Gendered Processes and Women's Stunted Career Growth: An Exploratory Study of Female Software Engineers

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Abstract

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Keywords

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In the present qualitative study, we explored to what extent gender has been an integral part of workplace experience and career growth among female software engineers in Indian Information and Technology sector. Following a purposive sampling strategy, data were drawn from twenty-one female software engineers. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted. A hybrid of theoretical and inductive thematic analysis was done to answer the research questions. For analyzing the data through theoretical thematic analysis, Acker's (1990) "Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations" was used as the theoretical lens. The result revealed that four features of gendered processes in the organization, that is, the gendered division of labour, gendered symbols and images, gendered interactions, and gendered effects on individual identity are experienced by female technology professionals. The impacts of these gendered processes in the career-growth and job-experience has been discussed. Moreover, gender-based stereotype, discrimination, the gendered division of labour inside the family, and self-silencing inside organization are found to be the gender-related aspects which function as inhibitors of women's growth in career. Keywords: Division of Labour, Gendering, Gender-Discrimination, Thematic Analysis, Technology

Introduction

From moment to moment we perform subtle psychological and social negotiations about just how gendered we choose to be

(Joan Wallach Scott, 1996, p. 506)

Every society has distinct gender roles; in most cases, men's roles are instrumental/economic, and women's roles are expressive/social in nature (Gupta, 2012; Parsons & Bales, 1955). Novarra (1980), for instance, mentioned that there are six "women's tasks" in society; all of these involve the traditional caregiving roles. Conforming to these socially prescribed gender roles primarily produce gender (Berk, 1985) and/or drive the individual process of "doing gender" (West & Zimmerman, 1987). These gender roles are so rigidly defined in some cultures that men and women get ridiculed for performing the roles and tasks allotted for the opposite gender (Shorter, 1975).

In Indian society, Eastern cultural values are pursued where these gender roles are "conceived, enacted, and learnt" (Dube, 1988). The roles are characterized by inequality of rights and positions where men are at an advantageous position. This inequality is reflected in The UNDP's Gender-related Development Index (GDI) where women are persistently found to be deprived in terms of a long and healthy life, knowledge, and a decent standard of living. Researchers like Ghose et al. (2001) prescribed that the reality of Indian women's status is worse than what can be concluded from the GDI.

In India, traditionally, men take economic responsibilities (Blackwell, 2004), whereas women's roles are subservient in nature (Khairullah & Khairullah, 2009). The gender roles are so prominent that in media like advertisements, also, women are portrayed in the traditional

roles of mothers, daughters, and sisters (Khairullah et al., 2009; Griffin et al., 1994). This unfortunate state of Indian women is reflected in women's participation in the labour force, which is as low as twenty-seven per cent (Klasen & Pieters, 2012). Mukhopadhyay and Seymour (1994) argued that the education of a girl-child in Indian families is determined by the existing "patrifocality" of the culture which is defined as "the kinship and family structures and ideology that give precedence to men over women" (Gupta, 2012, p. 154). The unequal scope of education among women reinforces the gender-based occupational segregation (Anker, 1997), which is one of the most pernicious indicators of gender inequality. However, in urban India, where educational inequality has been diminishing over the years, the labour force participation of women is stagnated at a low percentage, which further strengthens the patriarchal argument. Anker (1997) points out that gender-based occupational segregation is detrimental to society since it affects the perception of men towards women in addition to women's self-perception. Also, it determines women's lack of representation in the labour force. The segregation is most obdurate in technology/engineering; the fields are chosen by a few percentages of Indian women (Chanana, 2000; Parikh & Sukhatme, 1992).

On a positive note, there tends to exist a steady increase in women's representation at the junior levels of Information and Technology sectors (NASSCOM, 2017) whereas the vertical segregation (Anker, 1997) and Glass-ceiling (Bhattacharya & Ghosh, 2012; Federal Glass Ceiling Commission. 1995) are still unaltered in the Indian IT sector. In consonance, NASSCOM report (2018) mentioned that in eighty per cent of Indian IT organizations, the female-representation at the C-Suite level is less than ten per cent. Moreover, there is a gender-based wage gap in India, even when males and females are at the same level (Das, 2012). Patel and Parmentier (2005) observed that traditional gender roles still persist in the Indian IT sector. Therefore, it is needless to mention that gender has chronically been one of the fundamental parts of the skeleton of IT organizations in India. Acker (2006), too, prescribed how social and economic inequality is produced and perpetuated in "doing the work." Therefore, from the given social context of India, it is evident that there is a need to examine the gender-related aspects of the organizations minutely. This is especially important since, in the last few years, this sector has been witnessing progress in terms of female-representation and thus, addressing the issues is necessary to ensure further growth in female representation as well as a healthy workplace experience among female software professionals.

