Women in Public Relations in Portugal

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Summary

This report provides an insight into the position of women in Public Relations in Portugal. Our research's main aims were: 1) understanding lived experiences, main challenges, and opportunities for women in PR; 2) exploring PR women's perspectives and preferences on work environment and office culture; 3) understanding socialization and leadership, concerning the engagement of Portuguese women in PR in different communication and leadership styles.

To achieve these goals a qualitative method was applied, using semi-structured interviews with women working in the public relations industry (communication agencies or in-house departments) in Portugal. A total of 19 women were interviewed by telephone and email; among interviewees eight were in leadership positions, being communication managers from middle or top management. Interviews were conducted between March and July 2020.

Following the framework of Topić (2020), the interview script was built on three sections that examined the (a) lived experiences of women in public relations regarding their career advancement process, work-life balance, and differential treatment and behavior based on gender; (b) the office culture in terms of employee discussions, jokes made by colleagues, and inclusion in decision-making process; and (c) leadership perceptions.

Results show that age and experience matter, in the sense that older women in medium leadership positions feel more constraints in career progression for being women and have a more masculine profile in communication and leadership styles, whereas younger, less experienced persons - and the oldest in leadership positions - perceive more gender equality on PR career path between men and women, both on Internal performance and on career development. Interestingly, women under 30 consider age (youth) more discriminating than gender. On the other hand, interviewed women agreed on the importance of networking for PR career development and that, generally, they do not perceive companies privileging males over females for work or leadership. Conversely, the fact that they state working more than 8 hours per day and weekends, not all being paid for this, together with a consciousness of being difficult to have families in this profession, unless they have a support system, reveal transversal gender equality issues related to work-life balance very important in Public Relations industries in Portugal. Furthermore, although some women seem not to understand the differences between
female and male leadership, the majority believe they have more feminine leadership characteristics.

**Keywords:** Women, Public Relations, Portugal, gender, female leadership
Introduction

The emergence of gender equality as a topic of concern in the field of public relations is linked to the progressive feminization of the labor market in the American context, but has also spread to other countries, mainly the UK and Australia (Topić et al., 2019). However, research within the Portuguese context remains scarce. In this report, we will focus on describing and analyzing the situation of PRP women in Portugal. Firstly, we provide a brief state-of-the-art, attempting not only to cover the research in this field but also to describe the Portuguese political, economic, and social contexts as well as their own changes over time. Secondly, we characterize the women working in the local PR market and finally, we present and discuss the results from the semi-structured interviews conducted with the PRP women.

Research into the role of women in PR has been conducted since the 1980s, but the 21st century, especially from 2010 onwards, has brought an increase in academic research concerning the experiences of women working in the industry (Polić & Holy, 2020; Yeomans, 2019; Topić, 2020; Topić et al., 2017; Topić et al., 2019; Topić et al., 2020). Recent studies (Topić & Tench, 2020) have shown that despite women’s dominance in the communication industry in terms of representativeness, they continue to face disadvantages in journalism, public relations (PR), and advertising. In contrast, little is known about the extent of these challenges in other fields, such as strategic communication, communication management, and media relations (Topić et al, 2019; Jelen-Sanchez, 2018). The fact that the European Communication Monitor has been logging issues in gender by surveying communication practitioners in Europe since the beginning of this century has also contributed to highlight the importance of how the feminization of this field may still entangle career progression and structural barriers (Topić, 2022), which in turn may influence what is being communicated to audiences.

At first, the EUPRERA project conducted an extensive literature review, which showed the theoretical development of studies in the PR industry (Topić et al., 2020). According to the authors, the body of research gathered reflects the professional situation of women in the industry, as the research produced is derived from their lived experiences. This comprehensive review underlined the importance of the 1986 Velvet Ghetto study, which pointed out that women faced multiple discrimination, seeing themselves as technical staff, and expecting less payment than men, regardless of higher academic degree. Some
of the identified issues include the glass ceiling, pay gap, lack of mentorship opportunities, and stereotyped expectations of a masculine leadership style.

Topić et al. (2020) have also examined the evolution of theories, with a special emphasis, in the 1990s, on the development of both feminist and organizational theories of public relations, focusing on themes that ranged from a radical feminist perspective, women as symmetrical communicators, the criticism of liberal feminism, glass ceiling and pay gap, work experiences and satisfaction, and power. Studies from the early 21st century focused both on the development of feminist theory first introduced in the previous decade and on the status and recognition of public relations practitioners. In the last analyzed period (2010-2019), the authors report that research regarding the position of women in public relations has come full circle (Topić et al, 2020). After four decades of research, the main focus has returned to the study of discriminatory work environment, marked by subthemes such as technical vs. managerial positions, “glass ceiling”, pay gap, male work culture and diversity; as well as prejudices against women (with subthemes of stereotypes about women’s organizational skills, power, stereotypes about communication skills).

Within the history of the country, particularly throughout the 20th century, Portuguese women experienced both progress and setbacks in their quest for equal rights, yet they have consistently faced inequality towards men. The First Republic period (1910-1926) saw some significant progress in women’s rights, more specifically in family and divorce laws (Guimarães, 1986). However, the government failed to address the issue of male dominance effectively (Vaquinhas, 2011). Although compulsory education was extended and became secular and free of charge, it encountered challenges to its implementation due to the “inertia of the state and the families” (Adão & Remédios, 2009, p. 5).

