach themselves from the mother's dependence (Turkel, 2000). This means that even though boys can establish autonomy more easily than girls, their gender identity is not as stable as females (Alsop et al., 2002; Hunter College Women's Studies Collective, 1995). Chodorow highlights that since there is never a complete separation between the mother and her daughter (since society does not demand it) (Else-Quest & Shibley Hyde, 2018), the daughter would remain preoccupied with relationship issues and, as a result of this non-autonomy, women long for more relatedness with their partners. If their partners are men, this relatedness would be difficult to achieve since men are taught to move away from the emotional connection (Alsop et al., 2002). Hence, according to Chodorow, although heterosexual women remain so, they look for other women to fulfil/support their emotional needs (Else-Quest & Shibley Hyde, 2018; Turkel, 2000). For Chodorow, if parenting was shared equally, there would not be a production of a perceived inferior gender since the rearing of children would no longer be linked only to women (Ehlers, 2016). This would impact not only gender norms but also the division of labour and gender identity (Ehlers, 2016).

Moreover, Chodorow (2004) sees gender as made up of a number of "constitutive ingredients, or components" (p.181), and each individual combines and shows specific personal versions of these components, which leads to the person's individual experience of gender. She also claims that one cannot separate the psychological experience of sex and gender from the cultural and linguistic one "since these categories are both driven by ordinary anatomy and named and created within culture" (Chodorow, 2004, p. 188). Else-Quest & Shibley Hyde (2018) argue that the question raised by Chodorow as to why women are still doing the mothering examines a more significant issue. Mothering enables the division of labour, since women are committed, sole caregivers, men can do the other jobs needed by society, this also enables the devaluing of women (Else-Quest & Shibley Hyde, 2018). Chodorow was critiqued for not recognising the fluidity of gender identity and nurturing capacities and furthermore, exploring families from a heterosexist bias (Else-Quest & Shibley Hyde, 2018). Chodorow is described as being over-optimistic in her idea that changes in rearing children will actually result in psychical changes in men (Alsop et al., 2002). Another criticism is that Chodorow's theory does not consider intersectionality of race and social class on gender (Else-Quest & Shibley Hyde, 2018).

Baker Miller, Chodorow's predecessor, states that both autonomy and attachment are essential to both sexes; she highlights that women live in a male-dominated culture that goes against women's "psychology of non-dominance, mutuality and relatedness" (Turkel, 2000, p. 232). Hence according to Baker Miller, women are defined by a culture that neither values nor supports or respects them (Turkel, 2000). Baker Miller did not try to create new theories but to hone existing theories so as to be able to develop new models to represent women better (Turkel, 2000). Baker Miller's work addresses the importance placed on separateness, power, and hierarchy, replacing them with a model that emphasised mutual respect and the building of community (Zeedyk & Greenwood, 2008). In her work, she moved away from a deficiency model of women to one where women's value and strengths are recognised and seen (Turkel, 2000; Zeedyk & Greenwood, 2008). Baker Miller explains this by

recognising the powerful impact that the cultural context has on women's lives (Turkel, 2000). According to her, as a result of our patriarchal society, women do not feel empowered to have an impact on relationships or society because their actions go unnoticed or are misunderstood, since these are done differently from the dominant male culture, hence perpetuating a cycle of disempowerment (Baker Miller & Striver, 1993; Turkel, 2000). Baker Miller also recognises and emphasises the "importance of relationships as the central organising feature in women's development" (Turkel, 2000, p. 233). She highlights that women seek connection rather than autonomy, and their sense of self is very much linked with their ability to form and maintain relationships (Baker Miller, 2008). Furthermore, she states that to be able to move towards a culture that values women, society needs to start appreciating women's relational qualities as strengths and move away from seeing these as pathological, realising that what was labelled as pathological is a conflict within society which fails to value women and their needs (Turkel, 2000).

Before analysing theories that focus on gender or womanhood as socially constructed, a brief overview of arguments that exclude transwomen from feminist theory will be presented. This overview will not be done because it is one I adhere to since this research adopts a trans-inclusive standpoint, which looks at gender and sex as socially constructed and in which individuals are constantly working to create and enact. However, this overview is intended to highlight that one still finds exclusionary grounds even within feminist groups or thinking and acknowledges that even though various psychological and social theories were/are postulated about gender and womanhood, biological dimorphism is still very predominant in the thinking of certain groups. Since the 70s, groups of radical feminists have promoted the agenda that for a person to be considered a woman, they have to have the chromosomal composition of one, a viewpoint which in recent years was promoted further within academic discourse and especially on social media. Such groups, which are commonly known as Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists (TERFs) or 'gender critical', operate from two standpoints; the first is linked to sex and biology where "'gender' may be subject to change, 'sex' is immutable" (Pearce et al., 2020, p. 679). Feminists

operating from this position claim that "characteristics of womanhood are fixed at birth (through chromosomes) and strengthened by life experience (though gender socialization and the experiences of gender discrimination)" (Hines, 2019, p. 146). Hence if one cannot change their DNA, one cannot become a 'woman' if they are born biologically 'male', "if chromosomal sex is taken to be the fundamental basis of maleness and femaleness, the male who undergoes sex conversion surgery is *not* female" (Raymond, 1979, p. 10). The centrality of the arguments of feminists who believe that womanhood is locked in biology versus those who oppose such concept is one linked to authenticity, that is, "who is, or can be, considered to be a 'woman'" (Hines, 2019, p. 146). Anti-transgender feminists or gender critical feminists make a distinction between 'female' and 'woman', where 'woman' is seen as a social role, and 'female' is having the chromosomal makeup "pertaining" to the feminine sex, therefore according to this reasoning, transwomen might be seen as women but not female (Hines, 2019). Such statements ignore works by Fausto Sterling (1993), who clearly state that there is diversity even within sex categories, and as a result, offer a diminutive model of biology. According to Hines, this viewpoint "enacts a regressive nature/culture divide to position transwomen outside of feminist concerns and distance them from feminists cultures and spaces" (2019, p. 154). Moreover, arguments such as those presented by Raymond ignore ways in which cisgender women "work to construct their own bodies into a binary" (Williams, 2020, p. 721).

The second positionality that 'gender critical' groups/ feminists operate from is linked to what self-determination is. Organisations arguing against self-determination see it as 'dangerous' since it enables "'men' (a category frequently presumed to encompass transwoman and non-binary people assigned male at birth) unfettered access to women-only spaces" (Pearce et al., 2020, p. 680). Such spaces are considered to be women's toilets, changing rooms, rape crisis centres, women's shelters and feminist groups. This argument stems from an older sex/gender essentialist discourse within western cultures that places transwomen as a threat to cis women since transwomen's bodies are associated with "dangerous male sexuality and potential sexual predation" (Pearce et al., 2020, p. 680). In some

instances, terms such as ‘gender fraud’ were used to describe transwomen who are not only misrepresented as men but, in some cases, also linked to rapists (Hines, 2019).

In the following sections, theories highlighting the social construction of gender (and in some instances, sex) will be explored, mainly due to their value to address the topic at hand and secondly as a counter-argument to the points presented when outlining trans-exclusionary ideology.

2.2.2 Socially Constructed

As opposed to the sex/gender or the biological models, models stemming from social structure or cultural theories link their definition of women to women’s places in society and how culture and power imbalances within it impact women and their lived experience. One of the first theorists to link gender and social roles was Oakley, whose definition of gender and work was based on the research into social roles conducted by Margaret Mead, who concluded that societies divide human characteristics into two groups, men and women (Delphy, 1993; Oakley, 1985). Oakley draws her conclusions that gender and sex are different, with the former being socially constructed, by using various examples such as intersex individuals, who, irrespective of their genital ambiguity, are still masculine or feminine (Oakley, 1985). For Oakley, the psychological differences between the sexes are a result of social conditioning and even though she acknowledged that division of labour by sexes is universal, what is considered feminine or masculine varies according to the particular society (Oakley, 1985). Additionally, theories such as social role theory had tried to explain how gender is acquired, and it came to the conclusion that one acquires their gender role through socialisation or the interaction with social structures (Alsop et al., 2002). This theory was very much criticised because it does not explain the spectrum of masculinity and femininity together with the changes that altered our social roles throughout the years and why resistance occurs, which leads some people to reject their social

roles (Alsop et al., 2002). Authors such as Ridgeway and Correll (2004) offer an alternative to this theory; they state that gender is an "institutionalized system of social practices for constituting people as two significantly different categories, men and women, and organizing social relations of inequality on the basis of that difference" (p. 510). They argue that gender involves all aspects of our social lives, cultural beliefs and distribution of resources at a macro level, which in turn affects our identity. Moreover, our interactions are determined by "patterns of behaviour and organisational practices" (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004, p. 511). Ridgeway and Correll (2004) state that gender beliefs are "a hierarchical dimension of status inequality" (p. 513) where men are seen as more status commendable, whilst women are the 'sweeter' sex who perform better at social tasks (which are given less value by society). This seems to suggest that notwithstanding society's development since the time of Classical Philosophy, cultural beliefs about gender have remained relatively stable with only minimal changes. Ridgeway and Corell, suggest that if we consider cultural beliefs about what makes a real man or woman, we would be focusing on, or depicting, stereotypes linked to a heterosexual, middle-class, white man/woman. They go on to state that everyone knows what the hegemonic understandings are; people are expected to know what they are, to hold them and to define themselves according to these beliefs, and in turn, everyone will be treated accordingly. They argue that sex categorisation is done in such a routine manner that it feels or seems natural to do so; however, it is socially constructed by applying widely shared cultural beliefs about gender. Ridgeway and Correll (2004) further acknowledge that apart from physical sex differences, we also use appearance and behavioural cues to categorise ourselves, and because people know that such cues will categorise them, they construct their appearance accordingly. They recognise that there are alternative gender belief systems; however, these individuals know about the hegemonic beliefs, since the latter are institutionalised in norms and structures reinforced by those in socially advantageous positions (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004).

Before delving deeper into specific feminist theories and how these theories perceived and debated the notion of gender, a very brief overview of some common characteristics between feminist theories

will be presented since these are at the basis of all hyphenated model theories. According to Hawkesworth and Disch (2016), there are three common characteristics between feminist theories of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, "(1) efforts to denaturalize that which passes for difference, (2) efforts to challenge the aspiration to produce universal and impartial knowledge and (3) efforts to engage the complexity of power relations through intersectional analysis" (p. 4). The last point, that is, intersectionality[13] started more as a response to feminist theories of the 70s and 80s who looked at women as one 'universal' group, which in most cases did not account for the differences that exist between women, which might originate from race, class and sexual orientation. Feminist researchers (especially those of the 70s and 80s) were central in creating feminist epistemology,[14] which inquires about how knowledge/ research is produced and whose needs are being met by such research. Up to the late 70s, biology/ sexual differences was used to create a supposedly empirical justification for sexual hierarchies. However, feminists use the notion of sexual hierarchies and how these hierarchies are socially produced, as previously highlighted when mentioning dimorphism,[15] to demonstrate that "difference is not a fact of nature but a vector of power" (Hawkesworth & Disch, 2016, p. 4).

One theoretical paradigm which addressed power were materialist feminists who see gender differences as rooted in social relations, which give rise to social practices that produce and reproduce gender inequalities. For materialists, biosocial categories are the same as economic, social classes, which give power to men over women. One such theorist was Gayle Rubin, who inquires, what is a woman, by linking the question to women's gender roles, especially those linked to her domesticity. Rubin concludes that "a woman is a woman" (1975, p. 158) and she only becomes adjectives such as

[13] Since intersectionality is a central notion in this research, the literature underpinning this perspective will be addressed further in a specific sub-section within this chapter.
[14] Feminist epistemology will be adopted throughout this research and, therefore, will be further addressed in the Methodology chapter.
[15] Notwithstanding the denaturalisation of difference between men and women based on the basis of sex, this notion was still very much present during the 70s and 80s movement where gender was seen as the "*content* and sex as the *container*" (Delphy, 1993, p. 3; Viveros Vigoya, 2016)

"a domestic, a wife…a prostitute" (1975, p. 158) according to her social relations. According to Rubin, works by Freud and Strauss demonstrate that women are fashioned into domesticated women, and this is done through a systemic social apparatus. She states that the "'sex/gender system' is the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied" (1975, p. 159). Furthermore, Rubin (1975) states that sex is not only based on the organisation of gender but also on "obligatory heterosexuality, and the constraint of female sexuality" (p. 179). This means that to fit in one's gender, one must identify with the corresponding sex but also be attracted towards the opposite sex.[16] Although the oppression excreted by the sex/gender system has changed over time, it is still seen in children's socialisation (Rubin, 1975). Rubin concluded that if the social relations that make men and women are changed, then the gender identities and the inequalities between men and women can be changed (Rubin, 1975). Rubin states that heterosexuality, just like motherhood, is a political institution that controls women. The notion of compulsory heterosexuality was also addressed by Rich (1980), who inquires if "in a different context, or other things being equal, women would *choose* heterosexual coupling and marriage; heterosexuality is presumed as a "sexual preference" of "most women", either implicitly or explicitly" (p. 633). Such statements by Rubin and Rich at the time when they were originally published started enquiring about the taken for granted knowledge and institutions; hence enabling women to further question their gender identity and how these institutions create dominant discourses around heteronormativity, as will be discussed further when discussing poststructural feminism, especially Butler's work.

This notion of social relations and how these promote inequality was further addressed by theorists whose main works focused on addressing patriarchy, a word that symbolises different levels of oppression for different feminists. Christine Delphy questions the notion that sex precedes gender (Delphy, 1993). According to Delphy, society places men and women in different hierarchical classes,

[16] Even in cultures where individuals were allowed to switch genders they had to become the opposite gender, that is they had to be "either male or female but not a little of each" (Rubin, 1975, p. 182)

and it is this factor that defines them and not biology (Viveros Vigoya, 2016). She emphasises that there are two modes of production, one which is industrial and the other, domestic (Alsop et al., 2002; Delphy, 2016). Women share a common class position and, as a result of marriage, they will produce children and supply childbearing and domestic services (Alsop et al., 2002; Delphy, 2016). To be able to move away from this hierarchy, we need to move away from gender roles and gender per se (Delphy, 1993). However, Delphy's work, especially the application of the concept of mode of production, was criticised by Barrett and McIntosh (1979), who suggest that the focus of her work is similar to Marxist feminists, but Delphy does not adhere to Marx's analysis of capitalism and patriarchy (Alsop et al., 2002).

According to De Laurentis (1990), feminism discovered the nonbeing of a woman because even though women are constantly spoken about, they are underrepresented, unheard, rejected and controlled, on a discourse level as well as on an existential level. De Beauvoir (1956) states, "a man never begins by presenting himself as an individual of a certain sex; it goes without saying that he is a man" (p. 15). According to de Beauvoir, men and women are not at opposing poles because men are both the positive and the neutral, this can be seen in the fact that man refers to humankind in general whilst women represent the negative elements: furthermore, a woman is not regarded as "an autonomous being" (p. 15) but in relation to men. As a result, women are defined by men; "he is the Subject, he is the Absolute-she is the Other" (De Beauvoir, 1956, p. 16). De Beauvoir asks why women reluctantly accept the status of the object (De Laurentis, 1990). The question is asked in the light of de Beauvoir, knowing that this relationship (men and women) is more beneficial for the oppressor than the oppressed (De Laurentis, 1990). However, she comes to the conclusion that this bond that connects men and women is different from the bond that unites oppressive relationships (ex: proletariat to bourgeoise) (De Laurentis, 1990). Furthermore, this bond is unbreakable because one cannot break society on the basis of sex "the couple is a fundamental unity with its two halves riveted together, and the cleavage of society along the line of sex is impossible" (De Beauvoir, 1956, p. 19). However, as cited

in De Laurentis (1990), MacKinnon argues that women's objectification is not a result of her biology, but because women are objectified, they are seen or made as sexual beings. Mc Kinnon also states that women engage in self-objectification, however for de Laurentis, this process of women turning themselves from subject to object and again to subject "is what grounds a different relation, for women, to the erotic, to consciousness, and to knowing" (De Laurentis, 1990, p. 119). De Laurentis (1990) points out that heterosexuality and male dominance overlap. This is seen in both social structures and cultural norms; for example, even if heterosexual women are not dependent on men financially or sexually (as a result of being their spouses) they are still dominated in their everyday lives (as a of result sexual harassment or rape for example). Furthermore, male dominance affects other institutions such as employment (where women are harassed or discriminated).

A commonality between Wittig, de Beauvoir and MacKinnon is their claim that women are not a "'natural group' with common biological features" (De Laurentis, 1990, p. 139) who are oppressed as a result of natural differences but are a "social category, the product of an economic relation of exploitation, and an ideological construct" (De Laurentis, 1990, p. 139). Hence, different women experience their gender and the effects of patriarchy differently, depending on their role in society and the privilege that they are given within it.

The sex/gender difference model, be it difference as a result of a biological factor or as a result of social construction, was criticised on two fronts. Firstly because of the suggestion that when one claims that they embrace a particular identity (say woman), they are stating that they are similar to or share qualities of other members who take on the same identity (in this case, women). However, this notion is contested since there are various ways to 'do' or to 'be' a woman, some of which fall within the perceived norms of 'being' a woman, whilst others might not. In fact, one of the criticisms of the sex/gender difference mode suggests that sexual differences are constructed as a hierarchy, which conceals and further excludes individuals who are part of sexual minorities or those who live outside

the sexual binary (Stone, 2016). Another criticism is that other differences such as race or class are not considered or are considered as secondary; this could lead to placing oppressed individuals against each other since one would be prioritising oppressions (Stone, 2016). Since the 80s, feminists of colour have challenged the notion that 'woman' is a universal term because if presented as such, the term woman does not acknowledge the multiple facets which encompass the term woman.

2.3 Patriarchy and Privilege

In the previous sections of this chapter, I have referred to patriarchy and patriarchal ideologies. Such ideologies will be addressed in this section, in further detail, by giving a brief overview of the changing nature of patriarchy. Although it is still very much prevalent in our society, over the last decades we have seen a shift whereby patriarchy has become more subtle at the risk of being taken for granted or perceived as non-existent. However, prior to addressing patriarchy and how such ideologies are sustained in our societies, privilege will be addressed since it is persons who are in privileged positions that continue to sustain dominant ideologies.

Both Kimmel (2016) and McIntosh (2016) depict privilege by using two interesting metaphors; for Kimmel, being white or male or heterosexual in our culture is "like running with the wind at your back" (p. 14), McIntosh links being white to an "invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and blank checks" (p. 44). Both metaphors reflect unearned benefits given to specific individuals because they form part of dominant social identities. For those with privilege, these unearned benefits are the order of the day and the norm; hence, the individuals who are "aware" of privilege are those who do not have it "to be white, or straight, or male, or middle class is to be simultaneously ubiquitous and invisible. You're everywhere you look, you're the standard against which everyone else is measured"

(Kimmel, 2016, p. 17). Moreover, for Kimmel (2016), this invisibility is politically sustained since it creates further privilege whilst it maintains the power status quo, and this invisibility is also a luxury for those who hold privilege as they do not have to think about their taken-for-granted social identities daily; instead, they are seen as how one ought to be or the standard.

Privilege is not monolithic (Coston & Kimmel, 2012) since it is shaped according to the intersecting social identities one holds, such as race, sexual orientation or social status, amongst others; however, male and heterosexual privileges remain so dominant in our societies because "male privilege provides benefits reinforced by androcentric social norms based on the patriarchal design and historical binary developed by and for men" (Case et al., 2014, p. 723); the same can be stated for heterosexual privilege since these reinforce heteronormativity for the benefit of heterosexual individuals. According to Case et al. (2014), both heterosexual and male privilege "connect to a gendered system of oppression and social norms and roles that restrict behaviours for women and men" (p. 724). Moreover, according to Connell (2005), as a result of hegemonic masculinity,[17] all men gain from the patriarchal dividend, that is, the advantage that men gain from the subordination of women.

Various feminist authors have highlighted the different aspects of patriarchy in their writings, and the central theme within these writings is the control of men over women (Delphy, 1993; Millett, 1969; Mitchell, 1966; Walby, 1990). Moreover, these authors describe the systemic structures which are in place so that such subordination is perpetuated, such as through unequal distribution of power, sexuality, socialisation, mode of production and emotional attachment (Connell, 2021; Mitchell, 1966; Walby, 1990). To be able to present a more holistic view of current patriarchal systems the intersectionality of patriarchy with other hierarchical systems of inequality, such as race, class, sexual orientation and ableness, need to be acknowledged and taken into consideration (Connell, 2021;

[17] Connell (2005) defines hegemonic masculinity as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (p. 77).

Ortner, 2022; Walby, 1990). For Ortner (2022) "patriarchy is more than just "sexism"" (p. 307). Such statements are important to be acknowledged since, in most recent years, patriarchy has become less "monolithic and homogenous" (Ortner, 2019, p. 61) which led to it being less visible or perceived as non-existent, whilst at the same time, it became more complex since it is now intertwined with other forms of inequality as mentioned above.

To be able to give an overview of how society is still experiencing patriarchy, the changing aspects of patriarchy and patriarchal ideologies will be portrayed, focusing on power relations, division of labour and sexual relations. The power dimension is central to patriarchal ideologies whereby such domination is exerted through visible measures such as violence against women (stranger harassment, rape and femicide) to ways which might be more subtle, such as how men are still being perceived as the head of household and the impact of the male gaze on media and concepts of beauty. Walby (1990) states that violence against women is not an anomaly or confined to a particular subculture; it is a pervasive aspect of male behaviour deeply embedded in societal norms and structures. The state's failure to intervene effectively in these instances, unless the violence is deemed "extreme" or perpetrated in "inappropriate" circumstances, contributes to the normalisation and tolerance of male violence against women. Such instances of normalisation and tolerance of violence can be seen in stranger harassment, where even though it might have some similarities with sexual harassment, such as unwanted verbal (catcalling, whistling) and nonverbal (following, leering) behaviours, it differs in its context and duration. Street harassment typically occurs in public settings by individuals who are unfamiliar with the victim, and the contact between the two parties is often brief and fleeting (Saunders et al., 2017). This can create a persistent state of unease and intimidation for women, transforming public spaces into everyday hostile environments (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008). This tolerance is further reinforced by a prevailing discourse that justifies certain forms of violence against women within specific contexts, such as in victim blaming, where women are blamed because of 'what they were wearing', for example. Victim blaming is another technique used so that men retain power

and control since the blame is shifted onto the victim rather than on the perpetrator (Saunders et al., 2017). The systemic manner in how institutions such as the state or courts operate, sustain and reinforce patriarchal ideologies, the latter can be seen in the difficulties women encounter in proceeding with rape and harassment charges, even when such charges are made public and gain international attention, such as with the #MeToo movement (Connell, 2021).

The sexual division of labour does not stop at the workplace; however, it is still seen in studies undertaken where females are the predominant gender working in professions which are more associated with the care sector (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2023a), whereas men are still prevailing in jobs which tend to carry a better salary. In most societies, the work that is done outside paid jobs (child-rearing, taking care of elderly members of the family) is not given the same importance as essential work, and in most situations, it is perceived as being done out of love and obligation (Bergeron, 2016; Connell, 2021). Statistics which emerged after COVID-19 showed how women (even those who engage in gainful employment) spent at least four hours per day taking care of their children (40% of women as opposed to 21% of men) and more than four hours doing house chores (20% of women, 12% of men) (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022a).

Another instance where patriarchy is visible is in how sexual relations are created and which sexual relations are seen as valid and 'normal', whereby the hegemonic assumption is that sexual attraction happens across opposing genders and where sexual relations are monogamous (Connell, 2021). Moreover, sexual double standards are still prevalent in our society, whereby women are stigmatised for the same behaviours that boost male status, hence providing men more freedom to pursue sexual activities (Rudman & Glick, 2021). The backlash that women experience when they move away from social expectations (for example, by engaging sexually with multiple partners) acts as a mechanism to put women back in their place; this can also be seen when women are agentic and/or show resistance (Rudman & Glick, 2021).

Research on backlash demonstrates that individuals often react negatively to powerful, confident women, as these qualities challenge established gender norms (Rudman & Glick, 2021). This resistance exposes that those who uphold patriarchal structures continue to perceive women as inferior. Masculine hegemony persists due to a complex interplay of rewards and punishments. Men who conform to rigid masculine ideals are often praised for their strength, toughness, and leadership qualities, which in turn reinforces toxic masculinity. Conversely, men who deviate from these ideals, such as those who are "gay, androgynous, feminist, or are not "tough enough" face bullying and harassment" (Rudman & Glick, 2021, p. 241). These negative consequences serve as deterrents, discouraging men from challenging the status quo. The recent surge of right-wing extremism, often considered to border on fascism, represents a stark manifestation of patriarchy's pervasive influence. This ideology is characterised by a rigid hierarchical structure and an idealised notion of the ""superior man"- white, heterosexual, able-bodied- and placing all others "outside" the realm of inclusion and protection" (Ortner, 2022, pp. 311, 312). For this reason, patriarchy must also be conceptualised from an intersectional perspective since categories such as 'men' and 'women' are always intertwined with other forms of social identities (Ortner, 2022).

2.4 Intersectionality

According to hooks (2015), the women's liberation movement was built on a "narrow platform", and for the feminist movement to reach a momentum to attract masses, it needed a "theory that would examine our culture from a feminist standpoint rooted in an understanding of gender, race, and class" (p. xiii). hooks states that feminism in the United States did not emerge from women who were most victimised; on the contrary, these women were a "silent majority" (2015, p. 1), not out of complacency but as a result of their victimisation. She criticises works such as Friedan's The Feminine Mystique, which, according to hooks, ignored the majority of women and focused only on the difficulties faced

by “college-educated, middle- and upper-class, married white women-housewives bored with leisure, with the home, with children, with buying products, who wanted more out of life” (2015, p. 1). By focusing on the impact that race and class have on women, it was (in the 80s) becoming more obvious that being a woman, that is, gender on its own, is not the denominating factor for women to have a “common” experience. For this precise reason, feminist theory has started to look at gender as a social identity in relation to other identities and how these intersect and impact each other (Shields, 2008).

Intersectionality is a term coined by Crenshaw in 1989 in a paper where she explored how the justice system and policy excludes individuals who have more than one ground for discrimination. Crenshaw also states that the focus in discrimination cases was on the most privileged group members (white women and Black men) at the expense of marginalising those who are “multiply-burdened” (Crenshaw, 1989; Walby et al., 2012). At the time, these cases focused on either sex (and in these cases, it was understood white women) or on race (that is, discrimination against Black men) but not a combination of both (Crenshaw, 1989). According to Crenshaw (1989), the focus on privileged groups[18] creates a distortion because race and sex are only subgroups of more complex phenomena, “the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism”[19] (p. 140). Furthermore, she uses the case of Moore vs Hughes Helicopter Inc to demonstrate that white women are central in the understanding of gender discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989). Crenshaw (1989) states that white women can claim sex discrimination, and this means that they would have been discriminated against on the basis of gender since their race does not place them at a further disadvantage within the said group.[20] In the same paper, Crenshaw narrates an analogy which is still referred to, up to this day, that is the traffic

[18] According to Crenshaw at times Black women were also excluded from feminist theory and anti-racist policy because both are set on experiences that do not portray exactly the interaction between race and gender (Crenshaw, 1989)

[19] To explain her argument Crenshaw used the case of DeGraffenreid vs General Motors (Crenshaw, 1989)

[20] According to Crenshaw (1989) this dichotomy is also seen in feminist and Black liberationist agenda where Black women are either too women or Black hence their experience is either absorbed in the collective or else deemed too different. Furthermore, she states that feminist theory does this because it thinks that sexism can be adequately discussed without paying attention to the “lives of those other than the race-, gender- or class-privileged” (p. 152).

intersection analogy, where if an accident occurs at an intersection the cars causing the accident could have been travelling from several directions . Crenshaw continues to explain that "if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination" (1989, p. 149).[21] However, if the justice system is not ready to look at the different dynamics involved in the accident at the intersection, the most likely result is that no action is taken (Crenshaw, 1989). Even though this analogy is still used today, along the years, intersectionality has developed further to include different social identities.

According to Shields (2008), social identities mean the social categories one feels part of and the meaning that one gives to these categories; hence these enable us to express our authentic selves and not become passive recipients of these identities. Furthermore, these identities take "meaning as a category in relation to another category" (Shields, 2008, p. 203). Spelman states that intersectional identities are not distinct identities that are somehow tied together but rather "relationally defined and emergent" (Spelmen, 1988 as cited in Shields, 2008, p. 303). Depending on the intersection one is at, one might be at an advantageous position, one which creates opportunity (for example, due to race) and at a disadvantaged position (for example, gender and or sexual orientation), one which creates oppression (Shields, 2008). Intersectionality creates a more inclusive method to analyse the 'women's experience', one which acknowledges the various intersections that women might encounter.

For Davis (2008), intersectionality addresses a "central theoretical and normative concern within feminist scholarship" (p. 270). The latter is done by using a tagline; its intention is to make visible the multiple facets of everyday life and the power relations within it whilst addressing the exclusions that have had such a troublesome role in feminist scholarship (Davis, K., 2008). Intersectionality brings together two strands of feminist thought. First, it tries to "understand the effects of race, class and

[21] Furthermore Crenshaw states that "Black women can experience discrimination in ways that are both similar to and different from those experienced by white women and Black men." (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 149).

gender on women's identities, experience and struggles for empowerment" (Davis, K., 2008, p. 71) by asking questions such as "how is race 'gendered' and how gender is 'racialized'" (Davis, K., 2008, p. 71). Furthermore, it asks how both race and gender are linked, affected and/ or affect social class (Davis, K., 2008). Secondly, feminist theories inspired by postmodern theoretical perspectives saw intersectionality as an aid to their project of deconstructing the concept of binary universality. Theories such as Queer Theory were in search of theories to 'challenge' the static perception of identity (Davis, K., 2008). Other authors, such as Nash (2008), state that intersectionality serves a theoretical and political purpose for feminist and anti-racist scholars because it captures and theorises about gender and race as a social process which happen simultaneously. It also seeks to create a vocabulary[22] to respond to critiques of identity politics; this is needed since according to Nash (2008), identity politics neglects intra-group difference, whilst intersectionality exposes the differences within the "broad categories of 'women' and 'blacks'" (Nash, 2008, p. 2; Shields, 2008). Moreover, it centres around the experiences of individuals whose voices have been previously ignored (Nash, 2008) and neglected whilst recognising the diversification of cultures (Oleksy, 2011).[23] According to Traister, intersectionality is "the youthful attempt to repair racial rifts within the feminist movement" (Traister, 2010 as cited in Oleksy, 2011, p. 264). However, older feminists criticised this reasoning and stated that "women often came last in line, worried that the breadth of intersectional priorities thinned the interest in women, vilified older white women and left feminists too unfocused to move forward" (Traister, 2010 as cited in Oleksy, 2011, p. 265).

Other authors analysed the history of intersectionality, such as Lykee (2010), who uses genealogy to help the reader understand the complexity of intersectionality. She states that intersectionality is made up of three bands of feminist analysis; these clusters are: "explicit feminist" theories of intersectionality, which "explicitly use the concept of intersectionality"; "implicit feminist" theories of

[22] Shields (2008) looks as well at intersectionality as a language creator which talks about gender whilst considering other dimensions of social structure and the role these play in the formation of gender.
[23] According to Oleksy (2011) intersectionality is developed after multiculturalism, a theory that looks at the group rather than the individual and their subjective experience.

intersectionality, that is, “theories that use intersections but without using the concept of ‘intersectionality’ as the frame of interpretation”; and “feminist theorizings under other names, that is, theories that concentrate on intersections, but while using other concepts and frames than ‘intersectionality’” (Lykee, 2010, p. 68).

Over time, intersectionality developed so much that one now speaks about structural intersectionality as opposed to political intersectionality. Structural intersectionality refers to the intersection of unequal social groups (Walby et al., 2012), that is, “the ways in which the individual’s legal status or social needs marginalise them, specifically because of the convergence of identity statuses” (Shields, 2008, p. 304). On the other hand, political intersectionality is the intersection of political agendas and projects (Walby et al., 2012); according to Shields (2008, p. 304), it is “the different and possibly conflicting needs and goals of the respective groups from which an individual draws her or his identity”. Moreover, intersectionality nowadays is used as:

- a framework whereby it reminds researchers that any discussion about identity should incorporate an analysis of how other identities interact with the chosen identity;
- a theory which provides “specific explanations about identity” (Warner & Shields, 2013, p. 804), hence offering an insight into identity development;
- and thirdly an approach to social activism since, as Crenshaw proposed, intersectionality can shed light on policies and social injustices that are taking place which might have been previously ignored, as well as facilitating “coalition building” (Warner & Shields, 2013, p. 805) in certain cases.

Even though intersectionality has been a cornerstone of feminist epistemology and methodology, authors such as Walby, Armstrong and Strid (2012) claim that intersectionality must still tackle the following theoretical dilemmas:

- The relationship between structural and political intersectionality; there are many existing intersections in social structures however, only a few reach policy and political level[24] (Walby et al., 2012). According to Walby et al. (2012), it seems that authors of intersectionality assume that political intersectionality can be derived from social relations suggesting the dilemma is best tackled by recognising that structural and political intersectionality are separate. However, a relationship does exist between them, and neither can be reduced to each other or consolidated (Walby et al., 2012).

- Balancing the focus on minorities to give them agency versus the actions of the majority or powerful is a dilemma (Walby et al., 2012). To tackle this, the definitions posed by McCall and Crenshaw of 'category' and 'identity' respectively are examined (Walby et al., 2012). Walby et al. (2012) state that these definitions do not focus on the relations within the social group but rather on the relations between the social groups;[25] as a result, they do not consider the "power of the actions of the dominant group within the 'category'" (Walby et al., 2012, p. 230). Additionally, they state that noting the importance of the powerful at the intersections might shift the focus of what needs to be addressed. In fact, they suggest that rather than looking at 'category' or 'strand' which seems to give the impression of a "unified block" (Walby et al., 2012, p. 230; Warner & Shields, 2013), one should focus on unequal social relations when the focus of the analysis is inequality (Walby et al., 2012). Because the focus of intersectional studies is not the origin of inequality, the latter is not addressed; however, according to the authors, the origin of inequality is central to social relations; hence the way forward is to address the origin of each inequality and to bring forward the "social relations of inequality" (Walby et al., 2012). Furthermore, the authors suggest that as inequality changes overtime, one must examine the historical construction of inequalities as a way forward.

[24] The policy and political level is significant to analyse intersectionality and equality policy (Walby et al., 2012).
[25] That is one group with one group, especially at the points of intersection (Walby et al., 2012).

- The diminishing focus on class and gender intersections has happened over time, “however class is an important aspect of the structuring of inequalities, intersecting in complex ways with all inequalities” (Walby et al., 2012).

- The naming of specific intersectionalities over others is an area where different authors cannot agree in their analysis of intersectionality. According to Walby et al. (2012), the way forward is to focus on the visibility of each social relation whilst also recognising how these are affected and changed at the point of intersection.

Other authors have further criticised intersectionality on various points that were not mentioned above. One of the main critiques by Warner and Shields (2013) is that “when applied in practice intersectionality sometimes replicates the approaches it is intended to critique” (Warner & Shields, 2013, p. 807). The latter is due to not adequately addressing the “fluidity of identity” (Warner & Shields, 2013) and treating categories as fixed, which in turn maintains the hierarchies that it is supposed to address. Moreover, Robertson and Sgoutas (2012) criticise intersectionality from a Queer Theory perspective. They point out that society’s understanding of social realities and, or, identities are hegemonic, and in turn, the discussion about the intersections is not applicable or adequately interpreted for every experience; hence they suggest that it is not enough to see how identities or categories intersect when these identities themselves have “socially constructed meanings” (Robertson & Sgoutas, 2012, p. 422). They use the term ‘gay’ as an example stating that gay came to mean white male ignoring all other variables; this association was done since the dominant group within the LGBT rights movement, that is, white males, determined the boundaries that encompass the term gay (Robertson & Sgoutas, 2012).

Additionally, they also state that intersectionality mostly makes use of identities that are “US-centric” (Robertson & Sgoutas, 2012) and these might not be universally understood. Intersectionality,

according to Purkayastha (2010), has to be developed further considering the transnational reality so to include other cultural explanations and understandings of identity, as well as the fluidity of identity. Purkayastha (2010) uses the example of class whereby one might be in a low economic class as per general US standards (or current residing country), but when compared to their native country, one might be fairly wealthy.[26] Furthermore, Robertson and Sgoutas (2012) criticise how intersectionality was used as a research methodology. According to them, results of social science studies "are interpreted through these socially constructed meanings that reinforce stereotypical understandings of identity" (Robertson & Sgoutas, 2012); this occurs as data is interpreted through the researchers' stereotypes and assumptions. Therefore, whilst intersectionality is used as an analytical tool, it will not automatically narrate the "complex realities of those on the margins" (Robertson & Sgoutas, 2012).

Even though intersectionality can develop further as a theory, as highlighted above, one must also acknowledge that intersectionality is also seen as the "gold standard" to analyse women's experience of identity and oppression from a multi-disciplinary point (Nash, 2008). Another feminist perspective that views women's experiences as multi-dimensional and socially constructed is poststructuralist feminism.

2.5 Post-structural Feminism

Towards the end of the twentieth century, there was a shift in how gender and gender identity was viewed; the poststructuralist view moved away from the difference model, focusing more on the social and discursive construction of gender and gender identity. According to Ehlers (2016), even though poststructuralist thinking is made up of different theories, all share the following common principles,

[26] On the same 'US-centric' note but dealing with a different social reality Puar sees intersectionality as failing to take into account the experiences of different religions and nationalities especially Arabs and Muslims (Robertson & Sgoutas, 2012)

"(a) showing that all identity categories silence or exclude certain differences, (b) denaturalizing and deconstructing identity, and (c) highlighting that any idea of the "authentic" subject is the product/construct of humanist discourse itself" (p. 356). These principles are analysed by scrutinising language since language constructs both our social world and ourselves from a poststructuralist standpoint.

Poststructuralism uses Saussure's late 19th century notions of language, for whom language is made up of a chain of signs, where each sign is made up of signifiers (sound or written image) and the signified (meanings), and the two components are related in a random way; hence the relation between the signifiers and the signified is a constructed one, not a natural one. Moreover, the signs derive their meanings from their difference from other signs. According to Weedon (1987), Saussure's notion of language is important because it makes "language truly social and a site of political struggle" (p. 23); furthermore, by looking at language as a site of political struggle, language is seen "as a system always existing in historically specific discourses" (p. 24). However, the problem with Saussure's theory is that "it does not account for the plurality of meaning or changes in meaning" (Weedon, 1987, p. 24); hence it cannot explain why a term such as 'woman' can have conflicting meanings which change over time. This issue was addressed in poststructuralism, where the signified are not seen as fixed but are "constantly *differed*" (Weedon, 1987, p. 25); consequently, meanings attributed to a term like 'woman' change according to the context it is being used in.

For Scott (1988), poststructuralism can help feminists in various ways: by analysing patriarchy in its various current expressions (be it institutional, ideological, organisational and subjective) and how these expressions shifted historically; in looking and thinking "in terms of pluralities and diversities rather than of unities and universals" (p. 33); in challenging hierarchies especially those linked to "masculine universals and feminine specificities" (p. 33); and by providing an alternative way to think and act upon gender in various aspects and political practice. On a similar note Weedon (1987) states

that feminist poststructuralist theory "is useful if it is able to address the questions of how social power is exercised and how social relations of gender, class and race might be transformed" (p. 20).

To be able to engage in such analysis, feminist poststructuralists adopted key terms used within poststructuralism such as language, discourse, difference, and deconstruction. Language is an important notion for feminist poststructuralists since it enables one to inquire about how social meaning is created (and in which context), how meanings change, how some meanings become the norms whilst others fade away and what this process shows us about how power is created and perpetuated (Scott, 1988). In poststructuralism, there is a clear difference between language and discourse. "Discourse is not a language of a text but a historically, socially, and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories, and beliefs" (Scott, 1988 p. 35). Usually, discourse is presumed to be "outside human invention" (Scott, 1988 p. 35), hence seen as objective knowledge which is beyond dispute. However, works such as those presented by Foucault[27] question dominant discourses and the assumptions linked to them. Foucault highlights the power of dominant ideologies and how criticism of such discourses is missing. *Difference* in the poststructuralist analysis of language means that "meaning is made through implicit or explicit contrast, that a positive definition rests on the negation or repression of something represented as antithetical to it" (Scott, 1988, p. 37). So, to analyse the meaning of something, one has to also inquire about what the meaning opposes or negates so as to identify which social contexts they are operating in; therefore, one has to examine patriarchal discourses and how discourses related to sexual differences are impacting meanings which seem unrelated to gender and the body. In this manner, the meaning of gender is seen through various kinds of cultural representations since these same cultural representations are re-creating and establishing how relations between men and women are structured and comprehended. Moreover, these oppositions are also hierarchical where one meaning is seen as dominant[28] or primary, and the

[27] A more detailed presentation of Foucault's analysis of discourse is presented in section 3.2 Discourse.

[28] The term which is considered dominant is the leading term.

opposing term is seen as subordinate or secondary, for example, unity/diversity, universality/specificity; "yet the first terms depend on and derive their meaning from the second to such an extent that the secondary terms can be seen as generative of the definition of the first terms" (Scott, 1988, p. 37). This is why deconstruction is needed so as to unveil the ways by which the meanings of both terms are constructed, and how these operate since the process of deconstruction involves the "reversal and displacement of binary oppositions" (Scott, 1988, p. 37).

As a result of adopting a feminist poststructuralist perspective, one would recognise that identity categories such as 'women' are pervious; however, it does not mean that individuals are "just the passive, unstable, fragmented effects of competing discourses" (Baxter, 2016, p. 43). Although in poststructuralism, 'the subject' is constructed within discourse, Weedon (1987) states that one is a thinking and feeling subject as well as a social agent who can counteract or resist contradictory subject positions. This perspective "believes in women's lived, embodied reality and their subjective, emotional and cognitive experiences, since the ways in which individuals make sense of their lives is a necessary starting point for understanding ways in which gendered discourses continue to structure social realities" (Baxter, 2016, p. 43). Poststructuralist feminism refuses to accept the modernist notion that "all women are necessarily victims of patriarchy" (Baxter, 2016, p. 43). In this context, they adhere more to a poststructuralist notion of subjectivity whereby an identity is not only seen or thought through a binary model, but they acknowledge and value the uneven and uncertain power dynamics between males and females (Baxter, 2016). For feminist poststructuralism, subjectivity is "used to refer to the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world"[29] (Weedon, 1987 p.32). Subjectivity is constantly being re-constructed every time we think or speak; hence various forms of subjectivity are culturally and historically produced and change depending on the discourse context in which they are being used.

[29] This notion of subjectivity is central even within this research since the way women understand their gender (both consciously and unconsciously) impacts the way they portray their gender to others. This notion will be explored further when discussing gender performativity.

Moreover, subjectivity can create conflict within the individual, since as we acquire further understanding of particular discourses, we become more aware of alternative realties which might challenge our own subjectivity/ consciousness. As a result of these challenges, one might start resisting dominant discourses and social practices, such as those linked to gender identity and womanhood. This resistance within poststructural feminism is seen as agency (McNay, 2016). For agency/ resistance to take place, it does not necessarily mean that there is an outright rejection of oppressive norms or a public rejection, but it might also be an internal displacement that leads to emancipation.

Notions of gender identity such as femininity and masculinity are continuously being challenged by dominant social discourses to permanently establish the meaning of these constructs. Notwithstanding, as mentioned above, individuals are not passively dependent on these discourses but can "adopt, negotiate, contest or overturn dominant subject positions" (Baxter, 2016, p. 43). This is possible and done through agency. As a result of agency, individuals are able to shift positions of power according to the occurring discourse; this flexibility allows women or girls to escape narratives which set them as victims of their circumstances. The focus of this standpoint is not on how males and females are placed with regards to power due to gender relations, but the focus is more on how gender discourses are combined with other institutional discourses so as to set-up females in positions of powerlessness.

2.6 Gender Identity a performance or performative venture?

An important notion that stemmed out of post-structuralist theory is the notion of gender performativity, where gender and gendered identities are seen as being created and re-enacted through discourse. Judith Butler is considered one of the main proponents of this theory; however,

before discussing Butler's concepts, a brief outline of Goffman's theory of performance will be presented since this can be seen as a predecessor of Butler's concepts.

2.6.1 Gender as a performance

Even though Goffman is not considered a post-structural sociologist, some of his concepts can be easily adapted to post-structural thinking. For Goffman, identity is done; however, it is not something one does on their own; on the contrary, it is part of "a social and collective endeavour" (Lawler, 2014, p. 119). This can be seen in situations such as gatherings or ceremonies which have two functions, that is, "the affirmation of basic social arrangements and the presentation of ultimate doctrines about man and the world" (Goffman, 1976, p. 69)

Goffman's dramaturgical theory divides life into two parts; 'front stage' where we interact with people: "front, then is the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance" (Goffman, 1956, p. 13). Whereas the 'backstage' or 'back region' is the place where we can practice performance techniques, it is also the place where the performer can "relax; he can drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character" (Goffman, 1956, p. 70). The back region is hidden, most of the time closed to other members of the audience, since this is the place that holds the 'secrets' of the performance and in the backstage, the performers act out of character (Goffman, 1956). So much so, that according to Goffman "a 'performance' may be defined as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants" (Goffman, 1956, p. 8).

Although we might feel that our performances are done out of our own free will, Goffman sustains that these are framed and constrained according to principles which organise the specific context (Brickell,

2003). Furthermore, Brickell (2003) defines frames as “properties of the social order” which “organise subjective experiences by providing the meanings governing interpretations of social events” (p. 160). Goffman rejects the notion that gender is natural (Brickell, 2003); by emphasising this through the performative representation of masculinity and femininity, one is not only expressing gender differences, but they are creating them (Lawler, 2014):

> What the human nature of males and females really consists of, then, is a capacity to learn to provide and to read depictions of masculinity and femininity and a willingness to adhere to a schedule for presenting these pictures, and this capacity they have by virtue of being persons, not females or males. One might just as well say there is no gender identity. (Goffman, 1979, p. 8)

When discussing gender Goffman is not interested in the practices per se, but he is more interested in the “consequences of gendered practices for the production of gender as a social institution” (Smith, 2006, p. 90). Goffman (1977) dismisses biological differences as a justification for women’s subordination; according to him, "physical facts of life" such as gestation are extended and commonly justified as 'essential' differences between the sexes. This practice is done through institutional reflexivity, which according to Goffman, can be seen in five examples: through gendered division of labour, which creates mutual dependency in the couple since domestic work is seen as not appropriate for men, whereas paid work is not appropriate for women; secondly, siblings are seen as socialisers where through one's home experiences we learn our gendered roles such as girls need to be treated in a softer manner; hence, they are given a softer bed whereas boys need physical strength hence they are given a bigger portion of food. Thirdly, Goffman distinguishes between public toilet facilities and domestic toilet facilities; the former makes a distinction based on biological characteristics; however, the latter demonstrates that this is not needed since both sexes use the same bathroom in a private context. Another example is "selective job placement" (p. 317), where women are engaged in, or encouraged to engage in, jobs that reflect the roles given to them within the household (so either jobs related to domestic labour or to caring for others) or jobs which "meet the public", such as hostesses or receptionists, and use women's attractiveness as a selling point. Finally, an "identification system" is

set in place so as to mark gendered persons based on appearance, tone of voice, name and title. As a result of institutional reflexivity, social order is maintained. Hence Goffman concludes that gender identities are not a result of our biological differences but are the creation of institutional practices, which are sustained through social interaction.

Some of the ideas presented by Goffman can be seen in Butler's theory, even though their positionality is a post-structural one. Butler's work stems from three crucial points that propose a new way to explore gender and its interpretation, this interpretation is deemed crucial for this research since it combines the social construction of gender with the discursive element. Butler poses their theory on the notions that: gender differences are not biological; gender is socially constructed; and gender is performative (Butler, 1988; Jagger, 2008; Salih & Butler, 2004). To be able to develop these concepts, she draws on other theorists such as Simone de Beauvoir, Foucault, Wittig, and Lacan.

2.6.2 Gender as performative

Butler starts from de Beauvoir's premise that "one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one" (Butler, 1986, p. 519). According to Butler, if we accept the notion that one becomes a woman rather than one is a woman, then we are accepting that becoming a woman is a social process (Butler, 1988). For de Beauvoir gender is not stable but rather an identity that is developed over time through the "stylised repetition of acts" (Butler, 1988, p. 519). Both Butler and de Beauvoir agree that the body is the vessel which can only take up, and in turn, is limited by, the "existing cultural norms, laws and taboos which constrain that taking up or 'choice'" (Salih & Butler, 2004, p. 21). Gender is understood through gestures which are then linked to the body, where they give the illusion of a fixed gendered self (Butler, 1988). In de Beauvoir's work, the biological elements are not denied but are re-understood as distinct from the cultural process whereby the body takes on the cultural meanings (De Beauvoir,

1956, as cited in Butler, 1988). The latter means that to become a woman is to force the body to conform to a historical notion of a woman rather than a natural fact[30] (De Beauvoir, 1956). Hence the body is a production of a "cultural sign" (Butler, 1988, p. 522). For this to be possible, the reproduction has to be done repeatedly and sustained as a project (Butler, 1988; Salih & Butler, 2004).

According to Butler (1990) if we accept the notion that 'one becomes a woman' and that the link between sex and gender identification is illusionary, nothing guarantees that the body of one who becomes a woman will necessarily be the body that we generally link to woman. Butler further develops de Beauvoir's notion to question the binary. Since, according to Butler, our anatomical understanding is a result of cultural meaning, we view sex, gender, sexuality, desire and the body, as well as the two binaries, as the norm. However, in reality, these are products of "compulsory heterosexuality" and "phallogocentrism"[31] (Butler, 1990). Here Butler ties in with Wittig's work which states that the binary restriction on, and the division of, the sexes, is essential for heterosexuality and its reproductive aims (Butler, 1990). Butler also references Wittig's work when she speaks about heterosexual material practices as productive of meaning and looks at how gender is given meaning in a specific culture and context (Butler, 1990).

Like Foucault, Butler thought that discourse produces the identities that it (i.e. discourse) appears to be representing "gender proves to be performative – that is, constructing the identity it is purported to be" (Butler, 1990, p. 25). For Foucault, the genealogical analysis[32] of sexuality is a search of discourse

30 A notion which De Beauvoir adopted from Merleau-Ponty for whom, the body gains meaning through the specific historical context and through its continuous recreation; hence its manifestation in the world is not pre-set by an interior essence, and its expression is to be understood as taking up and recreating a set of historical possibilities (Merleau-Ponty, 1945).

31 "Phallogocentrism" was a term coined by Derrida which demonstrates how our cultural heritage revolves around the male experience. This is possible firstly because our history is narrated from a male perspective and secondly even traditional intellectual discourse is based on the male experience since the analysed texts are masculine ones (Dely, 2007).

32 Foucault uses the example of what we now refer to as butch women who were convicted of sodomy or the 'crime against nature' because they acted like men, hence transgressing gender norms, to argue that acts were not always considered as an expression of the "individual's psyche or as evidence of inclinations of a certain type

production, that is, the production of power and knowledge (Sullivan, 2003). Our desires are also performatively constructed, whereby the socially dominant performances are those of heterosexual desire (Butler, 1990). Since heterosexuality is created through discourse and institutions,[33] which have been absorbed in our culture and normalised; hence heterosexuality is more powerful and has more knowledge than other sexual orientations, according to Foucault[34] (Sullivan, 2003). Furthermore, for Foucault, the self is constructed through our relationship with others and within institutions that have the most power and knowledge; in turn, our life is constructed by the discourse that exists in our culture (Sullivan, 2003). Butler, like Foucault, drew light on the importance of the uttering of words since these represent the phenomenon (Butler, 1990). For example, identifying a newborn as 'boy or girl' is not determining if the child will become male or female, but whoever utters the identification is taking part in the formation of that child into male or female (Butler, 1990). The latter can be asserted since, Butler states, our gendered identities go further than just the utterances[35] of words; they span the entire spectrum of attitudes, choices, interests and 'corporeal forms' that we equate with being female or male[36] (Butler, 1990). For a performative utterance to achieve its purpose, it has to be linked to the appropriate conditions; for example, for a marriage to take place, the person who says 'I pronounce you husband and wife' has to have the power/ capacity to actually marry people otherwise that statement would just be a statement without any performative value (Butler, 1993). The same notion applies to gender, whereby gender is performative because it is not "descriptive but prescriptive" (Livia & Hall, 1997, p. 12); therefore, it requires the individual to act in accordance with gender norms to create the appropriate gender within the said culture. Performances of masculinity and femininity vary according to social context and over time, as well as cross-culturally and throughout one's life (Butler,

of subject" (Sullivan, 2003). On the other hand for Butler the genealogical critique has two aims; first to denaturalise sex, gender and the binary and secondly to destabilise the "epistemological and ontological, regimes that produce them as natural" (Jagger, 2008, p. 18).

[33] Although acts, gestures and desires create the illusion of an interior and structured gender core, there is no inner realm of experience prior to the social one (Butler, 1990).

[34] The individuals that do not fit in the dominant group are seen as the 'other', and therefore treated as social outsiders and subjected to social punishments (Butler, 1990).

[35] Butler subscribes to Austin's (1962) meaning of 'performative utterance' whereby these utterances are seen as a separate category without a truth value; that is the statement is neither true nor false, since it does not describe the world but "acts upon it- a way of doing things with words" (Butler, 1993; Livia & Hall, 1997, p. 11).

[36] One 'choses' their gender from the gender constructions that are culturally available (Salih & Butler, 2004).

1990). Gender is a repeated action; this action is a "reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings" (Butler, 1990, p. 140) which are already socially established (Jagger, 2008; Sullivan, 2003). According to Butler, these representations are never entirely stable, and in different contexts and times, they can take a different meaning, vis-a-vis the dominant norms[37] (Butler, 1990). According to Butler, the performance of gender is interdependent with the performance of other aspects of our identity such as class, race and ability. In turn, our gendered performances affect how others respond to us, responses which continue to form our gendered identity.[38] Consequently, what we consider as 'nature' is an effect rather than a cause, that is, an effect of the response of others to our gendered identities in relation to other aspects of our lives (Butler, 1990). This is why according to Butler, there is no doer behind the deed; the doer is formed from the doing (Butler, 1990).

According to Butler, even though gender is un-natural and socially constructed, it is a construct that is continuously taking place, which we cannot be 'without' (Salih & Butler, 2004) "because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the ideas of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis" (Butler, 1988, p. 522). These gendered performances or constructions are carried out according to a 'script', and this is where Butler draws on Lacan's work since, according to her, these scripts are like 'laws' (Alsop et al., 2002). The scripts are the ideals of masculinity and femininity which in turn portray particular behaviours as appropriate and others as inappropriate; these ideals are unachievable but nonetheless are the reference points to the way we act[39] (Alsop et al., 2002). According to Butler, "gender is a kind of persistent impersonation that passes as real" (Butler, 1990, p. viii), with the realness of gender being constituted out of the ability to make-believe as a result of the embodiment of norms (Alsop et al.,

[37] Butler uses the examples of butch/femme roles and drag to further demonstrate this (Butler, 1990, 1993).
[38] In this context, Butler yet again agrees with Foucault when she states that we become "subjects from our performances and the performances of others towards us" (Alsop et al., 2002, p. 99).
[39] Unlike Lacan, Butler argues that the scripts can change over time (Alsop et al., 2002). Lacan and Butler also differ in their view about 'Law' whereby for Lacan law means symbolic order which is patriarchal and what is outside the social order becomes repressed, hence thinking outside the law is meaningless and will lead to psychosis (Alsop et al., 2002). On the other hand Butler sees the law as hegemonic and not conforming to it will lead to social punishments and exclusions (Alsop et al., 2002).

2002). Furthermore, Butler states that the creators of gender become so immersed in their 'fictions' that its construction reinforces one's belief in gender as something necessary and natural. As previously mentioned, even though gender is unnatural and constructed by society, it is a construct that is constantly taking place and that one cannot be without (Salih & Butler, 2004). The social pressure to adhere to gender is so great that (most) individuals feel offended or even hurt if they are told that they do not portray their manhood or womanhood well enough or improperly (Salih & Butler, 2004). Hence if the human existence is a gendered one, to move away from the established genders is, to a certain extent, to put one's existence in question[40] (Salih & Butler, 2004).

Butler's theory did not come by uncontested and without its fair share of controversy. Two common criticisms are that since gender is a performance, then one can change it at will,[41] which makes gender seem like a trick (Jagger, 2008), as well as the lack of freedom Butler leaves for personal and political agency. Authors like Biddy Martin criticise Butler's theory on the following grounds: queer theory seems to demonstrate gender categories as negative and that one who continues to use terms such as man/woman is being dictated to by the dominant norms (Martin, 1994). Furthermore, Martin (1994) argues that the problem is not gender but the fixed "correlations between sex, gender identity, gender or sex roles, sexual object choice, sexual identity" (Martin, 1994, p. 115) as well as the lack of possibility to construct another gender. According to Martin (1994), we need gender categories to be able to articulate concepts like misogyny. On the other hand, McNay (as cited in Alsop et al. 2002) accuses Butler of implying a false dualism between 'normal' and 'excluded' identities and between 'dominant' and 'resistant' responses to subjectification. McNay criticises Butler for reducing questions of gender hierarchies to questions about the construction of sexed identities; that is, she does not give sufficient importance to material and social factors which structure people's lives along gendered lines (Alsop et al., 2002).

[40] More so if we attest that the 'doer' that is the one doing the reproduction of gender is produced "in and by the act" (Jagger, 2008).
[41] This was denied by Butler and in her texts starting from Gender Trouble onwards it was made clear that gender is not a question of choice (Alsop et al., 2002).

2.6.3 Can Goffman's, and Butler's theories be compared?

Goffman's notion of gender identity is very similar to Butler's perspective, which claims that no identity precedes the social; even bodies are inundated with sociality since we give meaning to some characteristics and not to others (Lawler, 2014). Furthermore, for Butler, identities are "performative in that they bring into effect what they name"[42] (Lawler, 2014, p. 129). According to Butler, the performativity of gender is not the same as a staged performance of gender; this is since there is no doer behind the deed or person behind the mask. Lloyd (2016) states that Butler makes a distinction between performativity and performance since, according to the latter, performative acts are not singular or deliberate which are freely chosen, but these actions are repeated actions, which are compulsory and enforced according to the accepted dominant gender norms.

Gender is not natural or pre-existing; on the contrary, it is produced in discourse, especially in discourse about sexed identities. Since discourse can produce "sets of social relations in which sex or gender is a significant dividing line; those social relations, in turn, come to seem both natural and inevitable" (Brickell, 2003; Lawler, 2014, p. 129). However, we are not free to perform gender as it pleases us, but it has to be framed within the confines of "compulsory heterosexuality" (Brickell, 2003; Lawler, 2014, p. 129). Butler, like Goffman, argues that the very fact that we must keep repeating the same behaviour shows that such behaviour is not stemming out of nature, that is, part of human nature. Butler uses drag to sustain her argument since according to Butler drag is not an imitation of the 'original femininity', but it reveals the performative aspect of all genders (Salih & Butler, 2004). Moreover, Butler

[42] For an utterance to be performative, it needs the following features: the person doing the utterance has to have the authority to do it; the place where the utterance is done has to be socially recognised as appropriate; and the person about whom the utterance is made, has to be socially recognised as an appropriate person about whom those words can be spoken.

seems to agree with Goffman in so far as "we *become* what we continually, repeatedly and compulsory perform" (Lawler, 2014, p. 133).

2.7 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, the presented literature tackles the question of gender and how different perspectives address the notion of womanhood; the presented perspectives address arguments linked to sex/gender distinction, gender as being socially constructed, with an emphasis on how different feminist theories understand gender. Furthermore, a more in-depth analysis of the literature linked to intersectionality, feminist post-structural theory and gender performativity was carried out.

Chapter 3- Literature Review- Discourse

3.1 Introduction

In the following sections, literature about language and its impact on gender will be presented, specific focus on discourse is deemed to be essential for this research, especially Foucault's concepts of discourse since this concept addresses the link between discourse and power. Although this research emphasises the constructive nature of discourse rather than its linguistic aspects, reviewing literature on queer linguistics was considered relevant as it offered insights into the dominance of heteronormative discourses. The final section examined the interaction between identity, gender, and discourse, as well as their creation and/or re-creation within our societies.

3.2 Discourse

Our linguistic abilities have developed so much that nowadays, we do not only speak or see language as a static descriptor of the world, but language is seen as doing something, as being an act within itself. As will be discussed within this section, discourse has a constructive function; that is, it creates the reality or social practices which they are describing; for this research, a thorough understanding of discourse is needed so as to enable me to understand how discourse (or the different discourses) which are in place within a given time impact gender identity.

Various authors proposed different definitions for discourse, such as Cameron (1998), who states that discourse is language that communicates meaning in context, which is, representing the interaction between people and groups of people in real social situations. Other authors state that discourse is "language as action, or as interaction in specific situations" (Talbot, 2010, p. 118); furthermore,

according to Kress (1985), “discourses are systematically-organised sets of statements which give expression to the meaning and values of an institution” (Talbot, 2010). We use discourse to give meaning to “every aspect of our social, cultural, political environment” (Blommaert, 2005, p. 4). Discourse transforms our environment into a “socially and culturally meaningful one” (Blommaert, 2005, p. 4), where this meaningful construct follows strict conditions that are both linguistic (things have a pre-set linguistic definition) and sociocultural (there are pre-set cultural notions of a specific term) (Blommaert, 2005). Even though authors use different words or statements to define discourse, the common denominator seems to be the social element; that is, discourse creates our social reality. However, in turn, discourse is also created as a result of one’s social context.

From a theoretical perspective, discourse can be explored through either a structuralist or poststructuralist standpoint. Even though both these linguistic, philosophical branches claim that “our access to reality is always through language” (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 8), they have diverging viewpoints on the impact and the social use of discourse. From a structuralist perspective, language contributes to the construction of reality; it is not just the reflection of reality; they agree that meanings, representations and physical objects, are real and exist; however, these gain meaning through discourse (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). The meaning that an event might have depends on the type of discourse that one attaches to it; for example, after a natural occurrence takes place, one can either speak from a naturalistic standpoint and consider the event as a natural phenomenon, or speak from a religious standpoint and see it as an act of God, or adopt a political point of view and argue that the event happened because the powers that be are not acting upon their responsibilities (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). Irrespective from which standpoint we view an event, the fact that we are creating meaning through discourse will either create or change the world (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). Hence, one can claim that language is not just a channel through which information is passed, but it is a “machine” (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 9) that develops and makes up the social world, as well as social identities and realities (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). For Saussure, as read by Jorgensen and

Phillips, the meaning of a word is not inherent to it, but it is the "result of social conventions whereby we connect certain meanings with certain sounds" (2002, p. 10). Furthermore, he states that a word takes its meaning by being part of a *structure* of other words and hence, can be compared to everything that it is not; therefore, one knows what the sea is because one knows that the sea is not a pond or a lake (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). In Saussarian tradition, the structure of language can be compared to a fishing net, where each sign, represented by a knot, has a fixed place and its distance from the other knots defines that particular sign (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). This notion is based on the assumption that signs are fixed in their relationship to other signs, and so is their meaning (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

Later structuralists and post-structuralists criticised the fishing net metaphor. Whilst post-structuralists agree with the notion that signs acquire their meaning because they are different from other signs, they claim that these signs can change according to the context they are used in (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). Furthermore, according to this thinking, signs are provisional and not necessarily consistent, which solves the structuralist issue with change, since in post-structuralist philosophy "the structure becomes changeable and the meanings of signs can shift in relation to one another" (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 11). The second criticism that structuralists receive from a post-structuralist perspective is based on how structure is created, reproduced, and changed through language. According to this criticism, people draw on structure, but they might also change the structure by introducing new ideas of how to interpret or present the sign they are reproducing.

One of the most influential post-structuralist discourse philosophers was Foucault, whose ideas about discourse developed between his archaeological and genealogical writings. In the former phase, he focuses on the subject one is speaking about, which is done through "historically specific rules of formation" (Howarth, 2000, p. 7; Talbot, 2010). In the latter, he is concerned with how "discourses are shaped by social practices and the way they in turn shape social relationships and institutions"

(Howarth, 2000, p. 8; Talbot, 2010). As this would suggest, throughout Foucault's writings, one can find different notions of what discourse is, such as discourse being "merely representation" (Foucault, 1970, p. 81) to "how is it that one particular statement appeared rather than another" (Foucault, 1972, p. 27).[43] For Foucault, discourse is not just what someone says or states, since statements are just signs (not a unit per se) that are either written or spoken, "a function that cuts across a domain of structures and possible unities, and which reveals them, with concrete contents, in time and space" (Foucault, 1972, p. 87). Hence for statements to be understood, one has to know the rules which regulate their functioning; however, in this case, Foucault is not referring to grammatical rules, but rules related to bodies of knowledge which are historically variable (that is, discourse/s) (McHoul & Grace, 2002). Discourse is different and identifiable from a statement due to its criteria of formation, transformation and correlation, where:

> "Rules of formation are the situations which make possible in the first place the objects and concepts of discourse. The rules of transformation are the limits of its capacities to modify itself, the 'threshold' from which it can bring new rules 'into play'. The rules of correlation are the 'ensemble of relations' which a discourse has with other discourses at a given time and with the 'nondiscursive context' in which it finds itself." (McHoul & Grace, 2002, p. 44)

As a result of these rules, discursive practices are set in place at any given time and these explain why some statements/things are "seen (or omitted); why it is envisaged under such an aspect and analyzed at such a level; why such a word is employed with such a meaning and in such sentence" (Foucault, 1989, p. 61). Weedon (1987) draws the link between discursive practices and women since discursive practices 'create' that of which they speak. The different discursive productions about women's bodies

[43] Even though Foucault evolved further how we look at and analyse discourse, there are two notions that remain central throughout. The first is that "discourse is not, and can never be, a transparent medium that 'mirrors' the world" (Miler, 1990, p. 116), whilst the second is "we cannot get 'outside' of discourse and gain access to anything beyond it", hence discourse is all that we know or discuss (Armstrong, 2015; Miller, 1990)

was/ is significant in how social norms about femininity were/are created, and the same can be said for how, as a result of patriarchal discursive practices, women were/are excluded from public life.