These gendered experiences of female technology professionals not only depend on the cultural factors and disadvantageous social position of women in Indian society; but STEM-related (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) gender-stereotypes (which is found across countries) also are a large part of it. Therefore, this study might provide insights to the researchers across the globe who have been working on women's experience in STEM.

In the next section, we will be discussing Acker's theory of Gendered processes which we have used as the theoretical lens for the present study.

Gendered Processes in the Organization

Most of the existing organizational theories ignore the existence of gender as an integral part of organizational reality. Acker (1990), thus, questioned "why so little feminist debate" (p. 141) in the organization and suggested the absolute necessity of studying gender in the context of the organization. Mainstream organizational theory, therefore, is often cynically referred as "malestream theories" since "research on gender has been constantly ignored and, at best, marginalized in separate chapters, special issues, separate tracks or divisions at conferences, footnotes or parenthetic observations" (Martin, 2000, p. 208). Connell's (1987) work on hegemonic masculinity led to the recognition of gender in an organization. Peterson and Runyon (1999), establishing the need of studying gender, argued that "gender is a particularly

powerful lens through which all of us see and organize reality" (p. 5). Acker (1990) mentioned that in the organization there are certain gendered processes where the "advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine" (Acker, 1990, p. 146). Acker (1990) considered gender as something which is interactional or relational (i.e., gendered processes might be either explicit or implicit).

Previous research has rigorously worked on the experience of women in the male-dominated profession (Murray & Syed, 2010; Powell & Sang, 2015; Smith, 2013; Whitehouse & Diamond, 2006). Acker's theory of gendered processing is a suitable theoretical lens for understanding how women's experience is mediated through gender. Gendered processes involve four features:

First, the gendering process involves a gendered division of labour or "gender patterning of jobs, wages, and hierarchies, power, and subordination" (Kanter, 1977; Acker, 1990). This division inside organization leads to a lower position of women in terms of earnings, promotions, and opportunities (Roos & Gatta, 1999). Anker (1997) classified gender-based occupational segregation in two categories (i.e., vertical and horizontal). Vertical segregation occurs when males are located at higher levels than females when they work in the same organizational sector. Horizontal segregation leads to males and females working in different sectors so that there is a dichotomy of jobs for males and females. There exists a hierarchy even in this horizontal sex-typing of occupations since women's jobs are typically less paid than men's jobs (Guy & Killingsworth, 2007). Therefore, the gendered division of labour is essentially based on the traditional/historical division of labour where masculine and feminine roles are viewed as dichotomous, opposite, and hierarchical.

The gendered division of labour is explained at multiple theoretical levels. Human capital theory (Polachek, 1975) suggests that women are less penalized for spending time out of women's jobs as compared to men's jobs. Neoclassical economic theory, following the Marxist explanation, suggests that there is a hierarchy where rational men's work in terms of production is placed at a higher level than women's altruistic work. Gender theorists suggest that women's disadvantageous position in society and patriarchy are the macro-level forces that drive the gendered division of labour. At a micro level, psychologists emphasize on role theory and socialization theory to explain the gendered division of labour. Historically, two world wars had some effects of altering the existing segregation (Bradley. 1989); however, the implications were short-term. In recent time, even when there is a major increase in female representation in the workforce worldwide (Lopez-Claros & Zahidi, 2005; NASSCOM, 2017), gender segregation still persists (Alvesson & Billing, 2009; Blackburn & Jarman, 2006).

In the Information and Technology sector, since more females have been joining over the years, the gender-based horizontal segregation is challenged. Technology expected to destroy the existing gender-based hierarchy of the society and was, therefore, termed as "great equalizer" (Jolly & Horn, 2003). However, unfortunately, technology has reestablished the existing gender-hierarchy (Cockburn, 1992).