Recognizing equal working and intellectual abilities, a decree-law opened some public job opportunities for women but the document also stated that men would retain leadership positions, and women still could not vote.

If during the First Republic period, women were denied the right to vote, the dictatorship (1926-1974) established some suffrage rights for women, albeit under certain conditions.

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1 Decree-law no. 4676/18 of July from the Secretary of State for Justice and Worship
2 Law no. 3/3 of July of 1913.
3 According to the decree-law no. 19/694, of 5th of May of 1931, eligibility for the right to vote until 68 was limited to women who had completed at least high-school education and were heads of family, widows, divorced/separated, or with husbands in the colonies or abroad. It could only apply to local council elections.
Moreover, this period witnessed the election of the first women deputies to the National Assembly/Parliament, who came from the privileged social strata within Portuguese society. Despite this breakthrough, the representation of women in the National Assembly was meager, never surpassing 4% across various legislative periods (Adão & Remédios, 2005). These women were exceptional cases for two reasons. Firstly, most women during this time hailed from low socioeconomic backgrounds, rural areas, and were predominantly illiterate (Cova & Pinto, 2002). Secondly, the legal framework and the dominant ideology, rooted in the principles of the Church’s social doctrine, strove to "shape a conservative, restrained and backward world" (Van Dunem, 2016, p. 13) that relegated women’s role to the side lines. The 1933 Constitution stated equal rights for all citizens but imposed exceptions on women based on their nature and the good of the family. Therefore, the regime enforced a gendered public-private dichotomy, urging women to refer only to the private sphere, restricting them to the social roles of wife/mother and housewife (Aboim, 2010; Wall, 2011). On the other hand, men were conceived as the head of the family, i.e., as the holder of authority to whom women owed obedience (Cova & Pinto, 2002). For example, under the law, husbands could forbid their wives from working either outside the home or undertaking any profitable activity. Conversely, women were not allowed to pursue specific careers (e.g., army, diplomacy), and certain jobs (e.g., teaching or nursing) had limited rights (e.g., marriage).

Following the April 1974 Revolution, which brought an end to 48 years of oppression, Portugal underwent profound political, economic, and social changes (Barreto, 2005), with significant progress being made in the areas of equality and women’s rights until now (Rêgo, 2012). Not only voting rights were equally granted, but women’s participation in the labor market has increased substantially, reaching, in 2021, 73.5% (Labour market information: Portugal (europa.eu), retrieved 1 March 2023), compared to only 18.2% in the 1960s (Cabreira & Braga de Macedo, 2022). This growth has also been observed in the communication field, where the percentage of women working as journalists or PRP tends to be higher than men (Crespo et al., 2017; Ventura, 2014). Nevertheless, gender inequalities, such as the significant gender pay gap (Torres et al., 2018) and glass ceilings, are widespread, which suggests that the dominant presence of women in this industry does not, by itself, guarantee a paradigm shift.

From 1968 the law established equal voting rights for the National Assembly for all citizens who could read and write.
1. *Method and Conceptual Framework*

Recent studies have contributed to enlightening the barriers and challenges women face in the workplace, namely issues of equity in promotions, salaries, and work-life balance. Departing from the EUPRERA project concerning women in public relations, this research on women in PR in Portugal followed their European counterparts aiming to understand,

a) Lived experiences of women in Public Relations in Portugal, including expectations of women working in the industry, main challenges, and opportunities. Dimensions are (1) professional progression and (2) structural barriers.

b) The office culture, including networking work interactions, communication, and dress codes. Dimension is (3) (verbal and non-verbal) communication.

c) Socialization and leadership, concerning the engagement of Portuguese women in PR in different leadership styles and social contexts. Dimensions are (4) Leadership and (5) Social Context.

The research used a qualitative method of in-depth interviews, giving voice to participants and deriving meaning from words. Interviews were conducted in the period from April 15 and July 30, 2020.

Interviewees were asked questions, structured around three areas directly related to the research objectives:

**i) lived experiences of women working in public relations:** women were asked questions on work hours, work-life balance, working and raising a family, career progression opportunities, expectations on women’s behavior and attitudes women need to demonstrate to progress, experiences of direct discrimination such as disapproval, different treatment based on gender, sexist comments and practices, having to behave differently to be taken seriously and equality of opportunities. Here we underline professional progression and structural barriers as the main dimensions found in interviews.

**ii) office culture** where women were asked questions on communication style, networking, dress codes, chats and banter in the office, gender differences in office banter and social interactions, exclusion from business decisions, and expectations of women, such as
having to work harder to prove themselves because of their gender. Here we found the main communication dimensions, including personal style, gender stereotypes, reproduction and communication styles, and dress codes.

**iii) leadership** where women were asked questions on the socialization process, early social interactions, and experiences with their bosses with a distinction on how women and men lead and experiences with male and female bosses (for employees) and leadership styles (self-assessment of own leadership style for managers and leadership preferences for employees).

Criteria to participate in this study were: being female, working in the PR industry, either in the public or private sectors. Due to the pandemic situation related to COVID-19 interviews were conducted at a distance, either by email or telephone (Figure 1).