Foucault also developed the notion that discourse is closely linked to power and in turn, whoever holds power, has control over knowledge; moreover, discourse, knowledge and power are symbiotic; they feed off each other and re-create each other. For Foucault (1978), ""power" is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society" (p. 93). Moreover, power is seen everywhere "not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another" (p. 93), hence power is present in all our social relations. Feder (2011) suggests that to be able to understand better what Foucault meant by 'power'; one needs to also look at how the word is used or translated; she states that Foucault used the noun '*pouvoir'*, which, apart from meaning power can also mean "to be able to", hence this would also give the word an additional meaning, that of "potentiality, capability or capacity" (Feder, 2011, p. 56). This second meaning is seen when Foucault speaks of power as being productive; "it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production" (Foucault, 1977, p. 194).

Knowledge, therefore, is imparted to us (hence it is external to the agent) by society or the social group one forms part of. Knowledge is presented as a structured set of "claims" or "statements" (Miller, 1990, p. 117). These 'claims' are not objectively truthful or false, but they are defined by a group, a society and an institution since the knowledge is part of the "power relationships into which the group in question enters" (Miller, 1990, p. 117). Foucault, throughout his work, focused on two types of

knowledge *savoir* or implicit knowledge, that is, what is regarded as 'common sense'[44] within a specific context (time/place/people), and *connaissance,* that is the knowledge that is institutionalised. For Foucault, knowledge is not something imposed from an authoritative figure, but it is so ingrained in our discourses that it is considered or regarded as true, this is where the true influence of power is seen, in fact he uses the term power/knowledge[45] on various occasions.

However, for this power/knowledge to 'function', the discursive practices being utilised need to align with the messages that the power/knowledge is trying to produce. Even though many discourse theorists claim that discourse is solely determined by power relationships, it is not as such, since this would mean that people from different power positions would have a totally different discourse, which would lead to people from different power positions not being able to communicate together. According to Miller (1990), even though individuals from different power positions are able to communicate together, the meaning which speech acts have depends on the receiver's power position, "the speech act means one thing to the master and another to the slave"[46] (Miller, 1990, p. 112). Hence what is seen or considered as truth depends on who has access to such truth and who determines what truth is based on relations of power within institutions (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002; Talbot, 2010). According to Foucault, dominant members within institutions maintain power because they retain control by creating boundaries and order through discourses (Talbot, 2010). Moreover, meaning is not objective, on the contrary, its subjectivity is ingrained, and one would be mistaken to claim that discourse is objective, hence meaning "cannot exist in a world without subjects" (Miller, 1990, p. 120).

[44] Common sense or the taken for granted knowledge is that knowledge which one recognises as truth without contesting or researching such facts, such as, for example, the dichotomy of the sexes or that there are only two opposing genders.

[45] Power/knowledge "can only exist with the support of arrangements of power, arrangements that likewise have no clear origin, no person or body who can be said to "have it""(Feder, 2011, p. 56).

[46] Furthermore Blommaert (2005) addresses the notion of repertoire or ways of speaking, where he claims that the latter allows us to use linguistic resources within certain contexts, hence not everyone will have the same means of communication (since not everyone has access to the same level of discursive repertoire), hence not everyone will have the same means of communication, so not everyone is able to communicate with the same functionality.

Furthermore, the subject is constructed by rules of discourse; hence, when one explains the rules of discourse, they describe the subject (Miller, 1990).

However, even Foucault also acknowledges that "discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it…discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy" (Foucault, 1978, pp. 100, 101). Wherever there is power, there is resistance[47] since both 'forces' are constantly pushing against each other; moreover, power relations can be changed because of resistance. For Foucault, the very act of resistance is also an expression of power (Feder, 2011). One form of resistance that Foucault highlights is "reverse" discourse, where oppressed individuals use/reclaim the same terms/discourses used to oppress them. Foucault (1978) used the example of how homosexuals started speaking about homosexuality (even by using medical terms which used to pathologise them) to show that homosexuality is natural. Resistance might not be visible because "we cannot step outside the networks of power that circumscribe our experience, but there is always a possibility for thinking and being otherwise with them" (Oksala, 2011, p. 93).

The relationship between power, discourse and knowledge was re-addressed by different theorists, and even though the points mentioned above remain dominant, new perspectives emerged. For example, contemporary discourse analysis theorists disagree with Foucault's concept that there is one "knowledge regime in each historical period" (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 13). Instead, they argue that different discourses are either being used simultaneously or striving for the proper way to define the truth (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). Another development in thought was with regards to the notion of truth; whereby Jorgensen and Philips claim that since it is futile to ask if something is true or false, one must focus on "how effects of truth are created in discourses" (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 14).

[47] Resistance is not seen as an external force or relation to power.

Apart from the above mentioned points, Miller (1990) sustains that discourse has other functions which are not necessarily related to creating and maintaining power. Such functions are "social facilitation", whereby discourse is used to achieve "mutually beneficial social arrangements" (Miller, 1990, p. 123), by which the discourse used by someone who is deemed as having knowledge and/or power, is used for the benefit of those who do not have such knowledge and/or power. He also argues that the rules that create discourse render it autonomous from some social structures and institutions. Miller uses the example of telling the truth to prove this point since this practice is of benefit to the people participating in such discourse.[48] Even though Miller states that the determining factor of discourse is the "mutual benefit accruing to agents" (Miller, 1990, p. 123), he does realise that there will also be speech acts that will be performed for the benefit of the individual per-se.

From a feminist perspective, Foucault's theories were criticised on a number of accounts. Firstly, theorists such as McNay and Diprose criticise Foucault because he limits his focus to male subjectivity and ignores the construction of masculinity in relation to femininity; moreover, he does not offer an account of the construction of sexual differences and patriarchal powers (McHoul & Grace, 2002; McNay, 1992). McNay (1992) argues that "it is the body that is the principal target of the power/knowledge relations transmitted through discourse" hence "the question of sexuality and the body must be looked at in terms of how the body is invested with certain properties and inserted into regimes of truth via the operations of power and knowledge" (p. 28). Another feminist criticism of Foucault's theories is with regards to how he treats gender issues such as the lack of attention paid to the gendered nature of disciplinary techniques; McNay labels such lack of attention as gender blindness. Furthermore, Martin (1982) states that contrary to Foucault's claims, society did not repress sexuality; on the contrary, it has multiplied it and used it as a "particularly privileged means of gaining access to the individual and the social bodies, as a way of "policing" society through procedures of normalizing rather than prohibition" (p. 8) Notwithstanding the presented criticism, Foucault's work

[48] That is, that one would tell the truth which would be "mutually beneficial" (Miller, 1990, p. 123).

remains very important for this study. Such criticism shows that Foucault tackled his theory mainly from a male perspective, a perspective which within itself holds power and knowledge. This might go to show the strong impact of gender and our discourse production. Understanding discourse from a Foucauldian perspective will enable me to look out for the types of discourses used, power dynamics, and knowledge production within the discourses presented during this research, as discussed further in the methodology chapter.

As highlighted in the above paragraphs, discourse theory was an important shift in linguistic philosophy and for sociolinguistic studies.

3.3 Queer Linguistics

Even though this research focuses more on the constructive nature of discourse rather than on the linguistic element, it was deemed relevant to explore literature about queer linguistics since this review provided insights into the prevalence of heteronormative discourses. In this section, literature which combines Queer perspectives with linguistic research will be explored and linked to the study of gender, so as to explore whether this combination can give us a better understanding of gender as a social category as well as a lived experience.

From a queer standpoint, utterances are particularly important, and this is seen through the centrality of notions such as the 'performative utterance'. For a performative utterance to achieve its purpose, it has to be linked to the appropriate conditions, for example, for a marriage to take place, the person who says 'I pronounce you husband and wife' has to have the power/ capacity to actually marry people otherwise that statement would just be a statement without any performative value (Butler, 1993). As

outlined in further detail in previous sections,[49] the same notion applies to gender, whereby gender is performative because it is not "descriptive but prescriptive" (Livia & Hall, 1997, p. 12); therefore, it requires the individual to act in accordance with gender norms to create the appropriate gender within the said culture. Bucholtz and Hall (2004) claim that performativity is useful to linguistic analysis since it challenges the notion that gender and sexuality are natural since it claims that both gender and sexuality attain "social meaning only when physical bodies enter into historically and culturally specific systems of power" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004, p. 492). This means that when a researcher sees gender as performative, not constitutive, the study would need to take into consideration the context of the community by looking at the specificity of the community being researched as well as the historical context (Livia & Hall, 1997). The attention in this context is not on how individuals affirm or negate "a pre-given biological designation" (Hall, 2014, p. 234) but on how one actuates the various identity positions within the different contexts one finds themselves in, be it conversational or localised (Hall, 2014).

According to Motschenbacher and Stegu (2013), queer linguistics[50] analyses:

> "Any kind of sexuality-related discourse from a Queer Theoretical point of view: (1) heteronormative discourse, (2) *non*-hetero*normative* discourse (pertaining to non-normative heterosexualities), and (3) *non-hetero*normative discourse (associated with all forms on non-heterosexuality, including gay male and lesbian sexualities, but also many more)." (p. 527)

Queer linguistics does not see identities or identity categories as pre-established, but these are ideological constructs constructed by discourse (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004; Gray & Cooke, 2018), and this construction is done in a "fluid and temporary manner" (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013, p. 522). This implies that identity is 'performed' through language, whereby language is both the medium I use to

[49] Gender performativity is addressed in further detail in section 2.6.2 Gender as performative.
[50] Queer linguistics like Queer theory, does not assign a fixed meaning to the term 'queer' (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004).

express myself as well as the medium through which I see myself, depending on the discourses I have available (Gray & Cooke, 2018). This is so much so that the notion that identities are constructed through dominant discourses can be seen in practice even in cultures where there are more than two gender categories. Individuals forming part of the 'third' gender would need to construct their identity according to the dominant discourse. Their behaviour would be appraised when compared to the binary norm, whereby the individual behaviour is contrasted according to the dominant ideas of 'femaleness' or 'maleness' (Gray & Cooke, 2018). Queer linguistics does not only research linguistics related to gay and lesbian discourse (Motschenbacher, 2010; Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013) otherwise, it would mean that heterosexuality is not constructed through discourse (whilst homosexuality is). The notion that Queer theory and Queer linguistics looks only at sexual minorities and gay/lesbian language is a criticism that is ascribed to these standpoints by other perspectives; however, this is a false claim since both Queer theory and Queer linguistics look at heteronormativity, and the effects it leaves not only on sexual minorities but also on individuals who identify as heterosexual (Motschenbacher, 2010). Additionally, if queer linguistics was only a gay and lesbian approach to linguistics, it would only focus on homophobia and heterosexism; however, queer linguistics focuses on heteronormativity and how linguistic mechanisms facilitate the process for heterosexuality to be perceived as the norm (Motschenbacher, 2010). Over the past twenty years, more research has been conducted about the discursive construction of heterosexuality, and such research demonstrates that heteronormativity[51] does not only prefer heterosexuality but, more specifically, a type of heterosexuality which falls within the "normative structure of people's behaviour" (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013, p. 524). Consequentially queer linguistics sees all identity categories as problematic, since identity categories control and eliminate people who do not meet the normative requirements of the said category (Motschenbacher, 2010). This notion of meeting normative

[51] Motschenbacher & Stegu (2013) state that it's hard to find a context which is free from heteronormativity, even in groups where the participants identify as non-heterosexual, furthermore even non-heterosexual contexts have their own internal normativities, the latter are more visible now due to increase in acceptance of same-sex relationships. Furthermore, non-heterosexual individuals can also be seen as perpetuating heteronormativity especially when they try to access and enact heteronormative institutions such as marriage (Hall, 2013).

requirements is not only seen in categories such as man/woman, but also in the social construction of age, ability and in sexual orientation categories (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013); hence one has to look at intersectionality and at the context.[52] This standpoint is not only concerned with individuals who label themselves as queer, but it includes anyone who falls outside the normative practice of sexuality; the defining factor is not sexual orientation but rather sexual marginalisation (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004).

Queer linguistics targets two dominant discourses, which are: the linguistic mechanisms that construct heterosexuality as the norm and gender binarism (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013). Queer linguistics places gender binarism as the starting point of its research. Dominant discourse normativity supports and promotes the notion that there are two 'coherent' sexes, genders and desires; if a person forms part of either sex, they should do the gender as socially constructed for their sex and desire an individual from the opposite sex (who is also doing gender as socially constructed). This implies that any individual who does not follow the latter script is considered abnormal and invisible in most contexts (Motschenbacher, 2010). Research should be able to reflect this without being prejudiced by a priori assumptions that subjects fit within two exclusive categories. This does not mean that researchers cannot use the terms or analytic categories, but if this is done, the researcher must be critically aware of the "discursive materialization and normativity that are attached to them" (Motschenbacher, 2010, p. 7, 8). Motschenbacher & Stegu (2013) state that language constructs sexual identities as a binary in various ways; firstly, this is done in obvious ways, such as by giving labels (heterosexual, lesbian, gay, etc.) as well as by using gendered pronouns. Furthermore, by adhering to stereotypically gendered speech styles, men and women construct themselves as heterosexual men and women, on the other-hand "cross-gender application of these speech styles" (Motschenbacher &

[52] Notwithstanding this statement, Motschenbacher & Stegu (2013) recognise that even in Queer discussions its "generally not feasible to avoid category labels such as woman, man, lesbian, gay" (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013, p. 523).

Stegu, 2013, p. 525) is usually linked to gay and lesbian identities. Sexual identity labels construct the identity as heterosexual or homosexual, not in respect to the sexual act per se; this is very commonly seen since both self-identified heterosexuals and homosexuals might have had either same-sex sexual encounters or opposite-sex-sexual encounters; however, these encounters did not determine their identity (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013). Furthermore, this demonstrates that the continuum of sexualities is more complex than sexual identity labels are.

Heteronormativity as a by-product of language is another central theme in queer linguistics. According to Coates (2013), heteronormativity requires sexuality to be organised and regulated (through cultural practices) in such a way that what is considered 'normal' and 'natural' remains the dominant practice within society. As stated by Motschenbacher & Stegu (2013), Foucault, through his work, shows that the identity concepts of homosexuality and heterosexuality are not only culture-specific but are also modern from a historical point of view. The linguistic label had an objectifying effect whereby acts which were conceptualised through sexual practices became entwined with the practising person, the latter along with other social ascriptions from their social identities (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013). Globalisation and the Western dominance of other cultures allowed dominant discourses to be disseminated in other cultures (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013); hence, this induces doubt in what is supposed to be the naturality of gender and sexual binaries. Sexual identity, like gender, is performative (thus, so is heterosexuality), so it has to be "repeatedly and interactionally achieved" (Coates, 2013, p. 537). "Heteronormativity is a discursively produced pressure that requires everybody to position oneself in relation to it on a daily basis" (Motschenbacher, 2010, p. 16). Because heterosexuality is taken for granted, it limits one's choice, it restricts agency and because heteronormativity makes heterosexuality seem natural, it disguises all the cultural work that is done to maintain it (Coates, 2013). Moreover, this means that individuals who are not heterosexual have a constant pressure that has a long-lasting impact on their lives (even if they come to terms with their non-heterosexuality) because they have to fight and live in heteronormative structured institutions continually (Motschenbacher,

2010). Nonetheless, even individuals who identify as heterosexuals have to live with the pressure created by heteronormativity since they have to conform to its rules and display it accurately throughout their lives (Motschenbacher, 2010). When one queers heteronormativity when they do not conform to the heteronormative hierarchy, this could either be by having an affair or women expressing the wish to not have children, since the highest (best) form of heterosexuality is a sexuality which is monogamous, reproductive and whereby parties have conventional roles (Coates, 2013). Furthermore, when men and women do not align themselves with dominant norms for femininity or masculinity, they are queering heterosexuality because they are doing practices that can undermine it (Coates, 2013). According to Motschenbacher (2010), from a normative standpoint, men are more restricted in constructing their "heterosexual male role model" (Motschenbacher, 2010, p. 17) since they have to abide by norms which are more controlling for males than females, such as with regards to clothing, whereby no one will bat an eyelid if a woman wears trousers but for a man to wear a skirt is still considered as emasculating. On the other hand, when heterosexual women follow the "imperatives of heteronormative femininity" (Motschenbacher, 2010, p. 17), they support a system which sees women as 'the weaker sex' and men as powerful. Language is central in the construction of sexual practices since there is a whole linguistic range from courtship and flirting to verbalisation of sexual activities and erotic texts (Motschenbacher, 2010; Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013); furthermore, refusal and/or acceptance of sexual advances can be seen as a weakness and lead to judgment. Whereby a man might be labelled as gay if he refuses a woman's sexual advances or if he does not initiate them; on the other hand, if a woman accepts a man's advances instantaneously, she is seen as promiscuous (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013). The distinction between desire and identity in language is not unintentional but is motivated by historical developments in the "discursive formation of sexuality" (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013, p. 526). This notion of how one 'ought to behave' is also very much seen in language and over the years within different theoretical models, we have been presented with different linguistic deviants. In the dominance model, women are seen as the linguistic deviants as they

use a speech model that is different from men's,[53] within the difference model, the sissy or the tomboy are seen as deviant since they are supposed to belong to their group, but they preferred to play with the opposite sex (Hall, K., 2014).

Apart from the criticism previously mentioned, that is, queer linguistics, like queer theory, is relevant only for sexual minorities, a criticism which was argued as being false; queer linguistics receives other criticism from other linguistic schools. One of these criticisms is that queer linguistics acts on or has a political motivation. According to Motschenbacher (2010), queer linguistics does not only not deny this claim, but it admits that the standpoint is politically motivated. However, queer linguistics questions the possibility of having completely objective research since all research has an underlying aim, and even if a researcher states that they are objective, that is a political statement within itself (Motschenbacher, 2010). An opposing criticism to the one just presented is that poststructural approaches are apolitical; this is because if one undermines identity categories, the political agency of such categories becomes questionable (Motschenbacher, 2010). Then again, questioning concepts such as 'man' or 'woman' does not mean that one relinquishes the political agency since the process of deconstruction is a politically motivated one per se (Motschenbacher, 2010).

Through the process of questioning gender, the researcher is given the possibility to identify inconsistencies or individuals that are at the fringe who otherwise would be overlooked in other studies; hence this places concepts presented by queer linguistics as central to this research.

[53] This might include also other categories whose speech mode is different from the dominant male speech model example: gay male speech (Hall, K. 2014).

3.4 Identity, Gender and Discourse

The notion of the self is a notion that puzzled and continues to puzzle philosophers and other social scientists up to the present day, more so within a modern context where one's identity depends on and is 'shown' through a variety of contexts, such as gender and where it is being moulded, and produced through different discourses. This section will explore the interplay between identity, gender and discourse, and their production and/ or re-production within our societies.

The word 'identity' is a word that nowadays is used constantly; however, this notion is rarely agreed upon, which might lead us to ignore or overlook the multi-faced element/s of this concept (Sunderland & Litosseliti, 2002). It seemed that the endeavour to gain more knowledge about identity was and is an endeavour to get to know the self. From a philosophical perspective, we see this venture as addressing the self through different schools of thought, whereby each school saw the self as a being made, based or found within different paths. From an enlightenment philosophical standpoint, "the individual was conceptualised as a 'self-sufficient subject of action endowed with instrumental rationality'" (Gil 2000 as cited by Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 6). This is seen through work by Descartes and the notion that one can only achieve self-mastery through reason, and where cognition is a central feature (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). On the other hand, Locke's work focuses more on knowledge as stemming from observation rather than "a priori reasoning" (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 45). Through these works, we start seeing a notion of the self, being created by knowledge and experience, as something created in the mind, and it is in the mind where reflexivity is possible (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). Through this perspective, we start seeing "identity as an instrumental 'project of the self'" (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 45). On the contrary, romanticism sees the self as being something innate which is founded on feelings and responses rather than reasoning; in this school of thought, there is a focus on the true authentic self, which is linked to the notion of reaching our natural fulfilment or

fulfilling one's destiny (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). Yet again, through this perspective, we still see identity as a 'project of the self' (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006).

As a result of the psychoanalytic movement, the social element was introduced to the notion of self. Freud, in his work, did not only attempt to map the individual's mind genealogy and hence create a scientific method of how one can understand the psyche, but he also tried to understand "'normative' psychosocial behaviour" (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 20) through his work with patients. Even though psychoanalytic work focuses on the "internal working of subjectivity" (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 20), it also looks at the social element especially through the impact of socialisation. Furthermore, Lacan, who added to Freud's work, not only considers the social element in his work, but he also shifted the process of forming one's identity to the discursive realm. D. E. Hall (2004) states that agency is limited in Freudian theory, on the one hand, one is capable of reflexive interventions, that is, the self is able to reflect upon the self, whilst on the other hand, the self is constructed and encouraged to abide by unconscious drivers as well as "available positions of discourse" (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p.21; Hall, D. E., 2004). More recently, postmodern theorists see or present a dichotomous identity on one hand, which is fluid and moving, whilst, on the other hand, notions of sustaining and, or, reaching an "authentic sense of self in an uncertain world" (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 22) are also being presented. This also means a re-focus on self-improvement; however, this time, unlike in the romanticism period, it is also linked to "psychoanalytically-inspired explorations of the self" (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 22). These different schools of thought analyse and discuss the process of self or identity formation, but how do constructs such as gender impact our process of self and, or identity? What is the role of discourse in this gendered identity? Is the gendered self socially constructed or produced and reproduced through various methods?

According to Weatherall (2002), gender in discourse is seen in two ways; either as constructed through how it is "described in talk and texts" (Weatherall, 2002, p. 76) or as being self-constructed, that is, "a

social meaning system that structures the way we see and understand the world" (Weatherall, 2002, p. 76). These notions of gender as being constructed by a seemingly outside force versus self-constructed are notions that will be addressed over and again. However, how is gender seen in discourse? Do women's language and men's language symbolise gender in the language, and how does gendered discourse reproduce discourse? Ochs (1992) tried to analyse the link between gender and language by creating the concept of "gender indexes"[54] (Weatherall, 2002). According to Ochs, direct indexes include sex-specific pronouns (e.g., he and she) and nouns (e.g., woman and man) (Ochs, 1992). Nevertheless, the use of these indexes depends on the context; for example, gay men might use feminine pronouns to refer to other gay men. On the other hand, indirect indexes, or "non-exclusive indexes" (Ochs, 1992, p. 340), are, in theory, indexes that can be used "by/with/for both sexes" (Ochs, 1992, p. 340). However, in most cases, we find that if men use a specific non-exclusive index, women do not use it; for example, in most contexts, men are the ones giving orders with imperatives being seen as masculine or powerful whilst as seen in previous sections women are more likely to use tag questions (Ochs, 1992). Hence the use of indirect indexes is, to a certain extent, more common than direct ones because language (in context) focuses on social meanings rather than gender (Weatherall, 2002). Gal (1995) states that indirect and non-exclusive language means that how women use language and how men use language is cultural, and its purpose is to produce and compromise gender in interaction. In line with this, Litosseliti (2006) states that "*gendered* discourses, in particular, are discourses that say something about women and men, girls and boys, and about their – in certain ways gendered – actions, behaviours, positions, choices, relations, identities" (Litosseliti, 2006, p. 58). As opposed to men's and women's language, gendered discourses are voiced by both men and women. Even though this allows for more flexibility and fluidity, individuals are still constrained by their social positions and institutional structures; hence it can be stated that "discourses can be gendered as well

[54] "Indexicality…, whereby speakers connect particular linguistic features with representation of the social groups that are stereotyped as using them" (Jones, 2016, p. 213). Hence this theory also addresses the notion of how through particular use of language one points towards culturally recognisable identities. Furthermore, indexicality is an important bridge between modern and postmodern studies (Jones, 2016). Whereby modern studies, studied the difference between women's and men's language with a specific focus on dominance and power/ powerlessness; on the other hand, postmodern studies allow theorists to look at how language is used to index a broader range of cultural identities (Jones, 2016).

as gendering" (Litosseliti, 2006, p. 58). Sunderland (2004) has identified various gendered discourses some of these are:

- "Gender differences": deal with theories of gender and language where being male is seen as the norm, or where the sexes do not understand each other due to not having the same culture;
- "heterosexuality desire" which focuses on sexual drive, mainly "male sexual drive", and whereby heterosexuality is seen as the norm and the desired state. As per the literature presented in previous sections, such discourses are responsible for creating and re-perpetuating the notion of gender binaries and sexual dichotomies;
- "menopause" and the debate of "pharmaceutical" vs "alternative therapy", and
- "fatherhood" and discourses such as parental involvement, "traditional family fatherhood" vs. "shared parenting", and views of "new fatherhood" (Litosseliti, 2006, p. 59; Sunderland, 2004).

Gendered discourses are seen and can be labelled as such because they mark the context of how men and women can and should behave "when defining themselves as gendered subjects. These discursive frameworks demarcate the boundaries within which we can negotiate what it means to be gendered" (Mills, 1997 as cited in Litosseliti, 2006, pp. 59, 60). These discourses set the boundaries and position one gender versus the other.[55] Moreover, such discourses are such an integral part of dominant discourses that whoever does not adhere to such discourses, or opposes them, is seen as outside of the norm.

When one addresses notions like gendered discourses, it seems clear that discourse is a social construct that in turn constructs gender. From a social constructionist approach, language and discourse produce gender as an essential social category that is a result of the "ideological-symbolic" aspect of language,

[55] The notion of oppositionality is disseminated through various contexts, for example through education, media and employment; this can be seen when comparing girls' and boys' learning abilities, where one is seen as cooperating versus the other who is seen as competitive.

an individual creates their identity “thus gender has not fixed or stable meaning” (Sunderland, 2004; Weatherall, 2002, p. 85). “Gender is a social process; it is created and renegotiated in interpersonal relationships and encouraged and maintained through social structures” (Weatherall, 2002, p. 85) and women’s or men’s speech styles are not seen as originating from the social identity of their user, but are a discursive perception through which one constructs themselves as man or woman. We use our language to re-affirm and/ or, recreate who we are in terms of gender; consequently, one could state that they were a woman because, amongst other things, they talk like one. The study conducted by K. Hall (1995) examined how telephone-sex workers used speech styles and language, which is usually associated with women, to create this sexy persona. However, something that was discovered during the study was that one of the participants was a man who posed as a heterosexual female for callers. Within this study, the participants created what is perceived as stereotypical women’s speech; hence, they were re-creating conventional cultural norms of femininity (which are reflected and reproduced on a daily basis) (Hall, K., 1995). Such studies show the extent to which gender is socially constructed, and empirical research which assumes that “gender is located inside the individual as a stable set of characteristics” (Weatherall, 2002, p. 86) is proven to be mistaken. The notions that we have about what it means to be a woman or man, especially the dominant beliefs and stereotypes we have about each gender, are mainly created for the benefit of the dominant members of society (Jones, 2016). Patriarchy is a clear example of this, whereby patriarchy is created and perpetuated in society based on the notion that women are caring, that is, they care for the family at the expense of a career, versus men holding better job positions because they are more fit for the role. Another example is heteronormativity, when children role-play dating they are adhering to the pre-established notions of relationships; through such play, they start grasping messages that hint that if they are boys they should be paired with girls (Jones, 2016). Furthermore, behaviours/ actions that we consider to be within the norm depend on our context and on our dominant ideological system, which in most cases is heterosexual and cisgender. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2013) stated that these ideological systems are learned early on through social practices.

Studies such as Hall's do not mean that men and women do not communicate differently, yet these differences are linked to the access and opportunity that women/men have, for example, to give speeches such as political ones, or what is tolerated and expected out of an individual with regards to rudeness/ politeness. Texts are read and heard depending on the interpretation that one intends to give the said text, but the interpretation is dependent on the resources available to the receiver.[56] The text meaning is not pre-set in the text; instead, said text has potential for meaning, and meaning is given according to the social relations or social meaning one attributes to it (Talbot, 2010). The way we respond to texts depends on our social background and our interpretation of them. As social subjects, we are placed in subject positions that are created by discourse, and in turn, our identity as a person is dependent on how we act within these various discourses, positions and social roles (Talbot, 2010).

Consequently, this could mean that we are effects of discourse and not necessarily its producers. Upon their birth, women are placed in various social structures, be it institutional and, or, societal, whereby these lead them to fit in or act out specific roles; "we can consider an individual as a constellation of subject positions bestowed by different discourses" (Talbot, 2010, p. 124). This also means that one's subjectivity is "not fixed, invariant and 'unitary'; it is diversified and potentially contradictory" (Talbot, 2010, p. 124). In the case of women, a contrast is seen between what is expected of them in domestic work and paid employment.[57] Our identities shift according to the context we are in and whom we are interacting with; they mark similarities we have with other individuals within our social groups as well as differences (Litosseliti, 2006). The same applies to our gendered identities, whereby what it means to be feminine and masculine is very dependent on the social context one is in and on the social process of reproducing such femininity or masculinity from the various discourses available (Litosseliti, 2006).

[56] Such as intellectual abilities.

[57] This contradiction is seen because in some contexts it is acceptable for women to have a difficult job at home such as taking care of a baby for twenty-four hours, but it is not acceptable to have a 'difficult paid job'; this means that at home, women are expected to do the physical and mental challenging tasks but in paid employment they would not be given the opportunity to show their skills/abilities (Talbot, 2010).

Goffman states that what characterises one as male or female is not dependant on biology but a "willingness to adhere to a schedule for presenting these pictures" (Goffman, 1979, p. 224). Furthermore, his interest is in how these gender displays become ritualised through "institutionalised features of gender organisation" (Weatherall, 2002, p. 102). Goffman as mentioned in other sections states that being male or female is being able to learn to create, read and interpret masculinity and femininity, whilst being willing to adhere to appropriate representation of these (Goffman, 1977). Kessler and McKenna (1978) build on Goffman's work, stating that for an individual to pass as a man or a woman (not only in case of trans* individuals but even for cisgender individuals), it is not only a matter of displaying gender. The receiver has to be able to associate the displayed behaviour to the corresponding gender; hence "gender is a joint achievement in interaction" (Kessler and McKenna, 1978 as cited in Weatherall, 2002, p. 103). This notion of passing and of creating one's gender is very much linked to the poststructuralist notion of gender.

However, from a post-structural standpoint, one cannot see gender as simply two or as a binary[58] because this would mean that gender is viewed solely from a heterosexist and cis-sexist paradigm, whereby heterosexuality is considered the norm/normal and homosexuality, and trans* identities are deviant. This positionality attests that people are involved in the construction of their own gender; we are not acted upon without any say, and what we take to be an internal feature of ourselves is one that we anticipate and produce through certain bodily acts (Butler, 1990); hence gender is performative. As presented by Bergvall (1996) (as cited in Talbot, 2010), women can create new gender identities as a response to conflicting pressures, and one of the means through which we create new identities is language. Talbot (2010) highlights a study conducted by Bergvall (1996) that explains how women as engineering students changed their stereotypical behaviour to fit their needs. So as to satisfy their social and sexual relationships, there were instances where they 'performed' feminine behaviour and speech patterns attributed to women, such as being caring and compassionate towards their male

[58] A more detailed overview of this concept can be found in section 2.3 Post-structural Feminism.

counterparts (Talbot, 2010). However, to succeed academically and in their career, they were presented with conflicting demands since they were expected to act like their male counterparts, that is, they had to be competitive and assertive (Talbot, 2010). Hence, these female students had to create a 'new' gender identity so as to succeed or fit within that particular context (Talbot, 2010).

As presented in the previous literature review chapter, the notion of self-construction is central for post-structural thinking, and one of the mediums that an individual uses to construct themselves is talk, through which construction may intentionally be attempted (Sunderland, 2004). Intentional self-construction is done in situations where one is not known; one can present themselves, for example, during an interview or in a group, and create or portray an image of themselves that they think best fits that situation, indeed, one might even lie for that matter in these contexts (Sunderland, 2004). Usually, describing oneself takes the shape of describing family, interests, pets, sexual orientation or profession, amongst other aspects. Through the discourse one uses to describe themselves, the listener can claim that the person is constructing their identity; however, the listener cannot claim that the speaker is constructing themselves as a person, it might be reinforcing a sense of who they are, but the listener will not be able to know that. The latter is very much seen when one tries to analyse why the speaker chose to discuss topic A rather than B; a typical example is what topic women discuss first[59] if choosing between their career and family. If, for example, the speaker mentions first their profession and or career prospects, she is constructing herself as a professional; however, this does not mean that her family is not part of her identity as an individual. This construction also depends on the situation that one is in. If at a business lunch, the woman's choice of topic would be different from that at lunch with her friends. From a poststructuralist perspective, one is always a 'subject' of "cultural forces or discursive practices" (Baxter, 2016, p. 37) and one's identity is directed by "subject positions", which are approved by the community and which are learnt/ acquired through particular discourses available

[59] How topics are discussed entail "ideational meaning" whereby if the person speaks about topic A, she is implying that topic B is not as important. On the other hand, there is also the interpersonal element or meaning, that is, how one speaks about topic A or B will create other discourses (Sunderland, 2004).

within the same social context (Baxter, 2016). Thus, if one does not adhere to these discourses or subject positions, one is considered deviant. Language is seen as a regulatory form for individuals to conform to socially approved behaviour; since it is through language that one conforms to the group, and if one does not follow the pre-established pattern, then they are labelled and ostracised. An individual has more than one social identity, these at times are conflicting and yet at the same time quite predictable, such as mother versus professional woman which makes up a complex identity[60] (Baxter, 2016). Butler's prominent post-structural theory of performativity is linked to Austin's (1962) speech act theory, "which argues that illocutions such as 'I swear' or 'I promise' do not describe pre-existing states but literally call them into being" (Austin, 1962, as cited in Baxter, 2016, p. 40). Butler claims that gender has to be continually confirmed or repeated by performing acts that are congruent with cultural norms, which are historically and socially pre-established (Butler, 1990). Consequently, femininity or masculinity are not personal characteristics but "symbolic elements" which are indexed through speech, body language and appearance amongst others; this sustains that there is not such a thing as men's or women's language, but the products of repeated performed acts (Baxter, 2016; Sunderland, 2004). Butler (1990) uses drag to explain further how gender identity is performed. According to Butler, in drag, we see three dependent factors, anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance, all of which are in some interplay. Even though the drag artist is aware that they are playing with gender identity, this act is controlled by "compulsory heterosexual" (Baxter, 2016, p. 40) discourse. Through drag, one can see acts that are attributed to a specific gender or to a specific sex, which can be acted out by other individuals who would not necessarily pertain to the said gender or biological sex[61] (Baxter, 2016). Although Butler sees gender and identity as pre-programmed, it does not mean that people do not transgress out of these pre-programmed identities or that these are not resisted, and drag is a clear example of this (Baxter, 2016). Bucholtz and Hall (2004) claim that performativity is useful when researching discourse and gender because it challenges the notion that

[60] One must stick to the social patterns which can be pre-determined since these are pre-established.
[61] This notion echoes Hall's study mentioned previously, however instead of linking it to the social construction of language, Butler sees the notion by which we think that sex (as a binary and which as a result produces the sexed body) as natural, shows "how deeply its production of discourse is hidden" (Baxter, 2016, p. 40).

gender and sexuality are natural while claiming that both gender and sexuality attain "social meaning only when physical bodies enter into historically and culturally specific systems of power" (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004, p. 492). This means that when a researcher sees gender as performative, not constitutive, the study would need to take into consideration the context of the community by looking at the specificity of the community being researched as well as its historical context (Livia & Hall, 1997). Researchers must examine how speakers achieve principles of feminine and masculine speech whilst constantly producing the gendered self. The attention in this context is not on how individuals affirm or negate "a pre-given biological designation" but on how they actuate the various identity positions within the different contexts they find themselves in, be it conversational or localised.

Irrespective of which perspective or ideology one holds, one has to acknowledge that gender, identity and discourse are intertwined, and to a certain extent, co-dependent, and co-producers.

3.5 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, literature was presented to highlight key concepts and perspectives about language and its impact on how one perceives oneself and one's gender. This was done by presenting an analysis of the literature pertaining to discourse since this concept is central to this research, followed by a section about queer linguistics so as to review the impact of heteronormative discourses on gender and continued by appraising literature about identity, gender and discourse, which aims to view how these three overarching concepts are linked together and how they impact each other.

Chapter 4- Literature Review: The Self

4.1 Introduction

"Who am I?" or "What is the self?" are questions that not only academics and researchers ask to develop their research or studies, but it is a question that many of us ask throughout our lives as we develop as individuals.

Whilst different theorists give different definitions for the notion of self-concept (as per definitions hereunder), there is an element of commonality, mainly that self-concept is how we view ourselves and how we evaluate these meanings depending on others' reactions to us. Oyserman, Elmore and Smith (2012) state that "self-concepts are cognitive *structures* that can include content, attitudes, or evaluative judgments and are used to make sense of the world, focus attention on one's goals, and protect one's sense of basic worth" (p. 72). For Stets and Burke (2003) "the self-concept is the set of meanings we hold for ourselves when we look at ourselves. It is based on our observations of ourselves, our inferences about who we are, based on how others act towards us, our wishes, our desires, and our evaluations' of ourselves" (Stets & Burke, 2003, p. 130). Moreover, Rosenberg (1979) as cited in Owens, Robinson, and Smith-Loving (2010) "defined self-concept as the totality of a specific person's thoughts and feelings toward him - or herself as an object of reflection" (p. 479). To be able to develop one's self-concept, one needs to take part in the "reflective appraisal process"[62] (Stets & Burke, 2003, p. 130), this process is based on Cooley's "looking glass self" which in a nutshell states that significant others communicate their views or evaluations of us and these influence how we see ourselves.

[62] In the following sections, literature focusing on self-reflection and the reflective process will be presented in further detail.

Rosenberg (1979) further divided self-concept into three categories: self-referring dispositions which is how we differentiate ourselves from one another, based on abstract categories, such as the values we hold, attitudes, traits and skills; another category is physical characteristics, which once incorporated into our self-image might impact our behaviour, our social and psychological well-being and also impact how others respond to us, which in turn affects our self-concept; and the last component of self-concept is identity (Owens et al., 2010).

The following literature explores the self as a thought process, whereby the self is developed through inner talk, with an emphasis on pragmatism and the dialogical self, as well as the self as a product of social interaction. Both schools of thought tie in together and are very much a continuation of the literature discussed with regards to language and discourse. Since the self can be seen as the canvas on which gender is drawn throughout our lives, reviewing notions that address the formation of the self will enable me to delve deeper into the interplay between gender identity and the self/self-concept.

4.2 Pragmatism

Contrast exists between the pragmatist and Cartesian views of self. According to pragmatism, the self is shaped through social interaction, while Cartesian philosophy emphasizes self-construction through reason (Menary, 2011). Within pragmatism, there is a spectrum: some theorists, like James, emphasize individualistic self-reflection, while others, like Dewey, Mead, and Peirce, highlight the role of social interaction in self-development (Menary, 2011). Despite these differences, a shared perspective among these theorists is the concept of the self engaging in an internal dialogue (Wiley, 2006).

According to Peirce (1886), as read by Menary (2011), the sense of self is not inborn but develops within us; whereby "self-consciousness develops out of the 'child's development of cognitive capacities" (p. 614). A child, through interaction, learns that bodily interaction with objects causes such objects to change (Menary, 2011). Furthermore, through language, children learn that a statement or statements about the nature of an object with which they are familiar can serve them as guidance; for example, when a child touches something which they were told not to touch because it is too hot and consequently hurt themselves, they learn that a statement can contain facts (Menary, 2011). Furthermore, our thoughts are carried out in the form of inner speech, and our understanding of the world is formed through internal conversation (Wiley, 2006). Peirce links the self to language; according to him, the inner dialogue is articulated and verbalised. Peirce identifies the self with language in the following way:

1. “Thoughts are signs.
2. Thinking is conducted in a series (a train of thought) where previous signs determine consequent signs - through association, inference or other forms of interpretation.
3. All signs have their origin externally (in the world, not in the private inner substance).
4. The self that I recognise as myself is identical with the train of thoughts of which I am conscious.
5. Therefore, an individual self is identical with this linguistic series of thoughts.” (Peirce, n.d, as cited in Menary, 2011, p. 622)

According to Peirce, we are nothing if we are not part of the linguistic community; hence, this continues to emphasise how much the self is relational and one cannot exist without the other with whom they converse.

Similar to Peirce, Mead's starting point in analysing the self is a social one, by seeing the self as a social entity that comes into existence through language; however, Mead offers an alternative to Peirce's theory. Mead (1936) stated that "thinking is a process of conversation with one's self when the individual takes the attitude of the other, especially when he takes the common attitude of the whole group, when the symbol that he uses is a common symbol" (Mead, 1936, p. 380 as cited in Wiley, 2006, p. 10). Furthermore, for him, the function of this internal conversation is a problem solving one. Mead (like James) distinguishes between the *'me'* and the *'I'* whereby the 'me' is seen as the self as an object. For him, the 'me' is in the past since the 'me' is the 'I' of the previous moment (Wiley, 2006). Mead used the I-Me to demonstrate that the self is not only social in the sense that it represents society and that we can conform to its institutions but that we can also innovate them (Hermans, 2011). Mead's perspective and works will be discussed further in the section about the social self.

James's work opposes that of Peirce and Mead, seeing the self as a more individualistic venture and focuses mainly on the naming of the "I and me" as well as describing the stream of consciousness (Menary, 2011; Wiley, 2006). For James, "the "me" is the empirical person, and the "I" is the passing thought, which he equates with the thinker" (James, 1950, as cited in Wiley, 2006, p. 7). Even though these definitions are close to Mead's, they are not the same. For James, there is a distinction between the self as experienced/empirical or 'me' and the self as experiencing subject/spiritual self or 'I' (Menary, 2011). The empirical self is made up of the material and the social self, whereby "the material self is comprised of the body and at least those possessions to which one is emotionally tied" (Menary, 2011, p. 620), whereas "the social self is the collection of different habitualized personality traits that we project outwards onto the world" (Menary, 2011, p. 620). The spiritual self is the self that can experience both empirical selves. In James's theory, one can visualise the thinker/ the I communicating with the empirical self/ me; this is done through a stream of consciousness, which is

"the inner life, including all the feelings, sensations and ideas that flow through the person"[63] (Wiley, 2006, p.7). James (1890) theorises that the properties of conscious thoughts are that each individual thought is a component within personal consciousness, that these thoughts are constantly altering, and “sensibly continuous” (Menary, 2011, p. 619).

Furthermore, according to James, "the *I* is equated with the self-as-knower or the self-as-subject, while the *me* is equated with the self-as-known or the self-as-object" (Barresi, 2002; Hermans & Gieser, 2012, p. 3; Hermans, 2001). Three features characterise the self-as-knower: continuity, which refers to the notion of sameness through time which gives us a sense of personal identity; distinctness from others, which is one's individuality; and volition, which is seen in the processes of accepting or rejecting thoughts (Hermans, 2001, 2011). On the other hand, the *Me* or the self-as-known is composed of the elements belonging to oneself (Hermans, 2001, 2011). According to Hermans (2001, 2011), for James there is a continuing shift between *me* and *mine*; whereby the *me* is also made up of what is *mine* which includes items (e.g. my car) as well as relations (e.g. my wife). This means that the 'other' belongs to the self because the self and the other are not mutually exclusive, and the other is not seen as outside of the self since "people and things in the environment belong to the self, as far as they are felt as 'mine'” (Hermans, 2001, p. 244). This notion is the notion of extended self, whereby the concept of the self and the other do not exclude each other but rather include each other (Hermans, 2001, 2011). The extended self is in contrast with the Cartesian notion of the self, which is based on the duality not only of the self, that is, the self and the body, but also self and other (Hermans, 2001). James also recognises the multiplicity of the self, and it is the responsibility of the I (self-as-knower) to organise “the different aspects of the *Me* as parts of a continuous stream of consciousness” (Hermans, 2001, p. 246). James acknowledges that within each of us there are conflicting selves, and we have to choose amongst them; some selves are re-affirmed time and again,

[63] James contrary to Mead does not place emphasis on language when speaking about the stream of consciousness (Wiley, 2006).

and these form the basis of one's identity (Barresi, 2002). However, even though James sees the I as organising the *Me*, he does admit that the process might not be continuous since there are aspects of the *Me* that directly oppose the other (Hermans, 2001). James sees the multiplicity of self as well as the concept of the social environment as making part of the extended self, whereby a person shows a different aspect of the self, depending on the group they are in (Hermans, 2011). The way we 'transform' ourselves to fit this representation according to the group we are in is a clear example of the multiplicity of the self (Hermans, 2011).

4.3 Bakhtin- Russian Dialogism

Bakhtin used Dostoevsky's novels to highlight the multiplicity of the self as well as the dialogical process that takes place between the 'different' selves. According to Bakhtin, in Dostoevsky's work, the author is not seen as a single person; the characters are also portrayed as being independent thinkers, not slaves mastered by the "author-thinker" (Hermans, 2001, p. 245, 2011). Since each character is seen as writing their thoughts, a sense of the plurality of consciousness and worlds are created (Bukhatin, 1929/1973 as cited in Hermans, 2001). By creating a character "that personifies the interior thought of the first hero" (Hermans, 2001, p. 245), the author, externalising the inner thoughts, created a distinct character (with their own 'space' or dimension). This enables the characters to even dialogue between themselves (Hermans, 2001); that is, a dialogue between the physical person and the thought is somewhat personified. Bakhtin observed that the dialogical included but was not limited to face-to-face contact; it also extended further (Hermans, 2001). Barresi (2002) distinguishes between first-person information and third-person information, whereby for the former, he means the perspective that an individual has on their activity whilst they are engaged in it. On the other hand, for him, third-person information means "the experience that another person has of an actor when observing the actor engaged in an activity" (Barresi, 2002, p. 243). To be able to understand a person's activity

(whether that person is the self or third-party), there needs to be some assimilation of first- and third-person information; this notion is common to both Barresi and Bakhtin (Barresi, 2002). Even though Bakhtin states that for the person to be able to appreciate the self, one needs to integrate "third-person information about self with first-person information about self" (Barresi, 2002, p. 243), he admits that the person/actor will never fully achieve this integration; the same also applies for the observer (Barresi, 2002).

Moreover, prior to an activity/action, one "combines concrete first-person information about self with concrete third-person information about another individual engaged in the same kind of activity" (Barresi, 2002, p. 243) so we are able to comprehend what it would mean for the self to take part in such activity/ action. However, when one tries to understand oneself or imagine oneself in a specific circumstance, one must combine the *directly perceived*, the current-first-person information about oneself, with the *imagined* third-party information about oneself (Barresi, 2002). According to Bakhtin, we cannot understand others' activities in the same way that we understand our own activities because the self and the other hold separate epistemological positions (Barresi, 2002). Concerning the self, one is always situated within one's own "current position in space and time and bound to our current future-oriented perspective on action" (Barresi, 2002, p. 244), whereas the actions of the other seem to be determined by the environment. Notwithstanding this, we do attempt to see ourselves from the perspective of the third-person, and we also try to comprehend the other from the perspective of the first-person. According to Bakhtin, whilst engaging in such activity, we "'transgress' the boundaries between self and other" (Barresi, 2002, p. 244). Even though we try to transgress these boundaries, Bakhtin states that we will never be entirely successful in our attempts to do so (Barresi, 2002).

Whereas James was interested in the temporal aspect of the self, Bakhtin is more interested in the spatial aspect of the self (Hermans, 2011). Dialogue[64] gives the possibility to the self to differentiate between the different inner elements of the self, so much so that a fully developed dialogue can take place between what might look like two independent parties (Hermans, 2011). Even though it seems that both James's and Bakhtin's theories have some overlap, for James the various parts of the self are held together by the 'I' that ensures that there is a continuation of self-identity through time; on the other hand, Bakhtin emphasised more "the principle of discontinuity" (Hermans, 2001, p. 247). There is also a difference in how both authors dealt with the social aspect of the mind. James highlighted more of the social aspect of the individual self, whereas Bakhtin gave more attention to the "'voice' and 'dialogue', which enabled him to deal with both internal and external dialogical relationships" (Hermans, 2001, p. 247).

4.4 The Dialogical Self Theory

Hermans' dialogical self-theory combines James's theory of the self with Bakhtin's theory of the polyphonic novel. Each me represented in James's theory becomes a character in the composition of the self, and each me does not have a thinking I, but rather a speaking voice which represents the me's point of view to the other characters (Barresi, 2002). The notion of 'dialogical self' combines the concept of self and dialogue in such ways that both the concept of self and other is understood. The self is seen as something internal, happening within oneself or one's mind, while dialogue is seen as something external, that is, something happening between two people or more (Hermans, 2011). According to Hermans & Gieser (2012), when the latter two concepts are brought together in the form of dialogical self, "the between is interiorised into the within and reversibly, the within is exteriorised

[64] Dialogue in this context for both James and Bakhtin is the internal dialogue. That is, the conversations we hold with ourselves.

into the between" (p. 2) and as a result, the self does not have a separate existence from society but is an intrinsic part of it.

The dialogical self is not the same as 'self-talk' or inner speech in four aspects:

> "(a) it is multi-voiced rather than mono-voiced, as involved in interchanges between spatially different voices from different social or cultural origin; (b) voices are not only 'private' but also 'collective', as they talk through the mouth of the individual speaker; (c) the dialogical self reflects a theoretical view that explicitly rejects any dualism between self and other: the other (individual or group) is not purely outside the self but conceptually included as other-in-the-self; (d) the dialogical self is not only verbal but also non-verbal: there are embodied forms of dialogue before the child is able to verbalise or use any language." (Hermans, 2011, p. 675)

According to Hermans and Hermans-Konopka (2010), with regards to the self, "internal dialogue includes every form of internal communication or activity" (p. 174). In a more restrictive sense, dialogue is something that has to be learned and is part of one's own developmental process, it is acquired by interacting with others, which in turn acts as a motivator to the self (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010) since it moves the self to "higher awareness and integration" (Hermans, 2011, p. 674). Innovation is central to dialogue in the self since self-conflict, self-criticism, and any other self-activity can only be dialogical when they generate innovation or a new aspect as a result of the process of exchange with oneself or others. However, for this to be successful, parties should be willing "to recognise the perspective of the other party in its own right, and to adapt, revise, and develop their initial standpoints by taking the preceding verbal and nonverbal messages of the other into account" (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p. 175). For innovation to be effective, it needs stability within the self. During a conversation, people speak with each other; they do not just speak about each other.

During the dialogue, the subject/ speaker is seen as a "participant in an interchange that is marked by addressivity and responsiveness" (Hermans, 2011, p. 672). During this interchange, one must consider the aspect of James's self-as-subject and self-as-object. On a subject level "different selves address and respond to each other as subjects involved in a process of verbal and non-verbal interchange" (Hermans, 2011, p. 672); this process is performed from one's perspective and how one sees the other, for example, the other as a friend or the other as an opponent. On the other hand, "on the object level the parties involved in dialogue talk about themselves, each other, or their worlds" (Hermans, 2011, p. 672). The subject-level can be seen as having more predominance over the object level; this is because the object level is modified according to the influence that the subject level exerts on it.

Furthermore, dialogues are more than just interchanges between individuals or subjects but also between "collective voices of the groups, communities, and cultures to which the individual belongs" (Hermans, 2011, p. 672). These collective voices speak through the individual voice, for example: 'I' as a social worker' or 'I' as a gay person'. Skinner (2001), as cited in Hermans (2011, p. 672), stated, "from a Bakhtinian perspective, all utterances are multi-voiced and dialogical at the same time". This multi-voice element is not only because one's I position can talk to different internal selves but also because one is part of different social groups. In each speaking act, there are at least two voices; the voice of the speaker, as well as the voice of the social language which forms part of the speaker, such as the gender the speaker forms part of, or the generation one forms part of (Hermans, 2011). Bakhtin claimed that our utterances are 'half-foreign' since these are the voice of the collective spoken through the mouth of the individual; however, the speaker adds their own "intentions, and expressive tendencies" (Hermans, 2011, p. 672) to the collective voice of the group, and the latter becomes one's own. Notwithstanding this process of taking on or internalising the collective voice, individuals have some agency with regards to the collective voices since they can either agree with them and repeat them, for example, by choosing to partake in cultural actions/ festivities, or disagree with them, and renew them from their personal point of view (Hermans, 2011). Another essential feature of dialogue

is difference, “dialogue can only proceed when differences between the voices are taken into account” (Hermans, 2011, p. 673); for example, I take into account the voice of ‘I as a worker’ versus ‘I as a spouse’ when taking decisions relating to work[65]. On the other hand, even though dialogue needs difference to be able to proceed, it also needs an element of commonality and coordination whereby the parties taking place in such dialogue know their role in the conversation as well as what is expected of them so that the dialogue can be effective (Hermans, 2011). Hence, if I am an employee and my employer is speaking to me, I would need to know what is expected of me in my role within the company as well as the ‘proper’ way I should speak back to my employer.

The dialogical self develops throughout a person’s life stages. When the infant imitates gestures such as tongue protrusion or even when they provoke, that is, when infants incite previously imitated gestures and wait for the adult to respond, these features are all considered the foundations for turn-taking, which will become essential later on in life, especially with regards to question and answer (Hermans, 2011). During toddlerhood, memory and imagination, especially during play, will enable the child to bring to mind other individuals such as family members (and their behaviour or statements which they utter) and interiorise them as positions of their extended selves (Hermans, 2011). Another important stage is crawling, when the child has the possibility “to play and experiment with the opposite pair of ‘here’ versus ‘there’, additionally, standing stimulates the child to explore the opposite pair of ‘high’ versus ‘low’” (Hermans, 2011, pp. 669–670). Later in life, this knowledge and awareness of physical space will allow the person to understand vertical versus horizontal metaphorical forms of positioning.[66]

[65] Dialogue needs to take in consideration the different voices and take them as equally valuable.

[66] “Dialogical relationships can be portrayed as metaphorical movements. We move to the position of the other and back, going hence and forth on a horizontal plane” (Hermans, 2011, p. 665). On the other hand, depending on the dominance of the positions (either internal positions or another person’s position with regards to ourselves) we shift on a vertical plane; the more dominance one has the more up/ higher they are seen or we are seen as lower/ beneath them.

Hermans, Kempen and Van Loon (1992) saw the self as being made up of multiple I positions which are autonomous; "the *I* has the possibility to move from one spatial position to another in accordance with changes in situation and time" (Hermans, Kempen and Van Loon, 1992, as cited in Hermans, 2001, p. 248); the I shifts between different opposing positions and is also able to give each position a voice so that a dialogue between the different positions can be established. Hermans (2001) identified three types of positions: internal, external and outside, which he represented as follows:

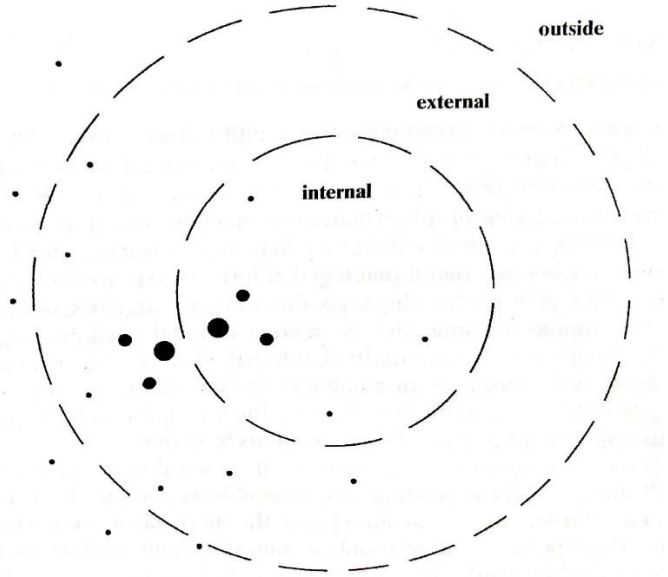

Figure 1- Positions in a multi-voiced self (Hermans, 2001, p. 253)

Internal positions are positions that are part of oneself, for example, I as a student or I as a wife; on the other hand, external positions are part of the environment, for example, parents or friends. However, these persons or objects must be significant from the perspective of one or more of the individual's internal positions so that they become part of the external positions (Hermans, 2001). Then again, internal positions become relevant depending on the relevance they gain from their relationship with one or more external positions (Hermans, 2001), where external positions are the perceived position, for example, the imagined voice/opinion of a parent about oneself (Raggatt, 2012). External positions are possible because parts of the intrinsic self are extended to the environment and respond to the spheres within the environment that are considered as mine. According to Hermans, "the self is not an entity that can be described in terms of internal positions only, as if they are monological traits, but

should be described in the context of other positions and groups of positions" (Hermans, 2001, p. 253). Lastly, some positions are outside of the "*subjective horizon self*" (Hermans, 2001, p. 254), and the individual is not conscious of their existence. However, there is a possibility that these outside positions might enter "the *self-space*" at some moment in one's life depending on a change in the situation (Hermans, 2001). For example, a person who has never worked in their life starts a new job, meets their manager (external position), and is now an employee (new internal position). One also finds themselves in a situation where some positions that were important in a period of their life reduce in importance over time, especially if the external and internal positions shift (Hermans, 2001).

4.4.1 I-positions

As has been previously mentioned, "changes and developments in the self automatically imply changes and developments in society at large and reversed" (Hermans & Gieser, 2012, p. 2). *I-position* refers "to a highly dynamic process of positioning, repositioning and counter-positioning, in which persons place themselves or are placed vis-à-vis other positions in personal or social spaces in this way giving expression to their sense of agency" (Hermans & Gieser, 2012, p. 15). According to Raggatt, *I*-positions emerge 'in' and 'over' time. This means that *I*-positions have both "local specific action patterns and extended historical/narrative coherence and continuity" (Raggatt, 2011, p. 214). Furthermore, *I*-positions could be paired polarities, whereby these polarities are a result of both "intra-personal (reflexive) and inter-personal (social) positioning" (Raggatt, 2011, p. 214). The I develops after contact with the social environment; hence it is attached to a specific context, that is, its position within a specific time and space. "The *I*, subjected to changes in times and space, is intrinsically involved in a process of positioning and is distributed by a wide variety of existing, new and possible positions (decentring movements) … at the same time, the *I* appropriates or owns some of them and rejects or disowns others (centring movements)" (Hermans & Gieser, 2012, p. 14). Moreover, Hermans and

Hermans-Konopka (2010) also state "the *I* is continuous over time: in the process of appropriation and rejection, it is *one and the same I* who is doing this" (p. 139). Once a position is appropriated, it becomes "owned" and is placed as an "accepted position in the self" (p. 141). Those positions that are appropriated would be now experienced as 'mine'; hence they add to the consistency and stability in the self. According to James, the self does what he calls "appropriation" and "repudiation" to discuss which parts it absorbs and which parts it discards[67] (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). As already discussed, one does not only appropriate the "me" but also the "mine" hence portraying the self as expanded to the environment (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). The extended self "can have the quality of *I*-positions, that is, the other conceived as "another I"" (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p. 142). This is in line with Bakhtin's work who sees the character as not being part of the author but as being another self in its entirety (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). Hence the embodied I must adapt to repositioning and counter-positioning; since these might put the I in opposed positions (both within the self and between the self and the other) (Hermans & Gieser, 2012). Each position that the I takes has its own story to tell related to the experience from its perspective. According to Nir (2012), *I*-positions function very much like a social system whereby each position has its own "views, memories, wishes, motives, interests and feelings" (p. 284); hence it has its own perspective or experience and its own stance. However, the *I*-positions are constantly changing themselves when the self engages in dialogue (Valsiner & Cabell, 2012).

Since the embodied I can move from one position to another depending on the situation, it experiences changes in positions of social power. Most of the time, we identify with what our culture deems as "positive" positions, e.g. hard-working, active, whilst dis-identifying with positions that are seen as devaluated or "negative," e.g. lazy or weak (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). Consequently, because the I engages in (dis)-identification, the positive positions become more dominant for the self,

[67] An object cannot appropriate itself, hence it needs an agent for appropriation or repudiation and that agent is the I that is, the conscious self (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010).

and we view the negative positions as "not me" (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). Hence, our positioning depends on "our internal dialogues" (Raggatt, 2012, p. 29) which in turn is based on our everyday interactions, our cultures as well as our history (Raggatt, 2012). Furthermore, like a social system *I*-positions are hierarchical, whereby some are dominant whilst others are more downcast (Nir, 2012). "Interacting *I*-positions are embedded within a self-structure, supportive of a particular hierarchical organisation" (Valsiner & Cabell, 2012, p. 84). Because of this hierarchical organisation, the relationship between the I-positions is vertical,[68] whereby the dominant-dominated relationship between the different forms is central[69] (Valsiner & Cabell, 2012). Linell (1990), as cited in Hermans (2001), states that meaning is not constructed out of thin air, but with each interaction, we have inherited cultural capital, which different individuals across history invested in. Meanings at a micro-level, that is, during dialogical conversations, cannot be understood or assimilated unless the person knows about them from the macro-context (Hermans & Gieser, 2012). According to Hermans (2011), two factors prevent a dialogue between the different I-positions from developing. One of these factors is that some I-positions as previously mentioned, are more dominant than others, and these positions could take over so much that instead of a dialogue, the relationship becomes monological; secondly "not all positions in the self are in direct contact with each other so that dialogical relationships have no chance to develop"[70] (Hermans, 2011, p. 661).

Before continuing to discuss further the dialogical self theory, some literature about social and reflexive positioning will be presented since this, as highlighted, has a direct impact on the *I*-positions. 'Social' position is of an external domain to the self since it is the result of the impact of others, of culture and of institutional directions which outline the self, such as status, gender, class or ethnicity (Raggatt,

[68] On the other hand, when two or more I-positions of the same dominance are engaged in dialogue, it occurs on a horizontal plane (Valsiner & Cabell, 2012).
[69] This means that there is an aspect of downward role regulation, with the possibility of having dominant *I*-positions restraining or even silencing dominated *I*-positions. The silenced and /or restrained positions are changed into *T*-positions, that is Taboo positions (Valsiner & Cabell, 2012).
[70] Not all I-positions have contact with each other since some I-positions are hidden to the self, for example because these positions are considered a taboo (even to the self so they are subconsciously hidden).

2012). As highlighted in other sections, societal relationships are ruled by dichotomies, and within each dichotomy, the master term is seen as possessing properties that oppose the other term (example: male versus female). The opposing term is most of the time negatively defined; for example, young is good, whereas old is bad or looked down upon, rather than defining the opposing term in its own rights. Furthermore, because some of the opposites have more power than the others, the ones that have more power have more opportunity to be heard. This impacts individuals since individuals cannot form meanings freely; "on the contrary, meanings are organised and colored by societal positions represented by the collectives to which they belong" (Hermans, 2001, p. 263). Collective voices also exist within the individual, and these voices might restrain or even silence one's own internal meaning or dialogue; however, the individual has the possibility to fight back to be heard (Hermans, 2001). As we previously discussed, these voices or positions that become our own were already in our social environment before we were born, and these positions (especially the ones assigned at birth) are not just names/ words, but they represent value systems that would determine our lives from a very young age (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). "I as male" or "I as female", for example, as the result of societal and cultural definition and training, become, like many other positions, "naturally" appropriated as ordinary parts of the self (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p.144). On the other hand, 'reflexive' positioning is the result of dialogical tension between opposing positions around esteem, agency, autonomy, communication with others, and the maximisation of pleasure (Raggatt, 2012). According to Hermans (2001), the discrepancy between individual and collective voices parallels the distinction between the social and personal positions, whereby "personal positions receive their forms from the particular ways in which individual people organise their own lives" (p. 263); "this means that we must distinguish between the influence of '*others*-in-the-self' (external positions) and '*otherness*-in-the-self' (internal positions)" (Raggatt, 2012, p. 34).

4.4.2 Third Positions

As briefly mentioned before, some *I*-positions might be in conflict, and as a result of that conflict, new personal positions, either form or old ones, are re-affirmed. "When two positions are involved in conflict, they can find, under specific conditions, a *conciliation* in a third position that is able to lessen and mitigate the conflict between the original positions" (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p. 156; Raggatt, 2012). Furthermore, Raggatt (2012) states that the process of internal mediation needs a "*triad* of two positions plus a third as mediator" (p.35). *I*-positions can be 'owned', that is part of me, or 'disowned', which is not part of me; however, some positions can be within the 'border-zone' (Raggatt, 2012). These border-zone positions are located in a vague zone, that is, having an awareness of feeling or experiencing something whilst dissociating oneself and labelling it as not of oneself. Hermans uses the example of jealousy to illustrate this position. Even though I might experience jealousy towards my partner in specific situations, I would not accept that this jealousy "belongs to me"; hence, I reject parts of my experience[71] (Hermans, 2011; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). Like the extended self:

> The internal one is divided in two parts, aspects of myself that I experience as close, intimate, owned, and familiar, and others that I feel distant, "not me", strange or alien, and disowned with the simultaneous definition of all those parts as being part of the broader "me" or "mine" (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p. 142).