Second, Acker (1990) propounded that the gendered division of labour is maintained and reinforced by the existing symbols and images inside the organization. The images of certain professions are viewed as masculine or feminine. In Kanter's (1977) study, for example, the image of a business manager has been defined by success and forceful masculinity. In a similar note, Cockburn and Ormrod (1993) found that technology is something "youthful and masculine." Sex-typing of jobs comes from the gendered division of labour and gender symbolism goes at a deeper level since it associates and shares inexplicit and gendered meanings and associations to a job. These gendered symbols become parts of organizational culture. In engineering sectors, late nights and male pub cultures, for instance, are integral parts of the organization which makes the profession symbolically masculine in nature. The

symbolic processes involve rituals, metaphors, and artefacts in the organizational culture, which might describe and prescribe the gendering process (Alvason & Billing, 1997; van Wijk & Finchilescu, 2008).

Third, gendered processes also involve interactions which are gendered in nature. The nature of the interaction is also characterized by dominance and subordination between genders. In an organization, social networking is of importance since it accentuates "the acquisition of resources and the exploitation of opportunities" (Bollingtoft & Ulhoi, 2005, p. 273). In most of the cases, however, these networks are found to be gendered in nature where people draw from culturally provided gender practices.

Fourth, gendered processes in an organization tend to impact the individual identity of a person; for instance, a person might change the dress code, language use, and self-representation in order to fit the gender script (Acker, 1997). This is found explicitly in gender management strategies such as blending (Sheppard, 1989) or "very careful management of being 'feminine enough'...while simultaneously being 'businesslike enough'" (p. 146).

Acker (1992) defined gendering processes at the five levels (i.e., structure, policy and practice, ideology, interaction, and identity). Britton (2003) proposed that the gendering process take place at three primary levels, (1) the structures of work organizations, (2) the cultural and ideological assumptions, and (3) the agency of workers themselves. Since the present piece of work aimed at understanding how gender impacts the workplace experience and career growth of women software professionals, Acker's (1990) "Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations" was found to be a suitable theoretical lens for the analysis of the data.

The review of the literature reveals that technology is not only a male-dominated organization, but the gender symbolism of technology as a masculine profession also is abundant in the work environment; this aggravates the proneness of gendering in the technology sector. However, there exists a dearth of studies that empirically tests the symptoms of gendering in the technology sector, with emphasis on how it impacts the career growth of women. We have attempted to address this gap through the present study; that is, we checked First, whether the symptoms of gendered processes are present in the Indian information and technology sector through the theoretical thematic analysis and second, how these processes affect the career growth and workplace experience of female software professionals through the inductive thematic analysis.

We, the researchers of the study, have a background in the psychological research. As conformers of the constructivist paradigmatic standpoint, we believe that experience of gendering is constructed through intersubjective meanings. None of the researchers had any experience of working in technology sector. This project exposed them to the gender-related aspects inside technology sector for the first time.

Method

Participants

At the beginning of the study, ethical approval was taken from the Institutional Ethical Committee (IITK/IEC/2017-18 1/2). Twenty-one female software professionals were interviewed for the present study. The software engineers had a work-experience ranging from five years to twenty-one years. For the selection of the participants, theoretical sampling was carried out with a snowball strategy where one participant who met the theoretical criteria of the work was chosen for the work and then, her contacts were used for the same. Although, we tried ensuring a maximum variation strategy or to "maximize the possibilities of obtaining data and leads for more data on their question" (Glaser, 1978, p. 45). The participants included a

large age range, and some of them were married, and some were single. Some of the participants had kids, and others did not. The participants' size of the organization also varied where some worked in small-sized start-ups, and some worked in the big corporations. However, all these participants have worked in the private sectors.

Data Collection

For procuring the data, in-depth and semi-structured interviews were used since Clarke and Braun (2013) suggested that interviewing is one of the best techniques for exploring human experiences. We aimed at understanding how women have experienced the gendering as a part of their work-life and how these experiences they think are detrimental to their professional existence. The epistemological difference between surveying and qualitative interviewing, as suggested by Holstein and Gubrium (1995), lies in the fact that in interviews, the participants are considered as meaning makers who are constructing realities. When it comes to understanding gendering processes, Acker (1990), herself relied on interviewing store managers and human resource managers to build her theory. Later, a number of other works (Alsos, Hytti, Ljunggren, Poutanen, & Kovalainen, 2013; Crawford & Pini, 2010; Kantola, 2008) also have used interviewing as a tool for procuring data to understand gendering processes. Some theorists suggested that while working with women, interviews are the most appropriate tool; Anderson and Jack (1991), for instance, argued that an "interview is a critical tool for developing new frameworks and theories based on women's lives and women's formulations" (p. 164). The interviews took place in the location and time of the participants' convenience and were explicitly told the purpose of the work at the beginning of every interview. The interviews were conducted by the first author. We followed an interview schedule, keeping the aims of the research in mind; however, the conversation continued in a conversational style rather than taking a data gathering approach.