1.1. Participants’ sociodemographic characteristics

Our participants were, then, nineteen women with ages ranging from 21 to 52 years old, and the average age of respondents was 33 years old (Table 1). We created three age intervals to mirror the distribution of interviewees (Figure 2) and perceived that most of our respondents were younger women (until 39 years old) and only six were older than 40 years old.

These age ranges help to understand the distribution related to professional experience in public relations. In fact, there is a relationship between age and professional experience,
which is shown in Figure 4. Older women naturally have more years of professional experience, though it should be duly noted that some of the younger women already have between three to five years of experience.

Table 1 - Age of interviewees

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Valid</th>
<th>Missing</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average</td>
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<tr>
<td>Median</td>
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<tr>
<td>StandDeviation</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2 – Age intervals

Figure 3 - Years of experience

Figure 4 - Years of experience per age intervals
Concerning academic degrees, all our respondents had one. Most at bachelor level in the field and four - of which two were younger - with master’s degrees (Figures 5 and 6).

1.2. Participants’ professional characteristics

The fieldwork was marked by the project’s team intention of understanding the participation and engagement of women in PR in different leadership styles, which led to the enrollment of both bosses and employees in this study. Following several contacts, the 19 women who showed availability to answer comprised only about a third of bosses (Figure 7). This uneven distribution may be explained not only by the real proportion - more employees - but also by the availability to provide answers. As expected, bosses or people in leading positions were those with longer professional experience, although one of them had just three to five years of experience in the field (Figure 8).
This study managed to get answers that could provide different working environments and perspectives, including women from the public and private sectors, although the latter predominated (Figure 9). We were also able to ensure that we had both employees’ and bosses’ perspectives from both sectors (Figure 10).

Another vector of analysis in this study was related to the specific professional position these women held. Our sample included diverse PR positions, which enabled a vision of heterogeneity of designations in the PR field in Portugal (Figure 11). Positions also vary according to years of experience, although for example there are two cases of women with less than one year of experience stating their position as PR Manager, which is quite atypical (Figure 12).
1.3. Participants’ professional characteristics

An in-depth analysis of our participants’ work environment reveals different types of companies and, furthermore, different types of industries. Although most of our respondents work in agencies or related, we also managed to recruit PR women from associations and one from an NGO (Figure 13). Taking a deeper look into the type of industry they came from, it is possible to verify the diversity of areas, though communication agencies clearly predominated (Figure 14).
To humanize the analysis, we will identify the interviewees by their first names, even if they are not their real ones. And, in line with the assumptions of phenomenological discourse analysis, we analyze these women's perceptions based on their personal background, life maturity, professional experience, and the hierarchical position they hold (Operational or Leader).
2. Findings

2.1. Lived Experiences of Women in Public Relations

2.1.1. Professional progression

The PR industry is full of female professionals (Fröhlich, 2023). This is clear from the high number of female students on university courses in the field of communication around the world, since the 80s of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century (Grunig, Toth, & Hon, 2000). However, at the hierarchical level, there has been a slowdown in the conquest of leadership positions by these professionals (Place & Vardeman-Winter, 2018).

This can also be seen in the panel of women interviewees: most of them work as employees, some with many years of experience in the industry, and only four have autonomous leadership positions, although one of them has male managers to report to. Among those women who are led, their managers are mainly men (13), while nine have women leaders. However, even in these cases, only four have autonomous leadership, as the rest have mid-level leadership (Team Manager) with male figures in CEO and Executive Director positions. There is only one case in which the situation is reversed: the woman is CEO, and the man is Team Manager.

Although this panel is not representative of Portuguese PR professionals, it is nonetheless curious that it illustrates some of what the literature on the subject says (Carli & Eagly, 2011; Place & Vardeman-Winter, 2018).

Despite this situation, the younger interviewees have an optimistic perception of women’s ability to develop relevant careers in the industry:

Constança (21 years old) ’I think that nowadays there is no longer such a discrepancy regarding career progression and gender. Women have the same ability to progress in their careers as men’ (...) ’I believe it only depends on me, my effort, and my skills’.

Rita (23 years old) ’Things have changed and that’s great. I think there’s more and more of this possibility and the truth is that I can see it in the job market’ (...) ’There’s still some prejudice, but things are changing, and I think it’s a positive scenario’;

Joana (24 years old) ’I’ve followed closely, for example, the transition of my current coordinator (who used to be a consultant like me) and the case of a client who went from Marketing Director to Managing Director of the company’ (...) ’In the case of Public Relations it’s even easier, not least because it’s a world in which we find more women than men, I’d say from my experience and contact with other people.’
Carolina (25 years old) "It depends a lot on the context of the agency/company you work for. But of the three I've worked for; I don't think there was any distinction between the progress of men and women. The distinction was made, as it should be, by the merit and abilities of the professional and not by their gender." (..) "But I have to emphasize that this opinion is due to my experience in the companies where I worked".

Sofia (22 years old) "It's a reality that, despite having a long way to go, has already been much further than it is today, so we just have to keep fighting as women to achieve it."

However, those with more professional experience end up showing greater realism, pointing out that career progression is still not equal between men and women:

Catarina (30 years old) "Maybe women have to work a lot harder and put in a lot more effort for it to happen, but it is possible. I think it's like that in all areas."

Julia (38 years old) "I feel that we can progress, but with a lot more work and trials than men."