Furthermore, Hermans states that even though I would have disowned a part of the self, it is still a significant part of the extended self and would still cause an "affect-arousing part in one's memory, imagination, and participation" (Hermans, 2011, p. 657). Valsiner and Cabell (2012) state that the I and non-I are not opposites but represent parts of the same whole. "The opposites exist *through* each

[71] Either because I consider these parts as negative, or society does.

other-leading to the relationship" (Valsiner & Cabell, 2012, p. 92), with this relationship being the starting point of a new connection, that is a new version of oneself as a result of the synthesis of conflict/ tension that has been overcome (Valsiner & Cabell, 2012). Valsiner and Cabell's statements are reflected in the study that was conducted by Branco, Branco and Madureira (2008), whereby one of the participants (Rosane) creates a new *I*-position to mediate between her conflicting *I*-positions.

Branco et al. (2008) present the case of Rosane, a Brazilian catholic lesbian woman whose family is very important to her. Figure 2 depicts Rosane's most important I-positions (a) The Catholic I-position, (b) the Daughter I-position and (c) the Homosexual I-position as well as their position with regards to Rosane's environment.

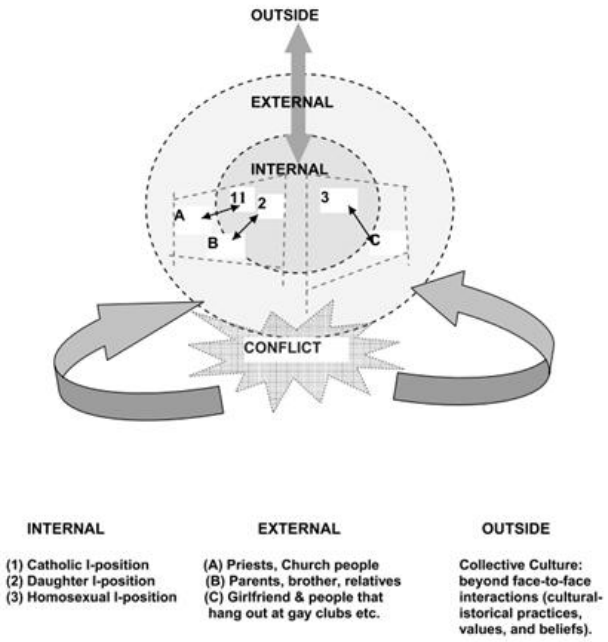

Figure 2- Rosane's I-positions (Branco et al., 2008, p. 31)

The above image clearly shows the opposing inner I-positions: the catholic daughter versus the homosexual woman. Even though Rosane is aware of the conflicting I-positions, she constructs a "personal theology where a merge of religious values and her private, personal life turns out to be

possible" (Branco et al., 2008, p. 33). However, she makes sure that her sexual orientation is not publicly known in Church, and according to the researchers throughout the interview, she refers to her sexual orientation as deviance,[72] and even though she is gay, she has other "normal" sides (Branco et al., 2008). Rosane develops a new I-position (see Figure 3), that of a missionary which brings together what seems to be two opposite worlds, "being gay allows her to help those poor lost souls living pointless, troublesome lives. She has now found an excellent sphere to practise charity" (Branco et al., 2008, p. 34). These new positions gave her the space and the possibility to appease her dominant I-positions, that is "'doing good' in accordance with the prescriptions of Christianity" (Branco et al., 2008, p. 35).

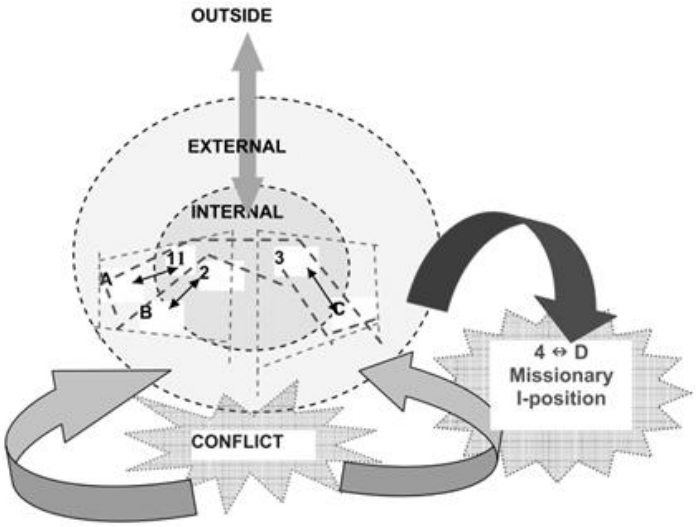

Figure 3- The emergence of the Missionary I-position (Branco et al., 2008, p. 35)

In Rosane's case, we need to look at the impact that sociocultural and historical views have on her, since she perceived herself to be different due to her sexual orientation, which did not fit in the societal dominant sexual orientations. As per Rosane's case, one needs to look at the impact of sociocultural

[72] In the case study Rosane also refers to gay individuals as being deviant or not 'normal' or they do not come from a stable background (mainly this consists of a family which is not divorced).

and historical views about gender and gender identity especially either for trans* individuals or for individuals who do not do their gender according to the binary but do not label themselves as non-binary, since such situations can create serious personal dilemmas which create emotional instability and fear for those who do not fit or follow the norm. Branco et al. (2008, p.37) state, “individuals need to find their own ways to deal with multiple moral contradictions, incoherence, and emotional confrontations at both social and subjective levels” (p. 37).

4.4.3 Meta-positions

Finally, according to Hermans, another position of the self is the meta-position, a position that is closely linked to self-reflection. Self-reflection can be seen as a person being able to take a ‘helicopter view’ of themselves whilst engaged in an action or ‘in the act’ during any particular moment; however, after the action/ moment ends, the person can engage in critical self-reflection, evaluating their actions and deciding on what parts to change/ improve when repeating the same action (Hermans & Gieser, 2012). There are various levels of self-reflection, whereby the first level is when the person sees themselves at face value, for example, a student. In contrast, the second level of self-reflection is when the person starts seeing themselves within a broader variety of positions; at this level, one would make the connection between the position they are reflecting upon vis-à-vis other significant positions. The final stage is when one reaches “a point where he has the feeling of taking a well-balanced decision which he considers as relevant to his future” (Hermans & Gieser, 2012, p. 16). In this context, a meta-position is also described as an ‘observing ego’ (Hermans & Gieser, 2012) and is seen as an overseer, viewing a limited set of interactions between internal and external positions which are currently available for one’s awareness; this implies that there are positions that one is not aware of or are still hidden hence the meta-position cannot oversee them (Raggatt, 2012). Furthermore, meta-positions can take the role of a self-narrative through which the person reflects on their past (be it events, performances and

experience) and forms a personal and a collective history because of the interconnectedness between the events, performances and experience (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010).

Hermans and Herman-Konopka (2010) state that a meta-position has some specific features. These are:

(a) it allows certain distance from other positions;

(b) it gives an all-encompassing view which allows for numerous positions to be seen concurrently and the relationships between them are visible;

(c) it "leads to an evaluation of the reviewed positions and their organisation" (p. 147);

(d) it gives one the possibility to see the connections between the positions and if these are "part of one's personal history or the collective history of the group or culture to which one belongs"[73] (p. 147);

(e) one will become more aware of the "difference in the accessibility of positions" for example, one can become aware that certain aspects of oneself change over the years such as becoming less carefree with one's finances as one grows older;

(f) "the importance of one or more positions for future development of the self becomes apparent" (p. 147);

(g) "it facilitates the creation of a dialogical space (in contact with others or with oneself) in which positions and counter positions engage in dialogical relationship" (p. 147);

(h) it gives a wider basis for "decision making and for finding one's direction in life (p. 148).

One can experience meta-positioning in two different contexts either by placing oneself, that is, one finds and places themselves in a social relationship, or one is positioned by others in that social relationship/ position; hence the placing is forced on the individual (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka,

[73] For example, I become aware that a women's caring role is part of the culture I belong to. This also means that we are influenced by such groups and cultures hence making this process not purely an individualistic one.

2010). The latter falls in line with the example of the midwife claiming "it's a girl" the positions are placed on the baby.

Dialogical self theory can be adopted as a research methodology or used as part of the analysis applied to participants' narratives. In relation to this, Raggatt classifies positioning in 3 ways "(i) mode[74] of expression, (ii) reflexive (or personal forms), and (iii) socially constructed forms" (Raggatt, 2011, p. 215). The following table highlights the sub-themes/ concepts for each mode.

(a) Medium of Expression	
Narrative/Discursive	storied self; autobiography; narrative voice
Performative/Expressive	role play; scripts; rituals
Embodied	body image, costume
(b) Reflexive	
Esteem Conflict	good self vs. bad self
Agency Conflict	strong self vs. weak self
Communion Conflict	intimacy vs. separation
Affect	happy self vs. sad self
(c) Social	
Occupation/status Conflict	boss vs. subordinate
Social Class Conflict	higher vs. lower
Cross-Gender Conflict	patriarchy; masculinity vs. femininity

Note: Criteria for coding forms of positioning based on this classification system are:

1. Narrative — presence of narrative accounts linking opposed positions;
2. Performative — presence of role play (e.g., work roles) linking opposed positions;
3. Embodied — presence of body image links among opposed positions;
4. Esteem — presence of good self/bad self positions;
5. Agency — presence of strong self/weak self positions;
6. Communion — presence of intimacy vs. separation-related positions;
7. Affect — presence of happy self/sad self positions;
8. Occupation — presence of power differential arising from work/status conflict;
9. Cross-Gender — presence of power differential arising from cross-gender conflict ;
10. Social Class — presence of power differential arising from social class conflict.

Figure 4- Forms of positioning in the dialogical self (Raggatt, 2011, p. 216)

I will focus briefly on the performative aspect, which ties in with Butler's notion of performativity. According to Raggatt (2011), in this context, performative "as it is used here incorporates the ideas of

[74] The author uses mode and medium interchangeably.

stagecraft, role-taking and role play, scripting, strategic display and dramaturgy, all used as metaphors for performance in everyday life" (p. 362), a notion very much in line with Goffman's concept of social performance. Raggatt claims that the notion of performativity is not only linked to the social self but also to dialogical self theory since different I-positions would engage in role-taking and role play (Raggatt, 2011); for example, the 'I as wife' is performed very differently to the 'I as lecturer'. On the other hand, the embodied expression is seen by biological factors (for example, skin colour, height, weight), by costumes and other adornments that we use to display our embodied selves and lastly, by "the conflicts we may have over body image" (Raggatt, 2011, p. 363). Butler, as discussed in previous sections, focused on both the embodiment as well as the performative aspect concerning positioning and gender identity.[75] However, according to Raggatt (2012), embodiment is critical for the process of positioning not only in situations of gender transgressions but also for everyday situations; "the act of merely dressing for the day creates a 'look' of one kind or another, and hence sets up the grounds for one's performances in the dialogues for that day. The clothes that we wear 'tell' about the voices within" (Raggatt, 2012, p. 363). Lastly, it is worth noting that the social form of positioning is based on hierarchies; hence, this illustrates that social positioning is directly related to power differences. Raggatt (2011) also claims that gender differences and conflicts are central to discussing power differences and social positions.

4.4.5 Criticism of Dialogical Self Theory

The dialogical self theory was criticised on several counts, mainly dealing with the ability of I-positions to create a dialogue and fragmentation of the self. Barresi (2002) claims that Hermans assumes that one "can freely move the narrative 'I-position' from one character to another to give each his or her

[75] "For Butler the conspicuous performances of the drag queen or the macho gay serve to problematize sex and expose the coercive power of gender stereotypes—a power, it should be remembered, whose instruments are the positioning channels of discourse, performance and embodiment." (Raggatt, 2011, p. 363)

own voice" (p. 247). Whilst Barresi acknowledges that Hermans states that there are dominant I-positions; he, however, labels this statement as a contradiction within Hermans' theory because one can either move freely from one I-position to another or not. Furthermore, Suszek (2017) claims that this notion of internal dialogue is complex, making it difficult for a layperson to understand this theory and incorporate it into an understanding of self (especially due to the popular conviction and promotion for the unit of self). Suszek states, "although many people are familiar with the experience of internal monologue, most people seldom have this experience or think that it is significant, whereas dialogical self theory claims that it is crucial for mental functioning and development" (p. 104). Notwithstanding the latter statement, the author acknowledges that there needs to be a level of self-reflection for individuals not to see themselves as monolithic; furthermore, they recognise that the multiple selves or I-positions function "automatically and preconsciously" (Suszek, 2017, p.105). With regards to the fragmentation of self, Markus and Adams (2001) and Suszek (2017) state that the emphasis on the multiplicity of self and of the mind's polyphonic structure undervalue the importance of personality consistency. Hermans addresses this critique by stating, "the notion of *I*-position favours the *inclusive* opposition[76] between unity and multiplicity instead of the exclusive opposition between unity and fragmentation" (Hermans, 2011, p. 662). According to Suszek (2017), the phenomena that dialogical self theory describes could be explained by looking at other well-known psychological theories, which explain the same thing but not in so much complexity. Furthermore, dialogical self theory "runs the risk of over-interpretation and reduction of human experience to the categories proposed by DST" (Suszek, 2017, pp. 110, 111). Lastly, dialogical self theory is criticised due it its lack of empirical evidence. Even though several attempts have been made to construct quantitative models to assess the "multiple-self system" (Suszek, 2017, p. 115) these models do not assess the theoretical implications but take dialogical self theory as given.

[76] By inclusive opposition, one adopts the notion of unity as being continuous throughout the different I-positions, whilst multiplicity is exhibited through the diversity shown by the different I-positions.

4.5 Self as Social

After reviewing literature that discusses the self as an internal process where the self is seen as made up of different positions holding internal dialogues between them, the following literature focuses more on the self as stemming from social interactions. The approach that will be adopted for this review is a pragmatic, symbolic interactionist one, mainly focusing on both Mead's and Goffman's works. However, since this research adopts a poststructuralist stance, both researchers' work will also be compared and reviewed from this perspective to analyse commonalities as well as to point out divergent ideas.

As presented in the previous section, Mead's starting point at analysing the self is a social one; the self is seen as a social entity that comes into existence through language. To be able to analyse the self from a symbolic interactionist perspective, one needs to acknowledge that there is a mutual relationship between the self and society, where:

> "The self influences society through the actions of individuals thereby creating groups, organisations, networks, and institutions, and, reciprocally, society influences the self through its shared language and meanings that enable a person to take the role of the other, engage in social interaction, and reflect upon oneself as an object." (Stets & Burke, 2003, p. 128)

Meaning is a central feature of social life and exists within each person. However, individuals' ascriptions of meaning emerge as a result of social interaction; hence meaning is a social product (Stryker, R. & Stryker, 2016).

According to Stets and Burke's interpretation of Mead, the self emerges out of the mind, which in turn emerges from social interaction; from this social interaction, the basis of social structure forms (Stets & Burke, 2003). Ritzer and Stepnisky (2018) state that the mind has the "ability to respond to the overall community and put forth an organized response" (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2018, p. 569). Moreover, Stryker and Stryker (2016) assert that the mind is the "content of cognitions; the concept of self, as Mead's definition has it, is that which is an object to itself, or in other words, reflexivity" (Stryker, R. & Stryker, 2016, p. 34). Reflexivity is the capacity "to become an object to one's self, to be both subject and object" (Callero, 2003, p. 119); it is the "ability to put ourselves unconsciously into other's places and act as they act. As a result, people are able to examine themselves as others would examine them" (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2018, p. 569). For Mead, this is a process of becoming other to one's self's consciousness; Gillespie (2006) argues that this form of consciousness is "essentially self-reflection" (Gillespie, 2006, p. 16). To analyse self-reflection, Mead uses James's concept of the "I" and "Me". "In self-reflection, self becomes an object to self" (Mead, 1913, as cited in Gillespie, 2006, p. 21), Mead inquires how this can be possible, and he concludes that the me is the self-as-known while the I is the self-as knower. The me enables us to have a relatively consistent and predictable self because it consists of internalized social roles (Stryker, R. & Stryker, 2016). Hence one might argue that the me can act as a tool of social control. On the contrary, the I is the creative element or the creator of the experience; it is the part that responds to the internalised expectations of others (Gillespie, 2006; Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2018; Stryker R. & Stryker, 2016). Stryker and Stryker (2016) state that Mead sees the self as existing as an internal conversation, "an "I-Me" dialectic organizing self-referential cognitive content" (Mead, 1964, as cited in Stryker R. & Stryker, 2016, p. 36), and our behaviour, social interactions, and processes are a result of this conversation. Even though Mead looks at the self from an "I-Me" perspective, he moves past James's theory since the I is the response to others according to Mead. We get to know the I after the act is done (Aboulafia, 2016; Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2018) and when we become conscious about the I, it becomes a "Me" (Gillespie, 2006). Mead emphasised the I for the following reasons: (a) it is the element of originality in the social process; (b) it is within the I that our most important values are located; (c) the I creates the realisation of the self since it allows us to develop

our personality; (d) it is the part of the self which gives us agency; and (e) the I is the result of an evolutionary process since people in primitive societies were more directed by the Me whereas in modern society the I is more visible (Mead, 1934). On the other hand, the Me is the taking on of the generalised other, that is, the attitude of the entire community (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2018).

The generalised other perspective varies according to the group one is in at the moment or the group they are thinking about when they are evaluating themselves[77] (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2018). As we are able to look at ourselves as objects and because we can take the role of the other and see ourselves from other's perspectives, "our responses come to be like other's responses, that the meaning of the self becomes a shared meaning" (Stets & Burke, 2003, p. 129). Through play and games, children learn how to take the role of the generalised other, that is, the expectations that they are faced with by the wider community (not just parents or friends). However, "taking the role of the other does more than allow persons to learn what others expect of them: it allows them to become self-conscious and self-critical and through these to control their conduct" (Stryker R. & Stryker, 2016, p. 36). Hence, one can argue that self-criticism is social criticism since it is through self-criticism that social control operates because when we criticise our actions, we are criticising them according to what is acceptable to society (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2018; Stryker R. & Stryker, 2016). However, Gillespie (2006) argues that in reality, what happens is that the self does not actually take the perspective of the other, but it takes the "self's own perspective from when self was previously in the social position of the other" (Gillespie, 2006, p. 22).

The presented literature shows that the self has a dual opposing function, that is, one of social control as well as creativity or agency. The creativity element transpires not only in how we respond to others

[77] This notion suggests that there are multiple selves, depending on the group one is in; furthermore, according to Mead (1934) each "self is different from all others. Selves share a common structure, but each self receives unique biographical articulation" (Mead, 1934; Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2018, p. 572).

but also in how we make use of language and gestures. Mead sees "thought, meaning and action" (Dunn, R. G., 1997, p. 687) as established in language; this is one of the commonalities that Mead and his theory have with poststructuralist thinking. Another commonality is that both standpoints strongly "emphasize the multiplicity and fluidity of signification and meanings and the processual, tentative, and contingent character of human communication and action" (Dunn, R. G., 1997, p. 687). Even though both standpoints emerged from critiques of Hegelian philosophy, that is, the rational alone is real, they shift the focus from a philosophy of consciousness towards a linguistically oriented epistemology. Pragmatists reject the concept of dualism whilst focusing on the process of problem-solving; whereas poststructuralists reject binary oppositions and introduce a more fluid understanding of language based on the differences between individuals (Dunn, R. G., 1997). Both perspectives shift the consciousness from an innate process to an external one that depends on relationships and collectively shared symbols. Poststructuralists see the subject as being constructed through discourse and discursive practices; for Mead, the subject is located within the social process and is defined as well as shaped by symbolic interaction; nonetheless, both standpoints see "meaning as objectively given in the outer world" (Dunn, R. G., 1997, p. 689). However, a significant difference between the two standpoints is that Mead redefines the subject as the self which is understood through the process of socialisation and role-taking; whilst, poststructuralists focus more on the objective view of a subject determined by its discourse (Dunn, R. G., 1997). Furthermore, poststructuralists eliminate the traditional concepts of subjectivity and replace it with performativity. According to Dunn (1997), this is seen in Butler's work when the latter claims that identities are discursively produced, and discursive repetition creates an 'illusion' of a self or an inner identity.[78]

Dunn (1997) states that some of Butler's concepts reflect Mead's ideas, such as, the notion that identity is performed through acts and gestures, which is indicative of Mead's concept that the self develops

[78] The inner sense of identity for Butler is fictional, one which is created with the intent to regulate heterosexuality, by regulating sex and gender through discourse.

through actions. Moreover, Butler sees these acts and gestures as being represented through discourse, which is public and social. Hence discourse is socially generated and shared between individuals so as to give them a framework of meanings, a notion similar to Mead's notion of community (Dunn, R. G., 1997). Lastly, Butler illustrates discourse as normative, which, according to Dunn (1997), hints at Mead's concept of the generalised other.

Even though there are some similarities between Butler's and Mead's work, there are various differences highlighted in Dunn's (1997) work. Firstly, Butler rejects the notion that identity is internalised and that identity organises the self (Dunn, R. G., 1997). Another difference is that Mead speaks about "self" whilst Butler speaks about "the body", with the body being the site where discourse becomes performative. For Butler, performances are 'scripted' or agreed upon by the dominant discourses of the said culture and acted out. On the other hand, Mead sees behaviour as "a body manifestation of the socially shared symbolic acts of group members" (Dunn, R. G., 1997, p. 694). Butler's notion seems to be dictated by discourse and discursive powers whilst Mead's notion originates in reflexivity, since one produces and defines acts as part of the process of social interaction. Lastly, another difference is in how identities are seen to be formulated. Butler famously states that there is no "doer behind the deed" which suggests that identities are constructed out of discourse; hence, there is not a subject who occupies a physical space prior to the discursive construction. On the other hand, Mead sees humans as "subjects with purposes, intentions, needs, drives" (Dunn, R. G., 1997, p. 695), which result from factors that are both discursive as well as social in nature.

Previously, most of the theories presented examined the self from a substance viewpoint, that is, being someone or being an identity. The following part will focus more on semblance, that is, on the self as being done or performed.[79] According to Goffman, the word person derives from the Greek word

[79] For a more detailed overview of theories which look at the performative/ performance element of the self, refer to section 2.6 Gender identity a performance or performative venture?

persona, which referred to the masks Greek actors used to wear during tragedies. Goffman highlights this and references Park (1950) who states, "it is probably no mere historical accident that the word person, in its first meaning, is a mask. It is rather a recognition of the fact that everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role…. It is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves" (Park 1950, as cited in Goffman, 1956, p. 11, 12). Lawler (2014) states that according to Goffman, Park's statement goes a step further than saying that we play roles and that these roles mask our true selves, for Goffman the masks are what make us persons. Moreover, Hacking's (2004) interpretation of Goffman's concept of role is that even though some roles are more owned than others, all roles are "an evolving side of what the person is" (Hacking 2004, pg. 290, as cited in Lawler, 2014, p. 121). According to Lawler, the latter interpretation suggests that there is no "doer behind the deed" (Lawler, 2014, p. 121), in our everyday actions and interactions, we play various parts, and these parts add up to ourselves. "To be a person, then, is to perform being a person" (Lawler, 2014, p. 121). For Branaman (1997), the self is dependent on the performances done in social situations because our sense of self results from publicly validated performances, thus supporting that the self is a social product. Additionally, even though we wish to fashion roles according to our liking, we are constrained to perform roles which are socially supported within the context of a given status hierarchy (Lemert & Branaman, 1997). Hence, the self is dependent on validation and norms of the society in which one is playing their role. This notion is very similar to Butler's standpoint which claims that no identity precedes the social; even bodies are inundated with sociality since we give meaning to some characteristics and not to others (Lawler, 2014). Furthermore, for Butler identities are "performative in that they bring into effect what they name"[80] (Lawler, 2014, p. 129).

[80] For an utterance to be performative, it needs the following features: the person doing the utterance has to have the authority to do it; the place where the utterance is done has to be socially recognised as appropriate; and the person about whom the utterance is done, has to be socially recognised as an appropriate person about whom those words can be spoken.

4.6 Identity Formation

The volume of literature which exists to analyse the question "who am I?" demonstrates the importance that such question holds not only on an individualistic level but also on an academic one. The previous sections explored concepts relating to the self as a dialogical process and the self as a social construct. In this section, literature discussing identity and identity theory will be presented.

Oyserman, Elmore and Smith (2012) define identity as "the traits and characteristics, social relations, roles and social group memberships that define who one is. Identities can be focused on the past – what used to be true of one, the present – what is true of one now, or the future – the person one expects or wishes to become, or the person one fears may become" (Oyserman et al., 2012, p. 69). The definition presented by Oyserman et al. ties in with Rosenberg's (1979) definition of identity which identified four aspects that make up identity:

a) Personal or individual identity is the part that reflects our unique identifiers, as well as our individual narratives; however, the basis of this identity is social since the characteristics that one identifies with are created and organised by institutions, for example, I work as…and I am married to so and so. Furthermore, Thoits and Virshup (1997) "defined individual identity as self-ideas abstracted from one's biographical details and framed in terms of broader social categories" (Owens et al., 2010, p. 479).

b) Role-based identity,[81] that is, "a social position a person holds in a larger social structure, considers self-descriptive and enacts in role relationship with at least one other person"

[81] Based on this aspect of identity, McCall and Simmons (1966) developed the role-identity theory. A theory which sees individuals as being able to improvise their performance according to the role that they are currently undertaking (hence, they have a creative element), yet at the same time the performance is still done within the limits and prerequisites of the current social position (Owens et al., 2010).

(Owens et al., 2010, p. 479). These forms of identity give the self meaning because they contain recognised role expectations, which could be either complementary (parent-child) or competing (two players representing opposing parties) or counter (police officer-criminal).

c) Category-based identity is an identity "based on perceived membership in a socially meaningful category (e.g. Arab or American)" (Owens et al., 2010, p. 480), whilst;

d) Group membership-based identity is "an actual membership in a bounded interconnected social group (e.g. Girl Scouts or a member of Earth First)" (Owens et al., 2010, p. 480). The distinction between category-based identity and group membership-based identity is blurred because we interact mostly with those individuals with whom we share the most significant characteristics (Owens et al., 2010). So being a Maltese woman is an identity based on a category, but this identity is also shaped by the interactions that one has with different individuals from groups they form part of, such as interactions with other work colleagues or activists.

Identity theorists such as Stryker and Burke (2000) state that there are three distinct uses of the term identity: one of these is seeing identity as the culture of the individual, hence in this context, there is no difference between ethnicity and identity; identity can also be seen as an identification with a social group; and finally, identity can be seen as the meanings that individuals give to multiple roles that they perform in a contemporary society which is highly differentiated. Additionally, Stets and Serpe (2013), emphasise that identity is "a shared set of meanings that define individuals in particular *roles* in society…as members of specific *groups* in society…and as *persons* having specific characteristics that make them unique from others" (Stets & Serpe, 2013, p. 31). Hence, one can state that individuals have multiple identities.

However, before delving further into identity theory, it is worth mentioning that identity theory originated from a shift from symbolic interactionism to structural symbolic interactionism. Stryker (2008) criticises Mead's work on the following accounts. According to him, even though Mead is aware that there could be a conflict between persons and between social units, "he sees society as differentiated in few ways, with extant conflict and differentiation likely to disappear as social evolution lead to the incorporation of smaller units into more encompassing units" (Stryker, S., 2008, p. 18). Additionally, Mead's work was criticised for seeing the self as "singular, internally relatively undifferentiated and (ideally) coherent"(Stryker, S., 2008, p. 18); this view does not allow one to take into account issues such as the impact of social structures on one's behaviour and how opposing roles can lead to interpersonal conflict. As stated in Stryker (2008), symbolic interactionism focuses on self-consciousness and its role in human behaviour; this could be a limitation since it does not and/ or cannot explain social behaviours where self-consciousness is absent. Stryker and Burke (2000) state that Mead's work analysed several sociological and psychological issues; however it did not "present a testable theory of any issue" (Stryker, S. & Burke, 2000, p. 285).

Stryker (2008) explains that structural interactionism was developed as a response to Mead's criticism so much so that it "sees the effect of social structures as a process by which large-scale structures such as class, age, gender, and ethnicity operate through more intermediate structures such as neighbourhoods, schools and associational memberships to affect relationships in social networks" (p. 20). Moreover, Stets and Serpe (2013), add to the latter definition by stating that structural symbolic interactionists see individuals as "enmeshed in society from birth and cannot survive outside of pre-existing organized social relationships" (Stets & Serpe, 2013, p. 33). This perspective emphasises that society is made up of social structures which are classified as large, which are, "those features of the stratification system such as race/ ethnicity, class, gender and socioeconomic status" (Stets & Serpe, 2013, p. 33). Large social structures act as social boundaries, determining who can enter particular networks and form social relationships; furthermore, these social structures enable an individual to

form a group identity, whereby they can identify with others based on the meanings associated with the particular stratification characteristic (Stets & Serpe, 2013). “Intermediate social structures are more localized networks, for example, neighbourhoods, associations and organizations” (Stets & Serpe, 2013, p. 34), which also act as social boundaries which affect one’s social relationships. Finally, “proximate structures are those closest to interpersonal interactions such as families, athletic teams, and departments within larger corporate or educational structures, or social clubs within schools” (Stets & Serpe, 2013, p. 34). These structures present individuals with social relationships based on a specific role identity and through which the role identity can be performed. Furthermore, proximate structures include others who have the role of counter-identities which in turn enable role enforcement (Stets & Serpe, 2013). Even though individuals develop their own self-definitions, these are very much influenced by the social relations and structures that one is surrounded by (Stets & Serpe, 2013). An integral part of structural symbolic interactionism (similar to symbolic interactionism) are symbols since “symbols provide a shared view of the world by providing names for a large number of objects and categories that are relevant for social interactions” (Burke, P. J. & Stets, 2009, p. 15). Apart from names, symbols give us shared meanings or responses, and since these responses are shared, they give us a basis of what to expect from others’ behaviour (Burke, P. J. & Stets, 2009). These symbols and the appropriate responses for them are learnt through social interaction, and it is through the same interactions that we learn how to respond to the various ‘positions’ which we call social structure (Burke, P. J. & Stets, 2009). In most situations, individuals reproduce the existing social structure by interacting and acting in a way that is approved by the structure and the situation (Stets & Serpe, 2013). Hence, this would mean that social structures act not only as social boundaries but also as social regulators. The latter does not mean that individuals do not have agency and that they cannot act outside the established perimeters, but the pressure is to conform so as not to the disrupt social order (Stets & Serpe, 2013). It is with this context as a background standpoint that identity theory was developed.

Identity theory started by trying to specify concepts such as 'self' and 'society', whilst making these concepts more researchable and empirically tested. As discussed when Mead's view on the self was presented, he based his work on the premise that "society shapes self shapes social behavior" (Stryker, S. & Burke, 2000, p. 285). Identity theorists Stryker and Burke depart from Mead's work and adapt it to a more contemporary view of society, where:

> Society is seen as a mosaic of relatively durable patterned interactions and relationships, differentiated yet organised, embedded in an array of groups, organizations, communities, and institutions, and intersected by crosscutting boundaries of class, ethnicity, age, gender, religion and other variables. (Stryker, S. & Burke, 2000, p. 285)

Moreover, it sees these components as independent, yet sometimes interdependent, as isolated and insular at times whilst at others they are not, they can be conflicting as well as cooperating, and in some instances, resistant to change and at others less so (Stryker, S., 2008). Individuals are seen as "living their lives in relatively small and specialized networks of social relationships, through roles that support their participation in such networks" (Stryker, S. & Burke, 2000, p. 285; Stryker, S., 2008). As previously mentioned, larger and more significant social structures act as boundaries, determining which small and specialised networks individuals can form part of (Stryker, S. & Burke, 2000; Stryker, S., 2008), hence limiting individuals of different backgrounds and resources from entering particular social relationships. The above-mentioned notion of society places more emphasis on social structures and interaction than Mead's model did (Stryker, S., 2008).

Through their theory, Stryker and Burke (2000) tried to answer the following question; "given situations in which there exist behavioural options aligned with two (or more) sets of role expectations attached to two (or more) positions in networks of social relationships why do persons choose one particular course of actions?" (p. 286). If one accepts Mead's assertion that the self reflects society, then one is acknowledging that the self is multifaceted (Stryker, S. & Burke, 2000; Stryker, S., 2008). Just like society, the different parts that make up the self are interdependent as well as independent and can be either

reinforcing or conflicting (Stryker, S. & Burke, 2000; Stryker, S., 2008). For identity theory, the authors use James's definition of the self, whereby an individual is seen as having as many selves as the groups with which they interact (Stryker, S. & Burke, 2000). On a similar note, Stets and Serpe (2013) use James's notion of multiple selves to discuss the multiple identities that one might have at one given time, which are initiated when the different identities share meanings.

Stryker and Burke call these multiple-selves identities; hence one has as many identities "as distinct networks of relationships in which they occupy positions and play roles" (Stryker, S. & Burke, 2000, p. 286; Stryker, S., 2008). Identity can be divided into:

a) role identity that is internalised meanings attached to the different roles one has within the social structure; hence a mother role identity may involve the meaning of care provider (Stets & Serpe, 2013);
b) group identities "are those meanings that emerge in interactions with a specific set of others like our family, work, group and clubs" (Stets & Serpe, 2013, p. 38). Group identities are different from social identities since the latter would categorise individuals according to their identification with social categories[82] (Stets & Serpe, 2013);
c) and person identities as unique characteristics which one sees in themselves. Even though person identity distinctively defines the person, the individual would still be internalising culturally recognised characteristics (Stets & Serpe, 2013).

In theory, these identities seem to be divided; however, in everyday situations, they overlap and are not easily distinguished and divided.

[82] Social categories are created as means of stratification and, in most situations, these are ascribed to the individual such as "race/ethnicity or gender" (Stets & Serpe, 2013, p. 38). Social identity is not considered a group identity by the authors because individuals, while doing this identity, are not interacting together for a common purpose.

For an identity to be verified, individuals perceive how others see them in the situation whilst comparing it to how they see themselves within the same situation (Stets & Serpe, 2013). Once the identity is verified, it needs to be activated as per the loop below:

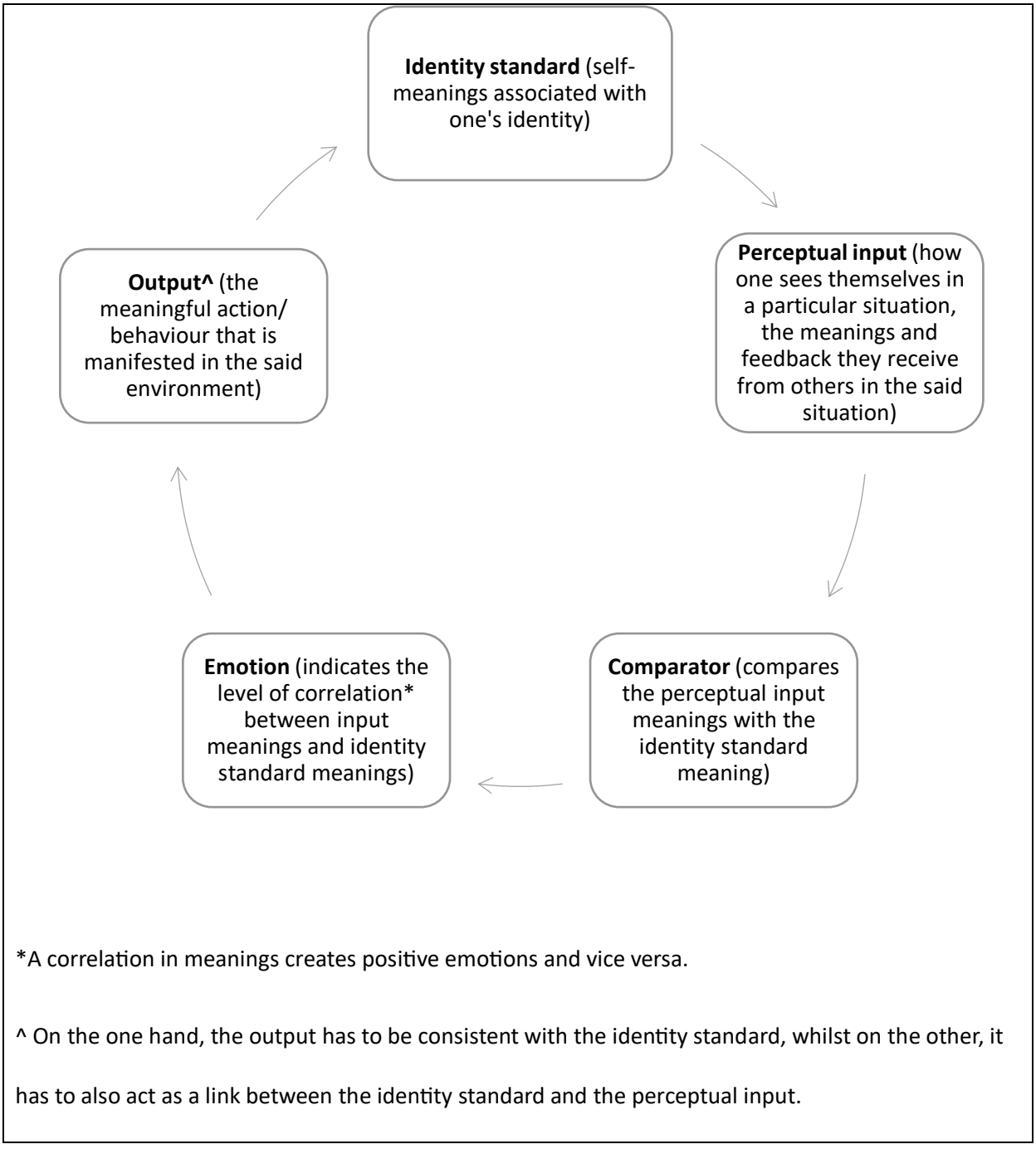

Figure 5 - Identity Activation Loop based on Stets & Serpe, 2013, pp. 31-59

When perception input is congruent with identity standard, identity verification will take place, which creates positive emotions, encouraging one to continue repeating the same output (Stets & Serpe,

2013). However, when congruence is not achieved, individuals experience negative emotions prompting a change in output or behaviour, ensuring congruency between identity standard and perception output (Stets & Serpe, 2013).

According to identity theory, social behaviour is linked to "'role choice'-the opting by persons to meet expectations of one role rather than another" (Stryker, S., 2008, p. 20). Additionally, "social roles are expectations attached to positions occupied in networks of relationships; identities are internalized role expectations" (Stryker, S. & Burke, 2000, p. 286). However, identities are not just roles; they are cognitive schemas with the capacity to affect one's cognitive as well as perceptual processes (Stryker S., 2008). Identities are organised hierarchically, reflecting the hierarchical importance that each identity is given within society (Stryker S. & Burke, 2000). Hence, the higher the identity saliency, the more individuals will engage in behaviour expected for the said identity; where "identity salience is defined as the probability that an identity will be invoked across a variety of situations, or alternatively across persons in a given situation" (Stets & Serpe, 2013; Stryker S. & Burke, 2000, p. 286). The more salient the identity, the more it will be brought into situations either through verbal actions or behaviour; hence the more an identity is used, the higher it is on the identity salience hierarchy (Stets & Serpe, 2013; Stryker S., 2008). Moreover, individuals will seek opportunities to highlight or perform salient identities; this also means that role choice is consequential to salient identities (Stryker S., 2008). Identity salience also depends on the individual's commitment to the said identity; the more committed to an identity, the more salient it becomes (Stets & Serpe, 2013). Additionally, the more salient an identity is, the more one is committed to it and the role relationships formed as a result of the said identity. According to Stryker and Burke (2000), the latter means that "commitment shapes identity salience shapes role choice behavior"[83] (Stryker S. & Burke, 2000, p. 286). Commitment has been conceptualised from a structural as well as a perceptual control perspective (Stets & Serpe, 2013).

[83] The latter statement is a re-formulation of Mead's statement "society shapes self shapes social behavior", hence shifting the perspective of how one looks at what shapes identity.

Commitment from a structural perspective is further divided into two dimensions; interactional, that is, "the number of the people an individual interacts with as a result of holding a given identity and the number of interactions with these people" (Stets & Serpe, 2013, pp. 36, 37). This means that commitment to an identity will be higher the more social interactions one has and the bigger the social network resulting from the said identity. The other dimension is affective commitment, which means the amount of affective discomfort one "would experience if they were no longer engaged in interaction with others associated with an identity" (Stets & Serpe, 2013, p. 37). On the other hand, perceptual control commitment is the "degree to which individuals work hard to verify who they are" (Burke & Reitzes, 1991, as cited in Stets & Serpe, 2013, p. 37); hence the more one works hard to verify an identity, the more salient it is. Rosenberg (1979) uses the notion of centrality to organise the different aspects of self-concept; claiming that the more important the identity is, the more central it is for the individual. Moreover, McCall and Simmons (1978) use the notion of prominence, that is, the higher on the hierarchy an identity stands, the more important it is for the person. However, Stets and Serpe (2013) claim that even though centrality and prominence seem to be the same as salience, there is a distinction between them. The main differences are the way that these notions are measured; "salience is based on probable behaviour, while centrality/prominence is based on the internalized importance of identity" (Stets & Serpe, 2013, p. 37).

Another internal perspective of identity, which tries to explain how multiple identities relate to the self, is the notion of the control hierarchy that is one's identities from a hierarchical system standpoint. At the highest level or "*the principle level*, are person, role, and group identities, which provide the standards or goals for *the program level*, the level just below it" (Stets & Serpe, 2013, p. 43). At the programme level, individuals gauge which identity goals have been met; the goals that are met are sustained, whilst those that are not, are changed. The principle level identities may be seen as "master" person identities, which in turn would influence one's selection of role and group identities (Burke, P. J. & Stets, 2009; Stets & Serpe, 2013). Contrary to the internal perspective of identity, the external

perspective “addresses how multiple identities are related to the positions individuals hold in the social structure and the groups to which they belong” (Thoits, 1983, as cited in Stets & Serpe, 2013, p. 43; S. Stryker S. & Burke, 2000). The latter can be seen through the different roles one holds, such as between obligatory roles and voluntary roles. “Obligatory role identities are identities that individuals are expected to assume over the life course such as student, worker, spouse, and parent” (Stets & Serpe, 2013, p. 45). The individual might not consider these identities as representing their true self, but these are taken on because they are normative in society. Understandably, these role identities will create conflict in the person, which will result in stress and negative emotions. On the contrary, voluntary role identities are those identities which present the individual with more agency and are easier to leave if the person feels that they no longer fit their true self; examples of voluntary role identities are a friend or being part of the knitting club. Individuals enter these identities since they believe that they can benefit from them, and when the costs outweigh the benefits, they can be simply abandoned.[84]

Even though identity theory recognises the impact of salience on identity and how this leads to consistency and stability, it also acknowledges that identity salience may change over time. This aspect led to further development of the theory, by inquiring about ways in which individuals are “tied into social structure and the consequences of these ties for their identities” (Stryker S. & Burke, 2000, p. 287). The latter led the theorists to assert that “expectations attached to roles were internalized and acted out” (Stryker S. & Burke, 2000, p. 287). According to Burke and Reitzers (1981), shared meanings are the link between identity and behaviour; that is, identities foretold behaviour only when the meaning of the identity and the behaviour correspond (Stryker S. & Burke, 2000). In later studies, Burke (2006) identifies three ways in which identities might change: one aspect is when “identity meanings and behaviour meanings that conflict causing modification in both meanings” (Burke, P. J. & Stets, 2009; Stets & Serpe, 2013, p. 47). Hence, individuals will adjust both their behaviour as well as their identity

[84] According to Thoits (2003), those who have more voluntary identities will have more positive emotions and lower stress levels than those who have more obligatory role identities (Stets & Serpe, 2013).

meanings to achieve more consistency. Another way is “changes in the situation which prompt changes in identity meanings” (Burke, P. J. & Stets, 2009; Stets & Serpe, 2013, p. 47), since changes in the situation can cause an incongruity between the identity meanings and the perceived meanings of the self. This was seen in the study conducted by Burke and Cast (1997), which concluded that parents shift towards more traditional gendered meanings of parenting within a year upon the birth of their first child (Stets & Serpe, 2013). Lastly, change happens when “multiple identities that conflict in a situation causing both identities to change” (Burke, P. J. & Stets, 2009; Stets & Serpe, 2013, p. 47), leading to the identities to shift towards a middle ground. However, according to identity theory, the identities that are more likely to change are those that are less salient.

4.6.1 Identity Theory and Gender

After presenting literature that highlights the main concepts behind identity theory in the following section, identity theory will be applied to gender and gender identity. Stets and Burke (1996) assert that gender can be understood at both a macro level, that is, as a social structure, and at a micro-level, that is, as an identity. If gender is analysed at a macro level and seen as a position, one will inquire about how men and women behave and how they are treated when interacting, given the expectations attached to their status (Stets & Burke, 1996). If one adopts solely this standpoint, the individual’s agency and choice are not examined. On the other hand, if gender is seen from a micro level, hence as an identity, one would examine the meanings that the person being interviewed gives to male or female, and how these self-meanings impact an interviewee’s behaviour in the interaction with others (Stets & Burke, 1996). If gender is seen only as an identity without taking into consideration the influence that interactions and society have on the person, then the researcher would be ignoring how the person is ‘doing gender’ (Stets & Burke, 1996). When gender is considered performative, the focus of the researcher’s attention shifts to include both the micro and macro levels of gender (Carter, 2014).

As discussed in other sections, with respect to poststructuralism, gender, and language, as soon as a baby is born, they are inundated with symbols and language that represent gender roles and stereotypes. Typically, the language used to describe boys focuses on physical characteristics, agility and strength, while the language used for girls revolves around emotional characteristics such as being affectionate and fragility (Carter, 2014). The difference in language use and treatment will shape the child's behaviour patterns and define boundaries; furthermore, these boundaries are internalised and become identity standards (Carter, 2014). Identity control loops sustain the internalised socialisation process of gender, since it "compares internalized standards (i.e. for appropriate gender behaviour) to perceptions of others (i.e. how others react and respond to behaviour) and, through emotion, regulates interaction between individuals" (Carter, 2014, p. 247). One's identity standard with regards to gender identity is the degree of masculinity/ femininity that one does, which is monitored through self-perceptions, especially during interactions (Burke, P. J. & Stets, 2009; Stets & Burke, 1996). Hence, if the self-in-interaction meanings align with the identity standards, the person will continue to behave in the same manner, whilst if there is a discrepancy, the control system will indicate this and send a signal so that the behaviour is changed (Burke, P. J. & Stets, 2009; Stets & Burke, 1996). The interactions that one takes part in are based on one's "internalized beliefs about gender and appropriate behaviour of one's gender, and these interactions sustain the gender system as a whole" (Carter, 2014, p. 250).

Carter (2014) sustains that "gender identities are *diffuse* identities" (p. 250); that is, they can assume (take on) the person, role and social identity. Stets and Burke (1996) state that "when people enter interaction, they bring not only their group memberships but also (and more important) self-meanings regarding how they see themselves as a member of that group" (Stets & Burke, 1996, p. 194). As previously discussed, person identities usually are salient identities since these are the identities that are most triggered in different situations, interactions and behaviour, which implies that gender is an integral part of the person's identity for most individuals. Since gender is used or demonstrated in

various situations, gender and its representation are a powerful agent of socialisation for children; this means that children's internalised meanings of gender, and their resulting person identity, also depends on how others close to them represent a particular gender (Carter, 2014). Furthermore, since person identities are often used, they "perpetuate and solidify over time" (Carter, 2014, pp. 250, 251).

Role identities involve the meanings that a person gives to themselves while performing roles; hence it is easy to comprehend how gender expectations, behaviours and stereotypes can be maintained and repeated when engaging in role-taking (Carter, 2014). Role identities are learnt when the meanings of specific roles are acquired after seeing the context of the role and the social surroundings in which it is played.[85] "Role identities thus are learned early on, and many of the different roles actors learn and play are based on *differentiated* expectations for behaviour; this differentiation is often gendered" (Carter, 2014, p. 251). The family is a clear example of the differentiation of role identities based on gender or better, roles based on sex, which is automatically associated with gender in everyday life. Additionally, for a role identity to be fulfilled, the self-meanings while doing the role and role behaviour have to match; for example, the role of a mother involves nurturing her children; hence, for her performance to be in sync with this role, she has to feed her children or see that they are clean. Stets and Burke (1996) differentiate between situated identities, which are meanings that are linked to particular situations, such as being a parent, a spouse or a student, with master identities,[86] such as gender identity, being "meanings tied to roles that cut across situations and that shape how our society is structured" (Stets & Burke, 1996, p. 196).

[85] Roles cannot exist on their own; they are defined as an alternative to another role; hence one learns what it means to be female from the notion of the opposite of what a male is.

[86] Master identities set the standard for lower level identities (Burke, P. J. & Stets, 2009); hence these identities also control one's identity standards as well as self-perceptions, so that one would change their behaviour to fit within the boundaries of the master identity (Burke, P. J. & Stets, 2009).

Lastly, gender identity is also a social identity. According to Carter (2014), "some group memberships are based on gender, and many groups are defined by gendered behavioural norms and expectations" (p. 252). Most social identities refer to identities that one assumes as an adult; however, the family is the first unit that pushes individuals towards group membership and in due course, becomes integrated into one's identity. Through socialisation, children not only learn how to be a boy or a girl, but they also learn what behaviour is expected and acceptable within a larger group of similarly gendered individuals, as well as how to adapt their viewpoint according to the gender they pertain to (Carter, 2014). Moreover, gender can be seen as a social identity because individuals think of others who are in the same group/ gender as being part of the in-group. Hence, when one says, "we women", they are not referring to their person identity or their role identity, but clearly, that person is referring to their social identity.

The more one "does gender" among others in interactions, the more likely one's gender identity will become more committed and thus salient within the self. Each time we interact, it is an opportunity to play out identity meanings; as a result, identity becomes a means through which we connect with others. Furthermore, gender's saliency serves as a tool to perpetuate norms and to replicate the social structure.

4.7 Reflexivity

The literature presented in the previous sections dealing with self, identity and the social self all had an underlying thread running through them, that of self-reflection or reflexivity, which ties the latter concepts with others discussed throughout this literature review. Theorists such as Mead and Vygotsky identify self-reflection as the feature that sets human beings apart from other animals, as well as a trait

that requires higher mental functioning (Gillespie, 2007; Oyserman et al., 2012). Even though other non-human animals can be considered conscious, only humans can be self-conscious due to the ability to see ourselves as objects (Porpora & Shumar, 2010). In this section, literature highlighting the role of self-awareness, which is our ability to see the self from an objective standpoint or the position of the other and the role of internal discourse, will be presented. The literature presented will not only focus on the internal process of reflexivity but will also look at the social element or the external dimension of reflexivity.

In non-human societies, even though there might be social structure, position exchange is either not present or else not as frequent as in human societies. The exchange of positions gives us the possibility to take on the perspective of the other. Social acts which allow frequent position exchange include: "buying/selling, giving/receiving, suffering/helping, grieving/consoling, teaching/learning, ordering/obeying" (Gillespie, 2007, p. 684). Each of these actions requires actor and observer positions that are reciprocal because when individuals have experienced both positions, they are able to take the perspective of the other within each role.[87] The role-taking of the other enables us to experience the self as an object to oneself, that is, to self-reflect or engage in the reflexive process (Callero, 2003). This is due to the fact that reflexivity is the ability that individuals have to reflect upon themselves and look at themselves as objects by being able to evaluate themselves, plan future actions and be self-aware of their existence (Stets & Burke, 2003). Furthermore, based on the ability that we have to take the other's position and see ourselves through the viewpoints of others, our responses become more like the responses of others, and the meaning of the self becomes a shared meaning (Stets & Burke, 2003). Osyerman, Elmore and Smith (2012) differentiate between an immersed individualistic perspective of the self and the collective perspective; when in the former perspective, one thinks[88] or focuses on what makes them different from the rest of the group. Whilst in the latter, one focuses on

[87] However, the taking on the perspective of the other is not always a given.

[88] The authors highlight that reflective capacity refers to the process of thinking, being aware of the thinking process and looking at the self as an object whilst thinking (Oyserman et al., 2012).

how they are similar and connected to others through the relationships formed. In both contexts, individuals can look at themselves from a distal perspective; that is, they examine or see themselves by considering what others are observing about them, hence looking at themselves "through the eyes of the other" (Oyserman et al., 2012p. 72). Even though self-concept and self-reflection seem to be dependent on the social experience, based on the notion that one becomes other to themselves and even takes on the perspective of the other, sociologists such as Mead[89], Cooley and James looked at reflexivity as an internal process which enables us to understand ourselves whilst also trying to interpret the experience through the eyes of the other[90] (Holland, 1999).

Sedikides and Skowronski (1995) remark that self-knowledge is achieved through three sources: social comparison, where individuals, in order to assess their abilities, behaviour and attitudes, compare themselves to others; reflected appraisal, that is, individuals learn about themselves from feedback that they receive from others either through direct feedback or through labels; and self-reflection which is a combination of behavioural self-perception, internal states and inference processes. In self-reflection, individuals act as external observers of their own actions. However, the self-observations are not done in a vacuum; on the contrary, the person makes use of external and internal context cues and the implications of their behaviour (Sedikides & Skowronski, 1995). Furthermore, during self-reflection, people also act as observers of their feelings and thoughts (internal states) and use these to draw conclusions about themselves (Sedikides & Skowronski, 1995). Through the various studies presented by Sedikides and Skowronski in their paper, they concluded that their participants perceived the process of self-reflection to be most important for self-knowledge. However, the participants did not only link self-knowledge to self-reflection but also to social factors. The social factors identified

[89] According to Tsekeris (2012) in Mead's theory the other is not just another person or a significant other but another perspective through which the world is seen and judged.

[90] The perception of interpreting experience or oneself through the eyes of the other is very much based on Cooley's looking glass self, which briefly states that significant others communicate their views of us or give feedback about us. These both influence how we see ourselves (Gillespie, 2007; Stets & Burke, 2003).

were social events and behaviours; hence all three criteria were deemed relevant. Nevertheless, social comparisons and reflected appraisals were deemed less important than self-reflection.

As discussed, when presenting literature about the dialogical self, identity, and the social self, there always seems to be a dichotomy amongst researchers; those who are more inclined to see the process as an internal activity versus those who rely more on the impact that society has on individuals and how this impacts us. With regards to this section, the two main 'opposing' perspectives presented will be the works of Archer, who focuses more on the internal role of reflexivity, whereas Bourdieu looks more at the taken-for-granted and reflexivity (or the lack of).

Archer (2007) states that for an internal conversation to be reflexive, it needs to have two central features; firstly, "the 'object' under consideration being bent back in any serious, deliberative sense, upon the 'subject' doing in consideration" (Archer, 2007, p. 2) and secondly it needs to hold a social element.[91] Hence, reflexivity is the ability that individuals have "to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa" (Archer, 2007, p. 4). As conceptualized by Archer, reflexivity involves both an internal dialogue for continual self-confrontation and a complex dialogue with the evolving social environment (Archer, 2007; Tsekeris, 2010). Caetano (2017) notes that Archer's shift in focus from introspection to internal conversation transforms the individual's role from a passive observer to an active participant. In this active role, individuals engage in constant self-dialogue to define their beliefs, goals, and deliberations (Caetano, 2017). Archer's perspective underscores the dynamic and proactive nature of reflexivity, where individuals actively shape and redefine their understanding of the self in relation to the changing social context. Tsekeris (2012) states "dialogical reflexivity is *both* rational *and* non-rational, cognitive *and* emotional, and emphasizes the ongoing

[91] However, according to Tsekeris in dialogical reflexivity, the self is social not because individuals enter into social interactions with others but rather because other individuals "occupy positions in the multivoiced self" (Tsekeris, 2012, p. 68).

formation and transformation of our minds in relation to (significant) others and the social world" (Tsekeris, 2012, p. 68). The concept of reflexivity shifts the understanding of the self from a 'self-in-social-vacuum' to a 'self-in-relation-with-others,' highlighting the interdependence and encapsulation of individuals within sociocultural and historical contexts (Tsekeris, 2012). This perspective emphasizes that while individuals maintain autonomy, they are fundamentally connected to and influenced by their social surroundings. In the context of the dialogical self, Tsekeris (2012) explains that the internal conversation among different I-positions is reflexively created and re-created. This process requires the mutual interaction of the ego with emergent social structures and significant others, whether actual, imagined, or implied (Tsekeris, 2012). The dialogical self is thus shaped through ongoing interactions with both the social environment and significant individuals in the individual's life.

Archer (2007) states that "the subjective powers of reflexivity mediate the role that objective structural or cultural powers play in influencing social action and are thus indispensable to explaining social outcomes" (p. 5). Caetano (2015) interprets Archer's concept of reflexivity as extending beyond internal dialogue, portraying it as a way of living in a specific society. Reflexivity, according to this interpretation, facilitates the identification of the causal powers of structures, allowing individuals to plan their actions by articulating personal concerns with the conditions that enable plan fulfilment. This perspective aligns with a reflexive realist framework, which underscores the importance of analyzing both the pre-notions guiding social agents in constructing social reality and the social conditions that lead to these pre-constructions. In essence, reflexivity, within this framework, involves a dynamic interplay between personal beliefs and the external conditions that shape social reality. Tsekeris (2010) underscores the significance of simultaneously examining the pre-conceptions guiding social agents and the social agents' role in constructing them. Archer's concept of reflexivity, accentuates the subjective powers empowering individuals as "active agents," enabling them to exert control over their lives. This perspective emphasises that through reflexivity, individuals actively contribute to shaping their values and the patterns that define their individuality, highlighting the dynamic and participatory nature of

the self in the construction of its own reality. Archer (2007) posits that the distinctive quality setting humans apart lies not just in the ability to create projects, but in the unique capacity to design and redesign these projects through reflective abilities. This highlights the active role individuals play in defining their pursuits and shaping their lives through reflexivity. In the societal context, individuals experience the influence of two forces: the impact of structural and cultural powers on the agent and the agent's subjective response to these powers. The former is objective, representing external influences, while the latter is subjective, emphasising the individual's personal response to and engagement with these influences. This dual interaction underscores the dynamic interplay between external forces and individual agency within the social framework. Reflexivity for Archer gives one the ability to foresee how an action will impact the individual.[92] For Archer, internal conversations perform a mediatory role; they mediate the impact of social institutions on us, but also define our responses to them. Furthermore, she developed a three-stage model to demonstrate how reflexivity impinges on the course of actions that we take:

> 1. Structural and cultural properties objectively shape the situations that agents confront involuntarily, and *inter alia* may possess generative powers of constraint and enablement in relation to
>
> 2. Subjects' own constellations of concerns, as subjectively defined in relation to the three orders of natural reality: nature, practice and the social.[93]
>
> 3. Courses of action are produced through the *reflexive* deliberations of subjects and subjectively determine their practical projects in relation to their objective circumstances. (Archer, 2007, p. 17)

[92] However, according to Akram and Hogan (2015), the notion of reflexivity as being the basis of action-taking could result in both positive and negative outcomes, since some will think that they are pursuing the best course of action, but it will lead them to a negative conclusion; nonetheless, even though not all reflexivity will be successful, still everyone is trying to be reflexive.

[93] The practice of thinking which is shaped by nature (one's biological ability) and one's social context.

Caetano (2017) challenges Archers' notion that reflexivity is an internal process; the former states that even "if reflexivity largely consists of a mental process that does not necessarily possess any external manifestation, it can still be exercised discursively in interaction contexts" (p. 68). During interactions with others, individuals "define, negotiate, and rework their goals and projects" (Caetano, 2017, p. 68). Social interactions play a crucial role in triggering mental processes and facilitating discursive consciousness. In the presence of others, individuals can contemplate the possibilities and limitations of their goals, plans, or issues with assistance (Caetano, 2017). The unpredictability inherent in social contexts requires subjects to anticipate, plan, and adapt their perspectives and practices before and during interactions (Caetano, 2017). Dialogues, while rooted in internal reflections, are not a direct transposition of internal conversations, as the presence of another individual influences the shaping of the dialogue. In certain situations, individuals turn to those close to them to verbalise their thoughts, seeking validation or questioning their intentions and gaining different perspectives (Caetano, 2017). However, individuals are selective in choosing whom to engage with, considering factors such as receptiveness, knowledge, experience, and emotional bonds when discussing reflections and creating segments of dialogue.

Individuals adjust what they say depending on the context and the image they want to portray of themselves; this adjustment is pre-reflexive and directed by practical sense. However, since interactions entail an element of unpredictability, one needs to engage in personal reflexivity to define the best actions for that particular context. The more familiar the context, the more one acts from a pre-reflexive stance, since one would feel more relaxed and feel less need to self-monitor (Akram & Hogan, 2015; Caetano, 2017). One avoids slip ups in formal contexts, being more reserved and aware of what one says and does and finding it harder to verbalise thoughts. The confrontation between various situations and rules of conduct involves adaptation, and thus, reflexivity is used to search for

acceptable behaviour; however, even in this context, the relationship between reflexivity and plurality of experience is not linear (Caetano, 2017).

As highlighted beforehand, contemporary social theory sees reflexivity as a process where individuals reflect on the social conditions that they form part of and how these can be changed; hence this means that there is more focus on agency with regards to the social structure (Adkins, 2003). This increased reflexivity might lead to critical reflection of norms, social arrangements and expectations. Adkins (2003) argues that the shift towards agency and, as a result, the notion of moving away from traditional norms and expectations, lead to more individualisation since external forms of authority are replaced by the authority of the individual to 'do' organised social arrangements such as gender. Archer's theory was criticised as it seems to suggest that actors/ subjects exist outside the social world, while they reflect in a cognitive and objective manner (Adkins, 2003). Similarly, Akram and Hogan (2015) criticise Archer by stating "this privileging of reflexivity means that agents are not sufficiently affected by the social, despite her presenting her thesis as a dialectical one where the social is integral to the analysis" (p. 606).

In contrast to Archer, Bourdieu's social theory transcends the dichotomy between objectivism and subjectivism, navigating the interplay of structure and action (Adkins, 2003). Adkins argues that Bourdieu's concept of habitus serves as a pivotal intersection of structure and action by both generating and shaping individual and collective practices. The habitus, according to Adkins, is productive and constitutive of dispositions that influence behaviour. Bourdieu's framework incorporates specific social fields, such as economic, political, and judiciary realms, which, despite appearing differentiated, overlap in their influence. Each field operates with its own logic and parameters, impacting and potentially limiting individual actions (Bourdieu, 1977, as cited in Adkins, 2003). Despite the influence of social fields on individuals, agency remains present as actors contribute to shaping the habitus of the field. Bourdieu introduces the concept of "feel for the game," emphasising

that individuals, while possibly aware of the constitutive role of their actions, engage in this process unconsciously (Adkins, 2003; Akram & Hogan, 2015). This non-cognitive form of knowledge, often taken for granted, is described by Bourdieu as pre-reflexive and challenging to explicitly articulate (Adkins, 2003). Adkins employs the analogy of driving a car to illustrate this type of knowledge, where practiced actions become instinctual. Adkins contends that since everyday practices operate on an unconscious level, reflexivity involves reflecting on the unthought and unconscious categories of thought, uncovering corporealized preconditions of more self-conscious practices (Adkins, 2003).

McNay (1999) adopts Bourdieu's theory to analyse gender identity, especially aspects that are embedded and embodied within one's identity. For McNay, gender identity or its practice is unconscious, pre-reflexive and non-cognitive; this is seen in how men and women unconsciously engage in conventional images of masculinity and femininity (which are not easily reshaped). McNay states "the destabilizing of conventional gender relations on one level, may further entrench conventional patterns of behaviour on other levels. For example, women's entry into the workforce has not freed women demonstrably from the burden of emotional responsibilities" (McNay, 1999, p. 103). For McNay, critical reflexivity happens when there is distancing of the subject from constitutive structures. Hence in the case of gender, critical reflexivity happens when one, for example, questions the conventional notions of femininity since by asking questions, one is indicating that there are tensions or that one is negotiating the fit between the habitus and the field (Adkins, 2003; McNay, 1999). Adkins states "reflexivity is therefore understood by McNay not to be a generalized, universal capacity of subjects but to arise unevenly from subjects' embeddedness within differing sets of power relations" (Adkins, 2003, p. 30). However, Akram and Hogan remark that for Bourdieu, reflexivity is not a capacity available for everyone rather, it pertains to a specific field; hence, it is a form of habitus within itself. Furthermore, it is essential also to consider Foucault's work when discussing Bourdieu's work since habitus does not just happen. There are multiple forces or processes at play that create this habitus, which places specific ideas and beliefs as superior or seemingly more legitimate than others.

Hence, these forces or processes would reinforce the taken-for-granted system (Akram & Hogan, 2015).

Akram and Hogan (2015) state that studies such as McNay (1999) and Adkins (2003) show that even though reflexivity is present in the habitus, there are aspects of our selves/ our identity which are pre-conscious of issues which are usually taken-for-granted, and which unless questioned would remain in the pre-consciousness. Consciousness-raising was used in the seventies to raise awareness about women's issues by addressing gender roles so as to be able to demonstrate how strongly these are ingrained in society, so much so that they are considered part of everyday life (Akram & Hogan, 2015). These practices enable agency because women are encouraged to start reflecting on their gender, their own behaviour and their thoughts about it. Hence, the argument according to the authors is that "reflexivity does not replace habit and the taken-for-granted as in Archer's account, but it must operate in relation to them" (Akram & Hogan, 2015, p. 620).