All the interviews were conducted by the first author of the work. The interviewees, after getting brief exposure regarding the study, participated voluntarily, and gave permissions to audio-record the interviews. For collecting data, we asked open-ended questions. We want to clarify that the data collection did not begin with any a priori theoretical lens in the mind but questions were asked to check two basic research questions; that is, how gender plays an important role in their day-to-day work-life and career growth. Acker's (1992) theoretical lens has been used to analyse the data since this has been used as one of the most suitable and commonly used work to understand gender in the organisation.

Thematic Analysis

"Analysis is a process of examining something in order to find out what it is and how it works" and "a process of generating, developing, and verifying concepts—a process that builds over time and with the acquisition of data" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 58). For the present work, we have chosen thematic analysis tool. Thematic analysis is defined as "a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insights into patterns of meaning across a dataset" (Clarke & Braun, 2013, p. 57). For conducting the analysis, the six-steps suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed appropriately.

1. Familiarizing with the Data: This is characterized by reading and rereading the transcribed data to develop acquaintance with the data. Since the data collection and transcription were conducted by the first author of the researcher, she already had an idea of the data. Moreover, the rereading of data has been done to ensure the first step.

2. Generating the Initial Codes: While reading the data words or small phrases are assigned to a portion of transcribed data (Saldaña, 2015). Braun and Clarke (2006) mentioned the metaphor of building blocks to describe the importance of initial codes in the foundation of themes.
3. Searching for Themes: Initial codes which have some unifying features or meaningful patterns are clustered to develop the themes.
4. Reviewing the themes: Themes are reviewed and checked in the context of the research questions, and it is ensured that the themes are relevant and also are substantiated.
5. Defining and naming themes: The naming of the themes was done to justify all the codes as well as the research question.
6. Producing the Report

Results

In this section, the themes derived from the qualitative analysis are discussed. The four symptoms of gendered processes suggested by Acker (1991) along with their adverse impacts on the career growth and workplace experience of women in the technology sector are evident from the narratives of the interviewees. The themes are derived through a hybrid of the theoretical and inductive thematic analysis of the narratives derived from the qualitative interviews. The data was collected for answering different sets of research questions. However, as suggested by Hammersley (2010), the data was freshly analyzed to answer the aims of the present work.

Theme 1: Gendered Division of Labour

In the present work, we observed gendered division of labour as a consistent theme across the interviews. This might take multiple forms; such as women consistently being allocated in the lower positions, absence or underrepresentation of women at the top levels of the sector, and unequal distribution of two sexes in the workplace. The vertical gendered segregation in the technology teams are observed where women are less represented in the technology leadership roles. A senior technology developer, for instance, shared,

> *I have never worked under a female lead in my fourteen years. I have had two female managers, but they are not technical lead; they are people managers (human resource managers), so I have never worked with a technical lead.*

Previous literature, also, shows that above the age of thirty, there are very few women visible in the Indian IT sector (Donnelly, 2015 Raghuram, Herman, Ruiz-Ben, & Sondhi, 2017). The skewed female representation is reflected in most of the technology teams. This acute absence of females in the managerial roles portrays the glass-ceiling existing in the IT sector (Bhattacharya & Ghosh, 2012).

This vertical segregation might be a consequence of horizontal segregation at the educational and occupational levels. We also found that, even in the same team, the type of tasks allotted to women differ qualitatively from the tasks assigned to male employees.

There exists an internal division of labour where women are provided with less critical and complex projects and more trust lies on the male professionals. Also, due to gender-based segregation, women often find themselves as the only girl in a team something referred to as solo-status in the social psychology literature (Thompson & Sekaquaptewa, 2002). It results in some sort of pressure to work harder; that is, stereotype threat (Steele & Aranson, 1995).

A professional expressed her concern regarding the division of roles inside the technology teams as well as the need to perform higher.