Vera (36 years old) "Yes, with many and varied obstacles to make it happen."

Beatriz (27 years old) "Even though there are fewer opportunities."

Ines (25 years old) "In general, women find it more difficult than men because of the added pressure they have to reconcile family and work."

Maria (25 years old) "not yet with the same opportunities as men."

This perception is in line with the fact that 10 of the 15 PR professionals who do not hold leadership positions have already realized that they are excluded from important company business. The older ones even say that they have been excluded "several times". However, the younger ones normally justify that this is due to a lack of maturity and experience:

Sofia (22) "I'm still at the beginning of my career, so it's completely predictable."

Rita (23) "I was in a trainee position, so I think it's normal...".

Ines (25 years old) "I'm not actively involved in this front of the company either."

Carolina (25 years old) "due to the fact that I don't yet occupy a high enough position within the agency for my participation in these decisions to be essential, or because the managers prefer to make them individually with the clients."

Catarina (30 years old) "in other jobs I've had, people thought that because I was young or inexperienced, I didn't have the ability to do a good job."
The more experienced women point out that the big deals are left to the administrators, who are mostly men:

Helena (42) ‘I’m excluded, but not because I’m a woman. It’s because I’ve been with the company for so long and because it’s all management decisions’.

Matilde was the only one of the interviewees who showed a more conscious perception of gender issues:

Matilde (27) ‘My managers have always been men and always a bit self-centered. I don’t know if that has an impact or not, but they have this desire to be better than others and to always be on top of everything. And they end up ignoring those around them and not involving them in decisions. That’s what I’ve experienced. For example, we organized an annual event in July, but because of the virus, we had to postpone it. However, this was the decision of one person, one man, and it was never communicated to the team, and they were never asked for their opinion. I felt a bit left out since I’m on the team.’

Even though most answers do not show that there is any gender awareness in the differentiated internal treatment, almost all the women are aware that it is easier for women to progress if they are closer to the traits that are normally characteristic of the male nature:

Helena (42 years old) ‘Women, I don’t even like to say this very much, but the truth is that women, for the most part, have to stop being women. I say this in the sense of the sensitivity, affection, and tenderness that characterizes them. They have to look at the pragmatic side of things and be very determined, organized and have their objectives very well defined’.

Matilde (27 years old) ‘Women have to show a lot more confidence, whether it’s asking for a pay rise or implementing a strategy’.

Inês (25 years old) ‘As well as professional competence, I think they have to demonstrate an additional ability to be assertive in communication and even authoritarian. In addition to this, I think that those who tend to be always connected and underestimate free time or family time are privileged’.

Joana (24 years old) ‘I’m aware that women have to show a side of themselves that isn’t so real: staying longer at the office, showing more results, trying to be more proactive, always striving for more, more and more’.

Rita (23 years old) ‘I think what people expect is for them to have a strong attitude and to be true leaders’.
Catarina (30 years old) "They have to show that they're not emotional, it's an idiotic prejudice, but they're expected to be less emotional than men".

Maria (25 years old) "It's not so common anymore, but they are still expected to be available at all times, whether they have a family or not, whether they have children or not".

Constança (21 years old) "I feel that the attitudes that women (and some men too, although I notice it more in women) need to change or improve are related to the assertiveness and confidence they show".

Sofia (22 years old) "Ability to make decisions and think things through".

Carolina and Marta believe that the expectations placed on women are the same as those placed on working men. Margarida has the same perspective, although she recognizes that society's mentality needs to change:

Carolina (25 years old) "I believe they are the same as those that men need to demonstrate: excellence in the work they do, good presentation and communication skills, good skills for the jobs they do (which come from both schooling and professional experience already gained), a good ability to listen to others and establish good relationships with clients, collaborators and colleagues, and the ability to maintain decorum and respect for everyone you work with";

Marta (36 years old) "I don't think they have to show more than men. I think what we really have to demonstrate is that we are efficient, that we deliver results, and that we can provide valuable answers. I think that's fundamental, regardless of whether you're a woman or a man";

Margarida (44 years old) "There's nothing a human being can't or shouldn't show when they accept a paid job, whether they're male-female, young-old. It doesn't matter. From the moment you accept a paid job, you have to show results. This applies to everyone. I make no distinction between men and women. What I would say is that women still earn less than men in terms of salary".

Vera and Beatriz believe that the expectations placed on women have to do with the traits associated with them in terms of their ability to work. And this is what penalizes and burdens them:

Vera (36 years old) "A woman is expected to be more patient, more compliant, to accept more things, more workload, more tasks, and more difficult missions that would be assigned to a man. On the one hand, not just because of her ability to perform them, the expectation is that a woman will have multitasking ability. And as there is this expectation, the work or the things that are assigned to her correspond to this expectation. And that ends up putting more of a strain on them."
Beatriz (27 years old) “Although I don't feel it in my area/work, I am aware that women need to go the extra mile to be valued and noticed”.

Júlia has a similar perception to the previous two interviewees. However, she contrasts by saying that women need to have the courage to empower themselves in the job market and in society:

Júlia (38 years old) “Women have work skills that men have only heard about. And once women fully embrace who they are (leaders, mothers, wives, etc.) without guilt or prejudice, I think it will be easier. But there's still a long way to go.