A criticism of Bourdieusian influenced accounts of gender and its transformation is, that such accounts "fail to register that reflexivity does not concern a liberal freedom from gender, but may be tied into new arrangements of gender" (Adkins, 2003, p. 34). Another criticism for Bourdieu's theory is that it "underestimates the extent to which reflexivity may routinely enter into everyday life" (Adkins, 2003, p. 34); this criticism is drawn from a standpoint which sees thought and body as indissoluble. Furthermore, Bourdieu's writing does not seem to address thoroughly the notion that reflexivity is rooted in the habitus; this means that it underestimates the ways in which critical reflexivity is part of everyday practice (Adkins, 2003).

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter presented literature linked to the self, mainly from a pragmatist and polyphonic perspective. Furthermore, the dialogical self-theory was presented as a possible theory of how we might look at our different 'selves' or roles; this led me, to analyse literature about the self as a social entity since, in the previous chapters, the social impact on gender was already established. Literature about identity formation was presented to establish the link between the self, the social self, and how we come to identify ourselves. Lastly, reflexivity and reflexive practice were addressed to discuss to what extent reflexivity is needed for identity and/or self-formation.

Chapter 5: Methodology

5.1 Introduction:

This chapter presents the research questions set for this study and outlines the methodology used to address them. This research study used a mix of critical and interpretative paradigms which enabled me to address both macro and micro aspects related to gender, identity and gender performativity. In the following sections, I discuss how this mixed paradigm impacted the current research and its execution by first discussing the epistemology adopted. I then consider the importance of reflexivity for feminist research methodologies, the level of reflection needed to answer the research questions, and how I used reflexivity throughout the process of data collection and data analysis. The epistemology section is followed by the data collection methods used, describing the sampling process and data collection. Feminist Post-structuralist Discourse analysis was used to analyse the data gathered, whereby within the section presenting the data analysis undertaken, the reasoning behind choosing such an analytical tool and how it was used are highlighted. The following section includes a description of the presentation of data. Reference is also made to the ethical considerations that were put into place before and during this research. Lastly, the methodological limitations are outlined.

5.1.1 Research Question and Aims

Even though ample literature exists about gender, discourse and identity, the interrelation between these three concepts and how each concept produces and re-produces the other needs further exploration, especially within the local context where such studies are nearly non-existent. The latter aspect led the researcher to formulate the following research questions.

- How do Maltese cis and transgender women identify and define their gender?

- How do women, through their personal discourse, understand their gender, and in turn how does this help them form (or perform) their gender?

5.2 Epistemology

5.2.1 Feminist Epistemology

Feminist epistemologies are a by-product of second-wave activism, where feminists started discussing how traditional approaches to research and knowledge production promote dominant ideas whilst hindering the development of more egalitarian relationships (DeVault, 1996; Harding & Norberg, 2005; Reinharz, 1992). Early feminist methodologies were adopted to demonstrate that the then-current social sciences focused mainly on men's experience by claiming that men's experience is universal and/or by misrepresenting or trivialising women's experiences; moreover, scientific research and social sciences were used to control women through medicine or social institutions such as the family (DeVault, 1996). Reinharz (1992) states that feminist research uses feminist theory because other theoretical perspectives "ignore or downplay the interaction of gender and power" (p. 249). The latter notion is central to feminist epistemology and is important in this research because even though I was not explicitly comparing men and women as categories, I intended to question who stands to benefit from the creation and reproduction of fixed gender roles or binaries. I also looked at how performing one's gender according to socially expected norms affects power relations and dynamics.

Since there are different definitions of feminism, there are numerous feminist perspectives on how social research methods can be conducted. However, some shared beliefs exist between all

perspectives, making us aware of the different oppressions within society and how these can be researched . DeVault (1996) states that irrespective of the perspective used, feminist research has three common goals: first, "excavation" (p. 32), namely a shift of focus from men's experience so as to uncover women's perspectives, concerns and inter-group diversity. For this to be achieved, the research does not try to get to know women (or their experience) but actually includes them and pay attention to the unique and specific women's experiences . Second, a reduction of "harm and control in the research process"[94] (p. 33) and third, a commitment to social change and consciousness-raising. Hesse-Biber's (2014) work is instructive here. She states that feminist research "recognises the importance of women's lived experiences to the goal of unearthing subjugated knowledge" (p. 3), hence challenging androcentric biases in research by acknowledging and including the centrality of gender in its analysis. Additionally, inquiring about the social construction of gender and gendered consciousness is central to feminist epistemology (Burns & Walker, 2005) which means that feminist epistemology is "interested in women as individuals and as a social category" (Reinharz, 1992). Whilst all these interpretations of feminist research were central to my research, the latter was particularly relevant since I wished to gain knowledge about the women's individual experience of their gender and how the socially constructed category of gender impacted their experience of womanhood and vice versa.

By challenging dominant perspectives, feminist epistemology gives "voice to the voiceless" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 242) which is done by placing marginalised groups at the centre of its inquiry. According to Hesse-Biber (2014), feminist epistemology has to move from the margins to the centre and, whilst doing so, challenge and eliminate privileged forms of knowledge which illustrate who can "be a knower and what can be known" (p. 3). At the same time, it has to inquire how a more legitimate view of the social world can be created (Hesse-Bibber & Piatelli, 2014). To be able to do this, feminists make use

[94] This goal is a response to the harm that women have been subjected to for the advancement of scientific knowledge.

of an array of research methods, either singularly or in combination; however, whichever method is used, it is always informed by the feminist movement. The centrality of the feminist movement in feminist epistemology means that the research done is critical since it questions dominant knowledge, but it is also political since it seeks to improve women's lives whilst emphasising social change and social justice . The link to the feminist movement is not only crucial for the political aspect of this epistemology but also for how the researchers position themselves within the research and view the participants. From a positivist perspective, "good research methods are supposed to be culture free, value free" (Harding & Norberg, 2005, p. 2010); however, feminist scholars started realising that this was not the case and that positivist researchers were not even perceiving, let alone amending "the assumptions and practices that shape the interests, conceptual frameworks, and research norms of social sciences" (p. 2010). Harding (1993) argues against the positivist concept of objectivity since this concept leaves out the extent to which the researcher's beliefs and position impact the research. She claims that each researcher makes subjective judgments throughout the research, such as the problems selected, the hypothesis formation, research design, data collection and interpretations, as well as how results are reported. This means that the researcher needs to self-reflect on how their social position, values, attitudes, assumptions, biases, and agendas impact the research. Hesse-Biber (2014), in interpreting Harding's notion of what 'strong objectivity' is, states, "it is in the practice of strong-reflexivity that the researcher becomes more objective" (p. 12). The notion of reflexivity in research was pivotal not only for feminist research but also for this study; hence, further down, I indicate how I engaged in reflexivity throughout this research.

A feminist researcher is both an "insider and outsider – taking on a multitude of different standpoints and negotiating these identities simultaneously" (Hesse-Biber, 2014, p. 4). So as not to engage in practices that support the status quo, a feminist researcher must be mindful of the hierarchies of power that exist or might exist between the researcher and their participants. Even though feminist researchers are aware of and try to diminish the power dynamics involved between the researcher and

participants, there are still contexts that make this task more complex. Wolf (1996) identified three issues where these power dynamics could arise, the first being the difference in the amount of social power the researcher and participant bring to the research. The research problem itself could be another source of power dynamics since one has to question who came up with the specific concept/ research question/ hypothesis? What is the intent behind this research? Which theoretical basis is the researcher adopting? Thirdly, the writing up and the representation of the study could be another area where power dynamics could impinge on the research. Throughout this research, I was vigilant for these dynamics so as to be able to acknowledge and address such situations. Adopting a feminist post-structural epistemology was one of the tools I foresaw that would help me address these power dynamics since this epistemological approach specifically questions the production of knowledge and the taken-for-granted knowledge and enabled me to gain a more in-depth approach to answer the research question.

5.2.2 Feminist Post-Structural Epistemology

Feminist post-structuralist epistemology is another critical perspective that was applied to this research. This epistemology was utilised because it originates from social constructionism, a perspective that has many valid concepts which are essential to this research, such as the criticism for the taken-for-granted knowledge; context is time-specific; knowledge is socially constructed and constantly recreated; the importance of discourse in the construction of knowledge, and the concept of dominant ideas and power (Gannon & Davies, 2014; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002; Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019) Additionally, feminist post-structural theorists develop these concepts further and apply them further to gender, making it a more valid epistemological stance to address the research questions.

Contrary to standpoint theory, feminist post-structural epistemology seeks to highlight the different realities women experience, how women perceive these realities and how in turn, women are shaped by them. Post-structuralism rejects notions such as absolute truth, objectivity and essentialism. On the other hand, it recognises how constructed realities can perpetuate dominance. This means that it allows researchers to investigate dominant ideologies, such as patriarchy and gender binaries, and their roles in constructing social structures. Hence, for feminist post-structuralists, when exploring women's experiences, one has to consider the context, be it cultural, historical, political or personal constructs, since these factors enable women to make sense of themselves and their social relations (Frost & Elichaoff, 2014). When utilising this framework as a basis of methodological exploration, the attention shifts away from the subject as being the creator of gender (that is, gender as being something internal) to language, which is seen as an instrument to construct reality, not only a tool to convey a message (Frost & Elichaoff, 2014; Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019). By shifting from language to discourse, language is seen not only as a conveyer of messages, emotions, and ideas but also as shaped by political and social frameworks, which in turn re-perpetuate dominant systems. Hence the discourse used within a specific context creates the reality of that said context, which implies that this epistemology seeks to go beyond the individual-social divide by exploring how the social world speaks the individual into existence (Gannon & Davies, 2014; Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019). Moreover, by analysing how specific discourses, such as those about gender, came to be part of the dominant discourse, one can better understand how such discourses are subjected to restrictions and perpetuation. Feminist post-structuralist epistemology was a key position from which to address the research questions since it acknowledges that "gendered discourses are neither transparent nor innocent" (Davies & Gannon, 2005, p. 319) but rather, they shed light on the ways through which individuals describe themselves, thus giving an indication of how the social world shaped that individual. However, even though these thoughts do not originate from within oneself, we come to see them as our own; hence we sustain them and use them as parameters to understand and define ourselves. Feminist post-structuralist epistemology was deemed important for this research because of how it addresses subjectivity, which is seen as an ongoing cycle where the individual is subjected to available discourses. While the

individual is subjected to specific discourses, that is, the gendered discourses available to them within their specific context, they are recreating themselves either as oppressed or oppressor; however, this whole process is not done knowingly, at least not in most cases (Frost & Elichaoff, 2014). Hence the individual/ subject is not fixed and all-knowing (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002).

The gendered experience is created as a result of multiple discourses. Hence to understand such an experience, one must recognise the uncertainty and the inconsistencies within such discourses.[95] Gendered subjects are positioned at discursive intersections. Individuals not only shift position, but such shifts might also mean a shift in the context, resulting in a shift in subjectivity, leading to fluidity or multiplicity of the subject. As a result, this epistemology allowed me not only to understand the differences which exist between women and men but also to acknowledge and understand the differences women experience amongst themselves. However, to be able to understand the creation of gender as a discursive construct and the various intersectionalities that this creates, I needed to question the taken-for-granted knowledge and deconstruct the notion of gender. In this study, I did not intend to use the notion of deconstruction to dismantle gender but rather to question the notion of gender so as to be able to reconceptualise it (Gannon & Davies, 2014). This was done by questioning my (as a researcher and as a cis-woman) taken-for-granted knowledge, alongside that of the participants', about gender and gender relations as suggested by Ramazanoglu & Holland (2002). I questioned the assumptions that the participants and I think of or make when we use terms like women, gender and gender roles, and in what ways (if any) the participants assume that gender is fixed. Deconstruction enabled me to question how 'truth' is socially constructed[96]; moreover, it gave me the tools to question the binary ideology, which is at the basis of modern society and through which the hierarchy of power is produced (Davies & Gannon, 2005; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). By

[95] As will be discussed in the data analysis section these are some of the reasons why discourse analysis was deemed to be the best tool to be used to analyse the gathered data.
[96] As I will be discussing I am also going to use a symbolic interactionist epistemology, which will enable me further to question how constructs such as gender are socially created, understood, and maintained.

questioning gender, I also envisioned that such practice would enable me to inquire about the taken-for-granted knowledge regarding gender in relation to other social constructs such as race and class. Hence, deconstruction of the data enabled me to question the binary and its limitations, its use, and if there was a way, or if there should be a way, to go beyond it.

5.2.3 Symbolic Interactionism

Adding an interpretative paradigm to the above-mentioned critical perspectives allowed me to inquire and answer the research question from a different but complementary angle, since interpretative approaches focus on interactions at micro-levels and the subjective experience; furthermore, personal experiences and perspectives are seen as valuable sources of knowledge (Hesse-Biber, 2017). The interpretative theory used was symbolic interactionism. This specific theory was chosen since it is complementary to social constructionism, such as the concept that the self and identity are socially created through interactions; hence, it is context-specific, not a manifestation of an internal core. Moreover, including such a theory enabled me to explore how, which and to what extent symbols (such as clothing, for example) are used to recreate gender.

Symbolic Interactionism started a shift in sociology whereby the analytical focus of the research was now shifted towards the individual and how social structures are formed and upheld through social interactions rather than looking at the macro-level of society or its institutions (Carter & Alvarado, 2019; Spencer et al., 2014). According to Bryman (1988), symbolic interactionism is based on two central concepts "the definition of the situation and the social self" (p. 54). These two concepts are clear in Blumer's (1969) writings, where he highlights the three basic principles of symbolic interactionism, with the first being "human beings act towards things on the basis of the meaning that the things have for them" (p. 2). He identified that these things could be: "physical objects; human

beings and categories of human beings; institutions, guiding ideals" (p. 2) and all situations that a person comes across in everyday life. This notion of meaning is very important and one which at the time of Blumer's discussion, was more central since research at that time was more focused on the behaviour as the result of a pre-identified and labelled factor;[97] hence, Blumer's suggestion that meanings have to be analysed "in their own right" (p. 3). The second principle is that the meaning of "things is derived from or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows" (p. 2); hence, meanings are "social products" (p. 5) created during interactions. Lastly, "meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters" (p. 2); during the interpretative process, "the actor selects, checks, suspends, regroups, and transforms the meanings in the light of the situation in which he is placed and the direction of his action" (p. 5). Hence, meanings are constantly evolving and not fixed. These three principles follow Mead's work on the 'I' and 'Me' function; as discussed in the literature review, and how the me reflects on how we should act in a specific situation because it is the view of ourselves as others see us, whilst the I is the part doing the actions; therefore we do not just act in a situation, we act according to how we think others will interpret our actions. Therefore, people act differently with different people and in different situations (Hesse-Biber, 2017). This demonstrates that our actions are not insular, and even when we start a completely new interaction with someone, we bring with us the acquired meanings and knowledge of previous interactions. The meanings and knowledge are acquired because of our interactions with others through which we learn shared meanings by adopting "common definitions of emotions, experiences and ways of acting" (Spencer et al., 2014, p. 86). Gender is a clear example of shared knowledge. Children from a young age are 'taught' either consciously or unconsciously how they can carry out their gender well, such as what the appropriate behaviour for the said gender is, how to dress, and how to speak. The child learns all this while interacting with others, and as a result of past feedback received. Since they 'wish' others to interpret their actions as being in accordance with their gender, the child/ individual acts according to the shared, agreed meaning/ portrayal of the

[97] In social sciences, these factors were linked to, for example, one's social position; in psychology these pre-identified factors were conscious and unconscious stimuli.

chosen gender. The notion of gender as being acquired through shared meaning was important for this research at both the data gathering and data analysis stage since it allowed me to inquire about the person's acquired meaning of their gender, whether that knowledge or meaning changed over time and the impact that social interactions had had in such change or lack thereof. Apart from inquiring about the learned meanings of gender, this theory also allowed me to inquire about how the participant acted out the 'I' based on how they thought others/ society viewed them, that is, the 'Me'.

5.2.4 Intersectionality

A recurring theme within the three epistemologies is that because we adopt various social identities at different points in our interactions with others, one must be aware and inclusive of the various intersectionalities that the participants might be exposed to. Intersectionality as a methodology observes how different "identity markers interact in a single subjectivity" (Oleksy, 2011, p. 265). Hence, this methodology has to account for diversity amongst group members, as some of the participants will share some identity markers whilst others will not (Oleksy, 2011). Furthermore, McCall explained that intersectionality as a methodology can be used and has been used as either of the following:

- "Intracategorical complexity", which challenges universal essentialism in identity politics and looks at inequalities through the lived experience; however, according to McCall, this method works well with a "single social group methodically" (Oleksy, 2011, p. 266), that is, race and women. This type of method relies on narratives.
- "Anticategorical complexity…aims to deconstruct master categories and narratives" (Oleksy, 2011, p. 266); since these narratives were male-oriented, they did not include the female perspective. Feminist post-structuralists sought to counteract the latter; however, as mentioned in the literature review, they were criticised by Black feminists since most of the predominant feminist theories are written from a white perspective.

- "Intercategorical complexity" analyses a "multigroup, and the method is systematically comparative" (Oleksy, 2011, p. 266); this method looks at more than one axis of inequality but it explores the categories of gender, race, sex, class, orientation, etc. one by one and shows how these are intertwined.

(Oleksy, 2011; Walby et al., 2012)

Intercategorical complexity was applied in this research since the participants were from different social classes and sexual orientations.

Combining feminist post-structuralist and symbolic interactionist epistemology was essential for this research so as to be able to explore both the macro and micro aspects of gender. The feminist post-structuralist epistemology enabled me to explore the dominant discourses and how these impact on the taken-for-granted knowledge and its social construction. At the same time, using symbolic interactionism allowed me to examine micro-level interactions and the participants' subjective experiences, in the process valuing these experiences as a source of knowledge.

All three epistemological perspectives discussed focus or drew attention to the level of reflection needed before and during data collection, as well as whilst analysing the data. For this reason, the following section will focus specifically on reflexivity and how it was utilised during this research.

5.2.5 Reflexivity

Reflexivity had to occur in all stages of the research process. I have already highlighted that strong reflexivity is, to a certain extent, part and parcel of feminist epistemology and why this is considered as such. I now turn to the reflexive process used when designing the research questions as well as the

ones which were used during the data interpretation and reporting process to produce a more thorough and in-depth investigation and analysis of the research questions.

Embracing a thorough reflexive process demands engaging in "self-critical action"[98] (Hesse-Bibber & Piatelli, 2014, p. 560), the "communal process" (p. 560) and "functional reflexivity" (Wilkinson, 1988, p. 494). By self-critical action and personal reflexivity, the authors suggest that the researcher looks at how their social context and identity as an "individual, a woman, and a feminist" (Wilkinson, 1988, p. 494) impact the research at hand. With regards to this research, I was aware that my interest in this topic, that is, gender construction and discourse, is very much linked to my work and activism within the LGBTIQ community. My work and discussions with Transwomen and Queer individuals have enabled me to reflect on society's construction of what it means to be a woman, as well as who gets to tick the box or who is deemed to be unfit for the title. As we are aware, society can be quite rigid in its gender dichotomy formulation at the expense of those who do not fit in the box. Hence, for example, I think that even ciswomen have to 'pass' in the sense that they have to fit in with society's norms and expectations of what it means to be a woman. With this research, I want to inquire about the personal experience of gender and the participants' definition of their own gender. As a feminist, I hope that the findings and knowledge gained from this research will enable me to work and advocate more effectively within the LGBTIQ community whilst also developing local academic knowledge about such topic.

On the other hand, the communal process[99] enables the researcher to inquire and reflect on how the social context impacts the research process and outcome. A study challenges the status quo once the common perceptions of both parties are questioned, and in this context, both the participants and I questioned our dominant ideologies (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2014), for example, either when the

[98] 'self-critical action' is referred to as 'personal reflexivity' by Wilkinson (1988, p. 494).
[99] This notion ties well with feminist poststructuralist epistemology and the concept of inquiring about how social concepts came to be.

participants self-reflected during the interviews or when I was conducting the data analysis. This process of questioning dominant ideologies reduces the hierarchical differences between the researcher and participants because both parties are seen in the production of knowledge. However, as previously mentioned, a researcher must question their positionality as insider and outsider, as well as the power dynamics at play during the interview. The power dynamics that I envisaged would be most at play during this research stem from the intersectionality of sexuality, race, class, and in this specific context, knowledge, that is, knowledge not only about gender but also how gender impacts all aspects of our lives. As a researcher, I am aware that knowledge like discourse is not neutral, and like discourse, it is subjected to the same notions of creation and re-perpetuation by dominant groups. To minimise these power dynamics, the first interview, which I carried out with each participant, was unstructured so that they could establish what they wanted to speak about and have time to give their definition and interpretation of gender. Furthermore, I kept a reflective journal to list insights, thoughts and questions which I have experienced during the interview, as well as whilst I transcribed and analysed the data of the first interview. During the interviews, some of the participants presented life events or social issues which they had experienced. The reflective journal was used to make sure that I was analysing and interpreting what they were saying from a researcher's perspective and not a social work perspective. In these instances, I pinpointed my concerns to my supervisor since she was in a position to understand how specific issues such as domestic violence or abortion could be analysed from a social work perspective, and we used to discuss how my approach to the presented data. During these discussions, we would go back to Feminist Post-structuralist discourse analysis, that is, the data analysis tool, and use its principles as a guide for the interpretation of discourse or presented narrative. Since I laid out which thoughts were my own and what thoughts/feelings/ideas the interview might have elicited in me, I was able to create an interview guide that reflected each of the participant's concepts. Additionally, since the same process was repeated for the second interview, separating my thoughts from the participants' allowed me to delve deeper into the participants' definition of gender whilst keeping my biases/impact on the research to a minimum. During the second interview some salient points and notions from the first interviews were re-addressed so as to check if the participants

corroborated the answers given in the first interview, as well as to check if the notions presented were also corraborated by the other participants and/or the literature review. By engaging in these processes, I was able to ensure that notions of confirmability were sustained throughout this research.

Brickell (2003), suggests the use of the following questions when inquiring about gender as performative. I envisaged using these questions to delve deeper in the reflective and analytical process; they were not only used to further explore the notion of gender and its performativity whilst challenging dominant ideologies but also acted as a tool to establish consistency during the analysis.

a. How is the gendered self, being constructed in the particular context, specifically, through the presentations that actors are doing in "two- (or multi-) interactions with others"? (p. 173)

b. How can the gendered performance be understood as a reflexive process?

c. How are biographies created over time through the consolidation of gendered enactments and interactions?

d. What are the ways through which the attainment of gender is considered satisfactory by self and others?

e. How are the participants doing gender on an ongoing basis?

f. What are the established and enforced rules and norms about what makes "competent" gendering?

g. How are the persons who are not acting out their gender properly held to account, and how do individuals supervise themselves and others during the gender performing process?

h. How is the notion of gender as a natural category enforced?

I envisaged using such questions after the first interview as a reflective tool to draw out the meanings of gender and its performativity from each particular interviewee. Secondly, these questions could be used to compare the answers for each participant hence being able to analyse their concepts and discourses further.

A factor that I needed to be on the lookout for was the assumption of commonality, that is, assuming that because both the participants and I identify as women, we both have the same experience. During the interviews, I tried to pick this up so that we could reflect on these assumptions to make sure that we are on the same page since the lived experience of gender is personal and different. This is based on the hypothesis that even though the participants all used the label 'woman', the way we do/ perform woman in our individualistic aspects may be different and differ according to the situation and social context. As a result of my context and past experiences, questioning gender and inquiring about the social construction of gender is common for me; however, I am aware that gender is part of the taken-for-granted knowledge for many individuals. During my research, I needed to be mindful about this aspect because my taken-for-granted knowledge (that is, one questions gender and their gender identity as part of self-discovery) may be in opposition to the participants' taken-for-granted knowledge.

Moreover, to be able to adopt functional reflexivity, one has to look at the epistemology and methodology chosen, why it was selected and how it could be utilised to structure knowledge. To be able to conduct such activity, I engaged in methodological considerations and questioning as suggested by Wigginton and Lafrance (2019), as represented in the table hereunder.

Methodological considerations	Potential lines of questioning for researchers
The politics of asking questions, that is, questioning the research question.	Whose interests are served in asking this question? What assumptions are inherent in the concepts under investigation? What might the consequences of the findings be? How can we produce a corpus of work that resists (rather than justifies) systems of inequality?
Attention to language/discourse throughout the research process; hence questioning the language we use	How do the terms we use in recruitment procedures shape which participants we invite (or exclude)? How do interview prompts position participants and what they are then entitled to say? Are the terms we use heavy with dominant discourse, or are they more ambiguous and open? Do our questions allow for complexity and contradiction, or do they require certain (socially expected) responses?
Representation and intersectionality	How can the 'differences' between the 'knower' and participants be acknowledged and addressed? To what social locations do research participants orient and how are these important for understanding their accounts? How do a variety of points of difference 'matter' to the issue at hand and how can these best be made visible in representations of data?
Mobilizing research for social change	How can research *transform* culture and discourse?

Table 1- (Wigginton and Lafrance, 2019, pp. 12, 13)

5.3 Data Collection Methods

A qualitative methodology was adopted in this study, primarily because such a methodology enabled me to explore the constructionist notions of gender as well as the relationship between theory and practice, by looking at how the participants interpret their gender and how this interpretation is based on their social context (Bryman, 2016) Furthermore, by adopting a qualitative methodology, I was able to explore the diversity between the participants since I was not seeking generalisations (Barbour, 2001) but rather a more in-depth account of their experience. Such in-depth narratives were needed to analyse dominant discourses and their impact on the participants' gender identity formation by making use of Feminist Post-Structuralist Discourse Analysis. The data was collected via face to face interviews conducted with a cohort of twelve cis and transgender women, irrespective of their sexual orientation, between the ages of twenty and forty. In the following sub-sections, I highlight how I conducted the sampling process, as well as the interviews; literature will be presented as to why these methods were the most appropriate for this study.

5.3.1 Sampling

Purposive sampling[100] was used to select the participants for this study. This sampling method was deemed the most appropriate for this study because, contrary to random sampling, purposive sampling ensures that participants who fit specific criteria, in this case, identify as women, are part of the research study (Campbell et al., 2020). Furthermore, Caswell (2013) states that participants in purposive sampling are selected based on their experience of the phenomenon being studied; hence

[100] According to Patton (2015) purposive and purposeful sampling can be used interchangeably. During the theoretical research for this section, both terms were used to gather literature; however, throughout this chapter, purposive sampling will be the term that will be used.

they could be identified as representative of such a phenomenon. According to Bryman (2016), the sampling done is relevant to the research question; however, "the researcher will want to sample in order to ensure that there is a good deal of variety in the resulting sample so that sample members differ from each other in terms of key characteristics relevant to the research question" (p. 408). As a result, purposive sampling yields information-rich data, enabling the researcher to gather an in-depth understanding of the questions under study and explain them (Campbell et al., 2020; Patton, 2002).

Bryman (2016) states that there can be two levels of sampling, one focusing on context and the other on participants. This research engaged in both levels of sampling; as already mentioned, the participants had to identify as women. Moreover, these women had to fall within a certain age bracket, that is, 20 to 40 years old, and they all needed to have been brought up in Malta since the local context was one of the focuses of this research. One of the reasons for selecting the identified age brackets was based on the notion that participants' might possibly be in different life stages, work experience and educational attainment. These factors might have impinged on how the participants define their gender or how their definition of gender may have changed along the years, possibly due to new life experiences. Another factor that determined the plan to adopt the identified age bracket was to be in a better position to explore any changes in the social context and how these might impact the definition of gender; hence, I was interested in exploring realities such as social media and if or how this had impacted the participants' gender identity and definition.

Even though this research adopted purposive sampling, an element of randomness was still retained. A recruitment poster was designed in Maltese and English (Appendix 1) and distributed to social media groups administered by LGBTIQ organisations and the biggest social media group for women only in Malta (which has a following of 49,000 women). The poster clearly stated that anyone who identified as a woman, was Maltese or raised in Malta and was ready to sit for both interviews could participate in this study.

5.3.1.1 Participants

In total, 23 women responded to the recruitment call; the first twelve who responded were sent the information sheet and consent form (Appendix 2) to have further information about the research and what their participation would entail. Fourteen[101] interviews were carried out in the first data collection cycle; however, only twelve responded when contacted for the second interview.

Throughout the data analysis chapter, the participants were identified as women 1 to 12. The reason behind this decision was to further anonymise the participants. When reflecting on the size of our population and the fact that some participants brought some unique stories or life situations to this research, I felt that if the participants were given a female name as a pseudonym, there might be the possibility of identifying some of the women since it may be easier for the reader to build up a story from the results when a name is given. Moreover, the reader might subconsciously link the pseudonym to a woman that they know with the same name, leading to the interpreted results being linked to the person they are thinking about when reading said results. The participants were not explicitly asked to disclose any personal demographics. Nonetheless, throughout the interviews, participants disclosed their age, sexual orientation,[102] education level and relationship status (see Table 2). The latter were deemed to be important when analysing the results since these demographics impacted how the participants responded during the interviews. Furthermore, the participants referred several times to these demographics and their relationship with their gender.

[101] Two participants who had shown interest in the research did not respond to my 1st email. However, after contacting the two successive prospective participants and starting the first cycle of interviews, the two women who were part of the original sample made contact with me, and since I was still in the interview process, I decided to add them to the sample.
[102] The term used is as identified by participants.

Pseudonym	Age	Sexual Orientation	Relationship Status	Education Level
W1	Late 30's	Heterosexual	Married	Doctorate
W2	Early 20's	Bi-sexual	In a relationship during the 1st interview, single during the 2nd	Graduate
W3	Late 20's	Bi-sexual	In a relationship	Reading a masters
W4	Early 20's	Bi-sexual	Single	Graduate
W5	Early 20's	Bi-sexual	In a relationship	Graduate
W6	Late 30's	Bi-sexual	In a relationship	Post-graduate
W7	Mid 20's	Bi-sexual	In a relationship	Post-graduate
W8	Early 20's	Queer	Single	Reading a masters
W9	Late 30's	Gay	In a relationship	Post-graduate
W10	Late 20's	Gay	In a relationship	Post-secondary
W11	Mid 30's	Heterosexual	Married	Post-graduate
W12	Late 30's	Heterosexual	Married	Doctorate

Table 2- Participants' Demographics

Even though specific measures were used to make this research as open and inclusive as possible, all participants (twenty-three) identified as cis-gender. The measures included: the recruitment poster leaving the definition of one's gender up to the participants by asking, "do you identify as a woman?"; and posting the recruitment poster on LGBTIQ social groups a day before posting on the women-only social group, since the LGBTIQ social groups have fewer posts per day, thus making the recruitment poster more visible and able to reach different intersectionalities.[103] One can postulate about the size

[103] The latter reasons were the only reasons for posting before on LGBTIQ groups since the women-only group is open to anyone who identifies as a woman irrespective of sexual orientation and gender identity.

of the trans community and that usually, the same transwomen come forward when conducting academic research aimed at trans-women as the reasons behind the lack of trans* participation. As a researcher and activist, I hope that not mentioning that transwomen were welcome to participate in the study did not deter them from participating. Even though the recruitment poster was shared before on LGBTIQ social groups, most participants approached me after posting on the women-only social group, stating that they had seen the post on the women-only group. This research has an over-representation of bi-sexual women which is very interesting and positive since bi-sexual women are still under-represented in everyday contexts and discourses.

5.3.2 Data Collection

As previously indicated, the data was collected through interviews since this method is best used when the researcher wants to focus on a particular topic or issue whilst acknowledging the participants' experience as central to the study and by assuming "that individuals have unique and important knowledge about the social world that is ascertainable and able to be shared through verbal communication" (Hesse-Biber, 2017, p. 143).

Interviews were deemed to be the best data collection tool for this research since, during interviews, one does not just record and document what the participants state. If a researcher engages solely in the latter, they would be missing out other essential aspects that are created when one talks, such as the non-verbal elements, how the participant forms a sentence and what is unsaid (DeVault, 1990; DeVault & Gross, 2012; Reinharz, 1992). Another element that would be missing if interviews were reduced to just human talk is the power dynamic involved in each interview which does not only include the power dynamic between interviewer and interviewee but also the power dynamic involved in interpreting the data gathered. In this chapter, I addressed notions central to feminist interviewing,

such as power and hierarchies created between the researcher and participant, what might be a false sense of commonality and how I intended to question the production of knowledge. Furthermore, according to Douchet and Mauthner (2012) interviews are not only a means to collect data "but also a site where data is co-constructed, where identities are forged through the telling of stories, and where meaning-making begins" (p. 335). This notion is congruent with post-structuralist epistemology since it acknowledges the reproduction of self rather than seeing the self as monolithic; moreover, the last quotation highlights a central concept for discourse analysis, that is, in order to analyse the data gathered from interviews, a researcher does not only have to look at what was said but also how it was said. DeVault and Gross (2012) sustain that the researcher's job is not merely to narrate what was discussed during the interview but to question the discourses used and the 'positions' produced (and producing) by such discourses. To be able to engage in such analysis, the interviewer needs to engage in active listening so that they not only hear what the participants are saying but also are able to process the non-verbal communications. If one does not engage in active listening, one might reproduce data which highlights dominant perspectives or the interviewer might only hear what they expect/ want to hear (DeVault & Gross, 2012). One should also engage in active listening so that the research produced is "*for* rather than *about* the people" (DeVault & Gross, 2012, p. 218) participating in the study.

So as to engage well with the participants and to gain in-depth knowledge about their definition of their gender, two audio-recorded face-to-face interviews were carried out with every participant. Upon agreeing on a date and time, each participant was given the option to select the location for the interview. This was done with the intention of giving the participants the possibility to select a venue that they would be comfortable in and also somewhat to mitigate the power imbalance between interviewer and interviewee. Most of the interviews were done in a cafeteria, which further enabled the interview to be conducted in a relaxed manner, almost as if we were chatting over a coffee, which was important for the purpose of the first interview. Two participants opted to invite me to their homes

for the second interview, which enabled them to have further control over the interview since they were within their safe space.

The first interview was unstructured since that allowed me to explore the participants' views whilst also allowing me to clarify and discuss with the participants, enabling me to generate theory (Reinharz, 1992). Furthermore, this type of interview gave me more flexibility to address the participants' salient ideas since they were the ones' leading' the conversation; hence, for example, participants were not stopped if they veered off-topic since these tangential conversations indicated aspects which were important for the participants (Bryman, 2016). An overarching question was used for the first interview: "What does it mean for you to be a woman?" A pilot interview was carried out before commencing the first round of interviews and the person who volunteered for this interview identified as a woman and was within the 20-40-year-old bracket. The pilot interview enabled me to become accustomed to unstructured interviews since even though I have conducted interviews in the past as a research tool, this was the first time I was making use of unstructured interviews as a means of data collection. Another reason for conducting the pilot interview was to gather feedback regarding how the participant felt whilst taking part in the interview, especially feedback regarding if the participant felt that my prompts or engagement in discussions with her were leading.

After the first round of interviews were conducted, a transcript of each interview was compiled, using MAXQDA. This tool was used since it enabled me to view statements as part of the whole interview as well as separate statements based on the codes given. Each participant was given the possibility to review the transcript of her first interview, enabling the participants to have further control over their statements while also ensuring adherence to principles of research credibility. The participants were given three weeks to get back to me if they wanted to omit or modify any statements narrated during the interview. Only two participants wanted to reduct specific words or lines, and in both cases, it was to protect their anonymity further since they were statements that detailed specific features of their

employment or profession. In both cases, the participants were assured that such statements would not have been inserted in the presentation of results due to ethical considerations. Each transcript was reviewed several times so as to be able to engage reflexively with the data, as highlighted in section 5.2.5, which enabled me to draw on dominant discourses. Statements were coded and grouped under parent codes; these codes were selected either because they were being presented repeatedly by the participants or because they stemmed from dominant discourses/ ideologies sub-codes, which addressed more specific themes within the parent code as per Table 3:

Code System	
What it is to be a woman	
	Being a woman in 2022/now
	Biology
	Safety/ not safe to be a woman
	Impact of men on women's identity/ definition
	Every woman as being different/ an individual
	Difference between generations
Society's expectations	
Impact of other individuals on gender formation/ aquisition	
	Impact of older generations on the construction of gender
Identities that we hold	
	Outcomes resulting from identities
Female objectification	
Reflecting about gender/ the ability to	
Privilege	
	Family background/ family privelege
Stereotypes/ presumption/ social construct	
	Discourses about men/ woman/ re-inventing discourse
Opposing terms/ dualities/ hierarchy of terms	
	Differences between men/women
Gender as taken forgranted/ default	

Table 3- Code System 1st Round of Interviews

The transcript and the analysis derived from each interview were used as a basis for the second interview, which adopted a semi-structured approach. Conducting the second interview in a semi-structured form allowed me to delve deeper into the participants' discourses. Moreover, according to Reinharz (1992) sharing the interview transcripts and conducting multiple interviews aids in building trust between the participants and the researcher. Even though a common interview guide was used

for all participants, the guide allowed me and the participants the possibility to tackle each question from different aspects since the questions did not focus only on the commonalities presented by the women but also enabled me to explore further markers that were either not adequately addressed during the first interview or which were brought to light due to the analysis conducted on the first interview. Seeking to address some points of commonality between the participants allowed me to tackle one of the drawbacks of open-ended interviews, which is non-standardisation; however, this was not done at the expense of losing the diversity portrayed by the participants. Even though an interview guide was adopted for the second interview, the participants still had leeway to take the conversation in new directions; I was still free to ask questions that were not indicated in the interview guide, and likewise, the participants could introduce new concepts which were not previously presented. After the second interview, I engaged in a process of transcribing and sharing transcripts with the participants, similar to the one that I had employed for the first interviews. New data gathered was added to the existing codes, or new codes were created for new concepts introduced during the second interview as per Table 4. The use of different codes made it simpler for me to collate participants' statements pertaining to specific codes in order to be able to analyse their narratives and discourses not just as individuals but also as a group, making dominant discourses more pronounced. Moreover, reviewing specific codes on an individual and group level enabled me to identify taken-for-granted knowledge and discourses. After the second interviews, the dominant discourses became more prominent, and there was also a consolidation of specific constructs, such as what is a typical Maltese woman. Furthermore, concepts such as the relation between our gendered identity and other identities that we hold were developed further, alongside a consideration of the impact of social media on our identity as women. The dominant discourses or constructs were grouped according to relevance and predominance to create the themes and sub-themes for the presentation of data as will be explained in further detail in section 5.4.2[104]. Adopting such a system throughout the data collection process ensured that the research is conducted in a systematic and rigorous manner, so as to ensure

[104] A mind map was also created to enable me to link the Codes presented in Table 4 to the reasearch questions (Appendix 3)

dependability. Moreover, the data gathered and findings reflect the impact of dominant discourses and social expectations which not only impact one's concept of gender identity but also other identities that the individual has, hence findings could be transferable to other contexts.

Code System
What it is to be a woman
Typical Maltese woman
Traditional/old time
Being a woman in 2022/now
Participant typical Maltese woman Y/N?
Mediterranian women
Biology
Safety/ not safe to be a woman
Men not comprehending the issues of safety
Techniques women use to feel safe/ because they don't feel safe
Impact of men on women's identity/ definition
Every woman as being different/ an individual
Difference between generations
Society's expectations
Sanctioning of women who do not conform to expectations
Women supervising each other
Challenging society's expectations
The need to fullfil society's expectations
Expectations on self as a result of expectations of women
Social media and its impact
Positive impact of social media
Unrealistic expectations
Impact of other individuals on gender formation/ aquisition
Impact of other women in aquiring our womanhood
Impact of older generations on the construction of gender
Identities that we hold (+)
Outcomes resulting from identities
Impact of identity on womanhood
Female objectification
Impact of sexual objectification and how we do our gender
Misogynistic comments and how these make the participants feel
Coping mechanisms/ what women do to combat misogynistic comment
Damned if we do damned if we don't
Women and religion
Reflecting about gender/ the ability to
Privilege
family background/ family privilege
Stereotypes/ presumption/ social construct
discourses about men/ woman/ re-inventing discourse
Opposing terms/ dualities/ hierarchy of terms
Differences between men/women
Gender as taken for granted/ default

Table 4- Code System 2nd Round of Interviews

Throughout both interviews, the participants presented various social issues and experiences that they or women very close to them had passed through, mainly domestic violence, marital rape, abortion as a result of becoming pregnant after being raped, sexual assault, harassment at the place of work, history of multiple miscarriages and treatment meted out by healthcare personnel, severe physical assault by one's parents after the participant came out. Even though all narratives were reflected upon as mentioned in the reflexivity section (5.2.5), the instances and narratives included in the data analyses were those which mainly impacted the participants' gender identity and performativity.

However, all narratives and presented issues were taken into consideration when presenting the recommendations for research and policy.

DeVault and Gross (2012) state that researchers engaging in feminist interviews have two challenges, the first being that of "reproducing false homogenization" (p. 208) and "responding to new developments" (p. 208). Discourse analysis was used to analyse the data gathered since this technique enabled me to address these two challenges as discussed hereunder.

5.4 Data Analysis

As discussed so far, as feminist epistemology underpins this research project, discourse analysis was the tool that was seen to be most appropriate for analysing the data gathered from the participants. In the following section, after presenting a brief overview of discourse analysis, a more in-depth description of feminist post-structural discourse analysis will be outlined since this is the analytical tool that was used for data analysis.

According to Gee (2011), "in language, there are important connections among saying (informing), doing (action) and being (identity)" (p. 2). To inquire about a subject from a discourse analytic standpoint, one would look at competing understandings of the topic and how the meanings and practices associated with the topic changed over time and space (Dunn, K. C. & Neumann, 2016). Discourse analysis assumes the stability of the concept being addressed; that is, its meaning is taken as a given; this enables one to inquire about the social construction of the topic at hand (Dunn, K. C. & Neumann, 2016).

To be able to present a more coherent picture about the analytic method that was adopted, first, a brief explanation of what and how I perceived and regarded discourse during this research is presented. Foucault (1972) defined discourses as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (pg. 49) as well as "a system of dispersion between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices" that form "a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functions, transformations)" (p. 38).[105] For Fairclough (1992), discourse is "a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning" (p. 64); and for Gee (2011), "discourse is a characteristic way of saying, doing, and being … if I have no idea who you are and what you are doing, then I cannot make sense of what you have said, written or done" (p. 30). Hence, discourses have to be recognised by others or, more specifically, to this research, others have to recognise which identity the speaker is portraying and what activity they are conducting. Gee (2011) states that people use language plus "other stuff", such as dress, ways of acting or thinking, as well as make use of specific symbols which are associated with that particular identity, to communicate both identities and activities. "You can't just "talk the talk", you have to "walk the walk" (Gee, 2011, p. 28), which is achieved by "acting-interacting-thinking-valuing-talking-(sometimes writing-reading) in the "appropriate way" with the "appropriate" props at the "appropriate" times in the "appropriate" places" (Gee, 2011, p. 34). This definition of discourse was central in this research analysis; since the researcher not only looked at what was stated by the participants, but particular attention was paid to the "other stuff", especially considering the degree of importance that these are given in society with regards to gender.

Fairclough (1992) adds another layer to Gee's interpretation of discourse since, for the former, discourse is a social practice which does not only "represent social entities or relations, … [it must]

[105] A more detailed review of Foucault's discourse theory can be found in the literature review.

construct or 'constitute' them" (p. 3). For Fairclough (1992), discourse as a social practice has two implications. In the first, discourse is seen as an action that enables people to act upon the world, upon each other and that is used as a form of representation.[106] The second implication is that there is a relationship between social structure and social practice, where social structure is both the condition as well as the effect on social practice (Fairclough, 1992). As analysed from this perspective, discourse impacts the construction of 'social identities', 'subject positions' and types of 'self'; furthermore, it impacts the construction of social relationships with people, on systems of knowledge and belief (Fairclough, 1992).

5.4.1 Feminist Post-structuralist Discourse Analysis

Feminist Post-structuralist Discourse Analysis (FPDA) combines two dimensions: post-structuralism and feminism, whereby the post-structuralist dimension is strongly influenced by the Foucauldian notion of actions forming the objects of which they speak; on the other hand, the feminist dimension encourages the researcher to inquire about gender and how power relations are constructed through discourses (Baxter, 2003b). Baxter (2003a) defines FPDA as "a feminist approach to analysing the ways in which speakers negotiate their identities, relationships and positions in their world according to the ways in which they are located by competing yet interwoven discourses" (p. 1). Additionally, FPDA views discourses[107] as directly linked to concepts of power, where power is not necessarily seen as an oppressive force but a force that creates and might also empower social relations. The focus of this analysis was spoken discourse, and it was well suited to this research since it identifies and interprets the "fluid and *interactive* ways in which speakers shift between competing subject positions within the course of a conversation" (p. 2). A central notion in FPDA is that speakers have multiple identities, which

[106] An implication which is very similar to Gee's definition.
[107] FPDA acknowledges that discourse is not singular, that is, there are multiple discourses that are operating and competing at the same time.

are negotiated depending on the discourses adopted, a notion which was discussed at length in the literature review when literature about the self and identity was presented.

Three principles are central to FPDA: self-reflexivity, deconstructionist approach and textual interplay. The principle of self-reflexivity involves declaring one's positionality whilst also being aware and even engaging with other perspectives/ standpoints since this enables the researcher to view the study from different viewpoints. The researcher should not only declare their positionality but also monitor it and evaluate it; this will prevent the researcher from shifting from "will to truth" into "will to power"[108] (Baxter, 2003a, p. 59). According to Baxter (2003a), during this analysis, the researcher must be aware that the technical terms used are not objective; hence "FPDA analysts need to be aware that its own 'foundational rhetoric' can operate as a form of arcane, scholastic discrimination with the potential to exclude marginalise uninitiated readers and researchers" (p. 60). Furthermore, when adopting FPDA, I also had to be aware of the textuality and fictionality of the research process; that is, each research is based on a set of decisions taken by the researcher, decisions which are not 'neutral' since knowledge cannot be separated from discourse. Hence, I needed to be aware of the choices made and be willing to explain the impact of my choices.

As discussed in the epistemology, the deconstructionist approach is used not to dismantle notions such as gender but to look at such concepts from new perspectives. The deconstructionist approach combines some or all of the following points: an "acknowledgement that the factual is replaced by the representational" (Baxter, 2003a, p. 61); an acknowledgement that meanings are never fixed; comprehending that the "process produces structure, not the other way round" (p. 61); to search and inquire about concepts that have privilege over others; to be critical of my "intellectual assumptions" (p. 62) and "continual textual interplay" (p. 62). According to Baxter (2003a), "a deconstructionist

[108] This notion is based on Foucault's critique of perspectives who turn their viewpoints into a 'regime of truth', that is their 'will to truth' is enmeshed with the 'will to power' (Baxter, 2003a, p. 22).

approach would advocate the need to juggle with sets of oppositions and supplementarities, always keeping one's options open in order to keep a richer, more nuanced range of ideas in play" (p. 63). In a later text, Baxter identifies concepts one can use to inquire about the discursive construction of subjectivity which are: "discourse as a social practice…the performative…the diversity and multiplicity of speakers' identities…the construction of meaning within localised or context-specific settings…an interest in deconstruction…inter-discursivity…the need for continuous self-reflexivity" (Baxter, 2008 p.245, 246).

Textual interplay is based on Derrida's notion of 'difference' and 'deferral' notions, which see meaning as only temporarily fixed, and that language is in a continual "state of flux" (Baxter, 2003a, p. 24). Textual interplay serves to question the assumption of opposition, whereby a term can be understood and given meaning as opposed to another. These assumptions have to be questioned since, in various analytical tools, these opposing terms are portrayed in a hierarchical manner where one term has more power over the other. Textual interplay can be acknowledged by deliberately not adopting "an overriding authorial argument at the expense of alternative points of view" (Baxter, 2003a, p. 64). Indeed, FPDA can bring forward multiple viewpoints by adopting Bakhtin's notions of polyphony[109] and heteroglossia. Polyphony "refers to the co-existence, in any textual or discursive context, of a plurality of voices which do not fuse into a single consciousness, but rather exist on different registers, generating a 'dialogical' or intertextual dynamism among themselves" (Baxter, 2003a, p. 67). In this study, polyphony was used to produce different perspectives on the discourses presented during the interviews; the fact that I gave the transcript to the participants also gave me their perspective on the text; hence the focus was not solely based on 'my' opinion/ understanding of the participants' perspective. Furthermore, participants' responses were compared to one another, adding another layer to the multi-perspectiveness, whilst always comparing these perspectives to my own. Practising polyphony enabled me to uncover "gaps, ambiguities and contradictions" (Baxter, 2003a, p. 69), which

[109] Bakhatin's theory of the polyphonic self was addressed in the literature review.

otherwise might have been ignored. This concept ties in with self-reflexivity because the researcher had to be aware of their standpoints, agenda and limitations. Furthermore, since this process was done in a post-structuralist framework that emphasises 'intellectual pluralism', the researcher did not assert that what they were saying was the 'truth.' As suggested in FPDA, the researcher's voice was placed along with the voices of others (participants or researchers).

Heteroglossia means "the act of making visible the non-official viewpoint, the marginalised, the silenced and the oppressed from other more dominant viewpoints" (Baxter, 2003a, p. 69). According to Bakhtin, as read by Baxter (2003a), language is the space where different social groups confront each other to gain more freedom through challenging hegemonic interests. This notion gives voice to individuals who have been silenced by hegemonic groups and counterparts within the same groups who are more vociferous. Heteroglossia was used in this study since all the participants were women: ideally, I would have had as diverse a group of participants as possible, which would have included women from different educational backgrounds, gender identities and sexual orientations. However, the research was an opt-in study; so one can postulate that maybe women who have been repeatedly silenced (by dominant groups and even by others in their minority groups) would not have come forward to participate in this study.

The third foundational principle of FPDA is to select a specific feminist focus, which Baxter (2003a) states "involves highlighting key discourses on gender as they are negotiated and performed within specific, localised contexts" (p. 66). According to the author, one needs to make sense of how discourses position women as "relatively powerful, powerless or a combination of both" (p. 66). To be able to analyse from an FPDA positionality, one needs to carry out a denotative analysis that intends to give a narration of what is happening in the text; this is done by making direct references to what is being said/ or by representing the non-verbals. This is followed by the connotative analysis, which is implemented by looking closely at and interpreting discourses (verbal and non-verbal). A connotative

analysis also examines the text from a synchronic approach, "which is done by doing a detailed micro-analysis of short stretches of spoken discourse" (Baxter, 2003a, p. 73).

The process which was undertaken to conduct the data analysis was conducted as follows. After the first interview was completed, the interview was transcribed. The transcription process allowed me to start doing some rudimentary analysis and start taking some analytical notes.[110] Transcripts did not only include what was said during the interview but also the silences since these represent what is not being said (Gill, Roslind, 2000). Transcripts were first taken at face value so as to understand what the interviewee said (Gill, Roslind, 2000). I then looked at the transcripts in more detail, and at this stage, I started asking the why and how. To be able to conduct an in-depth inquiry, first I asked Brickell's (2003) suggested questions when inquiring about gender as performative[111] as well as Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine (2017) suggested questions to select the corpus for further analysis. These processes enabled me to establish recurring ideas and/or diverging ideas. The analysis of the first interview was crucial since this was used to formulate the interview guide for the second interview. The process of analysis of the second interview was the same as for the first interviews. As discussed in the data collection section, participants had to sit for two interviews.

A recurring pattern emerged as the codes derived from participant responses were analysed, revealing a cyclical interplay between discourse, social expectations, gender identity formation, and gender performativity as per Figure 6.

[110] As previously described throughout the process of data gathering and data analysis a reflective journal will be kept to enable me to delve deeper into the analysis of the data at hand as well as to make a distinction between the participants' viewpoints and my own.
[111] Questions were presented in the reflexivity section within this chapter.

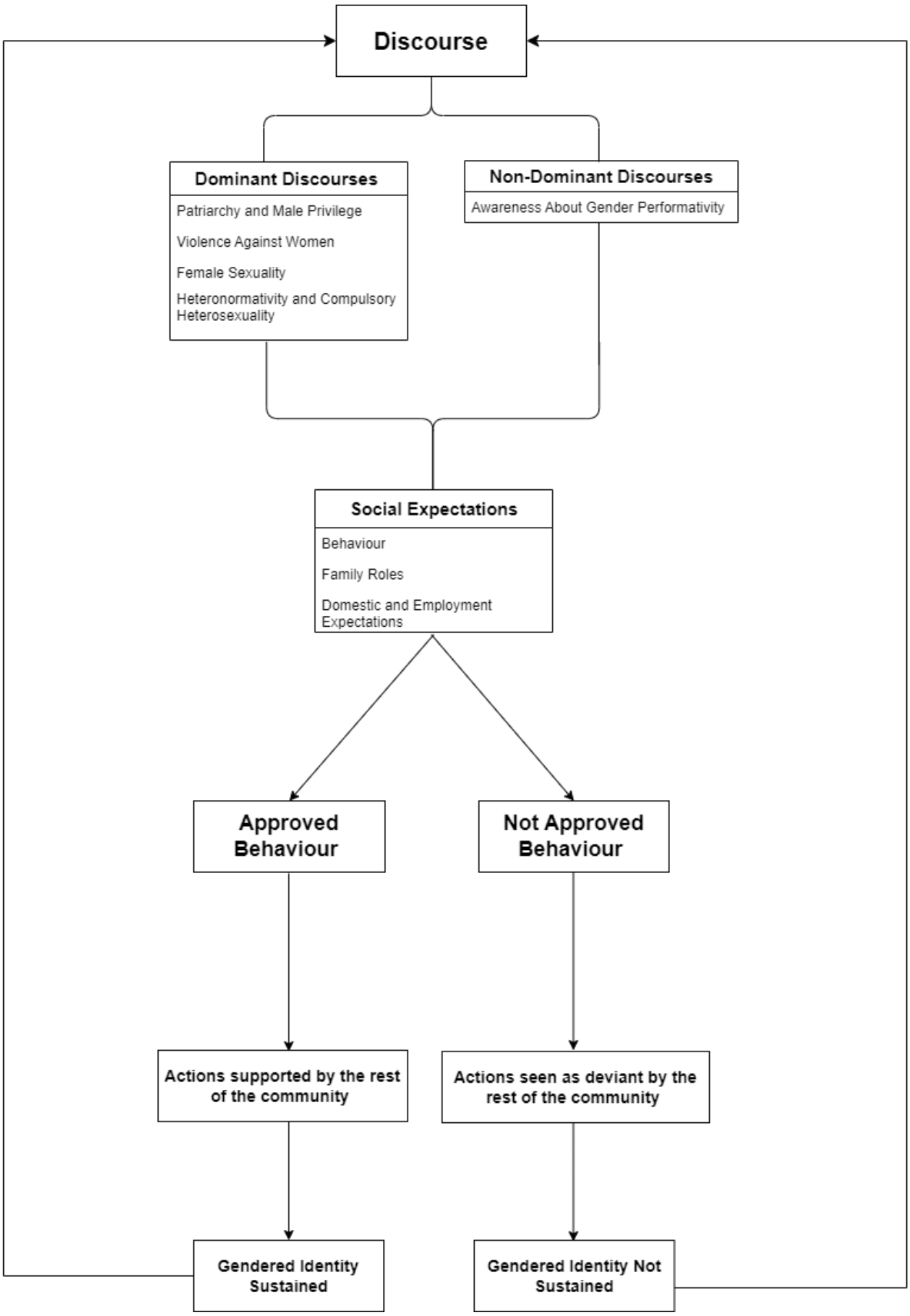

Figure 6- Cyclical process between discourse, social expectations, and gender identity formation

This cyclical relationship seemed to stem from the hierarchical nature of dominant discourses, which established a gradation of social expectations. Social norms, positioned at the apex of this hierarchy, are perceived as the most appropriate modes of behaviour. Individuals deviating from these expectations are labelled deviant and may face societal sanctions for their non-conformity. Dominant discourses shape societal norms and influence the formation of gender identity. Individuals, navigating their understanding of gender, internalise these prevalent discourses, shaping their perceptions of appropriate gender behaviour. They then engage in gender performativity, enacting the behaviours associated with their internalised gender identity. This performative enactment reinforces the prevailing social expectations and perpetuates the cycle. The presented cyclical relationship also demonstrates the interaction between macro and micro aspects of gender. The macro aspects are those dictated by dominant discourses and social expectations and analysis of such discourses could be done as a result of the adoption of feminist post-structural epistemology. The micro aspects, which focus on participants' view of self, the 'symbols' used to perform one's gender and the engagement in everyday acts of resistance, could be analysed as a result of the adoption of symbolic interactionist epistemology. Moreover, using feminist post-structuralist discourse analysis enabled me to explore not only the macro and micro aspects of gender but also the discursive construction of subjectivity.

5.4.2 Presentation of Data

To be able to highlight the interplay between dominant discourses and social expectations, the analysis of the gathered data is presented in two chapters; where the first chapter addresses data pertaining to dominant discourses, which look closely at male privilege and patriarchy and how the latter still seem to impede women from gaining access to further power (be it economic or political) within our society. Discourses around violence against women were analysed by looking at female objectification and the

role of social media in such objectification, stranger harassment, and safety concerns, which lead women to engage in self-surveillance and victim blaming. Dominant discourses about female sexuality were also analysed, leading to an analysis of heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality and how such discourses impact gender performativity. The first data analysis chapter concludes with an analysis of the participants' agency and how the latter might lead to backlash. The second data analysis chapter focuses on social expectations and women's gendered identities. Within this chapter, data regarding gendered socialisation and generational influence, gender roles and social expectations, as well as the internalisation or rejection of social constructs, are addressed. Moreover, participants' intersecting identities and the impact of their internal and external positions on their gendered identity are presented and analysed.

Direct quotes are presented within each section, followed by an analysis of said quotes and narratives presented by the participants. As discussed in the data collection section, each participant was given a code instead of a pseudonym. Each direct quote was labelled with a specific code which followed the same structure: Wn(n.n)* where Wn represents the participant number, the first number in the brackets represents the first or second interview, and the last number is the corresponding line in the transcript. Direct quotes which will have an * mean that the quote was originally stated in Maltese, and the Maltese version can be found in Appendix 6 with the same code as presented here under the same heading given to the data analysis section.

5.5 Research Ethical Considerations

Even though the participants who took place in this research were not deemed vulnerable individuals and interviews carried out did not elicit any distress, the hereunder measures were taken so as to protect the participants:

- Women with whom I have worked as clients in the past were not interviewed to protect them and avoid elements of bias within the research. All participants were at least twenty years old, as stated in the sampling section. The participants sat for the interviews after showing interest in participating in this study and opting in out of their own free will.

- Prior to their selection, the participants were informed that they would be participating in two interviews and were given an outline of the topic which was going to be discussed. This would have enabled the participants to make an informed consent; however, if at any stage the participant wanted to withdraw from the research, they could do so, and the data gathered about the participant up to their withdrawal would not be used in the research.

- Prior to enrolment, participants were given a consent form (Appendix 2) in which the here presented information was explained. Both the interviewee and researcher signed the consent form. A signed copy of the consent form was given to the said participants.

- The participants were made aware of and gave their consent to the interviews being audio-recorded and understood that transcripts would be made of each interview.

- During both interviews, the participants were offered the possibility to ask for further clarification at any point.

- Once the first interview transcript was done, it was given to the participant, whereby they had three weeks to confirm the transcript's validity. The same process was repeated with the second interview.

- If a participant wished to withdraw before the second interview, they could do so in the three weeks during which they had the transcript in hand.

- The anonymity of the participants was protected at all times. Codes were given to each participant for the presentation of results and data analysis. Moreover, identifying information about the participants was not included in the presentation of results and data analysis, and where possible, when identifying factors such as disability or specific details about particular

relationships were included, the participant's code was not presented so as to make the participant unidentifiable.

- The audio recordings and transcripts were treated with the strictest confidence and in keeping with the GDPR. All the raw data gathered from this research was destroyed after full completion of the examination process.
- In the eventuality that participants had become distressed during or as a result of the interview, they would have been referred to services that are free of charge, such as Richmond Foundation Psychological Support Services or Rainbow Support Services for women who identify as LGBTIQ.

(Bryman, 2016)

Moreover, in line with the University of Malta regulations, a Research Ethics and Data Protection Form was submitted (Appendix 4) on the 28th of April 2022, which was subsequently acknowledged by the Faculty for Social Wellbeing Research Ethics Committee on the 2nd of May 2022.

5.6 Limitations

The small number of participants could be considered one of the main limitations of this research since twenty-four interviews from twelve participants does not necessarily encompass a wide variety of women or women's experiences. Even though this research does not cover all the notions of what being a woman is, it still highlighted some of the most prevailing discourses found in the local context regarding gender and performativity. In the process of analysing the second round of interviews, new issues were presented, and if I had had the possibility to conduct another interview, it might have enabled me to delve further into these discourses; however, this would not have excluded the

possibility of newer concepts and discourses being presented in the third interview, since each time a round of interview is conducted the participants would be more at ease to disclose their narratives and/ or take the interviews toward new directions.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter highlighted the epistemology and methodological tools that were used to conduct the presenting research. Specific focus was given to how notions such as self-reflexivity and discourses were observed and analysed during this research since such notions are the basis for this research data collection and analysis. These concepts were kept in mind throughout the empirical work and were used as the foundation for the research.

Chapter 6- Results and Analysis: Discourse

6.0 Presentation of Results and Analysis

While sifting through the various codes I had generated when compiling the participants' responses, and more so when I was grouping these codes to draw the findings, I became more aware of the cyclical process between discourse, social expectations, gender identity formation and gender performativity as presented in Figure 6, pg. 191. I view this process as cyclical because dominant discourses set hierarchies of social expectations, and the social expectations which are at the top of the hierarchy are the ones that are viewed as the most appropriate. The latter set modes of behaviour, and individuals who do not act according to these social expectations are seen as deviant and might be sanctioned for not acting according to the expected behaviour.

Since discourses about gender identity and gendered behaviour are central in our social discourses and considered very dominant in discourse hierarchy, hence very socially controlled, they impact how one perceives what their gender ought to be, how one is expected to act according to their identified gender and how this is to be performed. Gender is not only controlled by specific social expectations but also by specific discourses which distinguish between the genders, creating a hierarchy of genders whereby one is seen as being the most dominant (in most societies, the most dominant gender is male) and in most cases, the genders are divided into two. Moreover, these gendered discourses portray gender and sex as monolithic, giving the illusion that gender and sex are fixed and that there is only one way to do gender or sexuality. The latter notions set how we as individuals view our gender, that is, as something natural, linked to our biological characteristics, which has to be done according to what society expects from us as gendered individuals. Furthermore, these gendered ideologies are so dominant that we are ascribed a gender by others based on our biological characteristics so that society can 'indoctrinate' us or socialise us on the best way to act out our gender. Even though this socialisation is constantly happening, one might not be aware of it since gender is taken as given or is seen as natural,

so "it is only fair" that those around us interact with us according to the gender to which we were ascribed at birth. The ascription of gender and gendered socialisation limits how one acts within their gender since if one does not act within the parameters set by society for the ascribed gender, they will be sanctioned. This, in turn, teaches us not only what our gender is but also what our identity is since gender is such an integral part of it. The formation of our identity or our identities takes us back to the dominant discourses because when we are forming our identities (be it those pertaining to role identities, group identities, and person identities[112]), these too are moulded according to the discoursive intersection between the dominant discourses of gender and identity.

The relationship between dominant discourses, social context, and identities is well-researched. In this dissertation, I wanted to take a closer look at the relationship between these three phenomena and analyse how each concept is re-created or sustained within our local context, leading to the analysis of their impact on the gendered experience. So, to present the findings and their analysis in a coherent manner, they will be split into two chapters. I will first present a chapter focusing on discourse by reviewing how dominant discourses, especially those stemming from patriarchal ideologies resulting in male privilege, impact gender and gender performativity. By analysing the discourses linked to such ideology, I will also reflect on the relationship between power and knowledge and how such a relationship has the potential to recreate our social context. The participants discussed various themes related to patriarchy and male privilege, such as their perspective and lived experience of patriarchy and male privilege, women's objectification, sexuality, stranger harassment, female sexuality and sexual activity, toxic masculinity, heteronormativity and gender performativity.

In the second chapter of the data analysis, the focus will be split into two sections, one dealing with social expectations and another with identity. The first section will present and analyse the most salient

[112] The definitions used for the understanding and analysis of these terms are the ones presented by Stets and Serpe (2013).

social expectations identified and discussed by the participants. The latter led me to discuss themes related to generational influence on gender acquisition, gender roles and expectations, especially those related to the family and employment, and the internalisation or rejection of mentioned social constructs. The last theme will lead to the second section of the chapter, which will deal with the different identities that the participants hold and the intersectionality between such identities and their gender.

To be able to establish how this cyclical process is taking place in the formation of participants' gender identity, I will first present several statements which highlight different definitions or the different perspectives presented by the participants of how they define being a woman; then, I will move on to link how these definitions are linked to dominant discourses and how in turn such discourses impact social expectations, leading to identity re-enforcement or modification.