> *In the present team I am the only girl, there are twelve guys…so the pressure is always there to perform. The pressure is always there. At times I have felt that you know, few of the tasks that have involved more logicality or which are not very straight forward are being given to guys. That is the common thing that I have felt in this company and also in my previous company. When it comes to speaking, public speaking, and presentation, they would prefer girls.*

Therefore, the traditional gender roles where women participate in communications and relational aspects and men perform the logic and technology are still pertinent. This gendered notion adversely affects the recruitment and growth of women in core coding teams further reestablishing the occupational segregation. As Alvesson and Billing (2009) suggested, the gendered division of labour further reinforces the division, and therefore, it persists.

A participant stated,

> *There are companies; for example, gaming companies, they would particularly prefer guys; it is my perspective. Because hardcore gaming coding is very difficult and one needs to be dedicated to working like overnight every day, but I have seen more guys doing that. I think the company has some lack of trust when it comes to giving responsibilities to women. In my experience, I have always seen that. I am given coding work, and it is very simple, but trust me, I can do the more difficult stuff.*

This kind of discrimination in the allotment of tasks and the perceived trust of the organization is likely to affect career growth directly. In an indirect and long term form, it leads to a lack of motivation among women. Also, the lesser opportunities for learning and growth resulted from experience in less complex projects are fatal. This eventually requires women to overperform in order to get equal opportunities. The division of labour also backed up by the gendered notion existing in the Indian culture that women find it uncomfortable to stay late at the office or travel for work. These gender roles existing inside the society also led to the division of labour inside the organization.

> *At times, we have to work hard to overpower a guy employee. So, we have to prove ourselves. We have to prove that we will be comfortable, we will not have any problem staying late at night at the office, or stretching extra for getting things done. So we have to clarify that in the beginning.*

The gendered division of labour is also manifested through the wage gap between male and female employees. One study from European countries suggested that women earn fifteen per cent less than men in the organization (EU Commission Report, 2018). In India, wage inequality is far worse (Patel & Parmentier, 2005) where women, on an average, earn sixty per cent of men's earning. Wage discrimination has come up repeatedly in the present work as well.

> *There is one of my friends; she is working in this company. Though she is working pretty well, there is nothing like she is getting an amazing package. Now there is another guy, he has less eligibility, but she got thirty per cent of appraisal compared to the guy.*

The explanation of raising voice against wage discrimination has been mostly explained in terms of self-silencing in order to conform to the traditional feminine role such as docility. Women professionals tried to attribute men's better career growth to traditional masculine gender roles such as aggressiveness.

> *I feel there was a lot of difference (in wage), the guys, they were paid more, because all the girls in my team we were not aggressive in pushing for higher wages, most of the time you get things when you bargain, but I never did that. But I know 2-3 guys who used to do that very well, and they were given more raises, mostly because they used to threaten to quit.*

This aspect of self-silencing in the organization is discussed in detail as a part of gendered organizational interaction.

Theme 2: Gendered Symbols and Images

Acker (1992) prescribed that gendering involves "construction of images, symbols, and ideologies that justify, explain, and give legitimacy" (p. 568) to the gendered organization. The source of these symbols might emerge from multiple levels such as existing metaphors, rituals, language, to the stereotypical images of an occupation. Male and colleagues (2009) argued that sex-role stereotyping in an organization could be attributed to Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organization. In an engineering organization, the organizational culture is gendered (Gill, Sharp, Mills, & Franzway, 2008). Every job has certain gender symbolism, and engineering and technology are not the exception. The brain metaphor, for instance, which is used to explain computers, attached an intrinsic masculine label to computers and technology (Van Oost, 2000). In the late Sixties, the masculine nature of computing became so evident through the metaphors that it became a part of the socio-cognitive schema. In a recent study, for instance, senior male engineers are found to underrate stereotypically feminine competencies (Male, Bush, & Murray, 2009).

Gender stereotyping is also one source through which gendering processes are maintained inside the organization. Social representation theorists have consistently emphasized on the symbolic and collective nature of stereotypes, for instance, "in the case of the Negro [sic] because of his skin colour, we respond to him not as a human being but as a personification of the symbol we have learned to look down upon" (Katz & Braly, 1958, p. 41).

The symbolic school of culture, which was expounded by Geertz (1973), argues that culture is "shared meaning system." In terms of symbols, images, and organizational culture, Indian Information and technology sector is characterized by what Poster (2008) termed as techno-masculinity. In the present study, these symbols have emerged in terms of stereotypical images and sexist jokes available in the organization.