The interviewed women leaders were given a different script. But almost all of them (4) confirmed that their journey had not been simple. They said they had been, or at least felt, excluded from important deals or decisions during their careers, as well as feeling "disapproved" of for their ideas and opinions:

Luísa (43 years old) “I've experienced disapproval... jobs where I was in charge and I gave an order and people didn't comply, with the indication that I didn't have enough merit to give orders. They didn't recognize my knowledge, wisdom, or ability to give orders. And this attitude came from men, especially” (...) “And I felt that this came from being a woman and being black”.

Laura (52 years old) “The disapproval wasn't so much because they expressed these opinions... Sometimes it's not so much what they say but what they do or don't say”.

Judite (43 years old) “Yes, I have. Women still have to prove that they are as efficient or more efficient than men. But there are already great examples of female leadership in various scenarios: political, economic, business, social, scientific”.

Isabel believes that this is due more to functional causes than gender. However, she ends up highlighting gender reasons, albeit indirectly, by justifying that this is because PR women's senior careers are mostly in positions that are less linked to major decisions:

Isabel (41 years old) “I've been excluded, but not because I'm a woman. More because of my role. There are few women with profit and loss (P&L) responsibilities. Women with more senior careers are usually functional experts, in communication, compliance, quality control, etc., roles that don't necessarily have responsibility for budgeting and making profits directly”.

Isabel believes that this is due more to functional causes than gender. However, she ends up highlighting gender reasons, albeit indirectly, by justifying that this is because PR women’s senior careers are mostly in positions that are less linked to major decisions:
2.1.2. Structural barriers

The central aspect of this dimension has to do with women's roles in the family and, above all, motherhood. Traditional societies still expect expressive roles to be the responsibility of women and instrumental roles to be the responsibility of men (Eagly & Wood, 2012). And this attribution ends up penalizing women both in terms of role overload (expressive and instrumental) and in terms of how they are perceived as professionals (Cukrowska-Torzewska & Matysiak, 2018; Yu & Kuo, 2017). And this can be seen in the difficulty felt by most of our interviewees in articulating their two roles. Especially in a profession where working hours tend to be well over eight hours a day and include weekends which, in the case of these women, are not compensated monetarily. Only one said that she sees this time turned into time off or vacation days.

It is no wonder, then, that it was the older women who complained most about the difficulty of getting ahead when you have a family:

Vera (36 years old) "There's no work-home balance! It's crazy. There's no time for both, but you have to do it". (…) "Priorities are mixed up. I often feel that way. It feels like I'm choosing work over home".

Catarina (30 years old) "It's very difficult to raise a family in this profession. The balance… It's much more work than home. A good professional has to be like that. The timetable is uncertain, there's always a lot to do, and the more teams you have to lead, the more work you have to do. You never know what time you're going to arrive; work takes up many more hours and you spend a lot more time at work than at home".

Despite the difficulties of the profession, changes can also come from the woman herself, such as the evolution of the job market:

Júlia (38 years old) "It's demanding. Especially if we're talking about progressing to a more active leadership position. But it is possible. It all depends on the limits we set for ourselves and others."

Margarida (44 years old) "It depends. If the person is part-time, the answer is yes. If it's full-time, it's much more difficult. It's just that the job doesn't have the configuration it used to have. But if I look at the Portuguese market, it's still very traditional, there are few people working part-time. And what I know is that the PR sector is very difficult to reconcile with my personal life, it's very stressful. In fact, a few years ago it was on the list of the most stressful professions. (…) However, I feel that there has been an evolution. This has to do with two things. It has to do with me because I've been working in this area of communication and public relations for many years, and from a certain point on you make different, more conscious choices. The second thing has
to do with the job market itself, which is changing us. And I would say for the better, in the sense that it benefits the human being, and it can be easier to balance all aspects of our lives - it's supposed to be easier. Considering these two things, I have felt a positive evolution when it comes to balancing the various spheres of my life”.

The women who didn't show this prejudice were professionals who don't have or don't intend to have children, or those who prioritize their careers:

Helena (42 years old) 'It's actually super positive, doable. As long as I have time management and everything is organized, it's easy." (...) 'I'm more pragmatic, perhaps because I don't have children. I'm much more focused on objectives, much more directed towards achieving them."

Matilde (27 years old) 'It's something I've never given much thought to, because I don't have the goal of creating a family. But if it were a goal, I think it would be easy" (...) 'I find it easy to separate things. There are sporadic projects that I take home, and I get burned out, but fortunately, it only happens to me once a year with a specific project. But it's important for me to separate my work worries from my life."

Constança (21 years old) 'In my opinion, in order to be comfortable and stable enough to raise a family, you need to make progress in the PR sector first. I think the reverse is no longer possible.' (...) 'At the moment, I consider that I have a good timetable, as it allows me to have one day a week (Friday) with practically the afternoon free. On the other hand, the rest of the days I don't have much time for myself and to do everything I want. But I think I manage to reconcile the time I have well'.

The younger women have not yet started a family and believe in shared marital roles. They recognize that for a woman with children, the profession is only easy with a support network, both professionally and personally:

Inês (25 years old) "is also very dependent on the support structure that exists, both on the part of companies and families. From the experiences I've had, having a network of close family members who can help with day-to-day logistics helps a lot, as sometimes the timetable isn't quite right."