6.0.1 What does it mean to be a woman for you? – Participants' definition of their gender

As presented in the methodology chapter, this research adopts a feminist-poststructuralist epistemology; moreover, this study aims to explore the role of discourse in the construction of one's gender. To be able to address the latter, my first cycle of interviews consisted of an unstructured interview; only one question was prepared for the participants, which was, 'What does it mean to be a woman for you?' The answers to this question were varied but simultaneously held several commonalities. Even though each woman discussed her definition of being a woman in her own narrative, the participants' narratives overlap. The overlaps, as will be presented, highlight the impact of dominant discourses and the social context on the participants' definition of their gender identity as well as their interpretation of the social context. These overlaps range from expected behaviour and

roles to the pressure experienced by women, to feeling oppressed or at a disadvantage and to the positive aspects of being a woman.

Hereunder, quotes from some participants will be presented, with the intent to first present an overview of how the participants see womanhood and to start exploring the discourses these women use when discussing their understanding of being a woman. Furthermore, as per Jones (2016) and Baxter (2016), since our gender and subjectivity are created through our discourses and how such discourses are presented, these quotes shed light on how the participants continued to construct and present their already identified gender for the purpose of this interview.

> **W8 (2.6)*[113]** I mean in the past there was the idea that a woman has to stay at home taking care of the children etc. I think that there are certain people who still see it that way but in general it has changed, the thing is that a woman has to do everything as in she has to work a lot at the same time she has to keep on taking care of the children, take care of the house seems that for men for some reason, there was never that much of a big change where the man has to take care of the children and the house, seems that the woman evolved and now she can work as well but the previous roles still (B: remained there), exactly, but man their role is working and that did not change in society…there was not a big change and I think even the need that you have to do it all exists, that you have to go to the gym, you have to maintain your figure, so much so that there is a lot of emphasis on woman's aesthetics and I think that is an important social expectation.

> **W5 (1.26)**
>
> that's I guess a part erm of what I define as being a woman, I guess, the ability, not the ability ta, the possibility I guess, cause there are women who can't have kids, and they are still 100% a woman, erm, ehe like you raised an interesting point, of erm most of the times the default that we're taking care of the kids, I think that in theory yes erm, like both your partner I guess

[113] A code will be used for each presented direct quote where W8 means participant 8, the first number in the brackets represents the first or second interview, and the last number is the corresponding line in the transcript, hence this quote is by participant 8, and it's the 6th line of the 2nd interview. Direct quotes which will have an * mean that the quote was originally stated in Maltese, and the Maltese version could be found in Appendix 6 with the same code as presented here under the same heading.

or yourself they have an equal ability to raise kids, but it, erm, it just defaults to the woman taking care of the kids, which in 2022, it's still astonishing that it's not more balanced I guess.

W9 (1.4)* Obviously, there are a lot of disadvantages as well, for example some things that make me angry is the fact that we are always seen as less, than the gender male, where women are capable as much as men and are treated less.

W4 (2.24)

I feel that you need to cross so many barriers to be accepted and to get treated fairly and if you are vouching too much for your opinion "oh you are a feminist, and you are too sensitive, and you are too liberal", so you can't even voice out your opinions and rights without feeling that hint of like "ehh din dejjem teqred" (*this one is always nagging*), so it's very annoying, and if you don't say anything, you should be more assertive, so, I feel I very big conflict, but at the same time even though it's difficult, it's beautiful as well and I love being a woman and there are so many things that we do so well, and the love and care that we can show you know...just the aesthetic of women and just I feel it's beautiful being a woman now.

W7 (1.24… 1.26)* in my opinion womanhood when compared to manhood it's broader because there are more things that women can do but if men do them they are going to be labelled as gay instantly…as we were mentioning trousers, for example, traditionally trousers were for man and skirts for woman, but if a woman wears trousers she will not be automatically labelled as a lesbian, on the other hand if a man wears a skirt, automatically (B: labelled), yes, and even make-up which is associated with women but if a woman doesn't do make up it's not automatically, not that much frowned upon by society, even if two women travel together and they stay in the same room it's more accepted then when two men, cause if two men do these things together ehh they are a couple for sure, so from this aspect it seems we have more freedom in society, it sounds a bit ironic but anyway.

The main discourses presented in these quotes will be unpacked throughout the data analysis chapter; however, the presented dominant discourses which can be summarised as follows, suggest not only the performativity of gender as highlighted by Baxter (2016) and Butler (1990), but also the impact of gendered discourses on the formation of our identity as per Litosseliti (2006) and Sunderland (2004). Several women linked being a woman to the aesthetics of a woman, conveying a sense that it is not

enough to be biologically female, but also, we have to 'look' like women, which includes being feminine, amongst other things. Women as being caring or the ones who take care of the family and the one who unites the family were also aspects very much mentioned by the participants. All women interviewed mentioned the pressure that women experience throughout their lives, ranging from biological pressures linked to reproduction to being able to balance all the demands that society has on us, such as being a good mother and at the same time holding a career: all this has to be done in a near perfect manner. Most of the data gathered highlights the oppression or the disadvantaged positions we find ourselves in compared to men. However, some participants discussed what they consider to be the positive experiences of being a woman, such as the sense of community or collegiality between women and that women have more 'freedom' to combine their feminine and masculine traits in specific situations (especially in clothes wear).

After discussing the participants' interpretation of a typical Maltese woman, I asked if they would label themselves as "typical Maltese women". This inquiry was made to start exploring the participants' definition of a typical Maltese woman, hence their perceptions of what makes traditional Maltese women, whilst also exploring whether they see themselves as traditional women or perceive themselves as challenging the taken-for-granted gendered behaviours and social expectations. Every participant stated they do not view themselves as typical or traditional Maltese women. However, some admitted that even if they do not feel or see themselves as a typical Maltese woman, they still conform to some of the social expectations impinged on women. Nonetheless, those who, to a certain extent, conform in some aspect to societal expectations still show a level of agency either by moulding social expectations to make them work more for themselves or when they act out of line with what are considered as dominant ideologies.

> **W10 (1.12)*** For example, I am not a woman who even though looks like a typical woman at first glance I am not so when you start seeing yourself you have to be more open for when someone is confirmative to things that society is expecting for example being cisgender, hetero…

W9 (2.4)* When I was young, I used to watch my mummy, and I used to say I don't want to be this woman, I don't want to be the woman that is always at home and then the husband comes, or I go to work as well, the husband comes home, and I have to cook for him, wash his clothes, so yes I think with the knowledge and developments that we have had in our society today I think that a woman can be more independent, I personally bought my own place at 24 years and started living on my own at 19.

W8 (2.8)* But when I started growing up, I started accepting the fact that I am breaking a lot of norms because my family, for example, my family is all pro-life, my mother and father are older, so they weren't, they were against LGBTIQ communities etc., so I got used to from a young age that I have my own values, and these will be different from others, and once you get used to something like this from your family which is harder to face then I got used to the rest of society, that is I think I do not feel I have to do any of the social expectations mentioned, at times I ask "will I ever be a mother?" or whatever and I might feel that thing, but then I ask but do I want it or not? Instantly I recognised the ideas behind becoming a mother, I think the only thing that I still need to work on is sexual abuse or catcalling, the others I always found the energy and motivation to fight them, I say if I don't want this thing I will not do it, so if I am angry and not sad I show it, those are ok but I think the system is so against you when you experience sexual abuse or catcalling and you get used to them so much unfortunately, but I try to fight it by talking to people and we say maybe we write an article on this things or we try to shed light on it but it's difficult.

W12 (2.12)* I think certain elements yes and other elements no, maybe for older generations, if I see today's generation I fit quite well with stereotypical women, but if my mother's generation had to see me, I don't think that I fit into the typical Maltese woman…because it's different they were brought up in a way that you grow up, erm, you find someone get married, if needs be you stop working and your husband takes care of you, whereas my life is totally different from that...

W1 (2.4)* Ironically I am, I cannot say that I am not, I mean look at me, I have my own house, I have a child, I have a husband, I have a job, I try not to be, I try to say that I am not but when you look at it in a reflective way you say I am, I try to say no I am not a typical woman for sure, but you know, I have all the ingredients which make up a typical woman…these things happened coincidently when I was young, I used to imagine being single with a career, you know, I did not use to dream that I would have to have a partner, that I would have to have, no my own house I always wished to have, I wanted my own house, but to have to have children, I always dreamt that I would have a career which I liked, but I would be hypocritical if I say noooooo I am not a typical woman because you see me you know (B: a typical woman of your generation) exactly.

As previously stated in the following chapters, the discourses and concepts presented by the women in the presented quotes and their interview responses will be unpacked and analysed by firstly looking at how these concepts are linked to dominant discourses and followed by the social expectations experienced by the participants and how they construct their gender identity within the current local context.

Discourse

6.1 Introduction

Analysing discourses produced by the participants about what it means for them to be a woman is central for this research since, from a poststructuralist standpoint, discourse is seen as creating the social reality of which it speaks, yet the same discourses change according to the social context one is in. Language is one of the modes through which we convey discourses; hence, through language or, in this case, the women's narratives, their social identities and realities are created. When reflecting on discourse and discourse production, the public (social) and private (personal) creation of discourses were kept in mind. Since patriarchal ideologies impact both of these discourses, they influence how one's social identity is created, affecting how and to what extent women can participate in society or social interactions. In the literature review, I have presented how discourse is linked to power and knowledge and how those who have power in a situation or society control knowledge and, in turn, discourse. Feder (2011) states that Foucault's use of the French word for power can have two meanings: to have the potential, and power is productive. When reviewing and analysing the discourses presented by the participants, these definitions were kept in mind. Through their narratives, the participants shed light on how their potential is limited in specific contexts due to how dominant discourses produce their reality as women. Then again, from the responses obtained, the participants seem to be aware of the dominant discourses or ideologies and their impact on them as women; hence, in some situations, one can see how these discourses are resisted and how the participants' 'power' is demonstrated through their agency especially when performing their gender. Moreover, for Foucault, knowledge is passed on to us (via external agents, be it society or individuals) by making it institutionalised, hence by institutionalising dominant ideologies or by making this knowledge seem common sense, making dominant ideologies seem natural or taken for granted, which is then seen in everyday discourses which convey patriarchy and male privilege as the norm.

In this chapter, the dominant discourses surrounding male privilege,[114] as presented by the participants, will be discussed. The participants highlighted dichotomies that women have to face daily, such as men being considered as 'protectors' of women versus men being oppressors of women, where the participants discussed how they receive messages about how they have to be protected by men (and if they are in a same-sex relationship they will be more vulnerable than other women), notwithstanding the significant national and international evidence base that highlights men as the primary abusers of women. To address the notion of women's abuse perpetrated by men, issues related to the male gaze and female sexual objectification will be addressed by looking at the participants' perception of how sexual objectification impacts what they wear since it might lead to unwanted male attention; moreover, the impact of the male gaze on intersecting identities such as gender and sexual orientation will also be explored. This dichotomy will be discussed by presenting findings about how the participants feel that women are sexually objectified, with women at different intersections experiencing more sexualisation and the role of social media in women's objectification. Stranger harassment and how this leads to self-surveillance, especially body surveillance, safety concerns leading to fear of stranger rape and victim blaming will also be discussed. A second common dichotomy faced by women is related to sex or sexual activity; on the one hand, women are constantly sexualised, but if they openly express sexualised behaviour, they are shunned for it. Dominant discourses surrounding sex and sexual activity will be addressed by looking at how women are impacted by dichotomous discourses surrounding the Madonna-Whore construct and how such discourses still influence social expectations from women.

In addition to these key dichotomies, the dominant discourses stemming from the pre-conception that everyone is heterosexual, along with dominant discourses on gender performativity and how these

[114] Even though a specific theme is dedicated to addressing male privilege, it is also an overarching theme, whereby discourses surrounding male privilege will be re-addressed or discussed throughout data analysis chapters since the themes presented in this chapter and the following are all stemming from the fact that we live in a patriarchal society.

impacted participants, are also discussed. Within this theme, the negative impact that dominant discourses can also have on men, especially on their gender performativity, will be presented and analysed. The final theme of this chapter deals with women's agency, and the backlash suffered due to being agentic, where specific social practices such as gossiping and shaming will be analysed in relation to how these are used to maintain the status quo.

6.2 Male Privilege and Patriarchal dominant discourses

Some of the most institutionalised and taken-for-granted knowledge stems from patriarchy and revolves around male privilege, predominantly white, heterosexual male privilege. For the purpose of this research, privilege is understood to be the unearned benefits granted to members of dominant groups based on one or more of their social identities (Case et al., 2014). Prior to delving deeper into the findings and analysis highlighting the participants' perspective of male privilege and how this impacts their gendered experience, it is important to note that all the participants have some form of earned privilege. What is meant here by earned privilege is that in certain aspects of their lives, the participants are privileged compared to other women. However, they earned this privilege mainly due to their educational status; nearly all participants (eleven out of twelve) have tertiary education. This is important to note for two reasons. First, most of the participants stated that their parents do not have a tertiary education background; therefore, even though they are women, they pursued a career or an educational trajectory that they wanted to achieve, and their family "allowed them" to do it. As will be presented throughout this and the following chapter, some of the participants acknowledge that they have an element of privilege as a result of their education or social positioning due to having professional jobs, which other women might not have, that enable them to navigate through our society better or more freely. However, they also acknowledge that this privilege does not put them on a par with men. Secondly, as a result of being exposed to a higher level of education, they were aware and could reflect on and discuss specific social constructs related to gender and sexuality, which cannot

automatically be stipulated for every woman on the island. Since all the participants identified as cis-women, I could not engage in analysing the difference in privilege experienced by transwomen. Moreover, racial privilege was not explored since all participants were white Maltese women. However, as a researcher, I am aware that in Malta, women who belong to different gender identities and racial minorities would have less privilege than the participants in this study.

> **W4 (2.4)**
>
> so basically that is womanhood for me, being me and exploring my femininity and also my bit of masculinity, that if for instance the leadership part, the ambition, and crafting it within my womanhood at the same time especially since I'm a helping professional it helps me a lot to explore my caring and helping side but at the same time, I get very ambitious and wanting to be a leader in the situation so they craft in a way so, I just find a way to explore this in my different context in life…

W4's response about her understanding of and lived experience of womanhood, even though she acknowledges that she portrays characteristics that are usually associated with both genders, characteristics linked to power, such as ambition and leadership, are associated with her 'masculine side', in contrast, care and helping others is linked to her 'feminine side'. **W4** did not make these associations out of the blue, but these associations result from how the dominant discourses portray both genders. Patriarchy or patriarchal discourses are not only normalised through institutions such as religion, education, and the media (Walby, 1990). Such discourses are also the basis of all our social interactions since they 'other' anyone who do not take up the acceptable gendered norms , (De Beauvoir, 1956; Irigaray, 1985). Like Kimmel (2016), the participants felt that men lead an easier life, since women do not have the same power and social standing in patriarchal cultures.

Moreover, in the statement by **W1**, one can pick out social expectations[115] such as getting married and having children and how men can decide not to conform to these social expectations without being shunned or seen as not conforming to social expectations contrary to women.

> **W1 (1.14)*** In general in society men have a much easier life on various levels, if we had to make a blanket statement a man's life is always easier on various levels ermmm lets start biologically, what society expects from them even if a man does not get married it does not seem to be that much of a problem but a woman who hasn't found a partner who hasn't found a husband then the biological clock erm…

Men's 'easier' life is also the result of the power that they have in society, a power that stems out of patriarchy, which, as per Walby (1990), is a "system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (p. 20). These social structures, even though they are autonomous, simultaneously reinforce and block each other. Our culture revolves around patriarchal practices, which are reinforced through social structures such as the mode of production,[116] paid work, the state, sexuality and cultural institutions. The participants also highlighted the same structures at various stages of our interviews, especially when discussing how society perceives women, where anything considered positive is linked to men or male characteristics, whilst the opposite can be said for women.

> **W4 (1.4…1.6)**
>
> I remember when I was younger, when I was younger I remember, I feel like culturally erm we were always perceived as kind of...not inferior erm gender or sex but qisu (*sort of*) I remember kind of hearing like boys are so funny, boys are so athletic and if you are a girl who spends time with the boys you are so cool, but the girls with a group of girls are seen as ohh they only talk about girly things and are so kind of perceived worse than the boys who are for instance playing football and (B: mhm, mhm)…if you are playing sports with the guys it's amazing, if you are

[115] A more thorough analysis of the social expectations experienced by women will be presented in the next chapter.

[116] Since the mode of production will be discussed at length in the sections dealing with social expectations (section 7.3.3), it was not included in this chapter so as to avoid repetition.

playing with the dolls it's perceived as ehh bil-pupi (*with dolls*) you know it's kind of perceived negatively.

W1 (1.16)* Obviously negative language is always linked to women always, historically and even presently, so a man is liked because he is a playboy, a woman we are scandalised because she is a whore and you can mention them all for example a man is assertive a woman is a bitch no? (B: yes, yes) erm a man is a team player and maybe a woman is an ass licker, which means that the duality exists a lot.

W1 (2.112)* The woman tempts, the woman breaks up the family, the woman who is not good enough, the woman who doesn't satisfy her husband, but where is the man who satisfies his wife, you know? The woman who does not remain beautiful enough for her husband, who lets herself go, these are all negative labels associated with women.

W7 (1.82)* If a men tells everyone that he is gay, generally he will not be asked if he is certain, because the fact that you say it it's like you are already placing yourself in a risky situation, on the other hand if a woman says I am gay, everyone says "but are you sure, did you try out with a man before", as if I will go and tell anyone that I am gay if I am not sure, so I think yes in all of this you have a difference between the sexes, and then again it might be because women are not taken as seriously as men, seems as if one has to always need to question women's decisions about themselves or woman's or women's identities etc

All three participants cited above highlight three areas where man is seen as positive or superior to woman, and the different contexts that they portray show that patriarchal ideologies can be seen in all aspects of our lives, be it childhood and the everyday comments we hear about ourselves as women and which we hear others (including women) use to describe other women. These discourses are so powerful that they surpass intersectionalities because even though a gay man is seen as 'lesser' than a heterosexual man, his word is always more valued than a woman's, irrespective of her sexual orientation. When reflecting on the participants' responses, I found myself thinking about how such statements impact how we view ourselves as women since if our subjectivity is being created every time we speak or we think, how do statements such as the ones presented portray women and in turn how do they impact our interactions with the world? For feminist poststructuralism, subjectivity is "used to refer to the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (Weedon, 1987, p. 32). From a young

age, we learn that it is cooler to be a boy than a girl; boys are always up for an adventure, whereas girls are at home playing with dolls, preparing themselves for their future roles, which, although such roles are central for the running and order of society, are deemed as inferior to male roles. Whilst growing up, we hear discourses that reinforce the notion that women's actions will constantly be scrutinised and held to a higher standard, and if we do not conform to the demanded standards, we are shunned, whereas men are excused.

> **W1 (2.28…2.30)*** But still "who knows what did she do to him?" so even when these cases of domestic violence happen, there is always the question mark, seems as if the man is always forgiven…but the woman "who knows what she did to him?" so yes society is very, very harsh, even for women who want abortion how scandalous", all men shouting "scandalous, scandalous, scandalous.

> **W9 (1.30….1.60)*** For men, it is never an issue, I know of women who struggle to find a new partner because they have children from another man or two, but the man is always seen as unblemished, irrespective how many kids he has it's as if they are not his, it's as if he is not part of it, it's as if he wasn't there, the woman did them on her own…I don't think that now it's very different, but when I was growing up it was always a world dominated by men, for example, at school, in books women were always seemed to be bad/wrong, women were always doing something bad/wrong.

This cycle of male excusing behaviour can be sustained because men hold the vast majority of power in our culture; hence, as previously mentioned, those who have power control knowledge and discourse.

6.2.1 Women Lack Representation in Positions of Power

We live in a patriarchal state, which is constantly engaged in the recreation of what Walby (1990) terms patriarchal culture. The notion of the patriarchal state becomes more evident when one looks at our national parliament and those holding power positions in our society. On paper, the state does not exclude women from accessing resources as per Walby's definition of a patriarchal state structure

presented in the previous theme. When analysing women's roles in politics, however, it is clear that there is an overlap of discourses and social expectations in place which disadvantage women but work to benefit the patriarchal culture. Women are still expected to hold the domestic and child-rearing role;[117] this expectation impacts women who try to engage in politics since, if they have a male partner, the latter needs to be willing to take a more active role in the private sphere so that their female partner can engage in the public sphere due to parliamentary working hours. These hours, that mean parliament convening mainly in the evening after a day of ministerial work, were not only created with men in mind but with men who do not feel the need to partake or contribute to their children's upbringing, hence also placing men who want to have a more active role in their family's life at a disadvantage.

> **W2 (1.38)*** In parliament, women in politics they are not well represented, why? Because the working conditions are not good and because there is the concept that women stay at home with the children so they don't change the working hours, so it's filtered in all forms of society you cannot say you will change this sector and you are ready you have to literally change society from top to bottom because it starts from the top and it filters down to the bottom

When discussing male privilege, it was highlighted how characteristics such as leadership and ambition (see the statement by **W4 (2.4)**) are considered masculine. It comes as no surprise that for the past 72 years, there was a status quo of 26 women elected to parliament (The Technical Committee for the Strengthening of Democracy, 2019), with the 2022 election seeing ten women being elected via initial election process or the casual election (*General Election 2022.*). Women's low election rate in parliament might be because the general perception is that women would be unable to do the job or not do it just as well. Bezzina et al.'s (2022) work is instructive here. They observe that those countries with a high income and proportional representation tend to elect more women compared to middle or low-income countries. Even countries with a strong Catholic background, such as Ireland, tend to follow this pattern; however, this is not reflected in the local Maltese context. Literature about gender and voting stereotypes shows that voters follow traditional stereotypes, with women candidates being

[117] A more in-depth analysis of domestic and child-rearing roles will be presented in section 7.3.3

hindered by family/house responsibilities (Bezzina et al., 2022), corroborating **W2**'s statement, and being perceived as having feminine-associated characteristics such as being compassionate, consensus-oriented, honest, and having a better relationship with their constituents (Dolan & Lynch, 2016). Whereas men are considered more intelligent and competent than women, women are seen as stronger leaders who perform better in times of crisis (Dolan & Lynch, 2016). Moreover, stereotypical assumptions are also linked to the policy interests and abilities that candidates have, with women seen as more proficient in sectors such as healthcare, education, family and social issues, whilst men are seen as more skilled in handling economic and trade issues and defence (Dolan & Lynch, 2016). These stereotypical assumptions and dominant discourses greatly impact people's thinking, including women's, leading them to vote for men (some of whom have made misogynistic remarks or have shown that they are not competent for such roles) rather than for women, hence always sustaining the power imbalance in Parliament. The latter is quite ironic since two Maltese women currently have very prominent roles at the European Union level: the EU Commissioner for Equality, and the President of the European Parliament.

Participants also discussed redress measures to tackle these representational imbalances. **W9** specifically spoke about the gender quota mechanism introduced in the 2022 national election and expressed her take on the situation and how she views women and power.

> **W9 (1.10)*** I don't think we have enough women in power to take certain decisions in our country, so I think that it has to start from the top, why don't we give women more chance to participate in politics, even after the last election, how come many of the women were not elected via people's votes, it gets to me to be honest, and it gets to me, because there were as many women who voted as men, so what is happening, is it us women?

In their study, Bezzina et al. (2022) found that 88.5% of participants favoured increased gender balance in parliament representation, and 66.5% supported gender corrective mechanisms. The authors state that these responses resulted from a more secularised and democratic socio-cultural background resulting from their participants' emancipatory values. However, respondents who are in

favour of the gender corrective mechanism voiced a significant preference for other positive measures, such as "childcare facilities and family-friendly hours for MPs, the possibility of backbenchers registering as full-time MPs, and the inclusion of women in the electoral commission" (Bezzina et al., 2022, p. 667). Creating more friendly measures will not only benefit or attract more women to politics but will also benefit male MPs since it also addresses the notion that men's sole responsibility is their career, as well as the assumption that every male has a woman waiting for them at home tending for the family and the household.

6.3 Men as the protector of women vs. Men as the oppressor of women

One of the dichotomies that emerged when the participants spoke about their lived experience is how society 'expects' men to protect them, which leads one to understand that society sees women as weaker or more fragile than men.

> **W7 (1.46)*** I also think the fact that a woman on her own or two women together are considered weaker than one man, let's put it this way, so for a woman to be safe in society, it seems that she has to have a man to protect her if they are two women together they are seen as weak.

W8's parents expressed the same concerns; in the following statement, she stated how they once asked her who would protect her at night if she was dating another woman.

> **W8 (1.8…1.13)*** once one of the conversations with them *(referring to her parents)* was, but if you end up with a woman, then who is going to take care of you in the street at night?…and when speaking about sexual assault and these things the power is very much exerted by men on women by taking, they take, literally, they take away the sexual dignity of women

However, as pointed out by this participant, women also need protection from other men, and even though most participants discussed sexual objectification and fear of men unknown to them, in most instances, research shows that women are most likely to be sexually abused by men known to them

(Council of Europe, 2023). Moreover, with the normalisation of harassment and violence against women and values stemming from honour culture, women learn that they are left alone if they 'belong' to another man (Rudman & Glick, 2021). The latter again places women in a double bind where we need males for protection on the one hand, and on the other, we are victimised by them. Walby (1990) described male violence as one of the six structures of patriarchy where men exert their power over women; this violence is not a one-off occurrence or carried out by a few men or by a specific culture, but it can be seen in all cultures and social classes. Violence against women can be seen in violent attacks such as rape or everyday occurrences such as groping or catcalling. Discourses around men enforcing their power (through objectification and violence) on women are so dominant in our cultures that they are normalised, and women expect them to happen; for example, we are aware that catcalling happens, and to a certain extent, we know that it will also happen to us at one point in our lives irrespective of how we present ourselves. As previously presented by **W1 (2.28…2.30)**[118] statement, the ones whose actions are doubted are the women's. Kimmel (2016) and McIntosh (2016) highlight that male privilege is invisible or taken for granted by men because when thinking of privilege, we only think about those discriminated against and not how we can be in a superordinate position compared to others. As a result of their superordinate positions, it is common for men to think and suggest to women to ignore the violence they might be experiencing daily (Saunders et al., 2017), leading us to hear such statements as the hereunder.

> **W4 (1.30)** once I had this friend and he was a guy and like he was saying if you get catcalled, mhux you just like ignore the person.

[118] See section 6.2 Male Privilege and Patriarchal dominant discourses for quote.

6.3.1 Female objectification

When conducting the first round of interviews, every participant, at one point or another, whilst describing what it meant for them to be a woman in Malta, mentioned various issues related to the prevalence of everyday female sexual objectification. This issue was explored further during the second round of interviews so as to gain a better understanding of how such objectification impacts the participants and how dominant discourses and social contexts continue to re-create such a phenomenon.

When objectified, one is treated as an object and can be manipulated and controlled; moreover, the 'person's' worth is based on physical characteristics (Calogero et al., 2010). In most situations, women's objectification is closely linked to sexualisation, that is, sexual objectification. For the purpose of these results, the definition adopted for sexual objectification is "the reduction of the female body to its physical appearance and the treatment of girls and women as bodies, such that their sexualized bodies or body parts are separated out from their personhood and commodified for others' consumption or regarded as capable of representing the girls and women themselves" (Roberts et al., 2018, p. 249). Objectification presents us with another instance where women's lived experience is placed in a dichotomous situation, where, on the one hand, women are invisible as social subjects, and on the other, our bodies are constantly observed and judged. When seeing the context of when and how sexual objectification happens, the link between the latter and patriarchal and heteronormative ideologies is very evident.

Women's sexual objectification is most apparent in two areas: in social encounters where catcalling, gazing and sexual comments take place, and in media representation where women's bodies and body parts are constantly placed in the spotlight for the male gaze (Calogero et al., 2010). Women are constantly exposed to sexualisation, so much so that it becomes the norm; additionally, such objectification is so much part of the dominant discourse that it leads women to believe that having a

sexy appearance is not only essential to appeal to men but also to have overall success in life (Ponterotto, 2016; Smolak & Murnen, 2010). According to **W12**, sexual objectification is so ingrained in our everyday behaviour that women teach girls how to be seen as sexualised, and in turn, as a result of this behaviour, they are also teaching the boys how they should view women, hence re-creating the cycle of sexualisation.

> **W12 (1.88)*** you know whats the pity, that other women teach, women how to do it, meaning at times you see children, and they would be very young they would be 6-year-olds, and they would be dressed like teenagers, sort of, why when you can make her wear a nice pretty white dress you know and you make her wear a jeans mini skirt, a crop top and boots, you know and then they ask her to pose and post it on Facebook, and say "look what a beauty I have, my precious", what are you teaching kids, you that you are doing the same thing, because if you see the parents' facebook, you would start understanding where this is coming from, but don't teach 6-year-olds, because then you are teaching as well her cousin who is a male to tell her how sexy she is, so we are bringing it on ourselves.

It is interesting to point out that even though **W12** is aware of the sexualisation process that is taking place, the subject at blame seems to be the parent (the mother more specifically) and not the social constructs and dominant ideologies that 'led' the parent to internalise sexualisation because society gave her more value in turn for her own sexualisation. For a person to be able to question the dominant ideologies first, one would need to deconstruct gender so as to be able to 'understand' how the different discourses are taken for granted and believed as natural; such deconstruction will be discussed further in the section discussing gender performativity.

According to Horney (1939), children face two potential dangers within their environment: devaluation and sexualisation. Horney believes that girls experience them both in our culture (as cited by, Kelman, 1967), as can be seen from how **W7 (2.85)*** described her feelings when she was 13 years old. Since sexualisation is portrayed as the norm, the participant felt devalued because she could not achieve the standard set by the media of what a sexual woman is.

> When I was about 13 or whatever and I used to watch MTV, the only thing you could see were asses and breasts and I had convinced myself that for a woman to be accepted by society or to be attractive or to have attention, even I had to have an ass and breasts, and at the time I did

> not have unfortunately, I was very, very sad and had low self-esteem because I did not have and I used to try and attract attention by being sexual, trying to I mean, I still didn't get any because I was a very timid person, but I used to present myself trying to look sexy (B: ehe), whatever that meant to me as a 13-year-old, even if it meant wearing those thin chokers which were fashionable when we were young (B: those that used to stretch), yes those that stretch, if that what was gonna make me feel like I'm sexy I'm gonna wear it you know.

As a result of the social normalisation of sexualised discourses and practices, women internalise the objectifying gaze (self-objectification) and start looking at themselves from the point of an external observer, where they engage in continual self-policing, which might lead to psychological consequences (appearance anxiety or body shame) with higher risks of having mental health issues such as eating disorders and depression (Calogero et al., 2010), as was described by W7 in the above statement.

Some participants during the interviews presented how, in some situations, they feel further sexualised or, at times, even fetishised as a result of their sexual orientation.

> **W9 (2.32)*** a friend of mine who is trans mentions this a lot, that transwomen they are sexually objectified and unfortunately it's worse than (cis) woman, like there is sort of a fetish…lesbian is a huge fetish especially for men, erm…you feel it, you feel it even you don't have to be trans, even if I am outside and I want to kiss my girlfriend if I see a man looking at us I don't feel comfortable because I know that we are seen as a sexual object.

As per **W9's** statement, studies have shown that transwomen and lesbians experience sexualisation, which in most cases negatively impacts one's self-concept and further increases minority stress (Annati & Ramsey, 2022; Anzani et al., 2021). Transwomen and lesbians' sexualisation is closely linked to dominant discourses surrounding these two identities and sexual discourse, whereby, for example, transwomen are seen as an overvalued sexual object rather than a person. In contrast, lesbians are seen as either experimenting when engaging in sexual activities with other women or are in same-sex relationships because they have not yet found the right man (Annati & Ramsey, 2022; Anzani et al., 2021). The role of media in both situations, where even though we have seen an increase in transwomen and lesbian representation in media, in most cases, it promotes representations that are either stereotypical or promote the heterosexual male gaze, and in the case of porn, it is outright

fetishisation (Annati & Ramsey, 2022; Anzani et al., 2021). The statement by **W8** highlights the centrality of the heterosexual male gaze in sexual objectification, where two women together are sexualised, whereas two men are seen as disgusting because they pose a challenge to hegemonic masculinity, "*and that really bothers me but it does happen in society that two women are sexualised, objectified, two men are disgusting*" **(1.6)***. Unfortunately, even though we are aware of the sexualisation of minority women such as trans* and lesbian, research about sexual objectification still centres around white, cisgender, heterosexual women (Roberts et al., 2018).

On the other hand, a participant who has a physical disability stated that she was never catcalled; hence, she never felt that she was sexually objectified.

> [119]I never really felt objectified because I never experienced catcalling and such issues, even the fact that yes, I don't think that I ever felt sexually objectified because I am a woman, but again because a lot of people see that I have a disability and that's the first thing they see, seems that makes it a bit of a different story.

The statement presented by this participant shows the direct opposite of what I have discussed with regards to trans* and lesbians since such a statement reiterates the notion that persons with disabilities are not seen as sexual beings (Malmberg, 2009); hence, in most cases, they are not sexualised. This narrative once again highlights the social expectations linked to women to be considered sexual, that is, have what is considered at the time a nice, young, fit, sexy physique.

In fact, age was another intersecting identity linked to sexual objectification presented by the participants, whereby different participants stated that they experienced more catcalling when they were younger, and the media portrayal of what is considered a sexy woman is very much linked to age.

> **W6 (2.87)*** and what's interesting is that a woman's sexiness is also associated a lot with youth, even if for example,(pause) porn, everyone's vagina is shaved, you don't see many people with body hair, for me that is a pre-pubescent child, not a woman, you know, I mean ok everyone has their preferences at the end of the day but the image disturbs me a bit because (pause),

[119] The participant code was not inserted in this section so as to further anonymise the participants, since when discussing intersecting identities in small communities it is easier to identify the participant due to proximity.

because I don't know why but somehow seems that the younger you are the better and it doesn't make sense.

W10 (1.58)* when I was younger, disgustingly looking back, I used to experience more catcalling they used to be older men, looking back you say "what the…", but when you are young you are not aware, you wouldn't know how bad it is and you take it as part of life, that is why I say looking back because at that time I used to say that I don't care, I used to say it's ok, but now yuk I was 14 and they used to catcall, not even now that I am 26 I will not hit on someone who is 16 but a middle aged man, cause in most cases that are old, not always but in most cases they are older.

The notion of being more sexually objectified when you are younger was presented in various studies (Awasthi, 2017; Davis, S. E., 2018; Gill, Rosalind, 2012; McKay, 2013; Ponterotto, 2016; Ward, 2016), whereas Montemurro and Gilen (2013) discuss how women are expected not to look sexual when they are over fifty years old, which in turn also impacts how women are expected not to behave sexually once they reach a 'certain' age. The statements presented by the participants further demonstrate the normalisation of the sexualisation of young girls, so much so that when it happens, young girls think that this is what happens without realising the consequences that such behaviour leaves on their self-image and concept.

6.3.1.a Social Media and Sexual Objectification

Various studies show how the media promotes the male gaze by sexualising and objectifying women (Awasthi, 2017; Davis, S. E., 2018; Gill, Rosalind, 2012; McKay, 2013; Ponterotto, 2016; Ward, 2016). Such studies demonstrate how the media always seems to portray a specific type of woman, that is, white, young, slender, with a small physique and little body fat, hence telling women in both an overt and covert way what they should aspire to be, as remarked by **W7**.

W7 (2.28)* so women used to reach that certain idea that was portrayed by the media and as a result it might even be if media told you about certain types of clothes or certain type of style

> which is more flirty which men might like it more they would move towards that to be liked even if they might not necessarily like it but to be more socially acceptable sort of…

In her statement, **W7** referenced self-objectification since to see oneself as emulating what the media portrays, one needs to see oneself through the objectifying glaze. Moreover, the notion of women moulding themselves to become something to appease society is a concept that the participants in various sections are representing; however, in this case, the notion of moulding oneself into a body or an image to fit in the dominant constructs might be problematic since it might also impact the psychological well-being.

If the mass media created all these objectification issues for women, it seems that social media augmented this phenomenon further and presented women with new realities. **W12** made a very interesting remark when she inquired, *"Are women becoming more sexualised because they want the likes, as in, or women know that they are only liked when they are sexualised?"* **(1.81)**. The participants seem to present two opposing stances regarding this topic, which emulates what studies have already come across. On the one hand, some of the participants stated that as a result of social media, women are becoming more sexually objectified and that we are chasing a body that we will never achieve (**W11 (1.10…1.12…1.14…1.24), W3 (2.20),** and **W5 (1.126)**) on the other hand some of the participants attested to post-feminist views of social media which gave an element of accessibility to women to be visible who otherwise would not have been visible in mainstream mass media (**W6 (2.47)**); however, this does not mean that women are no longer sexualised or free from the male gaze as will be discussed further when analysing such responses.

> **W11 (1.10…1.12…1.14…1.24)*** it's automatic if you know that you will get likes and you want more following you are going to do it…why did we go back 20 years, why is there a woman in a skirt looking sexy to sell a washing machine…for me she dishonouring women because, and something interesting is that when ******* (a local male influencer) was doing the same thing, he did the same but he was portrayed as a family man...but I mean sexuality has become a currency I feel on social media a lot.

In the above statement, **W11** discussed local advertisement campaigns that were happening online and had some billboards with the same adverts around the country during the time that the interviews were taking place. A specific company was using social media influencers for their adverts; the female influencers were portrayed in a sexualised manner (especially in the particular advert the participant was referring to), whereas a male influencer was not only not portrayed in a sexualised manner but was portrayed as a family man who is spending time with his children. Studies such as those presented by Bussy-Socrate and Sokolova (2023) discuss how influencers nowadays are more influential than traditional celebrities and how the former correlates sexiness with success and financial returns. Sexualised photos might be more likely to generate more likes and followers because of our culture of women's objectification (Ramsey & Horan, 2018). Because in most of these sexualised photos, the focus is on specific body parts that are considered sexual, such as legs, buttocks or breasts, the main purpose of these pictures is to attract the male gaze, which re-emphasises the idea that men are to determine a woman's worth according to her use (Davis, S. E., 2018). The fact that the mentioned advert was aimed at the male gaze was also identified by the participant since she clearly made the distinction between what 'sells' with regard to influencers who are women (sex) and men (family man). Other participants discussed the impact of social media and sexualisation on body image and the unrealistic expectations that are created as a result of such portrayals.

> **W3 (2.20)*** not only social media even adult websites…erm…seems as if we are constantly running after a body, that we will never manage to achieve, for example, I am small busted so how can I expect that all of a sudden I wake up with a huge chest, for example I will stay thinking about it and feel depressed because I know that nowadays women are admired for their chest and I might think about it twice and that's it but it might affect negatively someone else and it might be so bad that even though they might not afford it or they would have better ways to invest their money they still chose to do cosmetic surgeries.

> **W5 (1.126)**
> social media, unfortunately it is reinforcing and perpetuating certain images which are accepted and only accepted if you look a certain way for example or ha yes you have to have big boobs but a small waist, no one has those proportions or like very few people.

Several studies corroborate what the participants presented above, especially the correlation between the body image which is presented by influencers or celebrities and social media users' body dissatisfaction and appreciation (Awasthi, 2017; Brown & Tiggeman, 2020; Davis, S. E., 2018; McKay, 2013). However, of more relevance to this study are the discourses surrounding body and sexuality that social media is creating, which attest to dominant discourses surrounding the body since the influencers that are receiving the most visibility are those who portray the European concept of beauty or sexuality.

On the other hand, participants such as **W6** adopt a more postfeminist stance on social media and sexual objectification.

> **W6 (2.47)*** and even this shift I am seeing about what it looks to be a woman on social media where before we used to see perfection now we are seeing more realistic things.

From a postfeminist standpoint, social media gave women a level of power since, in mass media, women were consumers of media; with social media, we have seen women producing their own content, and even those who are working for agencies might have more say in what is being posted in their feeds/stories. The latter also gave women the possibility to post sexualised material if they thought that this was what they wanted to produce, which can be seen as very empowering for women (Bussy-Socrate & Sokolova, 2023; Davis, S. E., 2018). However, as stated by **W10** and **W4**, social media gave viewers the possibility to comment back, download and repost stories or posts, things which are not possible as much (or not with the same frequency) in mass media.

> **W10 (2.58)*** social media gave a platform so that different women are given more exposure than traditional marketing in the 2000, 80s, 90s, the thin woman of the traditional marketing, on social media more people could do it themselves there is no need to be hired by an agency where they used to do a selection so there is a variety of women who are being shown…but in social media you can comment and everyone can see the comments so both of them are happening, there is a variety of women, but people are getting negative comments and hate…

W4 (2.18)

A very dichotomy thing, so there is the very negative side and there is also the very good side (B: mhm), so erm...the very bad side is obviously the magazines, Instagram, the filters and the you know the praising the one body type , whilst also shaming on the others, one month it can be one trend that you have to be very skinny another month it could be that you be a bit curvy so it's not even, agreeing, and it's always changing and you are always expected to change within these trends, whether it is body, clothes, the way you behave and just in every aspect of being a woman basically, and then there is also the very positive side, so there is also people raising awareness on it and talking about it and even for instance on TikTok you see trends sometimes, there was a song for instance it was a positive feminist song, I am woman and for instance it would people showing erm, their body hair, their curves, their tummy rolls, or their erm...what are they called, stretch marks, so it's very beautiful to go on TikTok for instance, to see something that you have that maybe you're conscious of maybe due to society be praised and then obviously the comments sometimes there are people praising and hating but they're seeing more than what woman go through and its very beautiful so... it's like a community in a sense.

Both participants are aware of the two sides of the coin of social media, and even though both acknowledge how empowering social media can be, they realise the adverse effects that comments and hate on social media can generate. The responses narrated by the above participants reflect the literature presented by Gill (2020; 2007) and McRobbie (2011) even though the Western World (particularly specific people in power/governments) seem to present a reality where women have won their freedom because they can wear whatever they please, and enjoy sexual freedoms if that is their 'choice'; however, both authors argue that this image is distorted. According to Gill and McRobbie, post-feminism comprises several interconnected themes, where the female body is presented as a source of women's power; at the same time, it has to be monitored, surveilled, and modified to fit into narrow models of attractiveness. The same can be stated about female sexuality, where, on the one hand, women are presented as having sexual freedom but at the same time being given the

responsibility to monitor all sexual and emotional relationships whilst not taking into consideration the increase of 'lad culture' and misogyny. Davis (2018) states that women might post sexualised content as a means of resistance to dominant discourses and empowerment; however, the narrative is flipped over when such content is objectified as a result of commenting, especially by men, redistribution and editing. For Bussy-Socrate and Sokolova (2023), the user can be the one who creates resistance by not engaging in content that is objectifying and demeaning to women. However, for users to be able to engage in the resistance mentioned by Bussy-Socrate and Sokolova, they have to be aware of the workings of dominant discourses and how such discourses operate to maintain the status quo since even women are compliant with the power structure; hence an active part in their oppression. One of the ways how this could be done is first for women to be aware that their body is gazed upon (Ponterotto, 2016), which the participants in this study are; however, this might not be the reality for most women in Malta and secondly, to not participate in body "normatization" since by moulding our bodies into the expected and preferred body we are moulding our bodies to be pried upon by the male-gaze.

6.3.2 Stranger Harassment, Normalisation and Safety Concerns

As mentioned, when discussing female objectification, stranger harassment is so part of our culture that it is normalised and, in most instances, taken for granted. However, the following responses suggest that such harassment impacts women's everyday lived experiences. Stranger harassment, even though it might look like sexual harassment because it might involve the same unwanted verbal (catcalling, whistling) and non-verbal (following, leering) behaviours, differs from the latter since it occurs in public by individuals who are unknown to the victim and the contact between the two parties usually lasts a few moments (Saunders et al., 2017), turning public spaces into an everyday hostile environment for women (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008). In their study, Saunders et al. (2017) found that their participants started experiencing stranger harassment before they were 17 years old, reflecting what **W10** stated in the previous section about being catcalled at the age of 14 (see 6.3.1 **W10 (1.58)**).

Another important outcome from this study, which the participants discussed during the interviews, was that stranger harassment, since it is fleeting and occurs outside of contexts that can be prosecuted under sexual harassment laws, leaves women with few options for legal action as sustained by **W8.**

> **W8 (2.6)*** think about it, for example, catcalling or groping, they are almost a norm, kind of if you are a woman men will speak to you, they will do this to you and it's ok and you have to put up with it, because there are laws, which seem as if you can take them to court, but god forbid every time a man told me something I took him to court it doesn't make sense…

Fairchild and Rudman (2008) stated that as a result of the behaviours associated with stranger harassment, women experience an increased fear of rape, limit their freedom of movement and engage in self-objectification; all the participants mentioned experiencing the same effects to various degrees. Moreover, the same authors state that these effects shift women's perceptions of social environments, leading them to be more fearful and to have a higher perception of danger.

> **W3 (2.30)*** unfortunately we see it happen nearly on a daily basis, we used to say for foreign countries but I think we are becoming worse than abroad, because in Malta we used to take it for granted that these things don't happen.

> **W5 (1.114)** "before I used to think u ija (*oh ok*) we are in Malta it's a safe place erm I don't need to worry about my safety, but now again I think twice about this."

As described when I presented the Introduction Chapter, where I gave an overview of the social context that was taking place whilst conducting the interviews, several cases which involved rape and femicide were very much in the limelight; these cases and what seems to be an increase in crime locally made the participants question how safe Malta is, since there was this common knowledge locally that our island is safe and no 'major' criminal offences happen here. These incidents not only increased Fairchild and Rudman's (2008) perception of the social environment but also the hypothesis that women's fear of rape pervades their fear of other victimizations (Ferraro, 1996), as highlighted by **W2** and **W5**:

> **W2 (2.62)*** it influenced us women quite a lot even more when you hear cases in the media for example, Bernice Cassar, Sion Grech from 2005, which is being mentioned a lot now, Paulina's, so without wanting you become more, conscious.

W5 (2.40…2.42)

a few months ago or a year ago I'd be like ok going out alone at night, now I'll think twice about it, I see where I am where I'm going…I think twice now before going to Paceville[120] that sort of thing and if I'm like going to Paceville would I want to walk back alone to car, no I wouldn't, I would want to be with a group of friends for example, like even more than before that sort of thing.

W5 presents another factor identified by Fairchild and Rudman, which is limiting one's mobility since she thinks twice about going to the main entertainment locality usually frequented by people her age. Moreover, **W2,** in her interview, stated that she had not yet gone to the public garden where Paulina Dembska was murdered since the incident, and this was a place that she used to go to relax or spend some time listening to music.

Carretta and Szymanski (2020) link stranger harassment to PTSD symptom severity, self-blame, shame and the three dimensions of rape (taking rape precautions, fear of men and safety concerns), whereby those participants who engage in rape precautions experience less PTSD symptom severity since they would feel more in control of the situation. The participants in this study did engage in taking rape precautions and had safety concerns. The behaviour change mentioned by **W5** corroborates the findings of Saunders et al. (2017); apart from the precautions mentioned above, the participants mentioned other behaviours that they engage in when they have safety concerns, such as calling someone if they are walking alone at night; if alone at night and hear someone behind them they slow down the pace and let the other person pass them, wear the jacket hood and try to act in a less

[120] Paceville is the main party/ entertainment location on the island, usually frequented by young adults.

feminine manner so as not to be a target, a participant stated that she keeps a small pointed object in her handbag and another has a personal alarm.[121]

A response which was not found in literature was presented by **W6,** who seemed to imply that preventative actions are so internalised that they become not only part of our everyday discourses and actions but also women 'joke' about them; however, she is aware that these discourses stem from issues related to safety.

> **W6 (2.81)*** funnily enough, even through jokes, even the way we dress, at times we used to refer to them as look this could be a weapon, you know, it was a joke, a stilleto and you say "ehh this is a good weapon if needs be" and you laugh it off with your friends…but why? The brain have to go there, even for example a handbag "wow this handbag is heavy"…it's good to smack someone with it, exactly, so the issue of safety is there.

Studies have shown that the most common method used by women to deal with stranger harassment is passive coping, that is, trying to avoid or ignore their harassers, which, according to Fairchild and Rudman (2008), leads to further self-objectification and feelings of shame about their bodies. Although most of the participants in this study did not confront their harassers, they did not demonstrate heightened self-objectification and body shame. This could be linked to the fact that the participants are aware (as will be presented in the next section 6.3.3 Self-Survellience) that they did nothing to warrant their harassers' attention, but instead, they were harassed because of the sexist notions and discourses that are still prevailing in our society and everyday discourse (Carretta & Szymanski, 2020).

However, one of the participants stated that a few days before the interview, she had experienced stranger harassment and retaliated by confronting the harasser.

> **W1 (2.98)*** oh come on I was walking close to here in a jogging suit, a man who is not from my neighbourhood, cause he was in a delivery van, shouted in the middle of the road "hi sex" and I shouted back at him "why don't you go and tell that to your mother" he did not expect it so

[121] It is important to note that in Malta, it is not legal for citizens to carry pepper spray or such sprays to be used in case of emergency.

he closed the window and he left in a hurry and I really shouted why don't you tell your mother you pervert, but come on wearing a jogging suit with a shopping bag…

The same participant in different parts of both interviews expressed how such situations of harassment and sexism make her angry; moreover, she is one of the participants who pointed out different instances of sexism that women have to face in their daily lives, hence making her very conscious of such issues which could further explain her reaction.

6.3.3 Self-Surveillance

As mentioned above, Fairchild and Rudman (2008) established that stranger harassment leads to self-objectification; moreover, in a more recent study, it was established that even one incident of stranger harassment can lead to self-objectification (Moya-Garófano et al., 2021). This could be seen to explain why, during the interviews held with the participants on various occasions, they appeared to be engaging in self-objectification when they spoke about how, as previously mentioned, when women objectify other women or, as will be discussed, women are constantly on the look out for what is happening around them and checking themselves whilst doing so.

W4 (2.32)

you can't go out and be calm if for instance you are walking alone you are constantly scanning to see if you are safe, if you are going out, at night especially, your anxiety is higher, if you are going somewhere you have to be even more cautious even though you are dressed in a certain way, even though you may enjoy it you need to be more cautious so personally I don't think I can go anywhere without actually consistently scanning and trying to check my surroundings and my safety…Even recently for instance, I was just on a bus and this guy followed me off the bus....it was up the road coincidentally, and I was dressed very modestly as in I was going to work for an hour just to cover my colleague and it was terrifying, you know and I was dressed going for work, so you can imagine everything was covered, I wasn't eyeing this person, I did

> not make eye contact with him, I did not speak to him, when he would speak to me I would turn around so, I did not even give hints to this person and he still follow me off the bus, so you can never seem to do anything right without you know the risk of your safety.

Unfortunately, the above statement sums up perfectly the level of self-surveillance that women have to engage in, where we have to monitor our surroundings and how we dress. In the above quote, the participant felt compelled to explain in certain detail her clothing, why she was on the bus and her behaviour so as to explain that she did not invite or provoke such attention. Especially considering, as will be presented in the following sections, women's behaviour and clothing are always placed into question when incidents of violence or harassment occur. Moreover, this incident affected **W4** so much that she kept remembering the incident in a lot of detail even days after it happened. As presented by Davidson et al. (2015) in the above quotes and the other quotes presented in this section, there is a correlation between stranger harassment, body surveillance and hypervigilance (Carretta & Szymanski, 2020).

6.3.3.a Self-Surveillance and Clothing

The way we dress is an expression of our identity and, at times, individuality; however, all participants stated that they are aware and vigilant of what they wear, and this awareness stems from the fact that they would not want to attract unwanted male attention, such as catcalling or groping.

> **W12 (2.50)*** Because of certain men yes at times I do think listen you have a session with a particular man so don't wear that dress, sort of I feel that at times I am subject yes to sort of my freedom of how I dress is limited, it's not cause I am someone who likes to wear revealing clothes…

> **W3 (1.36)*** I get to a stage when I am not comfortable wearing certain clothes, I do not wear revealing clothes but for example, if I am wearing something showing the tattoo I have here (signals to upper chest area) I will not wear it because I have a big tattoo and people will instantly look at it, and if they are looking at this area they will look at my breast, and I don't feel comfortable because I know men without even wanting to are going to sexualise a woman.

The above quotes touch upon important issues linked to clothing, sexual objectification, self-perception and self-surveillance. Both participants made it clear that they do not wear revealing clothes, stemming from the fact that women who wear revealing clothes are, in most cases, considered as being sexual, hence 'inviting' men to hit on them or to sexually objectify them. Moreover, **W12** mentioned that her attire is dependent on the clients she would be working with that specific day; hence, she has to be 'careful' not to wear revealing clothes and the type of clothes that she wears (not a dress) because dresses for specific individuals are considered more sexual and less safe than trousers. Both participants' self-expression is conditioned by the notion that others will objectify them, and as a result, they are actively engaging in self-surveillance so as not to be objectified (in most cases by both genders). Both Bartky (1998) and Montemurro and Gilen (2013) discuss how social order is maintained as a result of controlling gender, especially the portrayal of femininity. Such control is so normalised that women engage in the monitoring of other women so as to ensure that they do 'femininity' well, that is, representing a kind of femininity that fits the standards set by the dominant culture of what femininity should look like; the latter has nothing to do with fashion but with the repression of women's sexuality (Montemurro & Gilen, 2013). Moreover, Bartky (1998) links self-surveillance to the parliamentary institutions as described by Foucault, who stated that such institutions are there to control how men behave. Bartky argues that if men are not free as a result of the parliamentary institutions, then what can be said about women whose subjectivity is constructed through practices that ask them to change their bodies or construct an image of themselves to be more pleasing to the male gaze? As if in a panopticon, women know that they are observed and judged; hence, they 'police' themselves so as not to be caught doing something that is not approved and is judged or shamed.

In the following quote by **W7,** the internal dialogue that she engages in when deciding what to wear is conveyed, showing how, as a result of previous experiences, she actively chooses not to fully express her femininity, even though in other parts of the interviews she states that since coming out she is more willing to express this aspect of herself. Nonetheless, **W7** is aware that if she goes ahead and

wears tight leggings, her mental health will be impacted because she will become self-conscious due to past experiences where she felt sexually objectified because she was wearing such clothes.

> **W7 (2.68…2.70)*** At times I want to be a bit more feminine but then I sort of step it down a notch because I know that for example if I go out with tight leggings I will be catcalled etc because it happened…so if I say that I'll be a bit more feminine, for me personally so I wear in a certain way, but that as a result of past experiences as I told you I tone it down at times, at times then I look back and think I would have expressed my gender in a better way in that situation but mental safety erm mental health sort of comes first, because there are times when I say I'm going to risk it but then at times I become self-conscious, even though I would have worn what I would have wanted to because I'm expressing my womanhood, so I'll be comfortable in that sense of self-expression but on the other hand I'll be self-conscious because certain people will look at you in a certain way, so there are two facets.

6.3.3.b Victim Blaming

To some degree, the women's expressed safety concerns are not only due to the fear of being raped but that they will also be blamed for being raped. Caretta and Szymanski (2020) highlighted how if women hold feminist consciousness, they are less likely to allocate the blame of stranger harassment on themselves since they would understand that such harassment is the result of living in a patriarchal society where rape myths are still prevalent and accepted. The participants' feminist consciousness can be seen throughout this study but more pertaining to this section in the way they question victim blaming and challenge rape myths.

Various studies present the relationship between women's clothing, sexual objectification, rape and victim blaming, where the rapist blame diminishes if the victim is thought to be wearing what is considered provocative clothing (Bernard et al., 2015; Stubbs-Richardson et al., 2018), since when one is wearing provocative clothing, they are more sexually objectified, hence seen as less of a human being but more of an object which can be treated as one wishes. **W3** narrated how, whilst on holiday abroad with her boyfriend, he commented on a woman who was on the tube wearing very revealing clothing, "he told me "then they wonder how they rape them"" **(2.30)***. This statement highlights two different

but equally important notions, first what Stubbs-Richardson et al. (2018) refer to as “the just world hypothesis” (p.92), where people believe that bad things happen to bad people and that there are good women (virgins) who dress appropriately and there are women who do the opposite (whores), in this context rape is seen as a deviant event which happens to girls who deserve such treatment because they are bad (whores). In the statement presented by **W3,** her boyfriend likely adopts this reasoning; moreover, such reasoning stems from sexist ideologies whereby men who want to retain their control and power blame the victim for the rape rather than condemn the perpetrator’s actions (Saunders et al., 2017). The participant continued to narrate how she reacted to her boyfriend's statement by stating:

> **W3 (2.30)*** I started an argument on that comment because that wasn’t a comment that one should pass, a woman wears what she wants, she can go outside nude if she wants and still doesn’t warrant anybody to even look at her let alone rape her erm…yes, I realised that even because of ideologies held by people close to me I hold back from wearing certain things.

This statement summarises what has been discussed above and throughout this theme whereby even though the participant is debunking the rape myth because she believes that rape is never acceptable, however, she also realises that as a result of such sexist beliefs held by a person so close to her, she is not free to wear whatever she wants because if her own boyfriend thinks such a thing about other women other men might think the same about her.

W4 discussed how specific institutions perpetuate the just world hypothesis and, as a result, teach women and young girls that they are at fault if something happens to them.

> **W4 (1.26)**
>
> you see even in the rape culture ha it's always "x kienet liebsa?" (*what was she wearing*) like and it's ridiculous, for instance, there is a museum abroad that's like, with the clothes of people, that they were wearing when they got raped and you see them, they are like, pyjamas, some of them are not ugly outfits, but very basic not revealing at all and they still got raped, so it’s clearly not, issa (*now*) if you are wearing certain things that make you look sexier they may

> look at you more but it's still the behaviour from their side that's the problem not what you are wearing you know.. you see it, for instance even erm, it's ridiculous I hate this erm, like my sister was at catechism so and literally the nun had told them if you, are wearing something sexy u hekk and get raped it's the woman's fault.

Such teachings not only impact women's self-objectification but also women's perception of their sexuality, as will be discussed in the next theme.

6.4 Dominant Discourses and Female Sexuality

Another area that is demarked by dichotomous discourses is sexuality and sexual relationships. Even though, as previously presented, women are constantly sexualised, we are not necessarily free to act on our sexuality on our own terms, with the dominant discourses reinforcing the notion that a woman has to be sexual to please men's needs, not her own.

> **W8 (2.28)*** seems that there is this idea that women are very sexually objectified but at the same time they can't show their sexuality, and that is something that irritates me a lot, so at one point they're at you service kind of, but if they are sexual because they want to be that's a big no-no kind of, that thing really bugs me because men and women and anyone in between they have the right to be a sexual being without being harassed.

When discussing sexuality, it is important to point out heterosexual privilege and how in this case, heterosexuality[122] is taken as the norm and heteronormative discourses are recreated in the same manner that patriarchal discourses are (Case et al., 2014). In Malta, discourses about sex and sexuality are not only impacted by the social construction of sex and the sexual differences between men and women but also by the discourse imparted by the Catholic Church. Locally, historically, most sex education was influenced by the Catholic Church's teachings, and up to this day, its teachings very much influence it. As a result, one common narrative we hear linked to women is the Madonna-whore dichotomy. **W6 (2.1)*** explained, "Magdalene is bad you know, but Mary is pure". This dichotomy

[122] Findings discussing heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality will be presented the next section (6.5)

conveys the notion that women can either be 'good', that is, pure and chaste or 'bad', that is, seductive, promiscuous, whores (Kahalon et al., 2019). In their study, Kahalon et al. conclude that men endorse such ideology more than women. However, when this ideology is endorsed irrespective of one's gender, it reinforces further gender inequality, benevolent sexism and gender-specific system stratification. **W4** also uses 'religious' terms to demarcate the difference between how men's and women's sexual activities are labelled by society when, on the one hand, men's sexual prowess is considered as "godly", whereas women are considered the "devil", once again noting that the positive attribute is given to the male gender.

> **W4 (1.6)**
>
> to be fair it's very clear there is a double standard you know like even for instance sexually, there is if a guy does certain behaviour he is perceived godly kwazi, like it's perceived so good, then if the girl does it, it's like she is the devil, like she is doing something so horrible and you know and it's not only happening in that context. I feel it happens in many contexts, like…

Dichotomous discourses about sexuality are not only seen from the religious aspect but also from a social aspect and the way that society sees women and women's actions, even those that are not necessarily sexual in nature. On the one hand, women are taught to refrain from sexual encounters and in many contexts, our sexual needs are not taken into consideration; on the other, our bodies and our actions are constantly being sexualised.

> **W3 (1.36)** "everything about us is always sexual."

> **W11 (1.2)*** the language used is very different, so if you go out/sleep with a number of boys/men you are a slut, but if a man goes out/ sleeps about he is a playboy (B: mhm, mhm) which is mind-boggling erm and yes there are a lot of these discourses.

> **W8 (1.24)*** I think it's very sad that as a woman you are more of a sexual object than men at the same time you have less right to be sexual…the fact that men can grope you, you are more sexualised whatever but then for example if a man goes out with a lot of women it's cool, it's

> a goal, it's an achievement, if a woman goes out with a lot of men, you are a slut, you're a whore, like a woman cannot sleep with a lot of men or with a lot of partners, but a man he can, like so in a way men can sexualise women and the woman who is seen as a sexual object cannot be sexual herself.

> **W4 (1.46)**
>
> I came across the term, clitoral directomy, or something and it's basically referring to how the main pleasure centre of the woman is never discussed, not even its function, just shoved aside, as in like even me only recently found out about it and it's very said not even in sex education it's very male centred I feel like, ah the condom, the female condom is mentioned briefly…

As can be deducted from these quotes, sexual double standards, that is, how women are stigmatised if they engage in the same sexual behaviours expected of and valued for men, are still prevalent and very much implied to the detriment of women. Terms like whore or slut are automatically associated with women, and the fact that there is not an English word (neither a Maltese one, for that matter) which describes a man who is behaving outside of what is considered acceptable or respectable sexual conduct, shows how such behaviour is typically and only linked to women (Farvid et al., 2017). I found it interesting that the participants did not use terms such as sleep around or engage in sexual activity, but they used the term "toħrog" which translates to going out with. This statement demonstrates the overarching nature of discourse and how specific discourses are used depending on the context because even though the participants were saying "to go out with", it was clear that, in most cases, they were not only referring to going out on a date with someone but also engaging in sexual activities. On the one hand, the lack of direct use of words such as sex shows that taboo is still part of our everyday discourses revolving around sex. On the other hand, women are shunned even if they date different men (let alone when it is known that they are engaging in sexual activities with these men), whereas men, on the contrary, are not only not shunned if they date different women but it is taken as given that they will brag (and even exaggerate) about their sexual ventures.

Traditionally, sexual discourses expect men to be sexually active and the ones who initiate sexual relations. On the other hand, women are expected to be passive, reactive and submissive (Endendijk et al., 2020; Klein et al., 2019; Rudman & Glick, 2021). Studies from the 1960s show that more women endorsed sexual double standards than men. However, recent studies show that more men support such standards. The same studies state that men lose respect for women who engage in a lot of sex, but the same cannot be stated for other men (Rudman & Glick, 2021). Like other patriarchal discourses, discourses about sexuality are passed on through social interactions where men encourage their male friends and relatives to engage in casual sex; on the contrary, women are discouraged by everyone to have casual sex. Women are discouraged from having casual sex to protect their reputation and for safety reasons or concerns. Women are expected to have a relationship-centred view of sexuality, where sex occurs in a stable monogamous relationship with the intent to enhance intimacy and partnership bonding (Klein et al., 2019). The latter notion is still very much prevalent in today's social expectations. Klein et al. (2019) concluded that women's sexual assertiveness deviates from sexual scripts, resulting in backlash; one of the participants in this research expressed the same backlash when she stated that her boyfriend shamed her because she asks for sex more than he does. "I ask for sex more than he does, so he tells me you should have been a man you constantly want it" **W3 (1.96)***. Such backlash creates social pressure on women to suppress their behaviour and sexual needs, or if they are still engaging in casual sexual encounters, they learn not to speak about it (Farvid et al., 2017; Klein et al., 2019).

6.5 Heteronormativity and Compulsory Heterosexuality

Whilst analysing the transcripts of the first cycle of interviews I became aware that every participant (even those who identify along the LGBTIQ spectrum) automatically referred to heterosexual dynamics or opposite-sex interactions when speaking about dominant discourses, which demonstrates the dominance of heteronormativity in our everyday discourses. Rich (1980), when defining compulsory

heterosexuality, was referring to the hegemonic discourses of gender, which assume that for one to fit in the norm, they have to express their sex through a stable gender, that is, females express feminine characteristics, and males express masculine traits and where both are attracted to the opposite sex; hence placing heterosexuality as the dominant and desired sexuality. Heteronormativity is seen as the heterosexual privilege synonymous with institutionalised heterosexuality (Jackson, 2006). Several participants referred to compulsory heterosexuality and heteronormativity and the impact these two phenomena have on their lived experiences as individuals and women.

> **W7 (1.14… 1.60)*** I was brought up, sort of my family background, to be a good family you have to be a wife, husband and maybe children, generally children are a must because otherwise you would have an empty house/nest, you know….even when you have a family meeting "haven't you found a man yet?"

> **W10 (2.16)*** a lot of people assume that you want to have a man, that you want to have his children I think…a lot of people assume, even when they speak to you, they speak to you as a catholic, as straight and that eventually you want to have children.

> **W9 (1.18)*** even the fact that I was starting to feel attracted towards another woman at 19, for me it was such, so influenced by the community, 19 years ago, 20 years ago that is something bad especially for a woman, I'm expecting you to have kids, to have a boyfriend, to have a man, to have a husband whatever.