> *Men make the usual jokes about girls cannot drive; girls cannot read maps kind of things. No matter how big an engineer you are, they will continue saying you are a girl you can't drive, you are a girl you can't read maps, no direction sense. All that is there.*

The environment is so gendered for women that often, the colleagues attribute women's success to something that one of the participants termed as "woman card,"

> *That she will play her woman card, she does not need to do anything. She will come to the office, smile, and her work will be done, these are the statements very normal coming from guys.*

These gendered symbols and images are used to justify the existing hierarchy of the organization. In the Indian IT sector, marriage and children are often used to justify the discrimination against women and to justify the gender inequality inside the organization; this is known as organizational logic (Mumby & Putnam, 1992).

> *I have seen in many organizations, that when they take interviews where they see that the girl is married, mostly they avoid giving them the job-offer because they have the doubt that they will go into the maternity leave.*

Some interviewees reported that often, women are not preferred for an international project since there is an existing prejudice from the organization that women will not be ready to take international projects since they are family-centric. This is termed as "spatial discrimination" (Poster, 2013) where women are restricted within "boundaries" (Lamont & Molnar 2002). This is often experienced by women in the Indian IT sector (Poster, 2013). In the present study, women are denied from opportunities of off-site projects that require travelling outside the city and country even when it brings growth in their career. An interviewee narrates,

> *There was a new project that was going to start, so somebody from the office called and told me "did you hear this person is getting an opportunity to go to the United States in this project?" I called my manager and asked him, "How come that guy got the opportunity, and I didn't; even when I have more experience?" This manager said, "I thought you might not want to leave your kid." He (the manager) should have called and asked me.*

Burris (1996), also pointed out that technical works are often viewed as something masculine. Some of the interviewees referred to certain aspects of their job, which are more appropriate for males than females, which might suggest some forms of sex-typing. The working environment in the Information and technology sector might be something "hostile" or "toxic" for the women (Frehill, Javurek-Humig, & Jeser-Cannavale, 2006) since it tends to follow a "culture of engineering" (Hacker, 1981). Poster (2013) also mentioned that the culture of engineering might lead to some temporal and spatial barriers for women in the IT sector. Here, the issue of the temporal barrier has come up frequently. A professional has reported how they were asked to leave office by a certain time in the evening.

> *There used to be a mail circulated to all the female employees that "you are not supposed to stay back in the workplace after six," so if there is something which requires you in office, you have to get permission from your higher-level managers, so I mean, I don't know if it is fair thing to do.*

The temporal barrier seems to come from families as well where women are put into the pressure of maintaining a time-limit.

> *If I had to work late I could not take that project; if that is a case I have to quit the job, till now if somebody asks me you have to stay late, I have to quit the*

> *job. Because I will not be getting permission for that, I won't get permission from my family; I will have to quit in that case.*

It is also interesting to note how these stereotypes related to the masculinized nature of the job impact women's employability in the sector.

> *The guys here (in my team) have a big opinion that they should not take women in the team because they cannot work all the time. Because whenever there are some openings since I am the only girl in the team, I keep on telling why can't we hire another girl, they say no girls, please. They will say after a certain time you people will say I have to go home. You people will not work. I feel very bad about it. Why do they still have that feeling that girls cannot do it?*

These stereotypical images of women, definitely determine the fate of women's growth in their profession.

Theme 3: Gendered Interactions

Goffman (1977) suggested that "In modern industrial society, as apparently in all others, sex is at the base of a fundamental code in accordance with which social interactions and social structures are built up" (p.301). Every interpersonal communication in an organization implicitly or explicitly reinforce gender inequality (Acker, 1992; Britton, 2003). Consequently, the interactions between inter-sex communications differ from intra-sex interactions.

The present study reveals two patterns where intergender communication becomes difficult in Indian organisations. First, the organizational environment is so gendered in nature that women often experience the fear of being judged in having a conversation with the opposite gender colleague. This essentially comes from the gender socialization in India. Basu and colleagues (2017), for instance, observed that "girls and boys should not interact" is a major theme of learning to be gendered among Indian adolescents. Ely and Padavic (2007), in their exhaustive literature, argued that how most of the existing literature suffers from the bias of assuming that gender role socialization only occurs in childhood. Where the reality is that these socializations persist and also are functional inside the organization. One of the participants, for instance, reported how having frequent conversations with a male colleague is referred to as flirting, overfriendliness, and eventually, her success is attributed in a negative way.