Sofía (22 years old) 'It's very difficult. It's a job that demands a lot from a professional, but I think that in this situation the importance of a close family that understands the necessary devotion to the profession makes all the difference. Of course, it's also up to the professional to manage the two issues and find a middle ground." (...) 'There has to be an involvement of all the participants in the relationship in relation to the home, be they men or women, so that a balance can be found.'

Joana (24 years old) 'There's no balance. I definitely spend a lot more time in the office than at home. I sometimes joke that the office is my first home and that I spend more time with my
colleagues than with the people who live with me, for example. But I'm not planning to start a family yet. (...) I believe it's possible to start a family and keep working in PR, but I have to be aware that not every day will be the same. That I don't have a totally fixed schedule, that sometimes I'll have to work weekends, that sometimes I'll have to leave the country. But I will also only build a family with someone who understands how my work works and who is a support, who doesn't always have to make up for absences. Also, because there's a lot of time to be there;

Carolina (25 years old) "In my case, since I don't have children yet, it's always been easy to settle down. I already have my own place with my boyfriend, who has always been extremely understanding about my having to arrive late some days because I have to work overtime or attend a work event, and we share this understanding because I also show it when he has to stay out late. However, I think it would have been more difficult to reconcile our routines if we'd already had children, a scenario we're putting off for a few years, so that we can now devote ourselves fully to our careers."

Some of the women pointed out that this imbalance becomes more evident in the type of work they do, pointing to agency work as the worst for this balance:

Rita (23 years old) "Especially in an agency, it's a very fast-paced and demanding environment... but yes, I think it's possible, although with some difficulties in dealing with the breakneck pace. (...) "Before the pandemic, I could say that I was able to separate, the vast majority of the time, one thing from the other. Of course, sometimes it wasn't possible, but I was able to separate them. After the pandemic, it's been practically impossible... The flow of work has increased, and clients call outside of working hours because, being at home, they assume I'm always available."

Inês (25 years old) "There's an imbalance when clients demand a lot from us. And there's a lot of pressure from the agency to be constantly available. (...) "And when working remotely, this balance is much more difficult to manage, and the leisure/family aspect suffers.'

Maria (25 years old) "It depends on the area of PR. Working in an agency is demanding and requires a lot of dedication in order to progress. I'd say it's not easy to combine this career with building a family'.

Carolina has worked for several companies and, in her still short experience, has already realized that the burden of this issue depends on the type of leadership and the competitive profile of the organization:

Carolina (25 years old) "This is a very, very complex issue because it depends greatly on the manager you have and the environment - more family-oriented or more professionally competitive - that you experience in the agency. Of the three I worked in, in two of them family
formation was even encouraged among the employees - in one of the agencies managed by a man and in the agency managed by a woman - and many employees had even left for a while to have children and devote themselves more to their upbringing and had re-joined the company later. (...) 'In these agencies, femininity was even celebrated as an asset and a complement to the more masculine outlook of male colleagues. Where, for example, a male colleague would take a more objective, calculating, or practical, "black and white" look at a problem a client had to solve, a female colleague could take a more human, emotional, and empathetic look, and the combined vision of both would offer a more complete and more satisfactory solution for the client'. (...) "At the other agency, having children was seen as an automatic exit card. In fact, it was one of the warnings that the manager used to give us when we had been there for a while and he was starting to get comfortable with us, 'the day you think about having children, give me your resignation letter because nobody comes back to work here after having children'. It was a place where the financial burden of an employee on maternity or paternity leave and the time they would need to spend bringing up their children - which they wouldn't use working - was seen as an expendable burden."

Marta, married with two children, supports both the idea that everything depends on the leadership profile and the support of the nuclear family:

Marta (36 years old) 'I'm married, I have two children. My manager has three daughters and a family structure too. And in the pharmaceutical industry, all my colleagues have a family structure too; (...) The balance between work and home is a little unbalanced, as I spend a lot of time at work and also travel around Europe, which makes everything more complicated. But as I have a family structure that manages to give me some help in this regard, it's easy to manage. I have a husband who supports me, in the sense that he works from home and that makes it easier for us to manage."

The imbalance is also noticeable among managers, both those who have chosen not to have children or start a family and those who have done so because they have a good support network:

Luisa (43 years old) 'I live alone, and I don't have the experience of raising a family. I think there are those who can, but I have a lot of work and when I get home it sometimes takes me 30 minutes to go to sleep. But if I had a family, I'd have other responsibilities' (...) 'At the moment I give a lot of importance to work. I always have because I don't have children and I'm not married. My inclination is more towards work than home'.

Judite (43 years old) 'It's still difficult to strike a balance between progress in the field and raising a family without a good family network and a good dose of professional understanding. As I have good family support and only one child, the balance is positive, but it's still very tiring
because I also have to reconcile the training part’ (…) But it depends both on our level of motivation and the organizational context in which we work”.

Two of the Leaders mention the importance of the woman herself ensuring this management, although one (Laura) tried to avoid the issue:

Isabel (41 years old) "It's difficult, considering that I cover a huge and dispersed geographical area, going from Latin America to Australia, and balancing all the time zones isn't easy. To be able to balance family and work as best as possible, you have to set boundaries and communicate them from the outset in both contexts.’

Laura (52 years old) 'Balance has to be ensured, otherwise, we're not happy and that has serious consequences for family and work.'