All the participants (not only those presented above) spoke about different instances where people around them assumed or took it for granted that the participants would get married (to a man) and have children. Halberstam states that our lives are ruled by what they identify as pragmatic markers, namely "birth, marriage, reproduction, and death" (2005, p. 5) that act as milestones which one is not only expected to achieve but should do so by a specific time: hereafter these become expected norms. Norms are seen as human actions guided by taken-for-granted assumptions based on collective values and beliefs (Jackson, 2006). The statements presented by **W7, W10** and **W9** highlight another dominant discourse, where the common assumption is that everyone is heterosexual or wants to engage in heterosexual relationships; that is heteronormativity. Jackson states that "heteronormativity is

mobilised and reproduced in everyday life not only through talk but also through routine activities in which gender, sexuality and heterosexuality interconnect" (2006, p. 114).

Moreover, institutionalised heterosexuality or heteronormativity requires sexuality and gender to be organised and regulated, not only by establishing a heterosexual/homosexual hierarchy but also by determining what can be considered hegemonic heterosexuality (Coates, 2013; Jackson, 2006). Hence, not all forms of heterosexuality are equal; the highest or best form of heterosexuality is one where individuals engage in monogamous, reproductive relationships with conventional roles (Coates, 2013; Jackson, 2006). As a result, heteronormativity negatively impacts not only individuals who do not identify as heterosexual but also some of those who do. Since heterosexuality is prescribed by dominant discourses setting it as the norm, individuals who are heterosexual have to act according to what society considers 'normal' (Jackson, 2006). Hence, if one is not acting within the norm, they are engaging in deviant behaviour, and because such behaviour tends to be shunned in our society, some individuals would stay away from such actions despite knowing that such actions would make them happier.

> **W3 (1.20)*** but if I am in a relationship with a woman I will let a lot of people down sort of…..probably deep down I know that I prefer to be in a relationship with a woman but because of social constructs and the way I was brought up I hold back.

I found the above statement intriguing as soon as I heard **W3** stating it during our first interview because it continues to demonstrate the impact that compulsory heterosexuality has on individuals. Since the introduction of the various legislations which grant equal rights to LGBTIQ individuals and more so after Malta has been topping the equality rainbow map for several years, it seems that the majority assume that it is now easy to come out and defy heteronormative constructs; however, we have to keep in mind that these constructs are deeply ingrained not only in our discourses but also in our identity formation. Moreover, sexuality, like gender, is not done in a vacuum but is done within a social context and according to others' expectations; hence, if one is aware that they will be rejected by their family or that forming same-sex relationships will "let people down," they will refrain from

doing so. Furthermore, this statement shows the power of dominant discourses because **W3** acknowledges the role of social constructs and the impact of her upbringing on her identity, but still, she holds back because acting on her attractions would mean that she would have to step 'out of the norm'. On the contrary, **W4** acknowledges that being heterosexual is seen as a norm; however, she has agency, which, according to McNay (2016), agency does not necessarily mean an outright rejection of norms but a resistance to such norms and discourses, which leads one to emancipation, enabling **W4** to strive to live a more authentic self.

> **W4 (1.8)**
>
> at first it would impact me you know I did feel a certain, you know like I have to get married have children you know, but the more I grew older kind of there is norms and so it's difficult to sometimes jump out of the box and not obey these norms, obviously there are some people who are going to shame you but, personally I kind of reached a point where I realised that the norms are not kind of laws, I don't need to obey them and what's important is that I am living according to what I feel is important, what I feel my femininity requires and what personally it is to me and obeying that…

Heteronormativity does not cease to exist once a person accepts their sexuality and/or starts engaging in same-sex relationships since, as stated by **W7** and **W4**, relationships which do not include the heterosexual dyad are seen as missing something or the parties involved in these relationships are seen as not being fulfilled sexually.

> **W7 (1.45)** "it is very much linked to being a woman that, women either on their own or with other women they cannot achieve sexual fulfilment."

> **W4 (2.14)**
>
> exactly, so even if, then on the other hand if you are femme, then people are likely to think that erm, you're not lesbian as well, so I think it's on both sides, one you're immediately attributed to one sexual orientation, whilst another you're immediately associated with straight, or if you

are very pretty and femme, you are like ehh you into men and which pretty boy are you going to date

Even though Rich (1980) wrote her paper 43 years ago, little has changed regarding how lesbian relationships are viewed. In her paper, she states that women who engage in same-sex relationships are either not acknowledged, as highlighted but **W7,** or hypersexualised and objectified, which was also mentioned by the participants who identify as part of the LGBTIQ community. **W4** describes another assumption which clearly shows that even if a same-sex couple is acknowledged, the couple in their presentation or in their gender expression will emulate a heterosexual couple; one of the women would be more masc presenting, and the other would be more fem presenting. As previously mentioned, the dominance of these discourses is also internalised by women who identify as gay or queer, so much so that one of the participants during her interviews assumed that my wife is femme because I am more masc presenting.

The centrality of men in female identities is also seen when people think that women engage in intimate same-sex relationships because a man hurt them or because they are men haters, which makes it seem as if a woman cannot have an identity of her own or rather on her terms. In the following statement, **W4** discussed how she might be perceived when/if she starts a relationship with a woman since she had had a long-term relationship with a man and her family was aware of this relationship.

W4 (1.16) “

but I do feel the constructs of ahh I'm not going to be whatever, if this happens what is my family going to think cause I've dated a guy for like a year and they had met him, and they are like "ehh kif harget ma ragel u issa qeda ma mara?" (*“ehh how come she was with a guy and now she is with a woman?”)* like what happened and then the jokes "daqs kemm weggek qlibt ghan-nisa" (*“he hurt you so much that now you switched to women”)* when it’s not the case it’s been there for all my life you know kind of thing, just because I didn't come out it doesn't mean

it wasn't there. Cause then there is the construct of coming out, and you need to put it out there, cause if you don't and you do something ehhh she is experimenting taf kif (*you know*) but it's something natural and part of me.

W3 (1.18)* when my mother and father were separating, she told me I will not speak against your father in front of you because god forbid you start hating all men and switch.

These findings, apart from shedding light on heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality, draw a link between one's sexual orientation and gender performativity, whereby one is not only expected to be attracted towards the opposite sex but must also present their gender 'correctly' since, even in cultures where individuals were allowed to switch genders, they had to become the opposite gender; that is they had to be "either male or female but not a little of each" (Rubin, 1975, p. 182).

6.5.1 Male Privilege, for The 'Real' Man, not The Good Man

Throughout this chapter, various arguments and participants' responses have been presented as to how male privilege is perpetuated and how female oppression continues to be a derivative of such social and discourse structure. For example, **W1,** in both interviews, narrated how she looks at her son and is glad for him because he will have an easier life, not because she will make it easier for him, but because society will make it easier for him. She is also aware that her son will have an easier life because society is set against women, whilst acknowledging that it was just luck that he was born a boy. However, even from some of the discussions conducted with the participants, it is clear that male privilege impacts men negatively as well, especially those who do not fit within the male hegemonic pigeonhole.

It is interesting to note that when speaking about men, all the participants were referring to white, cis-gender, heterosexual men, and whenever they were referring to non-hegemonic men, they always

stated that men can be feminine or weak. Whilst acknowledging that men in most situations have more privilege, they have this privilege as long as they remain between the constraints of gender.[123]

> **W8 (1.2)*** and I think even because in society, feminine qualities have been looked down upon compared to masculine qualities, that gives an advantage to women, in the sense that for women it's accepted, I think it is more accepted for women to be whoever you want to be compared to men, for example if there is a woman and she looks more typically masculine than feminine, it's more accepted than a man wearing a dress so I think, probably in a very bad way but I think it's beneficial at the same time because masculine qualities are thought to be better so it's easier for a woman to embrace both masculine and feminine qualities.

> **W7 (1.46)*** I also think the fact that a woman on her own or two women together are considered weaker than one man let's put it this way, so for a woman to be safe in society, it seems that she has to have a man to protect her, if they are two women together they are seen as weak[124] …I think it's more about dynamics of power, so if a man is effeminate he wouldn't have the same power that 'normal' men would have…

> **W5 (1.78)**
>
> I would feel worse I think erm if I was a man and was bisexual I don't think that I would express it as much and I wouldn't be open and I might be like in denial or not express it nothing, erm I think it would be less safe as a bisexual man in Malta er which, is sad and scary to think about. In fact, I think in Malta being female and being bisexual is more accepted then if you are a man and bisexual, I could be wrong imma from my experience at least, that is the impression I get.

These statements highlight how a man loses privilege when associated with feminine characteristics. According to Rudman and Glick (2021), there is a difference between the good man and the real man, whereby the good man is one who is dependable, defends the weak, takes responsibility and provides for others, whereas the real man represses anything that is considered as soft and whose primary focus is dominance and toughness. Moreover, the same authors state that little had changed since the 1970s when a study reported that masculinity was based on four instructions, that is men should not be

[123] Gender performativity and the constraints associated with re-producing gender will be discussed further in the next section.

[124] This quote was already presented in section 6.3, the whole quote was represented so as to give context to the participant's statement.

feminine or sissies, their main concern should be to climb the status ladder, they should be strong and reliable, and win at all costs. If we look at current discourses, the latter notions are still very much present in the dominant ideology of how a man should be and how a man should perform their gender. However, as highlighted in the previous sections, this ideology oppresses women and limits men's ability to live their authentic selves.

6.5.2 Women are freer to explore the gender binary.

An interesting finding linked to the gender binary that some participants discussed was how, as a result of hegemonic masculinity and the rigidity associated with masculine performativity of gender, men are more constricted with binary constraints, whereas women are freer to bend certain social constructs.

Several participants discussed how the binary could be seen to restrict men more than women; since as can also be seen from the below quotations according to the participants, society can be more accepting of women who do not conform fully to the binary (and to a certain extent, gendered practices have changed to allow women to engage in male/masculine activities), but it is less forgiving with men. This demonstrates the impact that dominant masculine hegemonic discourses have on the male construction of gender and the link that society still attaches to gender and sexual orientation (Motschenbacher, 2010). As was discussed in the section dealing with compulsory heterosexuality, society assumes that everyone is heterosexual until they bend their portrayal of their gender because then the person would be automatically labelled as gay.

> **W8 (1.2)*** it's easier for a woman to embrace both masculine and feminine qualities, as a woman I have the advantage that I can be what I want to be, I can break the societal stereotypical norms etc

> **W7 (1.24… 1.26)*** in my opinion womanhood when compared to manhood it's broader because there are more things that women can do but if men do them they are going to be

> labelled as gay instantly…as we were mentioning trousers, for example, traditionally trousers were for man and skirts for woman, but if a woman wears trousers she will not be automatically labelled as a lesbian, on the other hand if a man wears a skirt automatically (B: labelled), yes, and even make-up which is associated with women but if a woman doesn't do make up it's not automatically, not that much frowned upon by society, even if two women travel together and they stay in the same room it's more accepted then when two men, cause if two men do these things together ehh they are a couple for sure, so from this aspect it seems we have more freedom in society, it sounds a bit ironic but anyway.

6.6 Gender Performativity

Discourse dichotomies can be seen as central when discussing gender performativity since, to a certain extent, we 'know' what a woman is because we 'know' what a man is, and in turn, we perform our gender in opposition to what is expected out of men. Simone de Beauvoir (1956) introduced the concept that one becomes a woman, whereby becoming a woman is impacted by historical and cultural constructs, and that this becoming is like a project that we have to sustain through "stylised repetition of acts" (Butler, 1988, p. 519). However, it is important to note that even though, in theory, everyone in society (irrespective of the gender/ gender identity they ascribe to) has the possibility to create/ perform their own version of gender, we have to recognise the impact that dominant discourses such as those linked to the gender binary have on the individual. Butler (2004) acknowledges that even though we refer to gender as our 'own' gender, in reality, the boundaries within which gender can be created are outside of us and beyond us since these are socially and discursively set. **W6** referred to the latter when stating:

> **W6 (1.5)*** being women and womanhood, the narrative of the women we have round us will impact our narrative of how we should be as women.

Even though she did not include the whole of society, she is aware that the way we do our gender is very much linked to other people's narratives and discourses. The notion of becoming was central to this research since it allowed me to inquire about how each interviewed woman creates and sustains

her own project of womanhood whilst also analysing the role that culture and dominant discourses have on this process.

The participants identified different aspects through which they either conformed or challenged the taken-for-granted knowledge about their gender, mainly through their image, by combining masculine and feminine traits, as seen from the responses below.

Firstly, there is the concept of being a girly girl, or what one is expected to do to look like a woman; this would include liking fashion or being fashion aware, having long hair, and if one has tattoos, these should be feminine tattoos (such as flowers), should not be overly big and not placed in places which would draw attention. Furthermore, the participants once again discussed how if one does not conform to these pre-set standards, one is automatically labelled (usually, the labels are linked to homosexuality) or attracts unwanted attention, leading to the person being socially penalised for their appearance.[125]

> **W2 (1.4)*** I am not a typical girly girl, am not the type that is into fashion, does make-up, goes shopping, forget it, I hate doing those things, if we had to discuss hobbies I would fall more under male rather than female.

> **W3 (1.14…1.42)*** if a woman gets her hair cut it does not mean that she is straight or lesbian or bi…this is my style tattoos and short hair, unfortunately, I might be doing a lot of things which attract people's attention, all these tattoos and very short hair on a woman.

Secondly, one has to strive towards perfection; women are expected to look perfect or have what is considered a perfect body according to the current trend. However, certain practices have stood the

[125] In section 6.3.3 women's body surveillance is analysed in further detail.

test of time, like body hair; locally, even nowadays, women who have body hair are seen as defying the norm.

> **W4 (1.8)**
>
> So it's obviously not something that happens passively the more time passes and the more I grow comfortable, the more it's natural, but kind of at first especially it was more of an active like "***** (*states her name*) you can like have a bit of I don't know armpit hair and then shave it later for instance" like you do not need to be a constant perfect girl you know like I'm still feminine, I'm still a woman and etc.

The presented quotes present two concepts which are surfacing in several themes: the control imposed on doing gender, that is, one not only has to do gender, but this has to be done according to accepted standards, whereby even the body has to be moulded to fit within the currently accepted standards (Butler, 1988). The modifications mentioned by the participants are quite "normal" and do not necessarily involve invasive procedures; however, there are modifications which do require more invasive procedures, such as enhancement surgeries, which some women might find themselves compelled to undergo to fit in acceptable body sizes. Additionally, one does not only have to look female but also act like one by using appropriate gestures and engaging in 'feminine' hobbies or interests such as fashion, make-up and shopping (Butler, 1988; Butler, 1990). The second concept, presented in the above statements, is the notion of compulsory heterosexuality, and as highlighted by **W3** if one does not present themselves according to the accepted gender constructs, assumptions about one's sexual orientation are implied.

The above statements also demonstrate that the participants are aware of how they create themselves (or an image of themselves) based on how they present themselves aesthetically, hence, to a certain extent recognising that they (doers of gender) are being formed by their deeds (Butler, 1990). Consequently, what we consider as 'nature' is an effect rather than a cause, that is, an effect of the response of others to our gendered identities in relation to other aspects of our lives (Butler, 1990).

These gendered performances or constructions are carried out according to a 'script' (Alsop et al., 2002; Butler, 1990), which are ideals of masculinity and femininity that portray particular behaviour as appropriate and others as inappropriate. The participants showed that even though not all of them might be aware of Butler's theory, they did reflect on the notion of appropriate and inappropriate feminine and masculine behaviour, so much so that they also reflected on the notion of how men who do not conform to their appropriate scripts are negatively labelled. The latter can also be observed with regard to dominant scripts within our cultures, such as heterosexual men having to be butch or not displaying any traits that might link them to women because otherwise, they would be labelled as gay. Moreover, the scripts do not only reflect how one ought to portray the 'ideal' gender, but they also project what is the ideal sexual orientation. Scripts linked to heterosexuality are still dominant in our everyday discourses, and these scripts impact the views we form about relationships and how we perform our gender within relationships.

Most of the participants were aware that they are the ones "creating" their womanhood or their gendered experience, so much so that some participants discussed that even though they ascribe to the label 'woman', they use both traits considered feminine and even some considered more masculine, which as will be discussed further in the following section shows agency on behalf of the participants' part. It is interesting to point out that even though the participants are aware that they are creating their gendered experience/ doing their gender, they still frame this experience within a binary model, reinforcing the centrality and prominence of cisnormativity as part of our dominant discourses.

> **W1 (1.8)*** I do what I want because I want to…I will not allow anyone to tell me not to wear a certain dress because I will look too feminine and likewise I will not allow anyone to tell me not to wear a certain pair of shorts because I will look like a man, I take a bit of both and I stereotype both genders and make them work for me as I wish.

> **W4 (1.4)**

I was always loved clothes etc. so I always had my feminine side…what society perceives as feminine an aspect of it, but I always felt the push to be more manly in a sense and you know not too emotional and stuff like that, and kind of I felt that through time the more I became in touch with myself the more I kind of could bridge, my own personal feminine and masculine aspects together to merge into the woman that I am today cause I do identify as a woman.

W5 (1.8..1.18)

so basically those 2 elements of myself, both contribute to the way I see myself as a woman you do not have to be like totally feminine and only that it's erm, you can have both at the same time, or certain days you would feel more feminine, certain days you would feel more masculine, and erm ehe like…. the masculine bit of me I guess I also see it as making me a woman, erm I don't see myself as only needing to be feminine to say I am a woman.

These statements show other issues apart from gender performativity, such as we act according to characteristics that society labels as feminine and/or masculine, as per **W4**'s statement. The latter acknowledges that gender or gendered behaviour does shift through time and space. Furthermore, if we accept the notion that for several women to create their gender fully, they do combine characteristics pertaining to both genders, then we would also recognise that our genders do not lay fully within one side of the binary but that our doing of gender is more fluid than what we perceive it to be. Hence, the presented statements can be seen to confront the dominant discourses and the taken-for-granted notions of being and doing gender on a personal level.

Furthermore, the participants seem to be aware of the interplay between anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance (Butler, 1990) and how these three constructs are both dependent on and at the same time, impact other identities we hold.

W1 (1.58)* but to tell you a small secret, recently I went for a work interview and I didn't wear a dress, I wore trousers and a blazer because I knew that the panel will be made up of only

men…and you would ask me why? Because I did not want to (B: cause it makes a difference) it makes a difference, I did not want to look, young sweet you know smiling in heels.

W1 highlights that if you look girly/ladylike, men will look down on you, and you will be perceived as sweet and not taken seriously. She also refers to her age, hence highlighting the intersectionality between gender and age, which would place the specific participant at a further disadvantage within the interview since the men on the interviewing panel would not only see her as a woman but a young woman with all the social constructs and stereotypes that those two social identities bring to the table; sustaining once again that gender is not done in a vacuum and one's gender performativity is dependent on age, ability, class and race (Butler, 1990)

6.7 Agency vs. Backlash

Foucault (1978) states that where there is power, there is resistance or agency; agency cannot be achieved if we are constantly told not to rock the boat. Participants expressed how their current treatment in society makes them feel that they are constantly controlled by someone, that women are constantly judged and that we need to sacrifice ourselves for the benefit of others. Moreover, we are not encouraged to speak about our negative experiences and we are frowned upon if we voice our opinions.

W9 (1.22)* women are not seen positively when they voice their opinion, how come because I am a woman I am not allowed to make my voice heard, shouldn't I be there for other women, shouldn't I be a voice for society or for women, why I because I am a woman I'm seen in a bad light?

W6 (2.15)* I feel very strongly that society expectations of women are not to rock the boat, (B: ok), to serve others, and to take care of others, for me that has been my experience let's put it that way, very strongly and in different contexts, within the family, within work and with friends…

Notwithstanding the above statements throughout this research, the participants demonstrated that, in various instances, they resist dominant discourses and are agentic. Such examples were when they were discussing their perception of womanhood and gender performativity.

> **W8 (1.2)*** I think over time it's changing a lot what a woman is, kind of it's becoming more varied, each woman has her own definition I think.

> **W4 (1.14)**
>
> I'm already not part of the norm, but still a beautiful normal part of myself you know and being a woman with my own characteristics even if society may perceive them as weaker or worse or whatever they are still beautiful and (B: yes) as long as I'm not hurting, and affecting other people like who is going to stop me you know, kind of thing…

> **W 2 (1.73)*** I think femininity is more of a social thing, because for me, I am me and if something is more masculine or feminine I was ***** (name) and I will remain ***** (name).

When reflecting on the participants' responses about how they view and perform their gender, I kept going back to the idea that by viewing gender as performative, we can uncover how the daily combination of the micro (gender as an identity (Stets & Burke, 1996)), macro (gender as a social structure (Stets & Burke, 1996)) and intersectional elements of gender re-create that which we are doing. This notion resonates with Goffman's and Butler's understanding of gender and its performative venture, which highlights the micro aspect of doing gender, that is, how one as an individual represents their gender. For Goffman (1979), gender is not natural; it is created when one represents masculinity and/or femininity in their performative actions. However, he is not interested in the practices per se but in the consequences of gender practices, which produce gender as a social institution. The participants, through their actions and the possible consequences that these actions create, can be seen as challenging what is perceived as dominant ideologies within gender. This could be seen when the participants spoke about their image and when they spoke about the combination of their masculine and feminine traits to create themselves as a whole. Furthermore, Butler (1988), as presented in the previous section, states that gender is understood through gestures, which are then

linked to the body, giving the illusion of a fixed gendered self. Hence, challenging the notion that gender is fixed and linked to a specific body opens the discussion for how we can portray our true selves more authentically, which might be by either stepping outside of the binary or combining opposing traits and remodelling them to suit our purpose better. The macro and intersectional aspects of gender can be seen when we interact with others since our gendered performances affect how others respond to us, which then again continues to form our gendered identity.[126]

The participants are agentic in their ways of doing gender, by acknowledging that there is agency when doing such a deed, participants do not think that they are re-inventing gender because gender will always be done within a social context and for/with another. However, one has the possibility to take on critical definitions of gender or practices and adapt them as our own, even if they do not specifically fit within dominant discourses or social practices (Butler, 2004). Since for agency/ resistance to take place, it does not necessarily mean that there is an outright rejection of oppressive norms or a public rejection, but it might also be an internal displacement that leads to emancipation (McNay, 2016). Whereby individuals can subtly transform norms even whilst engaging in such norms. This notion of internal displacement can be seen in how the participants discuss social expectations,[127] how and if they meet them, as well as when discussing what is considered a typical Maltese woman and how they fit within this description. However, from the findings obtained, it is clear that society sanctions women who do not conform to social expectations. Faludi's (1991) work highlights the backlash experienced as a result of second-wave feminism, where she states that this backlash is not a new phenomenon but that it has been happening to agentic women for decades and from the responses received from the participants, the same backlash (if not more due to the fast-paced social realities created by social media and the internet) is still very prevalent in today's society.

[126] Further analysis of identity formation will be presented in the section presenting findings about Identities Held by Interviewed Women (7.5).
[127] Results and analysis of social expectations and participant's lived experiences will be presented in the next chapter.

W1 (2.26)* society is too harsh with women irrespective of who they are and what they do.

W3 (2.12)* but society does look down on these people because society tends to place everybody in a box, so if you don't fit that box, it is sort of a red light…

W3, suggested that society expects us to fit in a box, and the gender box is rather prescriptive, leading to very restrictive behaviour. When such behaviour is not followed, it generally leads to backlash, that is, social and economic penalties. One of the primary purposes of backlash is to reinforce cultural stereotypes or norms, hence maintaining the status quo, which, as a result, maintains male hegemonic practices (Rudman et al., 2012). Backlash, apart from penalising the women breaking the mould, also discourages potential agentic women. As women, we are all aware of the dominant discourses around our behaviour, indeed most women try to behave according to these discourses because they fear social rejection, which will, in turn, impact their feeling of belonging within the community as well as their self-esteem (Rudman et al., 2012). However, even women who act according to the 'rules' are penalised since, as stated by **W1**, society is too harsh on women, irrespective of what they do.

W6 (2.25…2.29)

I hope I am wrong pero (*but*) I think that even if you try to fulfil society's expectations, you are still going to be sanctioned if you are a woman. Inħoss (*I feel*) li whether you try to stick within the expectations or try to break them ħa jejdu fuqek, ħa jejdu kontrik (*they will gossip or bad mouth you*), you should be different, you should be what you are not, whatever that is, whatever if it's what we are saying you should be or the opposite...you can never get it right…almost qisu (*it seems*) just by the fact that of being a woman qisu (*it seems*) you are going to be sanctioned forsi (*maybe*), jew (*or*) criticised.

W5 (2.14)

if I'm working right and I'm pregnant, that promotion won't likely to happen right? because whether if it's conscious or not they are taking it into consideration, that I need leave and be

> less present at work so if from like route I would be following society's expectations by balancing everything out, erm....I'd be like sanctioned that way, but if someone else doesn't follow that same route they are like "ahh they are only focusing on their job, they are doing it for the money" that sort of thing, so ehe there is not a really win, win situation I guess.

As per **W5** and **W6's** statements, Lakoff (2004) and Rudman et al. (2012) present studies which demonstrate women's 'double-bind', whereby women are damned if they do and damned if they do not. In the above context, the women will be penalised, if she decides to start a family and even if she does not. Szekeres et al. (2023) state that in today's societies, even though women are encouraged to work, they are not allowed to do this at the 'expense' of motherhood since the latter is still considered the ultimate role we are expected to fulfil. They even argue that not conforming to this norm will lead to harsher consequences than other gender norm violations.

One backlash technique used to sanction those women who do not conform is gossip; this was also highlighted by **W6 (2.25…2.29)** and **W9 (2.12)**.

> **W9 (2.12)*** I believe that in Malta we do mind each other's business, so I can't tell you no for this question, erm, I think yes, I mean obviously you encounter all sorts, we are continuously judged…so I think that is a constant battle, you know.

Robinson (2016) states that gossiping has two normative functions: norm promulgation and norm enforcement. Hence, through gossip, we are telling the person with whom we are engaging in gossip that a particular norm exists and, depending on the gossip, whether it is positive/praiseful or negative enforcement of the mentioned behaviour that is meant. In the context of this research, gossip not only reinforces norms but also reinforces stereotypes since those individuals who do not behave stereotypically are negatively gossiped about. Throughout the different chapters and sections of the findings, various quotes were and will continue to be presented whereby participants stated that they feel they are constantly judged irrespective of what they do; most of them acknowledge that the constant judgment results from being a woman.

Jóhannesdóttir and Skaptadóttir (2023) argue that gossip is a form of power that not only acts as norm promulgation and norm enforcement but also condemns and shames those who do adhere to the norms. Shame is not a foreign concept for women; on the contrary, in most societies, gendered shame is imposed on women due to institutional structures. As corroborated by O'Reilly Mizzi (1994), who stated that in Malta, women are controlled by the combination of the Catholic Church's expectations of women, the code of honour and shame, and local traditions around the sacred woman. When any of the latter are breached, women within the community inform others about the type and extent of the nonconformity; this leads to the upholding of the status quo and reinforcement of role models (O'Reilly Mizzi, 1994) since no one would want to be a source of gossip. It is worth noting that the controlling elements mentioned by O'Rielly Mizzi were mentioned by the participants throughout this research as still holding various degrees of control over women's lives.

W9 adds another dynamic to gossip: our tight-knit communities resulting from the island's size. O'Reilly Mizzi (1994) links this phenomenon to the way that our villages and towns are structured whereby due to living in a densely populated area, anything which is out of the norm or does not adhere to normal routine is noticed, giving leeway for gossip to start. Moreover, according to Jóhannesdóttir and Skaptadóttir, gossip tends to be more frequent in such tight-knit communities, and it tends to revolve around: "shame, reputation and slut-shaming" (2023, p. 5); all three themes were also mentioned repeatedly by the participants in different contexts. This finding corroborates the notion that gossip is mainly used as a sanctioning tool by those with 'power' within this particular context, reinforcing patriarchal dominant discourses, especially those centring around the notion that a woman can either be a virgin or a whore.

The notion of shame has been a constant throughout the participants' responses, as seen in the various sections of this data analysis. Gendered shame is defined by Mann (2018) as "a central mechanism of the apparatus that secures the continued subordination of women across a number of class and race contexts in the mediatised, late-capitalist West" (p. 402). Mann states that women experience two different types of shaming; "ubiquitous shame," where shame is not just an emotion that women feel in the moment but rather a pervasive force that shapes their entire lives. Mann also suggests that shame is perpetually linked to a desire for a different past or future. "Unbounded shame" is an overwhelming and inescapable experience that devastates the individual's life since it not only robs people of their sense of worth but also destroys their ability to imagine a better future. According to Mann, unbounded shame found its ecological niche in social media. The participants' responses showed both ubiquitous and unbounded shame when they were discussing how women are always seen as less than men, how women have to pre-assess how others will interpret their actions since they might automatically be labelled as norm-breakers, how our actions are always doubted, how we have to portray the 'perfect body' but at the same time if we have a sexy body we are shamed for it as well, etc. Hence, it is quite easy to see how these factors impact our everyday lives, especially our sense of worth.

Shame or the fear of being shamed is the tying factor between dominant discourses and social expectations, as will be presented in the following analysis chapter. Women are taught how to conform to social expectations from an early age; if they do not do so, they would certainly be labelled and shamed for their wrongdoing; however, the same treatment is not reserved for men.

6.8 Conclusion

This chapter analysed the participants' responses dealing with dominant discourses that identified how male privilege and patriarchy impact every aspect of our lived experience as women. Male privilege and discourses stemming from patriarchal ideologies affect all social institutions, as can be seen from the responses dealing with women's roles and place in positions of power such as parliament. Such dominant discourses present duality in men's roles because, in some situations, or by certain people, men are expected to protect women; however, as per the participants' responses, they feel unsafe due to men's behaviour, which makes them feel objectified, harassed and fearful for their safety. Even though we are aware that stranger harassment is a common occurrence within our culture, it is still worth noting how ingrained and normalised such practices are within our discourses. The same can be said for female sexual sexualisation and objectification, where such discourses are so taken for granted that even we as women at times engage in surveilling other women to "make sure" that they fit within the dominant accepted discourses. This surveillance of women towards other women can be seen when we surveil what other women wear, especially in cases where women are victims of violence, where questions about what she was wearing or why she was in a specific place at a particular time are asked. Dominant discourses sustain not only patriarchal ideologies but also heteronormativity, which in turn impact how we do our gender as women and what are the expected and/or acceptable gender performances. Another interesting take from the participants' responses is that several participants commented that, to a certain extent, women are freer to explore their gender because society's expectations are less forgiving towards men who do not conform to hegemonic masculinity. Lastly, this chapter presented if and how the participants are agentic in constructing their gendered identity and the ways and means society uses to sanction those women who do not follow the presented dominant ideologies.

Chapter 7- Results and Analysis: Social Expectations and Women's Gendered Identities

7.1 Introduction

As stated in the introduction for both findings and data analysis chapters during this research, I could clearly notice the cyclical process between discourse, social expectations and gender identity formation. The previous findings and analysis chapter addressed dominant discourses and how these impact the participants' gendered experience. The following chapter will analyse the social expectations stemming from the previously mentioned dominant discourses. This chapter will be divided into two parts; the first deals with social constructs, and the second with the identities held by the participating women. Within the social construct section, themes such as gendered socialisation will be addressed, while findings about how those closest to the participants impacted their gendered learnt behaviour and the social constructs passed on to them from older generations while growing up will be discussed. Furthermore, this notion of generational influence was also analysed with regard to how older family members influence the participants' children or younger generations. Gendered socialisation prepares women for their socially expected roles, which, according to the participants, centre around women portraying appropriate behaviour, domesticity and familial roles. In the analysis of the dominant discourses, discourses about women's objectification and self-surveillance were presented in the sub-section about behaviour appropriate feminine behaviour, such as how one ought to sit or how one should behave in a social context, will be analysed and linked to how these impact how we are viewed as women by others. The women participating in this research discussed at great length the social expectations linked to childbearing and women's domestic roles, whereby every participant mentioned the still prevailing idea that women are expected to have children and if they do not have children, they are expected to care for something else, such as pets. Another predominant social construct is that the domestic sphere is still a women's sphere; however, women are also expected to have a career, whereas men are not expected to participate in domestic roles. The last theme in this section takes us back to how the participants are being agentic or less so in their internalisation or rejection of the dominant social constructs, whereby some of the participants, in

their own way, resist dominant discourses and social constructs by adopting internal displacement rather than public confrontation. However, it does not mean that those participants who internalised social constructs are not agentic because, as will be presented, some of the participants could reflect on their actions, leading them to question such behaviours. Notwithstanding, the most internalised social construct was that of compulsory heterosexuality, as will be discussed when presenting findings and analysis about family and domestic constructs.

The second part of this chapter focuses on the participants' different identities, their construction, and interplay. Throughout this research, the interplay between context and identity is constantly highlighted. This was particularly evident in discussions of womanhood, where participants' understanding of femininity varied based on their social surroundings and their ability to reflect upon their experiences. Similar patterns emerged when participants discussed other aspects of their identities. When asked to identify their various identities, participants overwhelmingly prioritized their familial roles, these familial identities formed the core of their self-perception. Following familial identities, participants mentioned roles derived from their employment, these identities also played a significant role in shaping their understanding of themselves. The participants' initial responses provide a clear illustration of the intersection between their internal self-perception and their external roles and affiliations. Their internal identity is shaped by the roles they play and the groups they belong to within various contexts.

7.2 Generational Influence- Gendered Socialisation

When compiling the results, it was evident that Oakley's (1985) definition of gender is still applicable to today's reality since gender is still socially constructed and masculinity and femininity vary according to the context or society one lives in. All participants agreed that our socialisation is gendered and that

our parents are our initial encounters with such a socialisation process. Eventually, society reinforces what we would have learnt from our home environment through dominant systems such as education and religion. As can be seen from the quotes hereunder, we are not only socialised according to dominant gender constructs, but these constructs are taken for granted and seen as the only or best way how we can perform our gender, as presented in the previous chapter.

> **W3(1.18)*** The upbringing is everything, erm in fact yes, I mention the upbringing a lot for example, I believe that the upbringing impacts human beings immensely.

> **W8 (2.16)*** I think that in reality you are born a blank slate kind of but eventually you start watching your parents what they are, you start seeing society reacting to your parents, to you, you start constructing these ideas in your mind.

W8's statement, refers to the notions discussed in discourses about gender performativity; that is, we are not born women, but we become one (De Beauvoir, 1956) by acting in such a manner that others consider appropriate for the gender we are portraying. Our parents have a central role in this process since they directly impact our looking-glass self from a very early stage of our development, which leads to the formation of our self-concept (Stets & Burke, 2003). Hence, one can state that our gendered identity is a product of a perpetual cycle, our parents perform their gender according to what others expect of them and in turn, they perpetuate the same process in on us and our 'value' depends on how well we do/perform our gender in our parent's eyes, as highlighted by **W2**:

> **W2 (1.12)*** there are certain social constructs that they would have been brought up with and they think that they have to impose them or because since you are a woman you must wear make-up, or because you are a woman you must wear heels…

The following quotes resonate with Goffman's (1977) discussion about gender as a social institution and how this institution is created through various practices labelled as essential, leading to the division between the sexes. He identified five examples which families and society use to teach gender: gendered division of labour, siblings as socialisers, public toilet facilities, selective job placements and an identification system; each example was in one way or another mentioned by the participants and will be reflected on throughout this section of the analysis chapters.

> **W9(2.20)*** first of all everything starts from home, so erm…yes I mean I lived in an old fashioned traditional family where my mother used to prepare the clothes for my father, used to prepare him food…

W9 gives a clear example of the gendered division of labour, which will be discussed further in section 7.4.3. In this quote, the participant reflects on two central notions: first, the notion of the traditional family.[128] When something is labelled as old fashioned, one would automatically link it to more conservative or rigid practices, which might further highlight the distinction between the individual's role based on their status within the family. The second notion is the mother's actions which are not only domestic but also actions which show that the mother is the one that takes care of everything, including preparing her husband's clothes. When I was listening to the participants speaking about their mother's roles within the house, I constantly remembered a phrase which I used to hear a lot growing up from women who were not gainfully employed, "jien ma nahdimx"/"*I do not work*", which could be seen to demonstrate that women even though they know how hard domestic work and child-rearing is they would not label it as work because society taught us that for work to be valid, there has to be a salary attached to it. Later in the interview with **W9,** it transpired that her mother was gainfully employed; hence she did not only receive messages about domestic roles from her mother but also messages about how women are expected to balance both roles.[129]

> **W1 (1.4)*** gender is also socially constructed that is we learn what it means to be a woman from a young age according to what adults tell us…for example, I have a son and a niece, and they were born two months apart so they are like twins I notice that the grandparents treat both children differently because the girl is a girl and the boy is a boy first and foremost we start with the most obvious for example the girl is fine because she likes pink and because she likes dolls and if for example, we go in a shop and my son chooses something pink his grandmother tells him no because that is for girls and I tell him do you like pink and he tells me yes so he can take it.

[128] It is important to note that in Malta, when we speak about the family, we do not only refer to the immediate family but also to the extended family due to the local proximity and the role that the extended family has in supporting the nuclear family in child-rearing. Grandparents, especially grandmothers, help out in such tasks, especially for preschool children, and they might also retain this role by looking after their older grandchildren during after-school hours.

[129] Further development of the balancing act/s that women have to do will be discussed in 7.3.3.

Children do not only receive messages about their gender, but these messages might conflict, as presented by **W1**. Authors such as Bem (1983) and West and Zimmerman (1987) presented how gender is learnt by modelling and assimilating other people's behaviour or language. Parents and other significant family members, such as grandparents, have a central role in the process of imparting gender and gender ideologies.[130] Endendijk (2022) presents what they term the gendered-family process model, which might identify several practices playing a role when parents present their children's gender to others. At first, the parents create a gendered environment, where, for example, pink is seen as more predominantly being used for girls and blue for boys, by the toys given to children, clothes and activities; moreover, gendered language, gender labels, and metaphors which reinforce gender stereotypes are used. Both studies presented by Helpern & Perry-Jenkins (2016) and Perales et al. (2021) demonstrate the impact that the mother's gender ideology has on the children, more so if these views are traditional ones. According to Helpern & Perry-Jenkins the latter finding is of no surprise since the mothers are the ones that are still mainly involved in child-rearing and domestic tasks, hence having a more direct impact on passing their gender ideologies to the next generation. On the other hand, Perales et al. found that even though mother-daughter gender associations were stronger than mother-son associations, the parent who has more egalitarian views had a more substantial impact on the children's gender attitudes. In the context presented by **W1**, the children are not only being exposed to the parental ideology but also to the grandparent ideology, which does not necessarily (as the quote suggests) reflect the parental ideology and can be more conservative than the parental one. The latter might lead children to internalise more traditional gender associations, especially if the children spend more time with their grandparents due to their parents' work commitments.

[130] For the purpose of this analysis, parental gender ideologies are understood to be the extent to which the latter hold traditional versus egalitarian views of men's and women's gender roles (Halpern & Perry-Jenkins, 2016).

Even though the participant (**W1**) is not inducing her son into traditional gendered play or colours, the grandmother is, and the latter is reinforcing the norm; hence, the boy is most likely to hear the same statements/ dominant discourses from other people, reinforcing the notion that pink is for girls therefore not for him. In their study, Wong and Hines (2015) conclude that gender-typed colour preferences are the result of sociocognitive influences, with such preferences starting to emerge around the baby's second year and becoming very established by the third year. The latter authors highlight how children start recognising and differentiating colours from their third month; hence, the selection of gender-typed colours when they are two years old shows that this choice is not likely to be of an inborn origin. As per Carter (2014), the difference in the treatment and language used when individuals communicate with boys and girls shapes the child's behaviour patterns and boundaries, which eventually are internalised, becoming identity standards. The same process is repeated with other individuals, and our gendered identity continues to develop according to others' reactions to our internalised standards of gender.

From the same quote, one can also deduce the opposition that non-dominant discourses are presented with, and this shows the influence of dominant discourses where what they present is taken as given. In this case, pink is no longer a colour but a gendered colour, one which can 'only' be claimed by its corresponding gender, and most of the individuals do not question why that specific colour is linked to the specific gender or if, in reality, the boy's life would change if he wears pink or plays with a doll.

7.3 Gender Roles and Social Expectations

If we acknowledge the concept that gender and gendered identities gain their meaning from the specific culture and context within which they are portrayed, then one cannot discuss Maltese women's identity without looking at the wider cultural context within which this identity is being

formed. Malta is in the centre of the Mediterranean, and Maltese culture shares various commonalities with the Mediterranean culture. For the purpose of this chapter, culture is understood as the well-established traditions, traits, customs, values, and religion shared throughout the Mediterranean region[131] (Minkov & Hofstede, 2014; Petruzzellis & Craig, 2016). During the interviews, several participants drew similarities between local and Mediterranean women, such as physical characteristics: brown eyes, olive skin and dark hair, being extrovert and bubbly and welcoming others into their homes. Another characteristic mentioned and highlighted in literature is the role of women within the family. Debattista (2022) looked at traditional gender stereotypes and their correlation with the Mediterranean culture in her study. The results presented in this study align with those of Debattisa. Of importance here is the finding that traditional family values are still very dominant locally. As a result, children's upbringing and domestic chores are still seen as women's responsibility, while men's role is simply to help out in such tasks out of necessity, which impacts women's possibilities to enter gainful employment and advance their careers. Hence, one has to question and, to a certain extent, acknowledge the power of dominant discourses and ideologies on the construction of gender stereotypes because even though we are aware of these gender stereotypes and how they place women in a disadvantaged position within our society, it seems that we are still engaging in these stereotypes and re-creating them.

Throughout history, many of our roles have changed and have been adapted to be more suitable to the society we are living in; apart from women's roles related to the domestic sphere, not only have these roles remained the same but now women are also expected to have a successful career or be gainfully employed. In comparison, a man's role in the domestic sphere is seen as an add-on or something he does to support his partner. These messages are passed to us whilst growing up, whilst seeing our mothers or other women going about their daily lives and how society responds to their actions. From the gathered responses, it is evident that the messages that girls receive whilst growing up are tied to

[131] Especially with the Southern European countries, mainly Italy.

their future role expectations, such as the roles linked to the domestic sphere and rearing of children, which eventually indoctrinates us into believing that women must be able to do it all. Other messages we receive are linked to how we present ourselves and our bodies to be labelled as women, and if we do not ascribe to the behaviours expected from us, we are shamed for it. In the following parts, the messages these women received while growing up and how they viewed gender roles and social expectations will be presented and analysed.

7.3.1 Behaviour

Women's bodies have constantly been subjected to control, as presented in sections analysing discourses about female sexual objectification (6.3.1) and sexualisation (6.3.1a); this is not only seen when women do not have free choice in doing what they want with their bodies but also in what is deemed to be appropriate female behaviour. Several participants remarked about how women are expected to behave, and it seems that a common thread between their comments is that women should guard how they behave, hold themselves back and please others.

W6 (2.53)* do not sit like that because a woman doesn't sit like that…

W12 (1.12)* I think that being a young woman, I learned that you have to hold yourself back…

W4 (1.8…2.22)

femininity like kind of culturally, you know there is a certain, notion of being nurturing and being caring and loving, and you know and then there is the darker aspect, that you need to kind of satisfy the men and you know like have to be the one that is caring and does everything for your husband and he maybe colder…. "on the other hand I've learnt that maybe expressing yourself too much is negative so it's also that conflict in itself, and people have tried to tell me for instance you should stay quiet or for instance even about my sexuality I remember my parents saying don't stay talking about it cause you never know what they say.

W3 (1.20)* we as women were always brought up that we have to be people pleasers

Ridgeway and Corell (2004) argue that our social relations are unequally organised, and the basis of this unequal organisation is that society is divided into two categories based on one's biological attributions. These two categories affect all of our actions and social interactions, which are dependent and determined by what are the acceptable patterns of behaviour for each gender and how well we re-create them. These patterns of behaviour do not just impact our daily behaviours but also the hobbies or recreational activities that we can engage in; for example, another participant stated how her father who was brought up in a conservative environment, used to tell her that women should not play or like football because that is a man's sport. The above statements and examples demonstrate that the acceptable patterns place women as the sweeter sex who perform better at social tasks, whilst men are the ones in charge and whose actions are seen as more valuable by society, hence recreating discourses which sustain male privilege and patriarchy. Moreover, it is also important to note that the gender dichotomy does not only impact how we are placed within the public and/or private sphere but also the language which can be used and the level of one's expression, especially about topics such as sexuality, which are usually associated with men. As one might imagine, this dichotomy also dictates which emotions are "acceptable" to be experienced and portrayed by which gender.

> **W8 (2.6)*** it seems that it's ok to be sad but not angry, I think that for eg. If you see a boy crying "he is gay", but if a woman starts to cry it's ok but if she is angry "she is crazy", "she is impatient."

W8's statement clearly depicts that it is acceptable for women to externalise their emotions by crying, but they are frowned upon when they externalise their emotions in an aggressive way because, yet again, women should be seen as sweet, caring etc.; hence it is not appropriate for them to be angry or aggressive. The contrary applies to boys/ men who are seen as effeminate or gay if they express their emotions since men should not emulate female characteristics because that would be beneath them, but when they get angry/aggressive, they portray masculine hegemonic ideals. It is noteworthy to mention that as per Ridgeway and Corell's (2004) understanding, even if there are individuals like the

participants in this study who know that there are alternatives to the unequal behavioural dichotomies imposed on us based on our gender, they are still compelled to follow the behaviour attributed to the corresponding gender because these expected behaviours are institutionalised in norms and social structures which are re-inforced by those who have socially advantageous positions, hence why most individuals internalise these social constructs.

7.3.2 Women as Child Rearers and the Lack of Balance Between the Couple When Raising Children.

While conducting the interviews and when I started analysing and reflecting on the transcripts, I noticed a pattern of how the women were speaking about men and other women or themselves as women. A specific focus needs to be given to the social expectations and discourses linked to women and child-rearing since this was one of the prominent discourses within this research and is one which is very much linked to the local context. On various occasions, the participants linked women to rearing children, and/or other family members or even pets; they did not necessarily agree with this role, or the social expectation/s linked to it but acknowledged that it is still a reality in our culture that women are seen as the accepted performers of such a role. In contrast, men are seen as retaining their independence or autonomy even after having children or having a family. Rubin (1975) states that a woman is a woman; however, she becomes adjectives such as a mother, a wife, or a homemaker, depending on her social relations, and these relations are created by the sex/gender system whereby one's biological sex is seen as the creating force behind social activities. The above findings demonstrate this narrative whereby women are seen as adjectives or become the adjectives society gave them based on their biological sex, as will also be portrayed. In my opinion, the following statement is one of the most powerful statements in this research because it not only graphically depicts the social expectations on women linked to childbearing and our rearing characteristics but also the social expectations related to age.

> **W11 (1.2)*** Then it leads to erm, having children, seems as if you are this womb, always growing till you are ready to have children, because you are a woman so it's natural, or this is the right thing to do, or this is what is meant….from when you are a girl, child rearing is always at the back of…and I also notice that those women who do not have children, they say eee because you are a woman so you take better care of your cats or dogs…Erm so that is the starting point, I think now I'm feeling it more because I'm becoming older and a lot of people are asking "did you have children?, you are 32" seems as if it's a ticking time bomb…

If we take Rubin's above-mentioned understanding, the woman is not seen just as a carer or a mother but as a womb; hence, her sole purpose is to bear children. The latter notion still holds a very high position in the hierarchy of dominant discourses, and this leads me to question how are women who choose not to have children treated? **W11** gave one take on the situation: they are expected to care for something else, such as pets, and they are expected to be good at it because they are women because it is natural. **W1** shared the same sentiment with **W11** when stating:

> **W1 (2.108)*** irrespective how much we love women, for the patriarchal ideology a woman's first job is to have children and she is happy, if she is not then there is something wrong with her, especially if she's had children and she is not happy, even if we look at how much we evince shock when a man leaves his family and when a woman leaves her family.

The relevance of the above statements lies not only in the way they were expressed but also in the demonstration that a woman's value is still linked to her domestic role. So much so that **W1** highlights the different reactions elicited from individuals between when a man leaves the family as opposed to when a woman leaves the family, shedding light on how, even though women are no longer necessarily expected to be solely housewives and mothers, people's reactions when these roles are not fulfilled show otherwise. Other participants did not only link women to child-rearing, but they also highlighted that throughout this process, it seems that men/ fathers retain their independence, and even though women are also expected to have careers, they are still expected to fulfil their domestic roles.

> **W3 (2.8)*** Exactly so yes on a societal level erm…there are a lot of expectations, we women expect to progress career wise as a man, technically yes we are able to, but we forget that a man has much fewer commitments then a woman has, erm…obviously without offending men, but a man doesn't have to go home, at least on a normal level, man does not have to go home and continue the second job practically, you have to wash the house, you have to cook, you have to take care of the children etc. erm...there are career levels that you can reach without taking your work with you home so there are those expectations from society which are contradictory

W5 (1.26)

erm most of the times the default that we're taking care of the kids, I think that in theory yes erm, like both your partner I guess or yourself they have an equal ability to raise kids, but it, erm, it just defaults to the woman taking care of the kids, which in 2022, it's still astonishing that it's not more balanced I guess.

7.3.3 Domestic and Employment Expectations

Furthering on the notions regarding acceptable behaviour according to one's gender, the social expectations commonly mentioned during the interviews were those related to women's domestic roles and the gendered division of household tasks.

W2 (1.2)* there are social constructs for example, if you on a biological construct you were born a woman so there are certain expectations that you have to be a housewife and you have to take care of children and such things

W11 (1.44)* when we were young, he (father) never used to let me paint, he used to tell me that is not your work, what do you mean it's not my job, and I used to enjoy it, I used to want to paint, I used to think that I wouldn't do a good job, but this summer the person who came to help me for the network, he used to take his daughter with him to help him paint, so I used to ask him, and he would tell me what to do until the following day and I used to do it, so I said ehh I am able to do these things I might splatter a bit more but I can do them, its ok, but for my papa…it's an issue that it's not your job, it's a men's job.

W11's example depicts and reflects what **W2** stated in the previous quote whereby the social constructs are so dominant and taken for granted leading to them being adapted into every aspect of our lived experience, in this case, the household. Moreover, time and again, apart from reflecting on the social constructs, the participants draw attention to how gendered our discourses are, especially regarding gendered differences and roles within the family, as presented by Litosseliti (2006) and Sunderland (2004). The social constructs and their reproduction through gendered discourses result in

men and women having designated tasks within the house that reflect what society deems gender appropriate; that is, men are valued for their physical strength and manual skills, whereas women are valued for their domestic skills. As also narrated by **W12**, these messages are imparted to us by individuals closest to us and whose opinion leaves the most impact on us, such as parents.

> **W12 (1.4)*** I don't know what people used to say, but my mummy used to tells us that people would tell her although you have two young ladies at home, they don't help you, so even outsiders expect that the young ladies would help their mothers not my brother

In the above statement, the participant's mother is not only conveying what she expected her daughters to do but also telling them that society expects them (not their brother) to help out in the house. So, to a certain extent, the mother in this context seems to be emphasising that this is not a personal expectation but a social one. However, the same participant continues to explain that both her parents used to work when she was young, and as a result of that, she was not brought up with the idea that her mother had to stay at home **W12 (1.4)** "issefter" (serving others). **W12** was in her late 30s at the time of the interview, so the fact that her mother used to work is important and should be noted, indeed 25-30 years ago the majority of the women would have been homemakers. Moreover, in other parts of the interview, the same participant stated that her husband helps with the housework, especially in the cooking, but she did not expect him to help with certain chores because her father never helped with these specific chores or with cooking. Something noteworthy is that during the interview, this participant came to the above realisation, showing an element of reflexivity not only on her gendered roles but also on the impact that her upbringing is still leaving on her in today's context as a grown woman.

> **W12 (2.26)*** I mean again I expect my husband to help me in washing the floor because my father always helped in washing the floor but I don't expect my husband in helping with washing the clothes because my daddy never did them, so unconsciously you absorb these things, this thing about clothes washing now I am thinking about it, I never told him, listen you have to do the clothes but there were occasions when I told him to wash the floor. Even food, my father used to cook rabbit on Sunday, my husband is different but it's because he does it, if he wasn't that way I wouldn't have expected it.

Another instance of reflexivity during the interviews was expressed by **W5,** who acknowledged that she might eventually be in her mother's same situation in the future, stating "my mummy doesn't stop doing things at home, probably I'll end up like her" **(2.26)***. This participant is still in her early 20s, and her envisioning herself in the same situation shows how dominant and permanent these gender ideologies and roles are because she does not see a way which is much different from that of her mother even in the future.

Apart from the expectation that women have to embrace their domestic roles, there is also the expectation that women are self-sacrificing or that they place themselves after the needs of their families.

> **W6 (1.8)*** when my mother used to cook the biggest portion used to be given to my dad and my brother always, then us (participant and her sister), and lastly what is left, if there is anything left, sometimes she used to say now I'll take some bread

The above quote demonstrates the hierarchical structure of the participant's family since the mother did not serve herself last so that her food would not get cold, but she fed the rest of the family first because they have to be fed, and she took whatever was left. This clearly shows what was previously highlighted by Ridgeway and Correll (2004) but also Goffman's (1977) notion of sibling socialisation; not only do the girls eat after their brother but the father and brother get the biggest food helpings.

Even though it seemed that most participants agreed about the social expectations linked to women's domestic roles, the participants presented two opposing viewpoints about the social expectations experienced by women with regards to employment. On the one hand, **W8** sees women's participation in employment as something positive, enabling women to climb the social ladder. Such a stance can be addressed from a choice feminist standpoint, which would acknowledge the positive factors that nowadays enable women to have a choice in pursuing whichever route they deem best for themselves.

W8 (1.2)* but as a woman I think, I have the advantage that I can be what I want to be, I can break the societal stereotypical norms. I think over time it's changing a lot, what it is to be a woman, kind of its becoming more varied, each woman has her own definition I think, her life and in fact we can do both like domestic things, take care of children, but still continue working, that keeps on amazing me, how for women, there are men as well who take care of the children, but in general we evolved from a woman whose place is at home taking care of the children to ok I am taking care of the children and the home whatever, but at the same time I'm working.

On the other hand, **W5,** even though she acknowledges that past realities were not fair to women, especially those who had to stop working, she suggests that that might have created an "easier" situation for them.

W5 (2.10)

like we are trying to balance everything literally, cause like in the past, ha erm, I take it from my nanna (*grandmother*) she had to stop working when she got married, so then, tipo ok it's not fair she had to stop working, but she only focused on housework and like raising the kids and all that, now we are expected to do that plus have a thriving career, plus being there to support your partner, friends, family, like it's a lot.

Even though during the past ten years, Maltese women started participating more in gainful employment, from 43.4% in 2011 (*Eurostat Regional Yearbook.*2013) to 72.3% in 2022 (Labour Market and Information Society Statistics Unit, 2023), stereotypical segregation of work is still very much visible since locally 38% of women, as opposed to 16.7% of men, are employed in areas related to education, human health and social work (Labour Market and Information Society Statistics Unit, 2023). Hence one has to inquire why this phenomenon is still happening. Some participants stated that it is because of girls being pushed towards caring professions, as **W5** said:

W5 (1.20)

I guess even like as you grow up in a society erm, as a woman you are pushed to seek out certain careers and not others for example, erm, you are more likely to ehhh go into a helping

role, a helping profession, or less likely to be an engineer for example, maybe yes they are stereotypes, but they are real.

Once again, this reflects Goffman's notion of institutional reflexivity and selective job placement, which is still prevalent in our society if we look at employment statistics and what jobs have the highest rate of female employees.

Other participants linked our career choice to our maternal characteristics.

W3 (1.2, 1.4)* There are more female teachers, maybe because the motherly figure we portray or because the motherly instincts or many maybe interact well with children, but once again, what I'm saying might be a social construct, but yes on the other hand I see jobs for example managerial roles where which still are being dominated by men… and unknowingly I do it as well unfortunately, a case in point I had to get the MDH Ceo's approval for a masters I'm reading, I was surprised, that she is a woman, and that was my initial reaction, I couldn't control saying, gosh a woman, but then thinking back I asked myself why am I surprised, we are able just as, if not more than men in reality.

Another issue that several of the participants mentioned was that a woman's career is stunted when she has children.

> **W11 (1.50)*** and it comes back not to inequality but to this stint which I notice between people who have children and people who do not have children, because if for argument's sake the woman is going to be the child rearer, the men can keep on going to work, and if he has a promotion he will take get it, whereas the woman if she had to do less hours, had to take sick leave, she will not take get the promotion most probably.

> **W10 (1.12)*** women are at a disadvantage for example, in my previous employment in a company 70% are women but when it comes to management most of them are men, from twenty, two are women, so you see the difference, I think the reason is because women have children, and they take a career break, and the focus changes and men keeps on climbing the leader and never, even though it changed compared to before, it's still men keep on climbing and climbing, and women take the career break and then lose their chance.

The above quotes highlight notions that keep on being discussed throughout the analysis chapters, mainly the notions of discourse dichotomies and the construction of gender. As per Hermans (2001), discourse dichotomies are made up of opposing terms, where the master term is seen as having qualities which oppose the other term. The qualities linked to the master term are seen as positive or are more valued in society than those associated with the opposing term, as presented when analysing

dominant discourses. When dealing with opposing terms, such as production vs. reproduction, paid vs. unpaid work and public vs. private domain, terms that are central in this analysis. The dominant terms presented are usually those associated with males or individuals holding power and privilege. Leading me to inquire about the construction of gender and how these two notions (discourse dichotomies and the construction of gender) feed off each other to continue creating dominant ideologies within society. Gender and our concepts about gendered roles such as parenthood are constructed on the micro, macro and interactional levels; hence our socialisation, personal experience and interactions impact how and in what ways we re-construct these roles and ideologies (Begall et al., 2023). One must also acknowledge that the latter depends on the intersections of one's gender with class, race, sexual orientation and social-economic status.

Domestic work was always linked to women; however, a distinction needs to be made in domestic work since caregiving roles are different from other forms of household production. Whilst there are some activities which can easily be shifted to the market (like cleaning) without much dramatic change being experienced, the same cannot be said for caring for the emotional needs of other vulnerable individuals within the household (Bergeron, 2016; Conlon et al., 2014). The latter depends on affective interactions and the existing relationship between who is providing and who is receiving the care. Even though we know how valuable this work is, individuals who provide this type of care (mostly women, as will be shown in the following statistics) are not paid[132] because this work is seen as self-rewarding, and it is done out of love and obligation. On the other hand, market work is seen as empowering for women since it can provide women with income, choice and autonomy; these are some of the incentives that led more women to enter gainful employment over the last decade.

[132] Here I am only referring when care taking roles are done within a family context and not a service bought from a third person outside the family context.

As previously mentioned, locally the rates of women in employment increased drastically over the last ten years. However, if we take a closer look at these statistics, they clearly show a discrepancy between the participation in employment with figures showing that more females (56%) than males (44%) have a part-time job as their primary employment (Jobsplus, 2022), or experience lack of employment stemming from sex differences, for example, 37.5% of women are inactive (i.e. not employed and not seeking employment) due to care or family responsibilities, whereas the reason listed for men's employment inactivity is reaching retirement age or uptake of early retirement (68.5%)[133] (Labour Market and Information Society Statistics Unit, 2023). Moreover, if one looks at the career prospects index outlined by the European Institute for Gender Equality (2023a), women who are in a relationship without children have the best career prospects, which even surpass those of men, however when the couple has children, the prospects of both genders are nearly the same with only 1% difference between them.

Furthermore, if we look at statistics taken during the COVID-19 pandemic period, it shows that 40% of women, as opposed to 21% of men, spent at least four hours a day looking after their young, and 20% of women and 12% of men engaged in housework for more than four hours per day during the same period (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022a). When looking at these statistics, one can state that this is not a local issue but a European one; however, Maltese women (over 50%, placing them at the top rank within the EU) stated that they are experiencing difficulties in combining paid work with care responsibilities[134] at least 4 days a week while on the contrary only 15% of the men are encountering these difficulties (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2023b).

[133] It is interesting to note that in the same survey there is not a statistic for males who are inactive as a consequence of care or family responsibilities and the justification given is that the statistic would be unreliable since there were less than 20 sample observations for that particular criteria.

[134] The question defined care responsibilities as "*providing care for (e.g., people with disabilities, older people, children), regardless of their age"* (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2023b).

In their 2023 study Begall et al. compared 36 countries to review the relationship between gender ideologies and gendered aspirations related to work and care roles or family roles. They found that even though individuals became more egalitarian-minded about women's role in the public sphere, especially in employment, they still hold traditional ideologies with regard to gendered responsibilities within the family and household. Begall et al. found that the highest number of individuals within their sample ascribe to multidimensional gender ideologies,[135] with "familialistic" ideology[136] being the highest. They define the familialistic ideology as one which believes that "preschool children suffer with a working mother and endorses the housewife role and women prioritising domestic tasks while at the same time being supportive of dual earning as well as male childcare and domestic responsibility" (Begall et al., 2023, p. 192). Malta, Ukraine, Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were the countries holding this ideology highly and as the dominant ideology. The women that I interviewed did not resonate with this ideology; however, they acknowledged that this is what is expected, so much so that they said that even if or when males help out with the house chores, it is still seen as an add-on for men but an obligation for women, such as stated by **W1**:

> **W1 (1.32)*** even though they (referring to men) are proactive within the house they still feel it's not completely their responsibility or they are an add on, you know like a bit of contribution (B: bonus), yes, yes, like who's is the responsibility for the management of the whole house?

The women participating in this research ascribe to more of a choice egalitarian ideology, which "reflects egalitarian attitudes toward mother's employment and men's suitability for childcare and domestic tasks in combination with endorsing the housewife role and low support for prescribed dual earning"[137] (Begall et al., 2023 p.196). The difference in results can be easily explained since individuals

[135] In a previous study the authors explain that even though gender ideologies are portrayed as being unidimensional with traditional ideologies at one end and egalitarian on the other, they argue that gender ideologies are indeed multidimensional since beliefs about gender roles are more complex than a linear continuum, hence giving the possibility to gather responses which are a combination of egalitarian and traditional viewpoints (Grunow et al., 2018).

[136] In the presented study two unidimensional classes (egalitarian and traditional) and four multidimensional classes (family oriented, choice egalitarian, intensive motherhood, and neotraditional) were observed (Begall et al., 2023).

[137] This ideology was mainly prevalent in Scandinavian countries, Slovakia, Portugal, and Serbia.

who supported the familialistic ideology are likely to be males, 50+, lower educated, not employed and married, whilst, amongst women, mothers are more likely to be in this category. On the other hand, respondents within the egalitarian category are "female, young, not religious, higher educated, employed…women without children" (p.196); these characteristics would describe the participants well. Begall et al. draw light on the notion that staying-at-home mothering can be seen as egalitarian if conceptualised from a choice feminist standpoint; the woman is taking this choice because she does not feel she has to enter gainful employment. In this case, the woman would be making use of her agency to choose between paid work and care work, as stated previously by **W8 (1.2)**.

Even though I agree with the notion that market work is empowering for women, we also have to consider that this might not always be the case, especially if the jobs that women can participate in are precarious and serve as a means of survival rather than liberation as can be seen locally when foreign women are employed in industries which are considered a female domain, such as care workers or cleaners. As previously stated, gendered divisions of labour are always shaped by social systems of power and hierarchy, which are the same systems that also shape and construct gender and gendered expectations. If we accept that gender is created at a micro, macro and interactional level, one has to inquire about how the policies and organisational systems in place perpetuate dominant patriarchal ideologies about women, reproduction and domesticity. In Malta, for example, the current maternity leave system or policy, where the maternity leave is of 18 weeks whereas the paternity leave is of only 10 days, is re-perpetuating the idea that women are the ones who should take most responsibility during child-rearing, whilst the "father's role" is to provide for the family.

Before moving to the next theme, I want to briefly address the heteronormative ways in which the divisions of labour 'assume' that domestic tasks are being divided between men and women. A heteronormative narrative was kept throughout this section since even though some of the participants identified as queer and were in same-sex relationships when speaking about divisions of

household chores and responsibilities of rearing children; they did not include or address same-sex relationships in their answers. This further demonstrates how ingrained these dominant discourses around gender and gender roles are in us that unless we actively reflect on them and question them, they are taken as given.

7.4 Internalisation or Rejection of Social Constructs.

Some of the participants reject the gender social constructs received (either knowingly or subconsciously). However, some participants also acknowledge that even though they thought they had rejected certain gendered social constructs, upon reflection, they acknowledged that these are so embedded in our behaviour that we uphold them subconsciously due to the internalisation process that we have been through throughout the years. When analysing the transcripts, it was interesting to note two anecdotes narrated by the same participant, which not only shed light on the dominant ideologies surrounding gender, which we are brought up with, but also the fact that we have agency when accepting or rejecting such ideologies. In turn, this resistance to dominant gender ideologies might also create a change or start a process of questioning in those individuals who originally imparted the dominant gendered ideologies in us.

> **W1 (1.12)*** my father never saw me as a woman, I have a younger brother, but my father never told me you are a girl so you don't go to university and your brother can go…my father even though from a working class background never thought that I was different and even till today, I mean my father is very very traditional but when he speaks to me he never speaks to me just as if I am a woman.

> **W1 (2.32)*** he told me you do not get discouraged, seems that he always assumes that because I am a woman I get discouraged.