> *At least in my first company, you talk to a guy, be a little friendly (to them), and then they will say that you are flirting with them. When you are successful, you are getting promoted, there is a tendency in the organization, to attribute this success to something else. Maybe your beauty, your gender or maybe your friendliness.*

Second, it is also found that women who are introverts and who find themselves shy and not-so-outgoing often find it difficult to have a conversation with males. Having intergender interactions are often considered as a part of extroversion and not-so-feminine. This, too, emerges from the lack of egalitarian values existing in India society. A senior software developer with more than twenty years of experience, for example, came up with why and how it is difficult for her to be a part of organizational networks.

Everything in the corporate sector starts from how you network with people and how you socialize with people. When it comes to females networking with males, not all can do that. Unless you are outgoing and social, and that comes to you naturally, but for females, who do not have this thing, for example, for people like me, who come from a small town and I am not naturally outgoing and not socially-networking, and if that part is not there then it is difficult.

Another interviewee explained how traditional gender roles have made Indian women cut on their organizational networking. Essentially, one might say that gendering leads to not the only difference in terms of the content of the communication but also the number of intergender communication. There is an overall absence of women in all professional and informal communications.

If the husband and wife are working in the same firm, and there is a team dinner, and after the team dinner, there is a booze party, so hundred per cent chance is that the female will not attend it because the kid will be all alone, but the male employee will attend. I have seen that.

Previous literature suggests that in male-dominated professions, there is a gender difference in both what is said and how it is said (Crawford et al., 2010). Males are more likely to have aggressive communication such as shouting and humiliating than females in the organization (Childs, 2004), whereas women choose to behave in a conventionally feminine manner characterized by docility. In payment negotiation, for instance, males use active negotiation strategy which might become aggressive in nature (Kaman & Hartel, 1994). In the present work, too, women chose self-silencing as a communication strategy. Self-silencing has been observed both in workplace friendships and with authority figures (Maji & Dixit, 2020). Self-silencing is characterized by a "tendency to inhibit self-expression and action" (Jack & Ali, 2010, p. 5). Throughout the interviews, women professionals have reported how they usually silence their real opinions and emotions; they delay their negative responses with their workplace friends and authority figures. This silencing happens both in the face of a sexist comment and in salary negotiation.

If someone passes a comment in the workplace, at that time I feel if I stay calm, it will be ok, in order to save that relationship, you let go things, you think it is ok. I do it often, I am a little sensitive, so I generally feel it is ok, leave.

Therefore, conforming to the traditional role of caring often led women to silence their voice and this, undoubtedly impact their career growth since they decide to let go and choose to be feminine. One software professional reported,

I faced discrimination. I did not get promotion for five years; I didn't get a promotion. I know what has happened. But what is the point of expressing that concern? They are not able to understand my concern.

In terms of the content of speech, women bring their family matters in everyday interaction. An interviewee, for example, mentioned,

One girl got married, and the other girl used to crib about her husband, they brought the personal space in the workspace.

Another aspect of gendered interaction also occurs when women change their identity to become like one of the men. This blending in strategy is discussed in detail under the gendered identity theme.

Theme 4: Gendered Identity

According to Acker (1990) individual identity component of gendering process "may include the consciousness of the existence of the other three aspects of gender, such as, in organizations, choice of appropriate work, language use, clothing, and presentation of self as a gendered member of an organization" (p. 147). Working professionals construct their identity in a way that matches their interest, dressing, and desires in a gender-appropriate way.

Sheppard (1989) suggested that blending in through minimizing one's identity to feminine traits is one widely used strategy of "gender management" (Sheppard, 1989) among women in the male-dominated industry. Women might want to dress like men, talk like men, and show their conformity towards masculine identity. Powell (2009) found strategies like behaving like boys, accepting gender discrimination, even taking an anti-woman approach among women engineers. In the present study, there was a continuous effort to disown the feminine identity.

This blending has come in terms of dressing,

In my college life, you will see me in round necks, in loose pants, in very loose t-shirts because I was not very comfortable wearing all that a girl would wear. So, I started dressing up as a guy and thinking like a guy.

Distancing from feminine identity becomes evident when one says,

I was a girlie girl, but now I do not like girly stuff a lot. Although I have become less feminine now, I have started putting lipstick these days.

Identity regulation (Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002), where the "power works through constraining feelings, thoughts and actions" (Alvesson & Billing, 2009, p. 99), occurs in a subtle and gendered way. Probably, that is why women professionals are forced to adjust their identity accordingly. These changes in identity more frequently occur among technology leaders.