Another indicator that constitutes a structural barrier for women as PR professionals is the need to change their nature, whether behavioral or expressive, in order to be seen as competent by managers and peers (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2008; Sloan, 2012). This is because societies, especially traditional ones, tend to value restrained and more submissive profiles for women in the job market (e.g. Garcia, 2021; Fischer & LaFrance, 2015; Mohindra & Azhar, 2012).

All the women interviewed who hold leadership positions confirmed that they have already been treated differently, either negatively or positively, just because they are women. That's why they admit to having had to change their behavior to be taken seriously:

Luísa (43 years old) 'In my case, because I'm a woman and black. Different treatment twice and several times' (…) 'When I had my company, I always felt that way. Ever since I started holding coordination positions, I've felt that people have always had to question my ability at some point.'

Judite (43 years old) 'Especially at the start of my professional career. (…) 'And today it still happens sometimes, especially when I want my opinion to be heard and understood.'

Isabel (41 years old) 'I'm a person who likes sarcastic humor and I have to tone down this side of me at work, as it can lead to misunderstandings'. (…) 'Being direct and being a woman is not always appreciated. But I've also been treated positively because I'm a woman, due to the implied obligation of quotas and gender diversity'.

Laura (52 years old) 'I've been treated differently a few times'. (…) 'But I prefer not to be taken seriously'.
More mature women also confirm that it's not always easy to make a stand among men, managers, peers, or clients:

Vera (36 years old) "Funnily enough with managers I've never felt it, but in the context of peers and, above all, clients yes, I've noticed different treatment because I'm a woman."

Margarida (44 years old) "Completely! Because the person I work for is very authoritarian and he has always made it very clear how he would like things to be. In other words, it has to be his way. And you either fit in or you don't."

Catarina (30 years old) "Yes, I try very hard to be taken seriously". (...) "Even in this job. I come into contact with a lot of agencies and as I have a more relaxed way of speaking and being, and because I have pink hair, I have to try harder to be taken seriously and to show that I have the skills and profile for the job I'm doing."

The younger women, on the other hand, although they recognize that they tend to control their spontaneity in order to be recognized at work, attribute possible discrimination to their youth and not so much to the fact that they are women. For them, gender discrimination is more present in the social context than in the workplace:

Rita (23 years old) "I don't notice any gender discrimination at work, but on a day-to-day basis I certainly do", (...) "At work, I have to be myself, but always with the ability to show interest and responsibility towards my obligations, always giving my best. (...) I do this because as much as I know what I'm worth, the boss must also know that I'm like this and the added value I bring to the organization".

Sofia (22 years old) "Of course. But it has nothing to do with my gender, but rather my position as an employee" (..) "Although I consider myself to be quite mature for my age, in certain situations the need to maintain discernment must be even greater. (...) "I've felt I've been treated differently because I'm a woman, especially in terms of physical strength. If there's heavier work, it's usually associated with the male gender. However, in the company, we all do the same tasks, with no gender differentiation".

Inês (25 years old) "In my case, I think the only time I felt in any way questioned was because of my age, because I was young and, at the time, had little experience in the area" (...) "Not because of my gender, but because of my profile. I tend to be quite calm even in situations where the workload is greater, and I think that in general in today's society, this is seen as not putting your shirt on or not showing concern for the work." (...) "I'm not very effusive either, or I don't show a lot of enthusiasm very easily, and that's once again seen as negative".

Matilde (27 years old) "I try to show more confidence" (...) "Not so much because I'm a woman. I'm 27 and my team are all men over 35/40. But I feel the generation gap more. Maybe that's
where I'm more conscious, in the sense of thinking 'ok, maybe here I should behave differently so that these people take my ideas more seriously'.

Some of the younger interviewees also point this need to the fact that they are in a more or less centralized structure in hierarchical terms:

Joana (24 years old) "We have a very relaxed atmosphere and relationship at the agency, also because it's a more horizontal than vertical structure, we're not a huge agency, so I don't feel I have to behave any differently. On the contrary, I feel that everyone is valued for the way they are because that also adds value to the team." (...) "Maybe at the beginning, when I started going to the first meetings with clients. I didn't want them to look at me as a 21-year-old girl, I wanted them to look at me with credibility and listen to my consulting advice. I think the age factor was the one that probably led me to act differently'.

Constança (21 years old) 'In the company where I work, the majority of employees are women, so there's no such difference. I've adjusted a few times because I'm a very outgoing person and I often don't think about what I say. So, it's normal for me to sometimes moderate my behavior in the workplace, but I've never been told or imposed to do so." (...) 'I think we should all be ourselves, even in the workplace, because that's where we spend most of our day. In my opinion, as long as we are good professionals and show our worth in work situations, our behavior and the way we dress shouldn't be a factor in whether we are taken seriously or not”.

Carolina and Beatriz naturalize behavioral adjustments to the professional profile, regardless of gender:

Carolina (25 years old) 'I've learned to behave differently, because on a personal level I'm more spontaneous, relaxed and enthusiastic" (...) 'I feel that in the workplace I have to maintain a correct and thoughtful posture, both in my language and in my physical presentation. If our language isn't the right one, if we abuse slang or don't show the proper respect for the person we're addressing, it's obvious that we won't be taken seriously or gain the respect we're aiming for. Respect is earned by showing respect for others. In the same way, if you mix up the personal and the professional too much, if you start to see your bosses and colleagues as friends and 'cronies' rather than what they are - colleagues in your work and professional life - you start to create instability that can affect your performance and professional success.”