As per **W1** statement, her father does not speak to her as if she is only a woman and did not stop her when she wanted to further her education. However, his dominant ideologies about women are seen

when he is surprised that she does not get discouraged, leading one to understand that the father assumes that women need someone's/man's help. **W1** stated statement **2.32** after she had given an example wherein she went to buy her son a bike and loaded the bike onto the car roof rack on her own without her husband's help; later on in the interview, the same woman stated that she confuses her father because she is the one talking to labourers when house maintenance needs to be done. Hence this led me to inquire about how or if we internalise or reject the gendered social constructs that we were socialised in.

Since this study adopts a feminist post-structuralist stance, whilst conducting my research, I was interested in both the discourses which created gender and gender identities that 'fit' within the dominant ideologies of gender and those which created/ demonstrated resistance to dominant ideas. Even though our subjective reality and gendered identity are constantly being re-constructed, one must acknowledge the impact of dominant discourses on our understanding of reality and how these discourses shape the context within which one can construct their subjectivity. Hence even though one might resist conforming to dominant gendered ideologies, these ideologies are ever present in our everyday interactions and actions and, upon reflection, we might find ourselves realising that even though in certain aspects of our identity we are resisting such discourses, in others we have internalised the dominant discourses and we are acting according to them.

The participants spoke about two ways in which they resisted the dominant gender ideologies imposed on them or expected from them. On the one hand, some of the participants, such as **W2 (2.24)**, stated that irrespective of how others wanted them to behave, they defied their wishes (however, without open confrontation).

> **W2 (2.24)*** He (referring to her father) used to tell me when I was still very young that women are not supposed to play or like football, if you look at me today I think I am the biggest female football fanatic.

On the other hand, other participants, such as **W4(2.24)**, openly confront the individuals who want them to conform to dominant social constructs. When narrating about how her mother wanted her to wear a different dress for a family event **W4** stated:

> **W4 (2.24)**
>
> she (referring to her mother) was if you are going to dress like that its, you are doing it on purpose for them to look at you and I was like they are older men with their wives and if they look at me they are the problem, I'm like in my 20's, they are next to their wife, if they are going to look at me, as in they are the problem not me…

The above statements not only demonstrate resistance towards how one ought to do their gender but also shows the interaction and intersectionality between gender, age, and sports. The latter two social categories have rather rigid concepts of what each gender has to do or how to behave. These statements lead us back again to statements about how gender is performed. Moreover, they show how the participants are being agentic in everyday occurrences by experiencing internal displacement and emancipation, as discussed in section 6.7 Agency vs. Backlash.

Contrary to what **W2** and **W4** mentioned in the previous section, **W6** recounted a conversation that she had recently had with her sister, which led her to the realisation that even though she would like to think that both she and her sister challenged dominant gender ideologies or gendered expectations, so much so that they used to challenge their mother about certain behaviours, now that they have partners they are repeating their mother's same actions.

> **W6 (1.8, 1.10)*** my sister and I as we were growing up in our teenage we used to challenge our mother and tell her not to behave in that way, that she has to take care of herself, and yet recently my sister and I were speaking and my sister yesterday without noticing, even though we used to try to open our mum's eyes we entered in the same patterns with our partners, both me and my sister, and we were a little bit shocked to be honest when we realised that even though we saw our mother and we told her not to do it, we did the same without noticing, in our relationship we put ourselves last (B: ehe), and it's a constant eeee trying to work on yourself…. I remember even consciously thinking, I don't want to be like my mother, you know, still unconsciously, they are there programmed in us.

Even though, throughout the interviews, **W6** showed a lot of insight into her relationships and how these impact on her as a woman and as an individual, the above quote, apart from showing the internalisation process of gendered ideologies, also demonstrates how such discourses are seen as "outside of us" and yet, how they are absorbed matter-of-factly. If we acknowledge that our understanding of and interaction with the social world depends on the social discourses around us, we also need to acknowledge that these discourses are being or were 'created' by someone or a group of people. Hence referring once again to how the discursive productions about women, women's bodies and women's temperament affected how social norms about reproduction, domestic work, and femininity were/are created to appease those who hold privilege, power and knowledge within a specific social context. For these discourses to stand the test of time, they need to be assimilated and thought of as being the way one ought to behave, placing them at a high rank in the hierarchy of dominant ideologies. One such discourse is that centring on gender performativity and how one ought to do gender so that one's gender is appropriately linked with their gender of choice or perceived gender.

W6, like **W3 (1.2, 1.4)**[138], while engaging in reflection about their gender and gender ideologies, they are coming to realisations about how the dominant discourses have shaped their identity and their expectations of gender or gendered actions. **W6** realised that her actions mimic those of her mother, leading her to place her partner and their needs before her own. On the other hand, **W3** still assumed that a man would hold such an important position as the CEO of the national general hospital. Hence highlighting the fact that even though one might be aware of social constructs or how discourses create that of which one speaks, we can still fall into the trap of the "taken-for-granted knowledge".

[138] This quote can be found in section 7.3.3

7.5 Identities Held by Interviewed Women

During the second interview, I specifically asked the participants to list or mention the identities they feel that they hold. Although, as a result of the first interview, I had started to get an idea of some of the most salient identities that the participants held as a result of how they discussed certain aspects of their lives or relationships that they hold as important, I did not want to guess or assume such facts. Moreover, I wanted to create a conversation about these identities to be able to link the mentioned identities, gender and any other intersecting identities that they might present. The discussions presented by the participants will be analysed using a combination of the dialogical self-theory (Hermans, 2011) and identity theory (Stryker, S. & Burke, 2000). Dialogical self-theory was deemed fitting for this research since internal discourse is central to this theory; just like for this research, this theory acknowledges that the internal positions (the parts of oneself) gain relevance depending on the importance that they are given from the external positions (significant individuals or environments); hence the internal is dependent on the external factors. Furthermore, dialogical self-theory also acknowledges what authors call the outside positions - parts of oneself that we are not as yet conscious of - but become aware of once a situation changes. Moreover, identity theory will be used to link further the results and discussions drawn from dialogical self-theory to the social context, hence also exploring the social impact on the participants' identity formation and re-creation.

In dialogical self-theory, I-position refers "to a highly dynamic process of positioning, repositioning and counter-positioning, in which persons place themselves or are placed vis-à-vis other positions in personal or social spaces in this way giving expression to their sense of agency" (Hermans & Gieser, 2012, p. 15). As per Ragatt (2011), I-positions are developed over time and are the result of intra-personal and inter-personal positioning; hence, the I develops as a result of our contact with the

environment, making it the result of a specific context. Moreover, as per Nir (2012) I-positions function as a social system, with each I-position having its own perspective or stance.

On the other hand, Stryker and Burke (2000) divide the above-mentioned various I-positions into role identities, that is, the different roles that the individual has within their social structure; group identities, that is, the meanings that the participants gather after interacting with a specific set of others such as their family or work colleagues, and person identities, that is, the unique characteristics which one sees in themselves.

Throughout this research, the notion that one's identity depends on one's context and how each identity can have its own introspection was evident in all discussions held with the participants; this was most evident when discussing their perception of womanhood and what it means for them to be a woman[139]. Even though there were similarities in the responses, each response reflected the participant's sense of identity depending on her social context as well as her reflexive ability. The same can be said for the responses received when the participants were asked about other identities that they hold (apart from the identity of a woman).

The participants identified various identities; however, they all mentioned their familial identities, such as mother, daughter, wife/girlfriend, sister, niece, and cousin, as their first responses to the question. After familial identities, most participants mentioned identities related to employment or the identities they derive from their work/ profession, such as academic, teacher, counsellor, therapist, support worker, allied health professional and artist. The initial responses presented by the participants show the bridge between the internal and external positions, whereby the participants' internal perception

[139] For example, W1, when reflecting on her portrayal of womanhood she had clearly stated that even though she wishes that she is not a typical Maltese woman, she has all the “ingredients” to be a typical Maltese woman (Section 6.0.1 W1 (2.4)).

is very much dependent on their role and group/s that they engage in within specific contexts. It is interesting to point out that the individuals whose I-position is linked to their profession have a profession that would be considered as giving further meaning to the internal positions and are professions considered positive by the rest of society. According to Hermans and Hermans-Konopka (2010), the embedded 'I' experience changes in social power because one moves from one position to another depending on the situation. Moreover, as has been discussed with regard to gender performativity, our internal dialogue is not solely our own, but it is also informed and formed by the collective voice; hence so as not to be shunned by our environments in most contexts, we portray characteristics or traits that society/ the group deem as positive. So much so that none of the women, for example, mentioned negative traits or characteristics, which obviously they have, but they disengaged from these identities. Like a social system, our identities are hierarchical, and those sustained over and again become dominant identities, whereas those we disengage from become less important or are rejected.

7.5.1 Intersecting Identities

Apart from discussing dominant identities, the participants also discussed identities considered intersecting, such as sexual orientation, disability, age and religion. These identities impact and are impacted upon by our social position since our identities derive from and result from the interaction with institutions such as culture and other members within our external context. As per the discussion on compulsory heterosexuality and heteronormativity, only the participants who do not identify as heterosexual mentioned their sexual orientation as part of their identities, and the majority of those who did mention it stated that it is quite an important/ dominant identity for them. However, such an identity, which to a certain extent defies the collective voice, can also create conflicts with other

identities. For example, when stating her identities, one participant[140] mentioned that she has very strong religious beliefs and teaches catechism, which is an important identity for her. The same participant stated that this identity clashes with her sexual orientation and that she was able to come to terms with her sexual orientation after engaging in therapy and after starting to attend meetings organised by a Catholic LGBTIQ group, which enabled her to understand further her religion and the role of LGBTIQ individuals in the church. She explained:

> **A*** it took lots of therapy to accept it because when when I discovered this within myself I said wow, don't speak to anyone about it, whatever, sort of bury it but then I had went to (names a NGO) and even they helped me to accept the fact that within a modern church there are still people on the outskirts, sort of, and even what they did recently wow sort of religion still teaches certain things but still we are all God's children, he created this….and that helped me, you know sort of I am God's daughter as much as my mother who is straight.

Moreover, this participant stated that religion was also important for her ex-girlfriend, so much so that they used to attend mass and other religious activities together and use their relationship to further their spiritual journey.

> **B*** both of us were involved in the church at times we even used to go to mass together….so on Sunday we used to attend our own parishes but on Saturday night we used to hear mass together in another parish where no one would know us, not to escape but, we made it something our own sort of….it was our own spiritual.

The latter demonstrates what Hermans and Hermans-Konopka (2010) term as third positions, whereby two conflicting identities find conciliation by forming a third identity; in this case, someone who is using her religious teachings to understand better her sexual orientation as well as her role within the church. Raggatt (2012) states that we engage in 'reflexive positioning' when there is dialogical tension between opposing positions, and in most situations, these tensions originate from the discrepancy between individual and collective voices. As a result of the reflexive positioning, we are able to distinguish between the influences of external positions, that is, "others-in-the-self" (p.34) and internal positions, "otherness-in-the-self" (p.34). However, in the case of this particular participant, the process of

[140] The participant's code was not inserted in this section so as to further anonymise the participants, since when discussing intersecting identities in small communities within a small population such as Malta it is easier to identify the participant due to proximity.

reflexive positioning does not seem to be complete since, whilst we were discussing this topic, she stated that she wants to be married using the Catholic rite (which does not allow same-sex unions).

The voice of the collective and dominant discourses could be heard in the participant's responses because one of the reasons she gave for wanting to have a religious marriage was that there is a better sense of commitment in persons who engage in such marriages compared to others who engage in civil marriages. She also stated that if she wants to engage in a religious marriage, it is obvious that she must prefer heterosexual relationships, hence consciously choosing to engage in compulsory heterosexuality so as not to be shunned by her external context. However, when I inquired about what she would do if the love of her life was a woman, she responded that in that case, she would have to accept it and get married civilly only and maybe find a priest who would be willing to bless their unions[141], hence demonstrating some integration between the internal and external context. The participant's automatic assumption that she will be married using the Catholic rite also shows that the saliency of her religious identity is higher on her identity salience hierarchy than the identity she gains as a result of her sexual orientation. The latter could also be hypothesised since, at the time of the interview, she was still very much involved in various religious activities within her parish church, but she had stopped attending the LGBTIQ Catholic group and was not involved in any other activities/groups which would sustain her sexual orientation identity. As previously mentioned, this participant had a complex coming out, and her family background is rather religious; hence, this could be another factor whereby how she sees herself within her sexual orientation compared to how her significant others see her within that identity might not create enough positive emotions to sustain such identity.

[141] At the time of the interview Pope Francis had not given the priests permission to bless same-sex unions.

Whilst the participant mentioned above is still somewhat coming to a compromise between the others-in-the-self and the otherness-in-the-self, another participant who stated that she has a disability seems to be more engaged in reflexive positioning and that her disability is another identity she has. The participant emphasised that her disability is not her main or only identity but one of many, **C*** *"I think having a disability is part of it, but it's not my identity, it's one of"*. She stated that she cannot deny that this identity impacts other identities; however, she stated that the impact is not a result of her internal positions but because of external positions. For example, even though she adopts a sort of take-it-or-leave-it attitude with regard to being accepted by people in general, she stated that she is cautious about her attire when she is meeting someone for the first time (especially if it is an important meeting) because it impacts how people receive her; experience has taught her that their attitude towards her will perhaps change to a patronising one or they may enter into saviour mode. In this case, the identity assimilation is more congruent because even though she realises that other's perceptions of her might change when they get to know that she has a disability, her own identity standard does not change since what others think about the participant's disability does not alter her self-concept.

> **D*** I'm aware of how people are going to view me differently when I wear erm, a skirt or shorts, the approach from people is completely different....I do think unfortunately we are still there, and people are afraid to ask, jigifieri (*that is*) other than ask they decide for you, imma (*but*) we are still in that phase, I had to accept it, but people are patronising.

Moreover, the change of behaviour of other individuals towards the participant demonstrates society's dominant ideologies towards persons with disabilities who, up to this day, are still seen as less able than the rest of society.

Another intersecting identity mentioned by the participants in various stages of the interviews was age; the participants did not mention that they identify with a particular age group, but they stated that on various occasions, they were treated differently, either patronised or their opinion was not taken in consideration because they were considered "young women" by others.

> **W1 (1.24…1.26)*** I always present myself as ***** (states name)…for me…titles are difficult because what are you, Dr, Mr, Miss, Mrs you know, so I ***** first name basis so I am ***** and they tell me ok **Miss** (emphasis on the word) and you know that Miss is patronising and it's because they want to put you in your place (B: yes, yes) yes and you have to, yes I think that for a woman its more difficult to assert herself then you know what I'm saying?....and I

always have the age problem as well, I am always the youngest so everything is against me, there is the fact that I am a woman, the fact that I am young, those things work against me.

W7 (1.54…1.56)* And I think that age is still a determining factor for example, I two years ago was 21-22 and I was the youngest in the office and a woman so they did not use to take me seriously, sort of they used to think what does she know just out of university and never worked before…it might have been the case that if I was a man they would have seen a potential in me, because I think then there are stereotypes as well, a young man and a young woman both of them say the same thing, but you say that the man "has leadership potential and he will go places". On the other hand, for the woman, who does she think she is? She wants to get promoted instantly, she has to take it step by step, why is she aiming so high?

The above statements show the outcomes that we experience as a result of multiple I-positions that we hold, their place in the identities hierarchy, their interaction with each other and their interaction with the external positions. For the participants mentioned in the previous paragraphs, their sexual orientation and disability were I-positions that they ascribed to and might be considered as part of their dominant identities; hence, they would be more aware of the impact of the external environment. On the other hand, even though for the participants **W1** and **W7**, age was not maybe an I-position that they would automatically identify with and might not have been high on their identity hierarchy, they still felt the impact of the external positions, such as their work environment; thus, demonstrating the extent of the external positions' effect on our internal positions.

7.5.2 Impact of internal and external positions on the woman I-position

The correlation between the internal and external positions intrigued me from the start of this research, especially the participants' dominant I-positions vis-a-vis their identity as a woman. For some of the participants, there seems to be a symbiotic relationship between the dominant identities whereby one identity impacts the other, making it more challenging to walk away from certain identities because it will impact the other identities and the external positions (**W4 (2.28)** and **W1 (2.90)**).

W4 (2.28)

All combined and in they just make me **** (states name), I guess? so I feel like, I don't know it's very ironic....I guess me being a woman helps me within these contexts but at the same time these contexts are impacted as well with me being a woman, so for instance if at work they maybe some different behaviour cause I'm a woman it would be impacted but at the same time in other contexts maybe something positive, the job for instance may help me that certain characteristics within my womanhood and my feminine side are able to get expressed that will help my within my job

W1 (2.90)* I like to say that they are always enriching but they are not you know, sometimes they are a bit tiring… at the same time, I cannot divorce myself from these identities as well, because it would feel very silly, so if I had to draw a diagram, I would draw arrows in both directions me and my identities and maybe I would even draw an upward arrow because they are all connected.

For others, the impact of identities on the I-position of a woman and their doing of womanhood changes according to their context because the latter determines how they can project their identity (**W11 (2.42)** and **W5(2.38)**).

W11 (2.42)

I don't think it's the same ghax (*because*) you take on a different role every time, being a daughter is different than being a sister erm...it changes automatically maybe not consciously but automatically it does change you have a more supportive role or a more erm...receiving role, or a more giving role, jigifieri (*meaning*) that changes accordingly.

W5 (2.28)

even at work, sometimes the situations with my clients require you to be more assertive so, erm sometimes I do show more of an assertive, mhux (*not*) dominance, imma (but), stronger in the sense of ha niqaflek (*I will stand up to you*) side than other times.

In her interview, **W9** stated that the context does not only determine how she portrays her womanhood but also her sexual orientation, that is, for example, if or when she discloses her sexual orientation, hence going back again to the notion of how dominant discourses and the collective voice impact our identities and I-positions. This notion aligns with Raggatt's (2012) concept of embodiment, whereby different I-positions would determine how one presents themselves to others is very much dependent on "the voices within" (Raggatt, 2012, p. 363).

Another area of inquiry was the impact that other women had on the participants in forming their I-position as a woman. By delving deeper into this notion, I wanted to explore which behaviours, characteristics or roles these participants obtained and retained from other women, hence leading to positions that are appropriated and accepted as part of the self or disengaged and therefore rejected (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). Even though most of the participants stated that their first model of how to be a woman was their mother, most of the participants disengaged with the characteristics that their mother portrayed, so much so that they stated that they did not want to be like their mothers because these women are: self-sacrificing, do not show emotional connectedness, are constantly taking care of others or serving others, people take advantage of them, and they portray an image of women as being weak and accept everything. The disengaged characteristics mentioned by the participants are not characteristics deemed positive, nor would one aspire to relive the experiences that the mentioned women passed through. When the participants mentioned women whom they thought were role models and whose characteristics they appropriated, they mentioned characteristics which are in opposition to the ones presented to them by their mothers.

> **W6 (2.49)*** I think my mummy was the first example of what it is to be a woman and there were things, I spent a long time trying to be like her, especially in my teenage… erm… it didn't really work out for me because it was very self-sacrificing and I wasn't happy when you are constantly sacrificing yourself, I was depressed you know, so erm then there is for example, my therapist who was a woman, who was also a big role model for, where I tried to start learning how a woman does not have to be self-serving (B: mhm,mhm), she can also take care of herself and still be a good woman, and sort of attractive, not attractive in a romantic or sexual way but

in the sense of someone I would want to aspire to be like….erm… someone that other people I think would consider like successful.

W2 (2.20)* mummy always tells me that at times it's better to not say anything rather than start an argument…my current top female role model is Roberta Metsola…whatever she has to say she says it, and even that fighting spirit sort of I draw from her, I never met her but considering what she did in her life and that she has a lot of commonalities with me especially her origins they inspire in me a lot, even how she thinks about certain issues.

W6 and **W2**, present distinct dualities where on one side you have women who are self-sacrificing and 'quiet', on the other hand, there is the presentation of women who are more self-assured and not afraid to make their voice heard, and their presence felt. One of the Gozitan participants mentioned that she had always admired a relative who, around twenty years ago, was a single mother of two children by choice. The participant mentioned that at the time, everyone kept suggesting to this relative to get married, but she did not want to and apart from raising her children, she had also had a successful career. The participant during the interview had discussed that Gozo is more conservative than Malta (especially twenty years ago), hence one can see the difference between this relative and how the participant described her mother as a traditional woman "serving her husband."

Another exciting dichotomy presented by the participants was conservative women whose lives centre around the family instead of managing a thriving career and being a mother, hence not choosing one identity over the other. The interesting aspect of this statement by **W1** was that the participant did not feel that the professional women mentioned hereunder were engaging in both identities (mother, professional) because they were expected to but because they wanted to.

W1 (2.80)* I started studying and I started seeing other women… and the fact that I saw these popular women who wrote whatever and they brought their children with them for a lecture because they did not have a babysitter, and they told us now the child will stay playing on a device which they had and whatever, but they told us so what I have children, and there my eyes were opened, both aspects are not a contradiction you know, and they spoke about their children, and it was normal not a taboo, sort of yes by the way I have children, but we will not speak about that because I am an academic and I there ********* (names the foreign

> university where she studied) was an eye-opening experience for me, most of my lecturers were women and they did not mind speaking about their pets, and they did not mind speaking about the fact that they were obviously successful in their own right.

Throughout both interviews, **W12,** at different stages, referred to the impact that other women, especially her mother, had on not only her acquisition of a gendered identity but also on what we think or how we perceive society. According to her, since the mother is the primary caregiver, she is the one who will pass on such notions as beliefs, stereotypes and norms, and this acquisition not only occurs as a result of what we hear (language) but also about what we saw, hence the interaction between the verbal and the non-verbal. The latter does not only impact how we do gender, but we also learn what to expect, for example, how to be treated by others. In section 7.3.3, I presented a statement by the same participant (**W12 (2.26)**) where she had described that she had used her father as a model of what a man has to do at home, consequently expecting her husband to help her in the house chores because her father used to help out her mother. Hence, to a certain extent, the latter demonstrates the cyclical effect where our social context is created by dominant discourses and at the same time, such discourses are re-created/ sustained by the social context. Moreover, our internalised positions follow the same cycle and are projected according to the specific social context.

Throughout both interviews, the participants discussed their gender from both the macro (social structure) and the micro (identity) level, which seems to demonstrate that even though some participants might not have been aware of the various theories related to gender and performativity, they were aware that the way through which they are doing their gender is impacted by both the social and the personal element. Carter (2014) states that gender identities are diffuse identities; they can assume the person, role and social identity. This notion was seen in this study, whereby on a personal level/identity, all participants identified as women and discussed how this identity is important to them and even those who stated that a woman's life is more difficult than a man's would still 'choose' to be women given the option. Apart from adopting a female identity for their personal identity, the participants voiced statements such as 'we as women', showing that being a woman is also a social

identity for them. The participants have also described roles they took that are congruent with their gender, for example, being a mother or wife; moreover, they discussed how these gendered roles were learnt from an early age and were internalised according to dominant scripts. However, even though the participants linked their gender identity to their role identities, the participants showed that they did not necessarily follow the conventional 'milestones' set by society, especially by their parents, for example, some participants chose to further their education and careers before starting a family, or they even discussed that they do not want to have children; however, the latter does not exclude or diminish the role that these women have within their intimate relationships and families.

7.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, results and discussions about what the participants learned about being a woman from past generations, how they perceive their gender, and how they are expected to engage in specific roles because they label themselves as women were presented.

W6, when discussing her journey as a woman, sums up the narratives presented by the other participants and their viewpoints about what being a woman entails and how society views and treats women. Furthermore, the below statement seems to suggest that the different journeys that we as women experience whilst creating our womanhood, these journeys are impacted by dominant ideologies of male privilege, violence against women and child-rearing.

> **W6 (1.2)*** I was proud that I was a girl because I felt like I had won the lottery that I was a girl, because I used to say ehh I can wear make-up, nice clothes and shoes, do my nails, between the ages of 6 and 10, I felt lucky that I was a girl and not a boy, because boys are boring, they don't do make up so for me it was a jackpot, and I remember even feeling that I have to tell others, "but I am a girl"…that was as a child when I started growing up and became a teenager I felt the opposite, I felt unlucky that I was a girl, actually when I started realising about periods and the pain, and the fear of being raped, and about catcalling, and about the pain of childbirth. And why do I get pregnant and not the man? And I used to hate being a woman for some time.

In the following chapter, the presented findings and their analysis will be discussed regarding how they enabled me to draw findings and answer the research questions posed at the beginning of this study.

Chapter 8- Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This thesis aimed to explore how Maltese women identify and define their gender. This aim was further explored by looking at the role that discourse plays in how women form and perform their gendered identity. The mentioned aims stemmed from my activist and social work carried out with gender and sexually diverse individuals, where in several cases, labels such as 'woman' do not necessarily mean being born a woman but entail other constructs which are mainly socially produced and re-produced as a result or in defiance of dominant discourses. Several reasons informed the decision to conduct the current study within the Maltese context, such as: the lack of research about gendered identity formation within local academia; the particular social context experienced by women as a result of the enmeshment between Catholic teachings and the expectations of women and its impact on the social expectations of women; and the legal shifts experienced in the past years granting several rights to LGBTIQ individuals which have created discussion about gender, identity and gender expression. Furthermore, since I was brought up in Malta, I would be better placed to understand the narratives and discourses presented by the participants.

Since the study adopted a feminist post-structuralist theoretical standpoint, conducting the research within the local context enabled me to identify further and understand the dominant discourses and their interplay with the re-creation of power and knowledge. The adopted theoretical framework enabled me to explore and deconstruct taken-for-granted notions such as gender and the performativity of gendered identity. Moreover, it facilitated my inquiry about how dominant discourses are created and, in turn, re-create social constructs, where such social constructs are so ingrained in our everyday lives and language that they are taken as given or the norm. Furthermore, the selected standpoint enabled me to engage in a reflexive process that questioned not only gender and the social constructs stemming from dominant discourses but also whom these dominant discourses serve and how these impact women's lived experiences. The exploration of the notions mentioned above was

carried out after a comprehensive review of literature on gender, discourse and identity, and an evaluation of which literature was salient in enabling me to formulate the research questions for this thesis.

From a theoretical perspective, this study made several contributions to the field of gender and sexuality studies. As previously stated, research about identity formation is somewhat lacking in local academia; this study sheds some insights into how local women engage and create their gendered identity as a result of, and simultaneously despite, dominant discourses and social expectations. In this research, the theoretical understanding of gender was approached by using different standpoints to get a more holistic understanding of the subject at hand and to enable the researcher to study the topic from different perspectives. That is why a vast theoretical input was placed in the literature review.

When it came to the gathering of data, both feminist post-structuralist and symbolic interactionist epistomologies were adopted. This enabled the researcher to study gender, identity and discourse from a macro and micro level. An intersectional approach was adopted to explore how macro discourses/structures impacted female participants located and positioned differently in Maltese culture due to their different intersections.

One key element of this research is how the interviewed women construct and negotiate their gendered identities in response to and in defiance of prevailing discourses and societal expectations. Notwithstanding the latter, most of the participants acknowledged that they have, internalised certain social expectations that they critiqued in other women, especially their mothers. The process of the interviewes triggered reflexivity in the participants which enabled them to work on themselves and be agents of change, albeit on a micro level. The results suggest that in the production of our gendered identities, we engage in a cycle, as presented figuratively in Figure 6 (p. 191), whereby one either defies dominant discourses and social expectations by engaging in everyday acts of resistance or assimilating dominant discourses by acting in accordance to social expectations.

8.2 General Findings

The findings of this research indicate that Maltese cis-gender women identify and define their gender-based identity on the interplay between the social, the performative and being agentic according to their own terms. This interplay is very much impacted by dominant discourses such as patriarchy and heteronormativity. Moreover, the participants showed different levels of reflexive processes, enabling them to reflect and discuss their gendered identity. I want to start by highlighting two findings, 8.2.1 and 8.2.2; which are deemed to be general findings since these portray findings which address a wider scope than that set by the research questions; these are followed by findings directly related to the research questions (section 8.3).

8.2.1 Difficulty in accessing Trans* communities

A significant element encountered within this research shows that even though several measures were taken specifically so as to have trans* women participating in this study, all the women who contacted me to participate identified as cis-gender. Measures taken included: asking participants if they identify as women (without any restrictions or specifics as to how one identifies as a woman in order to participate); specifically stating that the study is about gender within the local context; and also having the two biggest LGBTIQ NGO's on the island sharing the recruitment poster on their social groups two days prior to sharing the same poster on a more mainstream women's only social group. To a certain extent, I am known within the LGBTIQ community as a result of being an activist and having worked in the field as a social worker with the main service offering support to LGBITQ persons for several years, hence I am hoping that the lack of representation was not because the prospective participants may have thought that I am trans*phobic. The lack of trans* representation was rather disappointing for me. I had wished to have trans* representation in my study since a transwoman's reality, especially about her gendered identity, might have highlighted a different lived experience from a cis woman's.

Nonetheless, this outcome shows that there are still women whose intersecting identities make it more difficult for researchers when trying to access their experience; the latter is a factor which needs to be further considered when conducting future research about the subject by either making more effort to engage such demographic or taking further specific measures in order to access underrepresented women so that their experiences are also addressed.

8.2.2 Dominant Discourses and The Reinforcement of Patriarchal Ideologies

While reflecting and analysing the data gathered, I kept thinking that the responses were responses that people working in the gender field (be they academics or activists) have been talking about for several years. The data indicates the level of misogyny and patriarchal culture that women must navigate through on a daily basis, leading them to feel objectified, unsafe, that our social roles determine our value and that it is expected we juggle domestic and career/paid employment responsibilities. The relevance and importance of this finding is that such notions are not being put forward by experts in the field but by women who might not necessarily know about the theoretical or activist underpinnings of such notions. This strongly suggests that they have learnt about misogyny and male privilege at their own expense by living within our local context. The responses presented by the participants not only suggest that patriarchal ideologies are still very much present in our society but also that these ideologies continue to sustain misogynistic practices. As per Walby (1990), patriarchal ideologies still seem to control social institutions, resulting in women having less access to legislative power. One aspect of this is that even though there is more support from the Maltese public for gender balance in parliament (Bezzina et al., 2022) this does not necessarily lead to more women being elected via the initial election process. Patriarchal ideologies within our local context can also be seen in how, as a result of the male gaze, female objectification is "normatized" (Ponterotto, 2016), giving leeway to stranger sexual harassment, and leading the participants to experience a decreasing sense of security.

Furthermore, the participants seemed very aware that if they had to be victims of violence, their actions would be questioned, and they may be susceptible to victim blaming. As a result, they consciously engage in self-surveillance (Bartky, 1998), where they scrutinise what they wear and how others interpret their appearance since they would not want to give a 'wrong' message. This further suggests that not only are women not feeling safe but also that their expression of their womanhood is being dictated by what is thought to be appropriate clothing. The findings seem to align with Bartky's (1998) notion that social order is maintained as a result of controlling gender, especially the portrayal of femininity.

Additionally, several participants remarked that the experiences they were describing appeared to be representative of the lived realities of women in Malta, further pointing out that no tangible efforts were being undertaken to effect a transformative change to the existing situation. These responses were mainly stated when, during the interviewes, the participants were discussing violence against women and women's safety, specifically referring to cases of femicide which had happened during or just before the interviews took place and where the perpetrators were men known to the police, or reports had already been filed against them with regards to domestic violence; however, it seemed that limited action was taken against the perpetrators at the expense of the victims.

The participants spoke about patriarchy and the issues faced by women from a secular perspective. For me as a researcher this was quite interesting since I had expected the participants to discuss more the role and influence of the Catholic Church, since it is still considered a strong institution locally.

8.3 Key Research Findings

8.3.1 Participants' Construction of Gender: A Personal Reality Moulded by Social Constructs and Expectations.

A key finding from this research was that gender is still one of the dominant social institutions with established norms that individuals must adhere to in order to conform to their self-identified gender. Each participant had already constructed her gender prior to the interview since this was an opt-in study with the condition that participants had to identify as women to be eligible to participate; since each participant contacted me with the intent to participate in such a study, she had automatically "constructed" her gender from the get-go. Furthermore, throughout the whole interview process, the participants were constantly discussing what it means to be a woman to them; this gave them the opportunity to discuss both constructs to which they adhere or that they have assimilated as well as the ones which they try to move away from or regard as not representing them. The participants also mention several social instances that had enabled them to build their gender identity or become a woman (De Beauvoir, 1956). The participants' responses when asked how they re-enacted social constructs gave me a glimpse of how they do their gender on an ongoing basis. If we understand gender as a process of becoming, then we become our gender by adhering to or defying what our society expects us to be. Throughout the analysis, this could be observed in several instances which addressed generational influence on the participants' assimilation of gender, especially their mother's impact on how they understood what a woman is and/or ought to be (Bem, 1983; Perales et al., 2021). It is interesting to note that most participants stated that when growing up, they did not want to become like their mother since she was seen as someone who was constantly serving others whilst placing herself last. However, most of the participants also admitted that they are following in their mother's footsteps or, upon reflection, realised that they have assimilated certain social expectations, for which they would have criticised their mother. The latter seems to suggest that the participants unknowingly

adopted the same role identity as their mothers since several participants either engaged in the same roles which they attributed to their mothers/ women or envisioned that they would "end up" like their mothers. Despite taking on the same role identity, the participants seemed to be aware that the differences in the roles undertaken by individuals are based on their gender (Carter, 2014); this was, for example, observed when the participants spoke about domestic and childrearing roles. In several instances throughout the interviews, the participants spoke about women as a group and what was expected of us as women, suggesting that the participants adopted their gendered identity as one of their social identities (Carter, 2014) The participants' discussion of gender as a social structure and a personal identity seems to show that they are able to recognise and differentiate between the macro and micro aspects of gender (Carter, 2014).

8.3.2 Research Finding: Social Expectations: Women Have to Do It All

Throughout the responses, there seemed to be one factor that all participants mentioned and they followed a similar narrative, and this was the fact that even though social realities seem to be changing, enabling women to further engage in gainful employment, family and domestic obligations are still seen as a woman's responsibility (Bergeron, 2016; European Institute for Gender Equality, 2023a). Even though some participants stated that they did not want to have children or were not planning to have children for the time being, they all stated that a woman's value and worth are still linked to her ability to have children, whereas a man's value and worth are not similarly linked (Bergeron, 2016). The participants discussed at great length how domestic roles are still seen as a woman's domain whilst they are also expected to have a career or a job outside of the house, and how their male partner's support in the house and the rearing of children is still seen as a bonus or as something that he is not expected to do but may just contribute to. These findings suggest a prevailing tendency to associate dominant dichotomies around terms such as production vs. reproduction, paid vs. unpaid work, and

public vs. private domain with males or individuals holding power and privilege. As in the findings this raises the question of how these discourse dichotomies and the construction of gender mutually reinforce and perpetuate dominant ideologies within society.

8.3.3 Gender Performativity

A third key finding for this research was that participants used notions such as looking like or 'passing' as a woman when discussing notions such as the satisfactory attainment of gender and the impact that the latter has on the self and on others. Such responses seem to suggest that even though concepts related to passing and embodiment are typically associated with trans* individuals, cis-women still have to 'pass' as women or embody dominant constructs dictating what being a woman looks like (Butler, 1990; De Beauvoir, 1956; Merleau-Ponty, 1945). This finding emphasises the cultural corporeality of gender whereby, for a woman to be perceived as such, she has to sustain the re-creation of her womanhood to align with the specific historical and social context. Most participants distinguished between how they do their gender, how society expects them to do their gender and how other women do their own gender. This seems to suggest that even though most of the participants never engaged in a conscious reflection about their gender, they are aware of how society expects them to be 'a woman', leading them to either take gender as given or to challenge such expectations. When analysing the participants' responses, it seemed to be clear that the participants were aware of the areas where they were not performing their gender at the level that society would consider satisfactory.

Another interesting finding was that dominant discourses act as a tool of control not only with regard to women but also against anyone who seems to defy the status quo or dominant ideologies. This finding was deduced after analysing the participants' responses which suggested that even though

women are more likely to be sanctioned when they do not act according to social expectations and, in most situations, women are placed in a double bind, where we are damned if we do and damned if we do not. The participants further acknowledged that men too have to follow very rigid expectations when it comes to their gender performativity. So much so that several of the participants commented that women are freer, to a certain extent, to perform their own take on their gender; however, not the same could be said for men, and these participants discussed examples of how men are labelled if they are perceived as effeminate or if they are seen as being too close to other men, or if they wear clothes or makeup which are not considered as stereotypically masculine.

8.3.4 Participants' Agency in Deconstructing Gender.

The fact that some women within the study shifted their gender identity outside of the expected norms suggests that they were agentic, whilst at the same time showing that gender is a salient identity (Carter, 2014). Furthermore, the findings seem to suggest that the participants were able to differentiate between the micro and macro levels of gender (Stets & Burke, 1996) since their behaviour, which is the product of their gender performativity, which is in turn the result of the persons' gendered identity, was not changed to accommodate dominant discourses (macro levels of gender). The participants seemed not only aware of the social constructs and how these lead society to expect them to behave in specific ways, but they were also very much aware of the dominant discourses around gender and the dichotomies which are very much present in women's lives. This finding is important because it seems to suggest that once a person is able to differentiate between the micro (personal) and the macro levels of gender, they can challenge dominant notions or taken-for-granted constructs of gender.

The participants seemed to show resistance to engaging in social expectations, with participants who adhere to social milestones doing so with some tweaks. For example, participants who were married chose to delay having children to focus on their academic prospects, whilst others in a relationship at the time of the interviews stated that they did not want children. When reflecting on the responses presented by the participants, they seem to be presenting two polarities. On the one hand, they speak of women and the expectations of womanhood using discourses reflecting dominant ideologies, following heteronormative expectations, whilst on the other hand, as can be seen from the above examples, the participants do engage in various forms of resistance towards dominant ideologies. These polarities seem to reflect pragmatist notions and concepts presented by dialogical self-theory whereby our identities are made up of the compromise between conflicting selves, and the selves that we affirm become our identity (Barresi, 2002; Burke, P. J. & Stets, 2009). This is significant because the more one affirms actions that resist dominant discourses, the more emancipated one can become since, as per McNay (2016), internal displacement leads to emancipation.

8.3.5 Impact of Heteronormative Discourses

A noteworthy finding was that all the participants, even those who identified as gay/queer, followed a heteronormative temporality (Halberstam, 2005) when discussing their achieved or expected milestones. This seems to suggest that even those participants who are not in opposite-sex relationships portrayed themselves and their relationships within heteronormative ideologies. Moreover, the participants' narratives highlight how dominant such discourses are; for example, this is clearly observed when discussing roles within the household and the rearing of children. Each participant spoke about opposite-sex couples, ignoring that this narrative might not apply to them since some of them stated that they were in a relationship with another woman. The latter also sheds light on the notion that the participants not only seemed to adhere to heterosexual temporalities but might have still thought of heterosexual relationships as the 'normal' or 'valid' relationship. This makes

one wonder about how they view or construct their different roles in same-sex relationships. Furthermore, by the participants frame the social expectations about women within a heteronormative framework (irrespective of their own variance or lived experience), it seems to suggest that, from a social perspective, women can only exist or present themselves within a heteronormative paradigm.

8.3.6 Gender Identity and Reflexivity

I was somewhat surprised that all the participants made a clear distinction between sex and gender; the reason behind my surprise was that in my line of work (both as an academic and activist), I had met several individuals who were not able to make the distinction between the two or who had a somewhat limited definition of what gender or sex are, by for example linking one of them to sexual orientation. As highlighted in other sections, most participants had at least tertiary education; however, I do not think this was the only explanation for the participants' awareness of such definitions and knowledge about the topic. When I reflected on and analysed the participants' responses, I could apprehend that their knowledge also stemmed from their ability to reflect on their gender, social constructs and discourses related to such concepts. The reflection process could be seen as the participants made links and comparisons between their personal experiences and the experiences of other women, which suggested that they are able to view themselves from the perspective of the other, leading to self-reflection (Callero, 2003; Gillespie, 2007). By engaging in the reflexive process, the participants seemed to be aware of the social expectations and norms and how they would be perceived if they did not conform to such norms. Then again, as a result of the same reflexive process, the participants seemed to be aware of what aspects of their gendered identity they were not performing according to said social expectations and norms; the latter seems to align with Archer's (2007) notion of reflexivity which states that individuals are aware of the self-in-relation-with-others thus enabling them to define their understanding of the self in relation to the social context.

Prior to the first interview, some of the participants had never engaged in actively reflecting on or about the performativity of their gender identity and their gendered identity was taken for granted. Nonetheless, most of the participants were aware of the issues that women face as a result of being women, that is, as a result of our gender identity. This seems to show that even though some of the participants did not engage in a reflexive process about their gendered identity, they did engage in a reflexive process about the social expectations linked to their gender identity, and some of these social expectations were not taken as given since some of the participants showed resistance to such expectations. This finding aligns with McNay's (1999) interpretation of critical reflexivity since the participants seem to seem to be questioning the conventional notions of femininity. Moreover, the participants seem to be negotiating the fit between the habitus and the field since, within certain constructs, they conceptualise femininity from a conventional standpoint, whilst in others demonstrate different levels of agency.

8.4 Recommendations

8.4.1 Recommendations for Research

The above-presented findings suggest that further research needs to be carried out covering areas such as agency, heteronormative discourses and gender performativity, as per the hereunder recommendations.

- Throughout this research, several instances of everyday resistance towards dominant discourses were highlighted; however, further research regarding everyday personal agency could shed light on how individuals can resist and deconstruct dominant gender ideologies in their everyday performativity of gender.

- Further research on the role of heteronormative discourses and the impact on the formation and social expectations of same-sex couples or relationships is needed since, as highlighted in this thesis, participants who were in same-sex relationships or identified as queer still referred to a predominantly heteronormative description of the roles undertaken by individuals in relationships.

- To be able to gain further insight into how one's gender performativity and the impact of dominant discourses change over time, a longitudinal study could be undertaken where the participants would be interviewed periodically (for example, every 5 years) with the intent to compare how their understanding of, and definition of, their gendered identity alter.

- For future studies focusing on gendered identities, especially women's, specific efforts must be made when researching such topics, so that women at various intersections are attracted to such research to ensure more intersectional academic studies.

- A comparative study to this research could be carried out with trans* identifying participants to explore which dominant discourses impact their gender identity and their gendered identity.

8.4.2 Recommendations for Policy

As this research highlights, patriarchal ideologies are still dominant within most institutions, impacting women's everyday lived experience; hence, further shifts in local policies need to be made so that women's needs and wants can be better represented, which would guarantee the possibility of reaching higher positions within our society.

    - Studies such as Bezzina et al. (2022) and the 2021 general election highlight that implementing gender corrective mechanisms without engaging in other changes does

not generate the desired effect. Hence, further changes to how the parliament operates, such as holding parliamentary sessions in the morning and having the availability of childcare facilities on site, could be beneficial not only for women but also for men who want to take a more active role in the rearing of their children. These changes should also be accompanied by changes that tackle the boys' club mentality.

  - Furthermore, better distribution of parental leave or providing the possibility for fathers to take more paternal leave could enable both partners (in opposite-sex relationships) to participate in the early days of rearing their children.

- Throughout the interviews several participants mentioned either their experiences of violence against women, or domestic violence or violence experienced by women close to them. Even those women who did not experience such violence mentioned that they do not feel safe in Malta and that they do not feel that necessary action will be taken if something happens to them. Therefore, a more streamlined approach should be employed by the judicial system and police force to ensure that swift action will be taken in cases of violence against women and that such action will be followed through if the case merits this. This would increase women's sense of safety and security, enabling them to be more active in reporting harassment and violent incidents to the policies and/or leaving abusive relationships.

- Moreover, further awareness about violence against women should be made, which not only targets cis-gender Maltese women in opposite-sex relationships but ones which adopt an intersectional approach; additionally, it should take into consideration specific issues such as language and cultural practices.

- Further importance should be given within our educational system to subjects which will promote critical thinking since these would better equip students with the ability to question dominant discourses which promote patriarchal and misogynistic ideologies.

8.5 Limitations to the Study

As has been mentioned in other parts of this thesis, a limitation of this study was that on specific aspects such as gender identity, race and educational level, the participants who opted in for the study had relatively homogeneous backgrounds since they all identified as cis-gender, white and nearly all of them had at least tertiary education. This homogeneity could be resulting from the fact that this was an opt-in study, and women who might have felt confident to contact me would be ones who are interested in the topic and would have an element of privilege compared to other women, which would not make them concerned that they would be discriminated against based on their intersecting identities. Another factor which could have contributed to this homogeneity is that one of the purposes of the women only social media group is to raise awareness about women's rights hence the participants who contacted me through this group could have been more exposed to discourses about gender, and gender identity. Notwithstanding the mentioned commonalities, the participants came from different walks of life and presented several intersecting identities within their own rights, and the issues discussed are issues that are quite prevalent in Malta. The sample size could also be considered a limitation; however, as discussed in the methodology chapter, even though such research cannot encompass the totality of understandings of womanhood, it sought to explain the most salient discourses of gender and performativity within the local context.

8.6 Conclusion

As presented throughout this thesis, our gendered identity is one of our salient identities, which impact most of our interactions with others and our social context. By focusing on the interplay between gender, discourse and identity formation, I was able to explore how Maltese women identify and define their gender. The participants' responses highlighted a prevailing patriarchal society which is constantly impacting our lived experience. From a young age, we are bombarded with messages that reinforce the perpetuation of gender stereotypes and the internalisation of patriarchal norms, which have a profound impact on the formation of women's subjectivities. These pervasive discourses shape our perceptions of self and our interactions with the world. The constant scrutiny and heightened standards placed upon women's actions and behaviours serve to undermine their autonomy and self-worth. Women are expected to conform to societal expectations of beauty, intellect, and behaviour, while men are granted more leeway and excused for transgressions. This double standard perpetuates the notion of male privilege and reinforces the idea that women are in a constant double bind, whereby our actions are scrutinised and negatively judged irrespective of the outcome of our actions. However, women are also engaging in resistance since, through their actions and the potential ramifications of those actions, the participants exhibited a willingness to challenge the prevailing gender ideologies. This was evident in their discussions about self-presentation and integration of masculine and feminine characteristics to form a cohesive identity. The participants demonstrated agency in their gender performances, recognising that while gender is always enacted within a social context, it is not a fixed entity. Instead, individuals can adopt critical gender definitions or practices and adapt them to their own experiences, even if they deviate from dominant discourses or social norms.

This research revealed the predominance of patriarchal and heteronormative discourses in shaping our gendered identities, where such discourses are then manifested in social expectations and practices. Moreover, this research highlighted women's awareness about their gender and our social context's

impact on their everyday experiences. Such awareness led the participants to create their own personal gender performativity, one which fits their understanding of what a woman is and ought to be, by times conforming to dominant ideologies whilst resisting them in other contexts.

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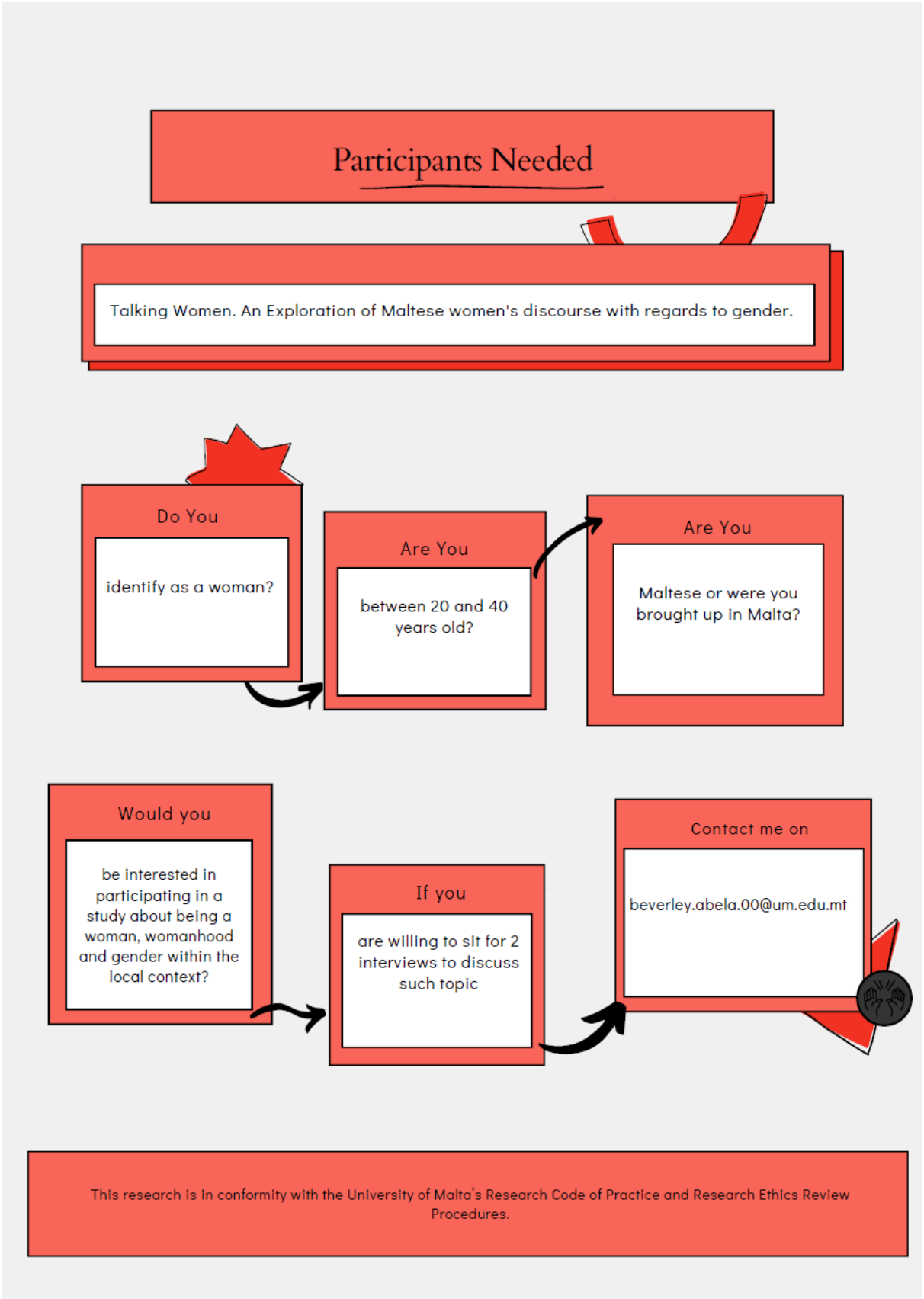
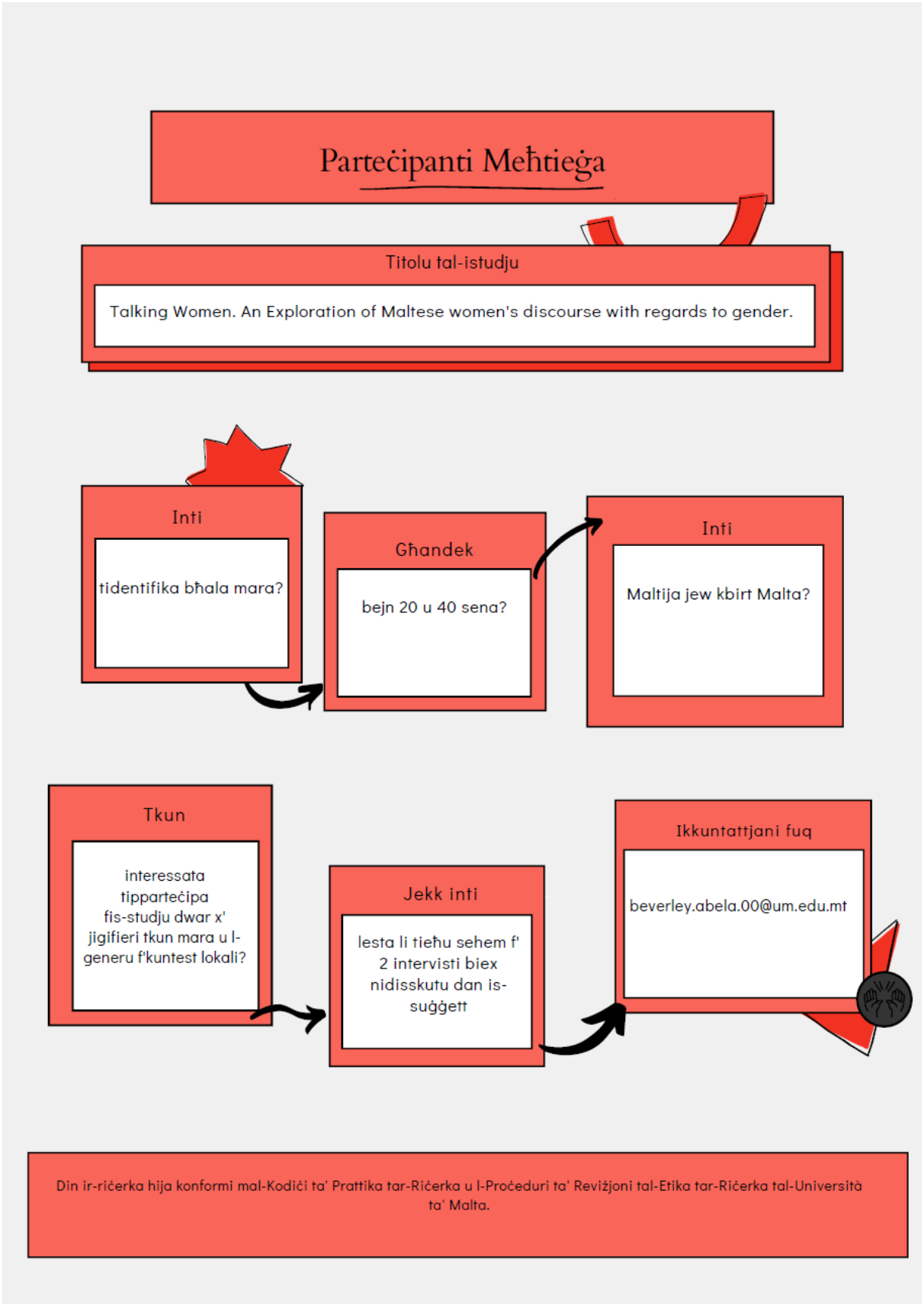
Appendix 1- Participant Recruitment Poster




Parteċipanti Meħtieġa
Titolu tal-istudju
Talking Women. An Exploration of Maltese women's discourse with regards to gender.
Inti
tidentifika bħala mara?
Għandek
bejn 20 u 40 sena?
Inti
Maltija jew kbirt Malta?
Tkun
interessata tipparteċipa fis-studju dwar x' jigifieri tkun mara u l-generu f'kuntest lokali?
Jekk inti
lesta li tieħu sehem f' 2 intervisti biex nidisskutu dan is-suġġett
Ikkuntattjani fuq
beverley.abela.00@um.edu.mt
Din ir-riċerka hija konformi mal-Kodiċi ta' Prattika tar-Riċerka u l-Proċeduri ta' Reviżjoni tal-Etika tar-Riċerka tal-Università ta' Malta.

Appendix 2- Information Sheet and Consent Form

01/08/2022

Information letter

To whom it may concern,

My name is Beverley Abela Gatt and I am a student at the University of Malta, currently reading for a PhD in Gender Studies. I am presently conducting a research study for my dissertation titled "Talking Women. An exploration of Maltese women's discourse with regards to gender"; this is being supervised by Prof. Marceline Naudi. This letter is an invitation to participate in this study. Below you will find information about the study and about what your involvement would entail, should you decide to take part.

The aim of my study is to explore how we as women define our gender, how we express these definitions in our everyday talk, and how this expression leads us to form and perform our gendered self. Any data collected from this research will be used solely for the purposes of this study.

Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to sit for two interviews. After the first interview is conducted, you will be given a transcript of the interview, and you will have up to three weeks to confirm or amend the information provided. After this process, you will be asked to sit in for a second interview, where a similar process will be repeated. Both interviews will be audio-recorded, and in the case that you would want to do the interview online, the interviews will also be video recorded.

Data collected will be treated confidentially and to ensure further anonymity, each participant will be given a pseudonym. The data will be password-protected, and only I will have access to the data gathered.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary; in other words, you are free to accept or refuse to participate, without needing to give a reason. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time, without needing to provide any explanation and without any negative repercussions for you. Should you choose to withdraw, any data collected from your interview will be erased as long as this is technically possible (for example, before it is anonymised or published), unless erasure of data would render impossible or seriously impair achievement of the research objectives, in which case it shall be retained in an anonymised form.

If you choose to participate, please note that there are no direct benefits to you. Your participation does not entail any known or anticipated risks.

Please note also that, as a participant, you have the right under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation to access, rectify and where applicable ask for the data concerning you to be erased. All data collected will be stored in an anonymised form following the publication of the results.

A copy of this information sheet is being provided for you to keep and for future reference.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me by e-mail: beverley.abela.00@um.edu.mt you can also contact my supervisor over the phone: 23402980 or via email: marceline.naudi@um.edu.mt.

Sincerely,

Beverley Abela Gatt
beverley.abela.00@um.edu.mt

Prof. Marceline Naudi
marceline.naudi@um.edu.mt
Tel: 23402980

Participant's Consent Form

Talking Women. An exploration of Maltese women's discourse with regards to gender.

I, the undersigned, give my consent to take part in the study conducted by Beverley Abela Gatt. This consent form specifies the terms of my participation in this research study.

1. I have been given written and/or verbal information about the purpose of the study; I have had the opportunity to ask questions and any questions that I had were answered fully and to my satisfaction.
2. I also understand that I am free to accept to participate, or to refuse or stop participation at any time without giving any reason and without any penalty. Should I choose to participate, I may choose to decline to answer any questions asked. In the event that I choose to withdraw from the study, any data collected from me will be erased as long as this is technically possible (for example, before it is anonymised or published), unless erasure of data would render impossible or seriously impair achievement of the research objectives, in which case it shall be retained in an anonymised form.
3. I understand that I have been invited to participate in 2 interviews in which the researcher and I will engage in a discussion to explore Maltese women's perception of their own gender I am aware that each interview will take approximately 1 hour. I understand that the interview is to be conducted in a place and at a time that is convenient for me.
4. I understand that my participation does not entail any known or anticipated risks
5. I understand that there are no direct benefits to me from participating in this study.
6. I understand that, under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation, I have the right to access, rectify, and where applicable, ask for the data concerning me to be erased.
7. I understand that all data collected will be stored in an anonymised form on completion of the study and following publication of results.
8. I have been provided with a copy of the information letter and understand that I will also be given a copy of this consent form.
9. I am aware that, by marking the first-tick box below, I am giving my consent for this interview to be audio recorded/video recorded and converted to text as it has been recorded (transcribed).

   MARK ONLY IF AND AS APPLICABLE

   ☐ I agree to this interview being audio recorded/video recorded.

   ☐ I do not agree to this interview being audio recorded/video recorded.

10. I am aware that my data will be pseudonymised; i.e., my identity will not be noted on transcripts or notes from my interview, but instead, a code will be assigned. The codes that link my data to my identity will be stored securely and separately from the data, in an encrypted file on the researcher's password-protected computer, and only the researcher will have access to this information. Any hard-copy materials will be placed in a locked cabinet/drawer. Any material that identifies me as a participant in this study will be stored securely for 6 months after the publication and grading of this research.

I have read and understood the above statements and agree to participate in this study.

Name of participant: _____

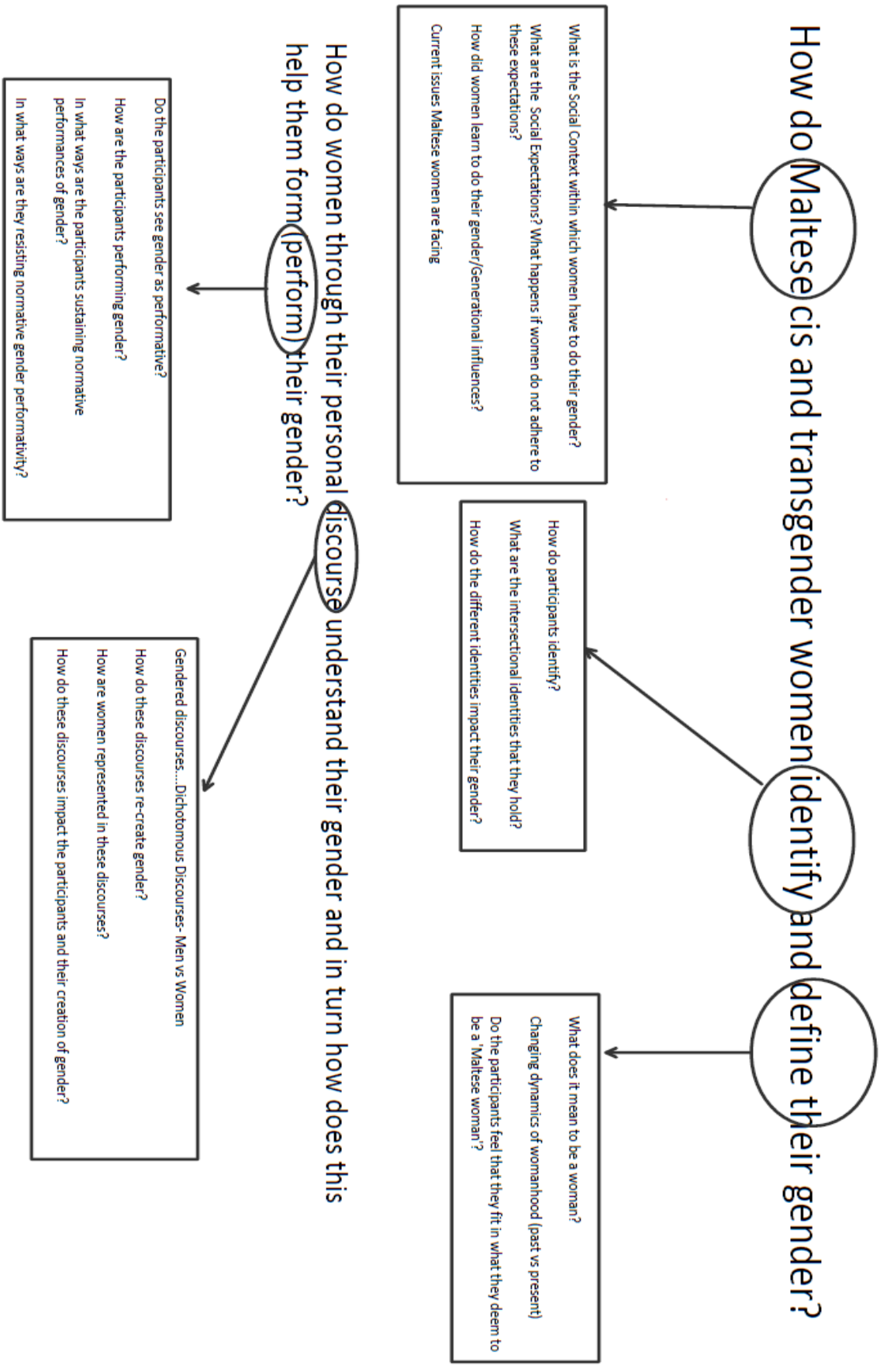
Signature: _____

Date: _____

_____

Beverley Abela Gatt
Beverley.abela.00@um.edu.mt

Appendix 3- Mind Map of Data



Appendix 4- UREC Application

Researcher Actions

Submit REDP form

Draft/submitted forms

Supervisor Actions

Forms pending endorsement

Students' submitted forms

Students' withdrawn / returned forms

Account

Logout

REDP Form

University of Malta staff, students, or anyone else planning to carry out research under the auspices of the University, must complete this form. The UM may also consider requests for ethics and data protection review by External Applicants.

Ahead of completing this online form, please read carefully the University of Malta Research Code of Practice and the University of Malta Research Ethics Review Procedures. Any breach of the Research Code of Practice or untruthful replies in this form will be considered a serious disciplinary matter. It is advisable to download a full digital version of the form to familiarise yourself with its contents (https://www.um.edu.mt/research/ethics/resources/umdocuments/). You are also advised to refer to the FAQs (https://www.um.edu.mt/research/ethics/faqs).

Part 1: Applicant and Project Details

Applicant Details

Name:
Beverley-louise

Surname:
Abela Gatt

Email:
[redacted]

Applicant Status:
Student

Please indicate if you form part of a Faculty, Institute, School or Centre: *
Faculty for Social Wellbeing

Department: *
Department of Gender and Sexualities

Principal Supervisor's Name: *
[redacted]

Principal Supervisor's Email: *
[redacted]

Co-Supervisor's Name:
[redacted]

Study Unit Code: *
Phd. Gender and Sexualities

Course Title: *

Student Number: *
05036324

Researcher Actions

Submit REDP form

Draft/submitted forms

Supervisor Actions

Forms pending endorsement

Students' submitted forms

Students' withdrawn / returned forms

Account

Logout

Project Details

Title of Research Project: *

Talking Women. An exploration of Maltese women's discourse with regards to gender.

Project description, including research question/statement and method, in brief: *

This research will explore how we as women define our gender, how we express these definitions in our everyday discourse, and how this expression leads us to form and perform our gendered self. This exploration aims to address three research questions which are:

- How do Maltese cis and transgender women identify and define their gender?

Will project involve collection of primary data from human participants?