In an organization, there are some women who have a very strong personality and who are very independent, they believe that if I think like a man, then, I will be equal and everyone will respect me. This lady I am referring to is like that, she is a very strong personality, she is very individualistic and independent, it is all good, but you don't have to think in that way to portray that you are strong. The male-dominated society has put it in that way that if you want to be strong, you have to be more masculine.

This kind of shift in identity among technology leaders might not be helpful to their career. As suggested by McCullough (2011), this becomes a part of double-bind where women technology leaders when behaving in an agentic manner are often perceived as hostile rather than effective.

Conclusion

The article has attempted to understand the gendered experience of female software professionals through the interviews. The aim of the article was to check the everyday gendered experience among women in a male-dominated profession like technology and how it retards their career growth. Through the theoretical lens, that is, Acker's (1993) gendered processes theory, it can be viewed that all the symptoms of gendered processes can be observed in the present sample.

Gender-based division of labour, both in vertical and horizontal forms, was evident in the present work. The horizontal segregation becomes evident since most of the technology teams had a skewed female representation. This led to solo-status experience among most of the participants. Previous literature suggests that solo-status results in higher vulnerability to stereotype threat, performance expectancy (Stangor, Carr, & Kiang, 1998), and performance apprehension (Maji, 2019; Sekaquaptewa, Waldman, & Thompson, 2007) among women in a male-dominated profession. In the present study, participants who were the solos in their technology teams reported their need to work harder to disprove existing gender-stereotype. The vertical segregation, too, is obvious since the absence of female technology leaders has come up as a chronic issue in the majority of the narratives, and this has been found to be a reality across the world (Colwill & Townsend, 1999; Cross & Linehan, 2006; Kirchmeyar, 2002). Adams and Weiss (2011), for instance, argued that the path to technology-leadership is gendered in nature since women are pushed to business and change management based on the traditional women's relational roles. In consonance, one of the interviewees also shared that she has worked under female managers but not technology leaders. This gendered segregation has been found to effectively damage the career growth of the professionals in manifold ways. Women have directly experienced a lack of faith in the organization. They have consistently stated how they experience a form of discrimination in terms of the quality of projects they receive, the promotion, and wages. Kanter (1977) found that women in male-dominated profession experience discrimination which resultantly retards their career growth, this is found to be true in the contemporary Indian Information and Technology sector.

These discriminations are also present in symbolic forms; that is, gendered symbols. These symbols have emerged in the forms of sexist jokes, stereotypical messages, as well as in terms of subtle discriminatory practices used by the organization in the recruitment process. There exists a gendered culture where the temporal and spatial barrier are experienced by the participants. This gendered culture, characterized by symbolic discrimination, too, results in reduced career growth among women.

In a similar note, the interactions inside the organization are found to be gendered in nature. The number of interactions that women make inside organisations is considerably less since they choose to cut down on networking and the informal team meets. This lack of presence in these informal group meets are not only fatal for their overall career growth but also, might contribute to the maintenance of gender stereotypes inside the organisation. Based on the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954), it has been found that increasing the number of qualitative interactions with women reduces inaccurate gender stereotypes (Basu, 2008).

It is also found that women choose to behave in a feminine manner and end up self-silencing in their interactions with male colleagues in response to their sexist statements or in terms of salary negotiations with their male managers. Besides that, the cultural values of India and gender socialization also impact inter-gender communication and significantly hamper smooth networking. In the end, it has been found that these gender processes have led to some changes in the identity of the female professionals, including masculinization and blending, to masculine identity. Therefore, from work, it becomes clear that all the symptoms of gendered processes are present in Indian Information and Technology sector. These gender processes are

found to adversely impact the career growth and recruitment process and their everyday experiences.

Since the dysfunctional symptoms of gendered processes are found to impact the overall workplace experience along with the career growth of women software professionals, organizations must address these symptoms followed by educating the employees about the pernicious consequences of gendering. Being aware of these implicit processes would help both the male and female professionals to detect the existing gendered symbols coming from others or themselves and eventually to respond to it. In this study, we found masculinization process where women not only distance themselves from feminine identity but also internalizes traditional masculine traits. However, we also found that women often self-silence in order to conform to feminine self; this necessarily means that there are some individual differences (defined by disposition, situation, or experience) in terms of the gendering of identity; future research must explore that area.

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