Yes / Unsure

Explain primary data collection from human participants:

Please explain the following aspects with regard to data collection from human participants.

a. Salient participant characteristics (e.g. min-max participants, age, sex, other): *

12 women between the ages of 20 and 40.

b. How will they be recruited (e.g. sampled, selected, contacted, etc.): *

The participant recruitment letter will be disseminated to various local non-governmental organisations that work with women, LGBTIQ non-governmental organisations, women-only, and LGBTIQ social media groups

c. What they will be required to do and for how long: *

Each participant has to sit for two interviews. Each interview will be approximately 1 hour long.

d. If inducements/rewards/compensation are offered: *

No

e. How participants/society may benefit: *

This research will enable us to further understand the construction of gender identity within the local context and gain further insight into how Maltese women define and re-create their gender, whilst shedding further light on dominant discourses surrounding gender and womanhood. No specific benefits for participants.

f. Is the participant's identity recorded at any stage of the research (e.g. in consent forms, records, publications): *

No

g. The manner in which you will manage and store the data: *

Data will be securely stored on a device which is password protected and only I will have access to this device during the collection and processing of data

Will project involve collection of primary data from animals?

No

Researcher Actions

Submit REDP form

Draft/submitted forms

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Logout

Part 2: Self Assessment and Relevant Details

In what follows, all questions have been answered as "No or Not Applicable" by default. Please mark "Yes or Unsure" to any of the issues that may apply to your research. In such cases, your research proposal presents potential issues in the domain of research ethics and/or data protection. Therefore, you are kindly asked to elaborate upon the specific issue/s you indicate, and you will need to seek F/REC permission before data collection.

Human Participants

Skip questions 1-10 if your project does NOT involve primary data collection from human participants (or their tissue/samples).

1. Risk of harm to participants:

Are your participants at risk of harm? (Physical, psychological, legal, economic, social, etc.)

No / N.A.

2. Physical intervention:

Does your research involve non-harmful physical intervention on participants which may raise ethical concerns in your discipline?

No / N.A.

3. Vulnerable participants:

Do you include participants who, in your study or discipline, would be considered vulnerable or may be more at risk of being in vulnerability than others (e.g. children, persons who are older, with dementia, patients, subject to discrimination, with disabilities, with mental health conditions, unable to give consent, in prostitution, incarcerated, substance abusers, economically or educationally disadvantaged or minorities)?

No / N.A.

4. Identifiable participants:

Are there participants in your research whose identity may be revealed in your research data, even though they have not given explicit consent to be so identified/attributed?

No / N.A.

5. Special Categories of Personal Data (SCPD):

Do you plan to collect SCPD, which, for identifiable participants (in records, data and/or publication), reveals race or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, membership in a trade union, genetic or biometric data that may uniquely identify a natural person, health, sex life and/or sexual orientation?

No / N.A.

6. Human tissue/samples:

Will your research involve the collection of human tissue/samples?

No / N.A.

7. Withheld info assent/consent:

Do you plan to withhold information from potential participants regarding the nature of the research when you seek to obtain assent/consent?

No / N.A.

8. 'opt-out' recruitment:

Will you use the 'opt-out' instead of the 'opt-in' method of obtaining consent when recruiting participants (i.e. will any participants be included in your study without providing explicit consent)?

No / N.A.

9. Deception in data generation:

Do you plan to actively provide false/misleading information or passively withhold information during the process of data generation (e.g. experiments, use of placebos, scenarios, games)?

No / N.A.

10. Incidental findings:

Could your research generate incidental findings that may need to be communicated to participants?

No / N.A.

Unpublished secondary data

Answer questions 11-13 if your research involves the use of secondary data. Otherwise skip to question 14.

Researcher Actions

Submit REDP form

Draft/submitted forms

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Account

Logout

11. Human:

Was the data collected from human participants?

No / N.A.

12. Animal:

Was the data collected from animals?

No / N.A.

13. No written permission:

Is written permission from the data controller of the original data still to be obtained?

No / N.A.

Animals

Answer questions 14 - 16 if your project involves primary data collection from animals (non-human vertebrates and cephalopods) or their tissue/samples. Otherwise skip to question 17.

14. Live animals, lasting harm:

Does your research involve taking live animals out of their natural habitat for use in procedures or where such removal may cause the animals lasting harm?

No / N.A.

15. Live animals, harm:

Is there a risk that your research causes harm to live animals?

No / N.A.

16. Source of dead animals, illegal:

Does your research involve the use of dead animals (or their tissue/samples) that have not been acquired legally or from a legal source?

No / N.A.

General Considerations

These questions are to be considered for all projects.

17. Cooperating institution:

If you need permission from a cooperating institution, do you require F/REC approval prior to approaching the institution?

No / N.A.

18. Risk to researcher/s:

Does this research expose any members of the research team to any significant foreseeable risk that would require precautionary measures over and above those typically required in their line of work?

No / N.A.

19. Risk to environment:

Is there significant foreseeable risk that your research can cause harm to the environment?

No / N.A.

20. Commercial sensitivity:

Does your research make use of data that may be commercially sensitive?

No / N.A.

Other Potential Risks

Other potential risks for research ethics and data projection may arise from conflict of interest; harvesting social media data; the involvement of low income and/or lower middle income countries; the import and/or export of records, data, materials and specimens; the need for special permits/licenses to employ specific constructs/tests; the researcher/s having a dual role; and/or the dual use/misuse of research, among other. Applicants are advised to refer to the FAQs in case of doubt (https://www.um.edu.mt/research/ethics/faqs).

21. Other potential risks:

Does your research run other potential ethical or data protection risks?

Researcher Actions

Submit REDP form

Draft/submitted forms

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No / N.A.

22. Official statement: Do you require an official statement from the F/REC that this submission has abided by the UM's REDP procedures?

Please note that answering "Yes / Unsure" here means that you may not start data collection until you receive F/REC approval. *You may also request a formal letter at a later date if you need it for publication/funding purposes.*

No / N.A.

Part 3: Submission

Which F/REC are you submitting to? *

Faculty applicants will submit automatically to the Faculty FREC. Non-Faculty applicants may refer to the UREC webpages and seek guidance from their Institute, Centre or School to identify which F/REC they should apply to.

Faculty for Social Wellbeing

Attachments:

Please indicate which of the following materials you are attaching. Failure to provide these, where relevant, risks delaying approval to proceed with the research. Materials should be attached below. Students may be required to produce their DRAFT letters of request ahead of sending to cooperating institutions and to obtain their supervisor's signature on consent and assent forms.

- Participants_Consent_Form_2022_BA_2.docx
- Malti_participant_information_letter_2022_BA_2_TRACKCHANGES.docx
- Malti_Consent_form_2022_BA_2_TRACKCHANGES.docx
- participant_information_letter_20222_BA_2.docx
- Participants_Needed_2.pdf

*Please produce these materials in English and/or Maltese and/or any other relevant language (or equivalent text that may be communicated orally for those who do not read).

- [x] Information and/or recruitment letter*
- [x] Consent forms (adult participants)*
- [ ] Consent forms for legally responsible parents/guardians, in case of minors and/or adults unable to give consent*
- [ ] Assent forms in case of minors and/or adults unable to give consent*
- [ ] Data collection tools (interview questions, questionnaire etc.)
- [ ] Data Management Plan
- [ ] Data controller permission in case of use of unpublished secondary data
- [ ] Licence/permission to use research tools (e.g. constructs/tests)
- [ ] Any permits required for import or export of materials or data
- [ ] Letter granting institutional approval for access to participants
- [ ] Institutional approval for access to data
- [ ] Letter granting institutional approval from person directly responsible for participants
- [x] Other

Please feel free to add a cover note or any remarks to F/REC

If this is a re-submission of a Form to F/REC, please include previous form reference number. Please indicate if you require written approval for institutional/funding purposes. Please include reference to project grant and/or any previous ethics/data protection approval of related parent project. Please elaborate on any additional attachments you are providing.

Researcher Actions

Submit REDP form

Draft/submitted forms

Supervisor Actions

Forms pending endorsement

Students' submitted forms

Students' withdrawn / returned forms

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Declarations: *

- [x] I hereby confirm having read the University of Malta Research Code of Practice and the University of Malta Research Ethics Review Procedures.
- [x] I hereby confirm that the answers to the questions above reflect the contents of the research proposal and that the information provided above is truthful.
- [x] I hereby give consent to the University Research Ethics Committee to process my personal data for the purpose of evaluating my request, audit and other matters related to this application. I understand that I have a right of access to my personal data and to obtain the rectification, erasure or restriction of processing in accordance with data protection law and in particular the General Data Protection Regulation (EU 2016/679, repealing Directive 95/46/EC) and national legislation that implements and further specifies the relevant provisions of said Regulation.

Applicant Signature: *

Write your full name here. By doing so and submitting this form you are effectively signing the declaration.

Beverley-Louise Abela Gatt

Date of Submission: *

28/04/2022

If applicable: Date collection start date

Please insert envisaged date of data collection.

01/07/2022

Administration

REDP Application ID

SWB-2022-00240

Current Status

Acknowledged

Audit Trail

28/04/2022 16:25
Beverley-louise Abela Gatt
Submitted by researcher

29/04/2022 17:06
Marceline Naudi
Form set to Endorsed by supervisor

02/05/2022 15:33
SWB Frec
Acknowledged by F/REC
Dear Beverley-Louise Abela Gatt, Your research ethics application has been received. As indicated in the Research Ethics Review Procedures, REDP forms which have no self-assessment issues are kept for record and audit purposes only. Hence, research may commence. Kindly note that FREC will not issue any form of approval as the responsibility for the self-assessment part lies exclusively with the researcher. Regards, SWB FREC

If a submitted application needs to be amended, it can be withdrawn, edited, and resubmitted, and it will retain the same reference number. There is no need to submit a new application.

Appendix 6 – Maltese Direct Quotes

6.0.1 What does it mean to be a woman for you? – Participants' definition of their gender

W8 (2.6)* “I mean hemm ukoll qabel kien hemm l-idea li l-mara trid toqgħod id-dar tieħu ħsieb it-tfal u hekk issa naħseb hemm ċertu nies li xorta għadhom jaraw hekk imma naħseb inġenerali issa nbidel il-ħaġa li l-mara trid tagħmel kollox as in għandha taħdem ħafna imma fl-istess ħin xorta trid tibqa’ tieħu ħsieb it-tfal, trid tieħu ħsieb id-dar qisu l-irġiel għal xi raġuni qatt ma kien hemm dik il-bidla kbira fejn ir-raġel għandu jieħu ħsieb it-tfal u d-dar, qisha l-mara evolviet u ġiet li tista’ taħdem ukoll imma l-irwoli ta’ qabel xorta (B: baqgħu hemm), eżatt, meta raġel ir-role tiegħu huwa xogħol imma ma nbidlitx fis-soċjetà ….ma kienx hemm dik il-bidla kbira u naħseb dik il-ħtieġa li you do it all teżisti ħafna u trid tmur il-gym, trid tibqa’ bil-figura, tant hekk l-estetika ta’ mara wkoll veru jagħmlu enfasi fuqha so naħseb dik hija, societal expectation importanti erm.”

W9 (1.4)* “Ovvjament hemm ħafna żvantaġġi wkoll, pereżempju, affarijiet li jiena jirrabjawni ħafna huma l-punti li aħna dejjem you are seen bħala inqas, mill-gender male, mill-male gender, erm, fejn nisa huma kapaċi daqs l-irġiel u huma trattati inqas."

W7 (1.24… 1.26)* “U fl-opinjoni tiegħi womanhood ikkumparata ma’ menhood, womanhood ħafna iktar broad għax dak it-tip għandek ħafna iktar affarijiet li nisa jistgħu jagħmlu illi jekk jagħmluhom l-irġiel mill-ewwel ħa jiġu labelled bħala gay u hekk, bħal din li qed insemmu tal-qalziet pereżempju għax tradizzjonalment, qalziet ta’ raġel u dublett ta’ mara imma mara jekk ħa tilbes qalziet mhux ħa tiġi labelled bħala lisbjana, awtomatikament fis-sens, mentri jekk raġel ħa jilbes dublett qisu awtomatikament (B: labelled), eħe, u anka jekk mara fis-sens il-makeup ukoll assoċjat man-nisa però jekk mara ma tagħmilx make-up mhux awtomatikament qisek, mhux daqshekk frowned upon ħa ngħid hekk mis-soċjetà (B: eħe, eħe) u anki jekk joħorġu żewġ nisa flimkien isiefru flimkien, jew jien naf jieħdu kamra ġo motel jew jien naf, qisek aktar aċċettata milli jagħmluha żewġt irġiel għax mill-ewwel għandek qisu jekk, jagħmlu affarijiet flimkien żewġt irġiel, qisek bilfors ehh mela bilfors koppja dawn (B: eħe, eħe) mmm, jiġifieri qisu minn dan il-punt hekk iktar għandna erm freedom qisna fis-soċjetà, tinstema’ naqra ironika imma insomma.”

W10 (1.12)* “Pereżempju jien m’iniex mara li għalkemm forsi nidher li jien mara tipika f'għajnejn nies oħra m’iniex hekk allura meta tibda tara lilek innifsek forsi tkun iktar open għal meta xi ħadd ikun conformative mal-affarijiiet li tkun qed tistenna s-soċjetà li tkun pereżempju li tkun cisgender, hetero."

W9 (2.4)* "Jiena meta kont żgħira kont nara ’l-mummy u hekk kont ngħid, kont ngħid I don't want to be this woman, I don't want to be the woman illi jiena dejjem id-dar, jiġi r-raġel jew immur xorta għax-xogħol , jiġi r-raġel u rrid noqgħod nagħmillu l-platt, naħsillu l-ħwejjeġ, so yes I think illi naħseb issa wkoll, bin-knowledge u bid-developments kollha li kellna fis-soċjetà tagħna tal-lum, naħseb illi mara

hija, hija u taf tkun indipendenti ħafna, anka jiena personali, eż. jiena xtrajt il-post tiegħi ta' 24 so bdejt noqgħod waħdi ta' 19."

W8 (2.8)* "Imma meta bdejt nikber bdejt naċċetta l-fatt li I am breaking a lot of norms għax fil-familja tiegħi pereżempju l-familja tiegħi kollha pro life, ommi u missieri għandhom iż-żmien so ma kinux, kienu kontra LGBTIQ communities u hekk so qisni mal-ewwel drajt minn età żgħira illi jien għandi l-valuri tiegħi u l-opinjoni tiegħi u ħa jkunu differenti minn ta' ħaddieħor u qisek once li tidra dik il-ħaġa minn ġol-familja li qisha l-itqal li tiffaċċja allura mbagħad I got used to it mal-bqija tas-soċjetà , jiġifieri, naħseb għalija l-ebda expectation li għedt ma għadni nħossha, xi kultant tiġi ta ehh tgħid, 'Inkun omm xi darba?' jew whatever u qisni nħoss dik il-ħaġa imma mbagħad ngħid, jien irridha jew le? Qisni mal-ewwel nibda I know li ssir omm dawn l-ideat, naħseb l-unika forsi waħda li għadni nbati fuqha hija tal-like sexual abuse jew tal-catcalling jew hekk, qisni dik, l-oħrajn dejjem sibt l-enerġija u l-motivazzjoni biex niġġilidhom (B: mhm), ngħid isma' jekk jiena ma rridx dil-ħaġa mhux ħa nkun hekk, jekk jien bħalissa rrabjata mhux imdejqa mela ħa nuriha, dawk ok, imma naħseb tant hemm is-sistema kontrik meta jiġrulek dawn l-affarijiet (B: mhm), u tant tidra sfortunatament illi ma għadx għandi enerġija li nagħmel xi ħaġa, qisha dik naħseb l-iktar inħoss, qisek il-ħtieġa li tkun siekta f'dawn l-affarijiet imma nipprova niġġilidha billi qisni ġieli nitkellem ma' nies u ngħidu forsi niktbu artiklu fuq dil-ħaġa jew nippruvaw inġibuha to light imma diffiċli."

W12 (2.12)* "Naħseb ċertu elementi iva, u ċertu elementi le, f'ġenerazzjoni forsi ta' qabel, jekk nara l-ġenerazzjoni ta' issa naħseb I fit quite well ma' stereotypical women, però jekk ikollha eż. l-ġenerazzjoni ta' ommi jaraw kif jien issa I don't think that I fit into the typical Maltese woman ... għax differenti, huma trabbew b'tali mod li inti tikber, erm, issib lil xi ħadd, tiżżewweġ, jekk hemm bżonn tieqaf mix-xogħol u jieħu ħsiebek ir-raġel, mentri jiena ħajti totalment differenti minn hekk."

W1 (2.4)* "Ironically I am hu, ma nistax ngħid li le, I mean arani, għandi dar tiegħi, għandi, tifel, għandi raġel, taf kif, għandi xogħol, imma, nipprova, li le, nipprova ngħid li jien m'iniex imma meta tħares lejja b'mod riflessiv tgħid, jiena hekk hu (B: hmm), nipprova ngħid le jiena żgur m'iniex mara tipika, imma ħeqq, għandi l-ingredjenti kollha tal-mara tipika taf kif…dawn l-affarijiet ġraw għax ġraw f'ħajti, meta kont ngħid żgħira, kont nimmaġinani nkun waħdi b'karriera, taf kif, qatt ma kont noħlom li dejjem bilfors ħa jkolli, partner, li bilfors li ħa jkolli, le dar tiegħi dejjem xtaqtha, dar tiegħi rrid, imma li bilfors ħa jkolli t-tfal u li bilfors taf kif, qisu dejjem kont noħlom li ħa jkolli karriera togħġobni, imma nkun ipokrita jekk ngħid, leeeee żgur m'iniex mara tipika, għax tarani ħeqq. (B: Mara tipika tal-ġenerazzjoni tiegħek.) Eżatt."

Discourse

6.2 Male Privilege and Patriarchal dominant discourses.

W1 (1.14)* "In general fis-soċjetà l-irġiel għandhom ħajja ħafna iktar faċli on various levels, issa jekk għandna nagħmlu blanket statement, ħajja ta' raġel dejjem eħfef fuq livelli differenti ermm nibdew bijoloġikament, x'tippretendi s-soċjetà minnhom anki jekk raġel ma jiżżewwiġx qisha mhux daqshekk problema imma mara li għadha ma sabitx partner, ma sabitx raġel imbagħad il-biological clock erm."

W1 (1.16)* "Ovvjament il-lingwaġġ negattiv dejjem mal-mara, dejjem storikament u għadu fil-preżent jiġifieri raġel niggustawh għax playboy, mara nitkażaw biha għax qaħba erm u tista' ssemmihom kollha, pereżempju raġel hu assertive, mara hija bitch le? (B: eħe eħe) erm raġel team player forsi, mara tilgħaq, jiġifieri duality teżisti ħafna."

W1 (2.112)* "Il-mara li tittanta, il-mara li tkisser familja, il-mara li mhux tajba biżżejjed, il-mara li ma taqdix lir-raġel tagħha, inti raġel li jaqdi l-mara tiegħu fejn hu taf kif? Il-mara li ma tidhirx sabiħa biżżejjed għar-raġel tagħha, li ntelqet, dawn huma kollha negative labels li huma assoċjati ma' mara."

W7 (1.82)* "Jekk raġel ħa jaqbad u jgħid lil kulħadd, 'Isma' jiena gay,' ġeneralment mhux ħa jsaqsuh:'Imma inti ċert?' (B:mmmm), għax qisu l-fatt li ħa tgħidha qisu diġà qed tpoġġi lilek innifsek f'daqshekk riskju, mentri mara jekk tgħid, 'Isma' jiena gay,' kulħadd 'Imma inti ċerta? Imma inti pruvajt ma' raġel qabel?' Bħal dak li qallu ħa mmur ngħid lil xi ħadd li jiena gay u m'iniex ċerta (B: hmmm) , jiġifieri naħseb eħe, naħseb din ukoll qisu għandek naqra differenza bejn is-sessi, u terġa' tiġi forsi għall-fatt ukoll li forsi, n-nisa ma jittiħdux daqshekk bis-serjetà daqs l-irġiel (B: mhm, mhm), qisek bilfors you need to question women's decisions about themselves or women's or women's identities u hekk."

W1 (2.28…2.30)* "Imma xorta 'Min jaf x'għamlitlu?' (B: mhm) Jiġifieri anka meta jsiru dawn il-każijiet ta' vjolenza domestika, dejjem hemm il-question mark, qisu raġel dejjem hu maħfur ħa.. imma l-mara 'Min jaf x'għamlitlu?' jiġifieri eħe s-soċjetà hija, hija, its very, very harsh, anki minn nisa li jridu abort, 'X'għarukaża', l-irġiel kollha jgħajtu, 'X'għarukaża, x'għarukaża, x'għarukaża.'"

W9 (1.30….1.60)* "L-irġiel qishom xejn mhu xejn, jista' jkollhom, ifhimni din anka erm ħeqq naf min ibati biex isib partner ieħor, għax għandu t-tfal minn ta' raġel jew minn ta' 2 diġà, ħeqq raġel qisu dejjem bandiera bajda, ikollu xi jkollu ma jimpurtax qishom mhumiex tiegħu, qisu ma għandux parti minnha, qisu ma,ma kienx hemm, il-mara għamlitha weħidha. Jiena issa ma naħsibx li hija wisq differenti, imma meta kont qed nikber jiena dejjem, dejjem its a world dominated by men (B:mhm) eż. l-iskola, jekk huma kotba, jekk huma ... kollox, kollox, il-mara dejjem qisha l-ħazina, il-mara dejjem li qed tagħmel ħażin."

6.2.1 Women lack representation in positions of power.

W2 (1.38)* "Il-parliament women in politics they are not well represented, għalfejn? Għax il-working conditions mhumiex tajbin, għax hemm dak il-kunċett li n-nisa jridu joqogħdu d-dar mat-tfal allura ma

jirranġawx il-working hours jiġifieri its filtered in all forms of society, ma tistax tgħid ħa tirranġa din is-sector u lest barra bid-daqq. Trid letteralment is-soċjetà ta' taħt fuq għax it starts from the top and it filters down to the bottom."

W9 (1.10)* "Ma naħsibx li għandna biżżejjed nisa fil-poter biex jieħdu ċertu deċiżonijiet fil-pajjiż, so naħseb illi għandha tibda minn fuq. Għalfejn ma nagħtux iktar ċans lin-nisa biex jidħlu fil-politika? Anki wara l-aħħar elezzjoni, x'jiġifieri ħafna min-nisa telgħu mhux bil-vot tan-nies? Jiena tkiddni ftit ngħidlek il-verità, u tkiddni ftit għax nibda ngħid nisa kien hemm daqs l-irġiel li vvutaw, mela (B:mhm, mhm) x'inhu jiġri, aħna n-nisa stess?"

6.3 Men as the protector of women vs. Men as the oppressor of women

W7 (1.46)* "Naħseb ukoll il-fatt li mara weħidha jew żewġ nisa flimkien meqjusin weaker then 1 man ħa ngħid hekk, allura qisek mara biex tkun safe fis-soċjetà u hekk qisu bilfors irid ikollha raġel jipproteġiha. Jekk ikunu żewġ nisa flimkien they are seen as weak."

W8 (1.8…1.13)* "Kind of u darba konversazzjoni minna, magħhom (*tirreferi għall- ġenituri tagħha*) kienet ... imma jekk issa inti ħa tispiċċa ma' mara mbagħad min ħa jieħu ħsiebek fit-triq billejl? U titkellem fuq sexual assault u dawn l-affarijiet qisu, the power is very much exerted by men on women billi jieħdu, the, billi they take, literally, they take away the sexual dignity of women."

6.3.1 Female objectification

W12 (1.88)* "You know what's the pity? Li other women teach women how to do it (B: hmmm), fis-sens ta' ġieli nara tfal libsin, ikunu vera żgħar, ikunu 6 year olds u jkunu libsin qishom like teenagers, tipo, għalfejn? Tista' tlibbisha libsa sabiħa hekk bajda pretty, taf (B:mhm) u qed tlibbisha mini skirt tal-jeans u crop top, u boots, taf kif, imbagħad jgħidulha pose, imbagħad iwaħħluh fuq Facebook, 'Ara x'għandi, ara xi ġmiel għandi, my precious.' What are you teaching the kids, inti li qed tagħmel bħalhom għax jekk ovvjament tara l-Facebook tal-ġenituri tagħhom tibda tara minn fejn hi ġejja, imma don't teach 6 year olds (B:mhm), għax then you are teaching as well her cousin who is a male to tell her how sexy she is, allura qisna qed inġibuha fuq saqajna din il-ħaġa sfortunatament. (B:Mhm.)"

W7 (2.85)* "Meta kelli jien naf 13 jew whatever, u kont nara t-television l-MTV, ħlief żejżiet u srum ma tarax u kont deffistha f'moħħi li biex inkun mara accepted jew by society, jew attraenti, jew whatever, jew biex nieħu l-attenzjoni, jew biex dan, irid ukoll ikolli żejżiet u sorm (B: eħe, eħe), illi dak iż-żmien ma kellix unfortunately, kelli ħafna ħafna dwejjaq u low self-esteem għax ma kellix u kont nipprova niġbed l-attenzjoni by being sexual, kemm nista' I mean, xorta I didn't get any ifhem, għax kont persuna timida ħafna, imma I used to present myself trying to look sexy (B: eħe), whatever that meant to me as a 13 year old, even if it meant dawk iċ-chokers l-irqaq ta' meta konna żgħar (B: li jiġġebbdu), eħe li jiġġebbdu, if that what was gonna make me feel like I'm sexy I'm gonna wear it taf kif."

W9 (2.32)* “Ħabiba tiegħi, she is a trans woman, fejn dil-ħaġa semmietha ħafna li sort of trans women they are sexual objectified li unfortunately its worse than woman, like there is like sort of a fetish… lesbian is a huge fetish especially for men, erm ... però eħe tħossha hu, tħossha anki għall-mod tal-kelma qegħdin nitkellmu ma hemmx għalfejn tkun trans, anki jiena jekk eżempju nkun barra u nkun qiegħda, għandi aptit nagħti bewsa lit-tfajla tiegħi, jekk nara xi raġel jew xi ġuvni qed iħares lejna ma nħossnix komda għax naf that we are seen as a sexual object.”

W8 (1.6)* “U dik vera tittikani imma vera tiġri fis-soċjetà li two women are sexualised, objectified, two men are disgusting.”

W6 (2.87)* “U what’s also interesting is illi l-mara u sexiness is also associated ħafna ma’ youth, anki pereżempju jien naf (pawża), porn ħa, kulħadd imqaxxar, il-parti tiegħu ma tantx tara nies bis-suf, xi ħadd imqaxxar għalija is a pre-pubacent child, not a woman, taf kif, I mean ok kulħadd gostih at the end of the day imma still dik l-image għalija tiddisturbani daqsxejn għax, (pawża), għax ma nafx għala imma somehow qisu iktar ma tkun żgħira iktar aħjar, and doesn't make sense.”

W10 (1.58)* “Meta kont iżgħar, disgustingly u looking back, kont inkun ħafna iktar catcalled, kienu jkunu rġiel ta’ età kbira, looking back tgħid xiż-żikk, meta tkun żgħira u ma tkunx aware, ma tkunx taf how bad it is and you take it bħala as part of life, għalhekk ngħid looking back għax dak iż-żmien kont ngħid just ma nagħtix kas, kont ngħid u ija, imma issa ngħid jaqq kelli 14 u joqogħdu jittantawk! Lanqas issa li għandi 26 ma nittanta lil ta’ 16 aħseb u ara rġiel mezza età, għax ħafna drabi jkunu kbar, mhux qed ngħid li dejjem, imma ħafna drabi jkunu kbar. Naħseb li huma l-iktar catcalled, huma t-tfal għax they don't offer, tfal,teenagers, għax they don't offer.”

6.3.1.a Social Media and Sexual Objectification

W7 (2.28)* “Allura n-nisa kienu jippruvaw jilħqu dik iċ-ċertu idea li jiġi erm portrayed fil-media u hekk forsi anka bħala riżultat eżempju fuq media jgħidlek ċertu tip ta’ lbies jew ċertu tip ta’ style iktar flirty, iktar ħa like l-irġiel iħobbuhom u dina, u qisu they move towards that anka biex qishom jintgħoġbu iktar, mentri mhux neċessarjament ikun li jogħġob lilhom imma just to be more social acceptable speċi.”

W11 (1.10…1.12…1.14…1.24)* “It’s automatic jekk taf li inti ħa iġib iktar likes u trid iktar following you are going to do it.Għalfejn? Għalfejn erġajna waqajna 20 sena lura? Għalfejn hemm mara b'dublett u looking sexy tbigħ washing machine? I mean għalija għamlet diżunur lin-nisa by ... għax, għax, u xi ħaġa interessanti li meta (isem ta’ influencer lokali maskili) kien qiegħed jagħmel l-istess ħaġa, l-istess għamel imma he was portrayed as a family man. Imma jiġifieri, sexuality has become a currency inħoss fuq social media ħafna.”

W3 (2.20)* “Mhux social media biss anka ... websites tal-adulti ... erm ... illi l-ħin kollu qisna qed niġru wara ġisem (B: mhm), illi qatt ma nistgħu niksbu, pereżempju jekk jiena magħmula żgħira, kif nista’ nippretendi li f'daqqa waħda nqum b'sider daqsiex? Pereżempju taf kif, ħa noqgħod nhewden u naqa’ ħażin għax naf illi llum il-ġurnata jiġu ammirati nisa dak it-tip allura jiena forsi naħseb fuqha darbtejn u tgħaddi, però ħaddieħor forsi taffettwah b'mod ħażin u forsi tkun gravi tant illi għalkemm pereżempju ma jkunux jaffordjaw, jew ikollhom fejn ipoġġu l-flus, xorta jagħżlu illi jien naf, jagħmlu operazzjonijiet kosmetiċi.”

W6 (2.47)* “U dika ... din is-shift qed naraha anki fuq what it looks like to be a woman fuq social media fejn forsi qabel konna naraw il-perfezzjoni, issa qed naraw affarijiet iktar realistiċi.”

W10 (2.58)* “Is-social media tat platform biex jidhru iktar tipi ta’ nisa differenti milli kienu jidhru fil-traditional marketing fiż-żminijiet 2000, 80's 90's, dik il-mara rqiqa dak it-tip ta’ traditional marketing, u social media iktar nies setgħu jagħmluha huma nfishom, ma hemmx għalfejn ikunu hired minn agency fejn kienu jagħmlu selection, allura hemm iktar tipi ta’ nisa li qed jidhru ... billi social media tista’ tikkummenta u kulħadd jara l-comments, it-2 saru li hemm iktar tipi ta’ nisa u qed naraw varjetà, imma li n-nies jaqilgħu kummenti ħżiena u hate.”

6.3.2 Stranger Harassment, Normalisation and Safety Concerns

W8 (2.6)* “Aħseb fis-sens ta’ pereżempju l-fatt li catcalling jew xi ħadd imissek, qisu they are almost a norm, kind of li inti eħe bħala mara inti l-irġiel ħa jkellmuk, ħa jagħmlulek hekk like and its ok trid toqgħod biha għax hemm il-liġijiet issa li qishom you can go and take them to court, imma allaħares kull darba li qalli xi ħaġa raġel mort il-qorti fuqha, like it doesn't make sense.”

W3 (2.30)* “Sfortunatament qed narawha tiġri kważi on a daily basis, konna ngħidu għalbarra minn Malta però naħseb sirna agħar minn barra minn Malta, għax hawn Malta konna noħduha for granted illi ma jiġrux.”

W2 (2.62)* “It influenced us women quite a lot u anki iktar ma tisma’ każijiet fil-media, eż. Bernice Cassar, Sion Grech ta’ 2005, issa qed tinstema’ ħafna, ta’ Paulina, jiġifieri bla ma trid qisek you become more, conscious.”

W6 (2.81)* “Funnily enough anka through jokes ta jiġifieri imma anka l-mod kif inkunu libsin ġieli konna forsi anka we refer to them, ara this could be a good weapon taf kif; it was a joke jien naf xi takkuna stiletto tgħid, ‘Ehhh din arma tajba kieku’ u tidħaq biha ma’ sħabek ... but why? The brain have to go there, anki pereżempju handbag tqil, ‘Illallu kemm hu tqil dal-handbag,’ tajjeb biex tagħti xebgħa bih eżatt, jiġifieri, eħe l-issue ta’ safety hemmhekk hi.”

W1 (2.98)* “U ejja jiena miexja hawnhekk bil-jogging suit, raġel ma joqgħodx hawn, għax kien jidher xi ħaddiem għax kien b'vann tad-deliveries, qalli, ‘Hawn sex!’Ija jgħajjat f'nofs ta’ triq u jien għedtlu, għax ma tmurx tgħid hekk lil ommok u għajjat u tella’ t-tieqa u telaq jiġri, għedtlu għax ma tmurx tgħid hekk lil ommok ja nittien, ma ppretendiex li, u vera għajjat, imma u ejja liebsa jogging suit b’xi shopping bag.”

6.3.3 Self-Survellience

6.3.3.a Self-Survellience and Clothing

W12 (2.50)* “Ħabba ċertu rġiel, eħe ġieli jgħadduli minn rasi, isma’ tilbisx dik il-libsa jekk għandek session ma’ raġel partikolari don't wear that dress, tipo nħoss li xi kultant I am subject yes to qisu my freedom of how I dress is limited, mhux għax xi waħda li nħobb nikxef u nagħmel ta.”

W3 (1.36)* “Li nigi f' punt fejn ma nħossnix komda nilbes ċertu lbies, m’iniex xi waħda li ħa noqgħod inqaċċat u nagħmel imma pereżempju erm ... jien naf ikun naqra mqaċċat li ħa tidhirli t-tpingija ta’ hawnhekk (signals to upper chest area) ngħid le m’iniex ħa nilbsu għax għandi tpingija kbira u mal-ewwel għajnejn in-nies ħa jmorru hawnhekk, u jekk ħa jmorru għajnejhom hawnhekk ħa jmorru fuq sidri, u ma nħossnix komda għax naf illi raġel mingħajr ma jrid he is going to sexualise a woman.”

W7 (2.68…2.70)* “Kultant I want to be a bit more feminine imma mbagħad qisni I step it down a notch għax naf illi eż. jekk noħroġ jien naf b'leggings issikkat, naf li ħa jiġi catcalling jew hekk li ġrat … hekk ngħid ħa nkun naqra iktar femminili u hekk u jiġifieri għalija personali jiġifieri nilbes eż. b'ċertu mod jew dan erm..imma mbaghad erm bħala riżultat ta’ qisu past experiences, kif għedt I have to tone it down xi kultant, allura ngħidd, xi kultant imbagħad looking back ngħid illaħwa I would have expressed my gender in a better way f'dik is-sitwazzjoni imma, mental safety, haw, mental health speċi comes first għax ġieli eż.xi kultant ngħid u iva I'm going to risk it, imbagħad ġieli nispiċċa niġi self-conscious avolja nkun ilbist dak li ridt nilbes as in I'm expressing my womanhood, allura nkun qisni ħa ngħid hekk komda f'dak is-sens għax I'm expressing myself, imma mbagħad niġi self-conscious min-naħa l-oħra illi ngħid imma għalfejn? Għalfejn ħriġt hekk meta naf illi ċertu nies ħa jħarsu lejk b'ċertu mod speċi, allura qisu hemm, dejjem hemm dawk iż-żewġ lati.”

6.3.3.b Victim Blaming

W3 (2.30)* “Qalli, ‘Imbagħad jistagħġbu kif jirrejpjawhom.’"

W3 (2.30)* “Ħloqt argument fuqha dik għax għalija ma kienx kumment li tgħaddi, mara tilbes li trid, tista’ toħroġ għarwiena jekk trid, still doesn't warrant anybody to even look at her let alone rape her erm ... u eħe rrealizzajt illi anka minħabba l-ideoloġiji ta’ nies qrib tiegħi, inżomm lura milli nilbes ċertu affarijiet.”

6.4 Dominant Discourses and Female Sexuality

W8 (2.28)* “Qisu din l-idea ta’ women are very sexually objectified but at the same time they can't show their sexuality, li dik il-ħaġa veru tirritani, mela filli they're at your service kind of, imma if they are sexual because they want to be, that's a big no-no kind of. Dik il-ħaġa ddejaqni għax men and women and anyone in between they have the right to be a sexual being without being harassed.”

W6 (2.1)* “Imbagħad il-Madalena l-ħażina, taf kif imbagħad il-Madonna li hija pura.”

W11 (1.2)* " Il-lingwaġġ li jintuża huwa ħafna huwa differenti ħafna, mela jekk inti toħroġ ma’ xi amount ta’ ġuvintur, mela inti considered qaħba, imma jekk raġel joħroġ, mela playboy (B: mhm, mhm) which is mind boggling erm u eħe hemm ħafna minn dawn."

W8 (1.24)* "Jien naħseb nara li it's very sad illi bħala mara, like, you are more of a sexual object, mill-irġiel imma at the same time you have less right to be sexual. Il-fatt li mela l-irġiel jistgħu ibagħbsuk, you are more sexualised, whatever, imma mbagħad pereżempju jekk raġel joħroġ ma’ ħafna nisa it’s cool, it’s a goal, it’s an achievement, jekk mara toħroġ ma’ ħafna rġiel, you are a slut, you're a whore, like mara ma tistax toħroġ ma’ ħafna rġiel jew ma’ ħafna partners, imma raġel iva jista’, like so in a way, mela l-irġiel jistgħu, jisesswalizzaw lin-nisa u mara li is seen as a sexual object she cannot be sexual herself."

W3 (1.96)* “I ask for sex more then he does, allura jibda jgħidli inti raġel missek ġejt, il-ħin kollu trid.”

6.5 Heteronormativity and Compulsory Heterosexuality

W7 (1.60- 1.14)* “Kif kbirt mal-background tal-familja u x’naf jien, illi qisek biex tkun familja sura trid tkun mara, raġel ehh u forsi tfal, ġeneralment bilfors bit-tfal għax dar vojta, taf int?Anki jekk ikollok xi family meeting, ‘Allura, għadek ma sibtx wieħed?’”

W10 (2.16)* “Ħafna nies jassumu li inti trid raġel, ikollok it-tfal miegħu hekk naħseb jien, ħafna nies jassumu hekk. Anka meta jkellmuk, in-nies ikellmuk bħala catholic, bħala straight u eventually tixtieq ikollok it-tfal.”

W9 (1.18)* “Anki l-punt li jiena bdejt inħoss feelings ta’ li kont miġbuda lejn mara oħra ta’ 19, for me it was such, I was so influenced by the community, 19 years ago, 20 years ago that is something bad

especially for a woman, li jiena I'm expecting you to have kids, to have a boyfriend, to have a men, to have a husband whatever."

W3 (1.20)* "Imma jekk inkun ma' mara I will let a lot of people down bħal speċi, probabbli deep down naf li nippreferi inkun f'relazzjoni ma' mara imma minħabba social constructs, kif ġejt imrobbija eċċ I hold back ..."

W3 (1.18)* "Meta ommi u missieri kienu qed jisseparaw, darba minnhom qaltli, 'M'iniex ħa nitkellem kontra missierek quddiemek, ma jmurx tumbra lill-irġiel kollha u teqleb.'"

6.5.1 Male Privilege, For The 'Real' Man, Not The Good Man

W8 (1.2)* "U naħseb anki l-fatt illi fil-komunità qisu feminine qualities have been looked down upon compared ma' masculine qualities, imma dik tagħti vantaġġ lin-nisa fis-sens ta' għan-nisa it's accepted li, qisha jiena naraha li għan-nisa iktar it's accepted to be whoever you want to be, compared mal-irġiel, pereżempju jekk ikun hemm mara u tkun tidher iktar typically masculine milli feminine jew hekk, it's more accepted milli ħa jiġi raġel jilbes libsa, so naħseb forsi, probabbli in a very bad way imma beneficial fl-istess ħin minħabba li masculine qualities are thought to be better, so it's easier for a woman to embrace both masculine and feminine qualities."

W7 (1.46)* "Nahseb ukoll il-fatt li mara weħidha jew żewġ nisa flimkien meqjusin weaker then 1 man ħa ngħid hekk allura qisek mara biex tkun safe fis-soċjetà u hekk qisu bilfors irid ikollha raġel jipproteġiha, jekk ikunu żewġ nisa flimkien they are seen as weak[142]. Naħseb iktar bħala dynamics of power, allura mbagħad l-istess qisha ħaġa, jekk raġel ikun iffemminat allura qisu ma għandux dak il-power li jkollhom irġiel 'normali'."

6.5.2 Women Are Freer To Explore Their Gender/ Gender Binary.

W8 (1.2)* "It's easier for a woman to embrace both masculine and feminine qualities. Bħala mara jiena għandi l-vantaġġ li I can be what I want to be, I can break the societal stereotypical norms u hekk."

W7 (1.24… 1.26)* "U fl-opinjoni tiegħi womanhood ikkumparata ma' manhood, womanhood ħafna iktar broad għax dak it-tip għandek ħafna iktar affarijiet li n-nisa jistgħu jagħmlu illi jekk jagħmluhom l-irġiel mill-ewwel ħa jiġu labelled bħala gay u hekk. Bħal din li qed insemmu tal-qalziet pereżempju għax tradizzjonlament, qalziet ta' raġel u dublett ta' mara imma mara jekk ħa tilbes qalziet, mhux ħa tiġi labelled bħala lisbjana, awtomatikament fis-sens, mentri jekk raġel ħa jilbes dublett qisu

[142] This quote was already presented in section 6.2.1, the whole quote was represented so as to give context to the participant's statement

awtomatikament (B: labelled), eħe, u anka jekk mara fis-sens il-make-up ukoll assoċjat man-nisa però jekk mara ma tagħmilx make-up mhux awtomatikament qisek, mhux daqshekk frowned upon ħa ngħid hekk mis-soċjetà u anki jekk joħorġu żewġ nisa flimkien, isiefru flimkien, jew jien naf jieħdu kamra ġo motel jew jien naf, qisek aktar aċċettata milli jagħmluha żewġt irġiel għax mill-ewwel għandek qisu, jekk jagħmlu affarijiet flimkien żewġt irġiel, qisek bilfors, ehh mela bilfors koppja dawn mmm, jiġifieri qisu minn dan il-punt hekk iktar għandna erm freedom qisna fis-soċjetà, tinstema' naqra ironika imma insomma."

6.6 Gender Performativity

W6 (1.5)* "Being women and womanhood kemm in-narrativa ta' nisa li għandna madwarna jimpattaw [sic] in-narrattiva tagħna ta' kif suppost inkunu nisa."

W2 (1.4)* "Jiena di natura ma tantx jiena the typical girly girl, m'iniex minn dak it-tip li taf inti nħobb nilbes, nagħmel make-up, immur shopping, tipo insa, dawk l-iktar affarijiet li nitqatel nagħmilhom jiġifieri kieku kellna niddiskutu fuq hobbies u hekk iktar naqa' taħt male milli female."

W3 (1.14…1.42)* "Li mara taqta' xagħarha ma jfissirx li hija straight, jew lisbjana jew bi, …this is my style tpinġija u xagħar qasir, qed nagħmel ħafna affarijiet biex niġbed l-attenzjoni tan-nies - din it-tpinġija kollha u xagħar qasir fuq mara sfortunatament."

W1 (1.8)* "Nagħmel li rrid għax irrid ... ħadd mhu ħa jiġi jgħidli mhux ħa tilbes dik il-libsa għax tidher wisq qisek mara, tant ieħor ħadd mhu ħa jgħidli mhux ħa tilbes dak is-shorts għax tidher qisek raġel jiġifieri jien iż-żewġ nipprova nieħu nisterjotipika ż-żewġ genders u nużahom għalija taf kif li rrid jien."

W1 (1.58)* "Biex ngħidlek imma sigriet żgħir mort interview darba tax-xogħol , m'ilux u ma lbistx libsa, ilbist qalziet u ġlekk għax kont naf li l-panel kien ħa jkun kollu rġiel... u tgħidli għaliex? Għax ma ridtx nidher, ma ridtx nidher żgħira, ħelwa taf kif, bit-takkuna nitbissem."

6.7 Agency vs. Backlash

W9 (1.22)* "Mara naraha tidher kerha meta ssemma' leħinha. X'jiġifieri jiena għax mara ma nistax insemma' leħni, ma nistax inkun hemm għal nies oħra, ma nistax inkun vuċi għas-soċjetà jew għan-nisa? Għalfejn jiena għax mara qed nidher kerha?"

W6 (2.15)* "Imma I feel very strongly that society expectations of women are not to rock the boat, to serve others, and to take care of others, għalija that has been my experience ħa ngħid hekk, very strongly u f'kuntesti differenti: fil-familja, fix-xogħol, mal-ħbieb."

W8 (1.2)* “Naħseb over time it’s changing a lot il- ... il- ... x'inhi mara (B: mhm), kind of imma it’s becoming more varied, kull mara għandha d-definition tagħha naħseb.”

W 2 (1.73)* “Naħseb jiena femininty is more of a social thing għax jien għalija I am me, issa jekk hux dawn l-affarijiet għandhom x’jaqsmu mal-irġiel jew man-nisa, boqq. ******(tgħid isimha) kont u ****** (tgħid isimha) nibqa’.”

W1 (2.26)* “Is-soċjetà ħarxa ħafna fuq in-nisa; huma x'inhuma jagħmlu, x'jagħmlu.”

W3 (2.12)* “Imma society does look down on these people għax society tends to place everybody in a box, allura if you don't fit that box, tipo, red light bħal speċi.”

W9 (2.12)* “Jiena nemmen illi l-Maltin ħsiebna naqra wisq f'xulxin, so ma nistax ngħidlek li le għal dil-mistoqsija, erm, naħseb li iva, tiltaqa’ ma’ kollox, I mean ovvjament, we are continuously judged … so I think that this is a constant battle, taf kif.”

Chapter 7- Social Expectations and Women’s Gendered Identities

7.2 Generational Influence- Gendered Socialisation

W3(1.18)* "The upbringing kollox, erm fil-fatt eħe, jien insemmi l-upbringing ħafna pereżempju: jien nemmen ħafna li l-upbringing jaffettwa bniedem immensament."

W8 (2.16)* "Naħseb hekk taħdem ħafna fil-verità, li inti titwieled blank slate kind of imma eventwalment tibda tara l-ġenituri tiegħek x'inhuma, tibda tara s-soċjetà reacting to your parents, to you, tibni dawn l-ideat ġo moħħok."

W2 (1.12)* "Ikunu ċertu social constructs li jkunu trabbew bihom huma u jkunu qisu jridu jimponewhom jew inkella, għax qisek jekk inti mara trid bilfors tilbes il-make-up, jew għax inti mara trid bilfors tilbes it-takkuna."

W9(2.20)* "First of all everything starts from home, so erm ... iva I mean li għext f'familja, it-tradizzjoni ta' qabel li 'l missieri ommi tlestilu l-ħwejjeġ, li jiġi d-dar u tlestilu l-ikel."

W1 (1.4)* "Gender is also socially constructed jiġifieri aħna minn meta nkunu tfal nitgħallmu x'jiġifieri tkun mara minn dak li jgħidulna l-adulti,pereżempju jien għandi tifel u għandi neputija. Dawn xahrejn hemm bejniethom, xahrejn, jiġifieri qishom tewmin. Dawn ninduna kif in-nanniet jittrattaw iż-żewġt itfal b'mod differenti għax it-tifla hija tifla u t-tifel huwa tifel. L-ewwel nies nibdew bl-ovvju bħal pereżempju t-tifla tajjeb għax tħobb ir-roża, it-tifla tajjeb għax tħobb il-pupi u jekk pereżempju nidħlu ġo ħanut u t-tifel jagħżel xi ħaġa roża, in-nanna tgħidlu le għax dik tal-girls u jiena ngħidlu, 'Jogħġbok ir-roża?' Jgħidli, 'Eħe.' Mela tista' toħodha."

7.3.1 Behaviour

W6 (2.53)* "Tpoġġix hekk għax mara ma tpoġġix hekk."

W12 (1.12)* "Naħseb tkun tfajla, ma nafx, tgħallimt li trid toqgħod naqra pass lura."

W3 (1.20)* "Aħna bħala nisa, aħna dejjem tlajna li we have to be people pleasers."

W8 (2.6)* "It's ok to be sad but not angry, qisu , naħseb pereżempju bħal jekk tara s-subien, jekk ikun tifel jibda jibki 'Dak gay' hekk. Mara jekk tibda tibki, it's ok però jekk jaqbad in-nervi 'Miġnuna dik', 'Bla paċenzja dik'."

7.3.2 Women As Child Rearers And The Lack Of Balance Between The Couple When Raising Children.

W11 (1.2)* "Imbagħad qisu it leads to erm ... having children, qisu inti dan il-womb dejjem tikber sakemm tkun lesta biex ikollok it-tfal, għax inti mara so it's natural, jew this is the right thing to do jew this is what is meant … meta tkun tifla ċ-child rearing huwa dejjem at the back of ... u anki ġieli nara min ma jkollux tfal qisu tindika li eeee għax inti mara mela allura tieħu ħsiebhom aħjar il-qtates, jien naf jew il-klieb ... erm jiġifieri dak huwa starting point li qed inħossha iktar issa forsi li qed nikber qed nara li ħafna nies eee kellek tfal, għandek 32, mmm qisu ticking time bomb."

W1 (2.108)* "Inħobbuhom kemm inħobbuhom in-nisa għal idea patrijarkali; mara l-ewwel job tagħha hija li jkollha t-tfal and she is happy. If she is not, then there is something wrong with her (B: mhm), there is something wrong with her especially if she's had children and she is not happy, inti anka naraw kemm nitkażaw b'raġel li jitlaq lil familtu u b'mara lil familtha."

W3 (2.8)* "Eżatt, jigifieri eħe on a societal level erm ... hemm ħafna expectations. Aħna n-nisa nippretendu illi kapaċi nilħqu daqs raġel. Teknikament eħe kapaċi nilħqu daqs raġel imma ninsew li raġel għandu ħafna inqas commitments milli għandha mara, erm ... ovvjament mingħajr ma noffendi lill-irġiel imma raġel ma jridx imur dar, at least on a normal level, raġel ma jridx imur id-dar u jkompli t-tieni xogħol tiegħu prattikament, li trid taħsel id-dar, li trid issajjar, irid jieħu ħsieb lil uliedu eċċ.Erm ... hemm livell ta' karrieri li tista' tilħaq mingħajr ma tieħu xogħol id-dar allura hemm dik l-expectation mis-soċjetà li hija kontradittorja."

7.3.3 Domestic and Employment Expectations

W2 (1.2)* "Hemm is-social construct eżempju jekk inti on the biological construct twilidt mara, mela hemm ċerta expectations li trid tkun mara tad-dar, tieħu ħsieb it-tfal, affarijiet hekk."

W11 (1.44)* "Meta konna żgħar aħna, qatt ma kien (tirreferi għal missierha) iħallini niżbogħ, kien jgħidli, 'Dak mhux xogħlok.' X'jiġifieri mhux xogħli? Kont nieħu gost, kont inkun irrid niżbogħ, ngħid, kont ngħid għax forsi ma nagħmilx biċċa xogħol tajba imma das-sajf min ġie jgħinni nagħmel in-network erm ... dan kien jieħu t-tifla tiegħu tgħinu jiżbogħ u hekk, allura kont insaqsih l-affarijiet u kien jgħidli sa għada ħa tagħmel hekk inti u kont nagħmel, u għedt ehh mela kapaċi nagħmilhom dawn l-affarijiet. M'iniexdaqshekk ... forsi nċaflas ftit iktar imma nagħmilhom, ma jimpurtax, imma għall-papà tipo, dan qabel weġġajt, jiġifieri mhux għax issue ta' disability issue, ta', dak mhux xogħlok, dak xogħol raġel."

W12 (1.4)* "Ma nafx x'kienu jgħidu n-nies imma l-mummy kienet tiġi tgħidilna, 'In-nies jgħiduli basta għandek 2 tfajliet id-dar, ma jgħinukx xi naqra?' Jiġifieri anki minn barra, it-tfajliet iridu jgħinu lill-mummy mhux ħija."

W12 (2.26)* "Jiġifieri again, nistenna lir-raġel jgħinni fl-art għax missieri dejjem jgħinna fl-art, imma ma nistax li r-raġel jgħin fil-ħwejjeġ għax qatt ma għamel ħwejjeġ id-daddy, allura qisu unconsciously dawn l-affarijiet tassorbihom, fis-sens din tal-ħwejjeġ issa qed naħsibha, qatt ma għedtlu, 'Isma' għamel il-ħwejjeġ,' imma l-art ġieli għedtlu, 'Isma' għamel l-art.' Anka ikel, missieri matul il-ġimgħa, ħlief li kien isajjar il-fenek il-Ħadd, ir-raġel tiegħi differenti imma għax imidd idu hu, kieku naħseb ma jmiddx idu hu lanqas tgħaddili minn moħħi."

W5 (2.26)* "Il-mummy ma tiqafx għaddejja d-dar, probably hekk ħa nispiċċa."

W6 (1.8)* "Ommi meta kienet issajjar, dejjem l-ikbar platt għall-papà u għal ħija, imbagħad aħna (parteċipanta u oħtha) u l-aħħar hi jekk jifdal, b'li fadal, jekk fadal, ġieli kienet tgħid, 'Issa jien nieħu biċċa ħobż.'"

W8 (1.2)* "Imma bħala mara jiena għandi l-vantaġġ li I can be what I want to be, I can break the societal stereotypical norms u hekk. Naħseb over time its changing a lot, il-,il- x'inhi mara, kind of imma its becoming more varied, kull mara għandha d-definition tagħha naħseb, il-life tagħha u l-fatt li we can do both like domestic things, nieħdu ħsieb it-tfal, xorta imma mmorru naħdmu. Dik tibqa' tbellahni, kif kind of għan-nisa, xorta hemm ukoll irġiel li jieħdu ħsieb it-tfal u hekk, imma in general qisha we evolved minn like ok il-mara postha d-dar tieħu ħsieb it-tfal u hekk għal ok, qed tieħu ħsieb it-tfal, qed tirranġa d-dar, whatever, imma qed taħdem fl-istess ħin u qed going up the social ladder kind of."

W3 (1.2, 1.4)* "Hemm iktar għalliema nisa, forsi minħabba the motherly figure we portray jew minħabba the motherly instincts we ... ħafna forsi jmorru iktar tajjeb mat-tfal però once again, li qed ngħid jien, jista' jkun social construct,erm imma eħe on the other hand nara xogħlijiet bħal pereżempju managerial roles fejn, erm, xorta għadha tiġi ddominata mill-irġiel u mingħajrj ma rrid sfortunatament nagħmilha jien ukoll, a case in point erm minħabba l-masters li qed nagħmel ridt inġib approval mis-CEO ta' MDH, I was surprised li hi mara u jiena dik kienet my initial reaction li ma kellix kontroll fuqha, li ngħid istra mara, imma mbagħad thinking back għedt why am I surprised, kapaċi daqs jekk mhux aktar minn raġel fil-verità."

W11 (1.50)* "Ukoll terġa' tiġi back to mhux inequality imma din l-istint li nara bejn nies li għandhom it-tfal u nies li ma għandhomx tfal tiġi wkoll erm ... għax jekk għall-argument il-mara ħa tkun iċ-child rearer, ir-raġel ħa jista' jibqa' jmur ix-xogħol u jekk għandu promotion ħa joħodha filwaqt li l-mara jekk kellha tagħmel inqas sigħat kellha tieħu iktar sick, il-promotion mhux ħa toħodha most probably."

W10 (1.12)* "Nisa żvantaġġati pereżempju fix-xogħol, fejn kont naħdem f'kumpanija fejn 70% tal-impjegati huma nisa imma meta tiġi għall-managment ħafna minnhom huma rġiel. Minn 20, 2 nisa, allura qisek tara d-differenza hekk dik ir-raġuni naħseb għax ikollhom it-tfal, jieħdu career break u tinbidel il-focus u r-raġel dejjem ikompli tiela' u qatt, għalkemm, għalkemm inbidlet mis-snin ta' qabel u hawn irġiel li qed ikunu d-dar, xorta baqgħet li l-irġiel dejjem telgħin, telgħin u n-nisa jieħdu l-break u mbagħad jitilfu ċ-ċans."

W1 (1.32)* "Għalkemm huma (tirreferi għall-irġiel) proactive fid-dar xorta jħossuha li hija mhux kompletament responsabbiltà tagħhom jew huma add on, taf kif qishom a bit of contribution (B: il-bonus) eħe eħe, qisu ta' min hi r-responsabbiltà tal-managment kollu tad-dar?"

7.4 Internalisation or Rejection of Social Constructs.

W1 (1.12)* "Missieri qatt ma rani bħala mara, jien hemm jien u ħija, jiġifieri hemm ħija warajja imma qatt ma qalli, inti tifla mela ma hemmx università u ħuk eħe … fis-sens li kellu missieri li għalkemm minn working class background, qatt ma ġietu f'moħħu li jiena differenti u għadna sa issa, jiġifieri, jiena missieri tradizzjonali immens, immens imma meta jkellimni qatt ma jkellimni just għax mara."

W1 (2.32)* "Qalli, 'Ma taqtax qalbek inti,' qisu hu dejjem jassumi li għax jiena mara ħa naqta' qalbi."

W2 (2.24)* "Kien jgħidli niftakar (tirreferi għalmissierha) meta kont daqs nitfa li n-nisa mhux suppost jilagħbu u jħobbu l-football, tħares lejja llum il-ġurnata, naħseb l-ikbar football fanatic li hawn as in mara."

W6 (1.8, 1.10)* "Jiena u oħti as we were growing up konna qed nitfarfru, konna qisna niċċelinġjawha l-mamà, ngħidulha tagħmilx hekk, trid tieħu ħsieb tiegħek innifsek (B:mhm, mhm) u dal-ħafna affarijiet, and yet recently anki konna qed nitkellmu jien u oħti lbieraħ bla ma ndunajna, avolja lil ommi konna nippruvaw niftħulha għajnejha, dhalna fl-istess patterns, mal-partners tagħna kemm jien u kemm oħti (B:mhm, mhm) and we were a little bit shocked to be honest biex nindunaw li avolja rajna lill-mamà u għednilha biex ma tagħmilx hekk, għamilna hekk bla ma ndunajna aħna (B: eħe eħe). Fir-relationship tagħna li npoġġu lilna nfusna l-aħħar (B: eħe), and it's a constant eeee trying to work on yourself … I remember even consciously thinking, ma rridx inkun bħal ommi you know u dawn l-affarijiet, xorta unconsciously hemm ikunu programmed fina."

7.5 Identities held by interviewed women

7.5.1 Intersecting Identities

A* "It took lots of therapy biex naċċettha, għax anki meta skoprejtha fija nnifsi tipo għedt wow, titkellem xejn ma ħadd whatever, tipo try and burry it imma mbagħad kont mort (isem tal-NGO) so qisu anki huma, għenuni naċċetta l-fatt, li within a modern church qisu xorta hemm people on the outskirts, qisu, però u anki dak li għamel il-papa riċentament wow, tipo ok xorta r-religjon tgħallem ċerta affarijiet però, kollha kemm aħna wlied Alla, he created this ... so dik qisha li għenitni, taf inti, tipo jiena ... tifla ta' Alla daqs ommi li hija straight."

B* "It-tnejn li aħna konna tal-knisja, ġieli anka quddies flimkien konna mmorru nisimgħu, so nhar ta' Ħadd konna fil-parroċċi tagħna imma Saturday night konna mmorru nisimgħu quddies flimkien xi mkien ieħor fejn ħadd ma jafna allura kienet mhux qed naħarbu ta imma, we made it something our own, qisu, so allura qisu its our own spiritual."

C* "Naħseb li għandi disability hija parti minnha, mhijiex identità tiegħi, imma hija waħda minn"

W1 (1.24…1.26)* "Jiena dejjem nippreżenta ruħi bħala ***** (name) ... jiena ... diffiċli titli għax inti x'inti, Dr, Mr, Miss, Mrs taf kif allura jiena **** first name basis taf kif jiġifieri jiena ***** u jgħiduli ok **Miss** (emphasis on the word) taf kif dik il-Miss hija patronising u vera jkunu jridu jpoġġuk f'postok (B: ija ija) eħe, eħe, eħe u inti trid, eħe, naraha li għal mara iktar diffiċli mbagħad biex tasserta [sic] illi hi li hi taf kif? U jiena dejjem ikolli l-problema

tal-età wkoll. Jiena dejjem inkun l-iżgħar waħda allura hemm kollox kontrija hemm il-fatt li jiena mara, hemm il-fatt li jiena żgħira, taf kif, dawk jaħdmu kontrija."

W7 (1.54…1.56)* "U naħseb ukoll għandha taffettwa wkoll l-età naħseb (B: mhm), pereżempju jiena ehh sentejn ilu kelli 21 jiġi, 22 u kont waħda miż-żgħar fl-uffiċċju u allura mara, u żgħira fl-uffiċċju, allura iktar u iktar ma kinux joħduni bis-serjetà jiġifieri jgħidulek din fiex tifhem għadha ħierġa mill-università, qatt ma ħdmet qabel u x'naf jien. Għandu mnejn li kieku kont ġuvni iktar kienu jaraw potenzjal fija għax naħseb hekk għandek l-istereotype wkoll, naħseb li jekk ġuvni għadu żgħir u mara għadha żgħira u t-tnejn ħa jgħidu l-istess ħaġa, qisek malajr tgħid, ara dan għandu, għar-raġel, 'Potenzjal li jkun leader tajjeb that he will go places u x'naf jiena.'. Mentri l-mara, 'Din x'taħseb li hi? qisha trid tilħaq mill-ewwel għadha ħierġa, kollox step by step. Għalfejn qed timmira hemm fuq?'"

7.5.2 Impact of internal and external positions on the woman I-position

W1 (2.90)* "I like to say that they are always enriching but they are not taf kif, sometimes they are a bit tiring … at the same time, ukoll I cannot divorce myself from these identities ukoll, għax it would feel very silly, so kieku jkolli npinġi diagram, nagħmel arrows iż-żewġ naħat me and my identities u anki forsi nagħmel arrow fuq ukoll because they are all connected."

W6 (2.49)* "Naħseb il-mummy kienet l-ewwel eżempju ta' x'inhi mara u kien hemm affarijiet, għamilt żmien twil nipprova nkun bħalha, speċjalment fit-teenage ... erm ... it didn't really work out for me because it was very self-sacrificing u I wasn't happy when you are constantly sacrificing yourself, depressed kont taf kif, so erm imbagħad pereżempju t-terapist tiegħi li kienet mara, kienet anki qisha role model kbir għalija, fejn bdejt nipprova nitgħallem kif mara ma għandhiex għalfejn tkun self-serving (B: mhm, mhm), tista' anki tieħu ħsieb tal-affarijiet tagħha u xorta tkun mara tajba, u attractive tipo, mhux attractive ... mhux attractive in the sens illi romantically jew sexually (B: eħe, eħe), imma in the sense of someone I would want to aspire to be like ... erm ... and someone that other people naħseb would consider like successful."

W2 (2.20)* "Il-mummy dejjem tgħidli xi kultant aħjar tagħlaqlu milli tipprova tibda argument. My top role model mara bħalissa Roberta Metsola … li għandha tgħidu, ħa tgħidu, qisu anki dak il-fighting spirit qisu, I draw from her, issa jien personalment qatt ma ltqajt magħha imma din, imma considering kemm għamlet f'ħajjitha u għandha dal-ħafna commonalities bħali, speċjalment l-origins tagħha, they inspire in me a lot fuq anki kif naħsibha ċertu affarijiet."

W1 (2.80)* " Bdejt nistudja, bdejt nara nisa oħra … u l-fatt li rajt dawn in-nisa popolari li kitbu whatever u ġabu t-tfal tagħhom waqt il-lecture għax ma kellhomx baby sitter, qalulna so what issa joqgħod hemmhekk, joqgħod jilgħab, kellhom id-device u whatever imma qalulna so what I have children u hemmhekk ftaħt għajnejja; it-tnejn li huma mhumiex contradiction taf kif, u they spoke about their children, u normali, mhux taboo, tipo eh eħe by the way għandi t-tfal ta, imma jien mhux ħa nitkellem fuq it-tfal għax jien akkademika u jiena ma', hemmhekk, naħseb ********* (issemmi università barranija fejn hi studjat) was an eye opening experience għalija, bħala università li għallmuni l-

maġġoranza nisa u kienu nisa li ma jiddejqux jitkellmu li għandhom pets, u ma jiddejqux jitkellmu li ovvjament they are successful in their own right."

7.6 Conclusion

W6 (1.2)* "Kont proud li jiena l-girl għax I felt like I had won the lottery li ġejt il-girl u r-raġuni kienet għax kont ngħid ehh jiena nista' nagħmel il-make-up, nista' erm nilbes il-ħwejjeġ sbieħ, iż-żraben, in-nails as a child, bejn ta' 6 eżempju u 10 I felt lucky li jiena l-girl u mhux il-boy għax il-boys boring ma jagħmlux make-up, so għalija kienet il-jackpot, u niftakarni anka nħoss il-bżonn li ngħid, 'Imma jiena girl.'Dik kienet as a child imbagħad xħin bdejt nikber u bdejt insir teenager I felt the opposite, ħassejtni li kont unlucky li kont girl, actually xħin bdejt ninduna bil-period u bl-uġigħ u bil-biża' li tiġi raped u bil-catcalling u bil-pain ta' child birth. U għax jiena nittaqqal u mhux ir-raġel? U kont nobgħod li jien mara għal żmien."