Beatriz (27 years old) 'Just maintain the necessary respect and professionalism required'.

However, we did find some positions among women with several years in the profession and others at the start of their careers who, despite assuming that they have already experienced gender discrimination at work, remain true to who they are as people:
Júlia (38 years old) 'I believe in the truth and I'm true to that'. (...) 'We just have to be true to ourselves and to others and the message gets through in the right way'.

Marta (36 years old) 'My company is run by a woman, and we have a very transparent and honest relationship. So, what I feel, I say. It's smooth. Transparency at the highest level'. (...) 'Of course, there are more formal contexts in which you inevitably adjust your behavior. And part of us is voluntary, a bit in line with our social values and beliefs.'

Maria (25 years old) 'In my field, I've never felt devalued because I'm a woman. But on the client side, yes' (...) 'But I feel I can and should be myself, always maintaining a professional attitude'.

2.2. Office Culture

2.2.1. Communication

Much has been written about feminine and masculine communication styles. However, it is important to stress that generalizations in this field are limited and that it cannot be said that all men or all women communicate in the same way, as there may be men with feminine styles and women with masculine communication styles (Jones, 2016; Maltz & Borker, 2018). But in general terms, we can say that there are some communication tendencies that are often associated with men and women (Allen, 2023; Buck et al., 2017; Davidson & Barrett, 2016; Ersoy, 2008; Holmes, 2008; Joshi et al., 2020): , including: 1) Objectivity versus subjectivity: women tend to communicate in a more subjective and personal way, using examples and stories to illustrate points of view, while men tend to be more objective, focusing on facts and data; 2) Competition versus collaboration: men tend to communicate more competitively, using assertive and direct language, while women tend to be more collaborative, using softer and more indirect language; 3) Confidence versus empathy: the male style adopts more confident and authoritative language, while the female style uses more empathetic and welcoming language.

a. Personal communication style and reproduction of gender stereotypes

In this context, we consider it relevant to know how women perceive their communication style, and whether there are common trends between those who are starting out and those who have years of experience and leadership positions.
Most of the women interviewed recognize that they adopt a communication style that is in line with the stereotypes typical of that style, i.e., more feminine communication that reflects the stereotypes most associated with women and more masculine communication that meets the 'Blockish' stereotype, a slang term meaning "masculinized" or "man-style" (cf. Topić, 2023; Topić & Bruegmann, 2021).

We identified this in all age groups and levels of experience in the field. In the feminine style, the words ponderation, passivity, introversion, softness of tone, less direct language, emotiveness, sensitivity, empathy, creativity, sharing, rapport, conciliation, and balance stand out:

Inês (25 years old) 'In professional terms I have a very measured style, in an attempt to move from a passive to an assertive style. (...) And without a doubt, I represent the more feminine stereotypes by the way I present myself, my desire to start a family, the type of activities I enjoy, and the care I take in certain aspects even in the office (for example, the way I organize my desk, the type of office accessories I have, etc.)".

Matilde (27 years old) 'I think that if I write I have a much more direct approach to what I have to say. When it's personal, I can't express everything I'm thinking. I'm more introverted in that sense'. (...) 'I'm more feminine and I'm assuming that female communication is more sensitive, more motivational".

Júlia (38 years old) 'I have a balanced style'. (...) 'Although I don't really like putting things into boxes, let alone stereotypes, I would say that I am quite feminine. And I don't think I do it intentionally. It's a question of personality'.

Carolina (25 years old) 'On a personal level, I'm quite direct, perhaps even 'too much', I don't have a 'tongue' or a filter. On a professional level, I'm much more thoughtful, both in institutional communication, written and oral and with colleagues and superiors." (...) 'I think I fit more into the female stereotype because even on a personal level I consider myself to be very feminine. To put it in more 'practical' terms, I'm emotional, more sensitive than many people I know, more empathetic, I think more creatively than practically, I establish closer relationships with other people and I think my instinct is always more to share than to conquer alone. I also attach enormous importance to my personal life, even more than my professional life, unlike what I have observed in some of my female colleagues and in the overwhelming majority of male colleagues'.

Margarida (44 years old) 'I'm very expressive, cheerful, and super spontaneous (with all the good and bad) and sometimes thoughtless'. (...) 'I think I reflect female clichés more. I don't know, perhaps because of my sensitivity, which is more typical of women than men. Even in terms of the sensitivity of leadership. But I can't tell you exactly why. I think women are more
sensitive to the issues that are important to consider at work today. For example: the issue of gender, diversity, reconciling professional and personal life, etc. I think we can also talk about the ease with which they create empathy, I would say. I'm generalizing, because there are also many women who don't match up to this. I think women are more balanced, perhaps a little more emotionally intelligent when it comes to these issues than men. As I think I have a certain balance in these areas, perhaps I can justify it in this way, that I have a more feminine style of communication and behavior”.

Beatriz (27 years old) "Very thoughtful". (...) "I identify more with the female stereotype, although this classification can be gender specific. And I'd say a lot because of the sensitivity issue”.

At the other extreme, we also have a group of professionals of different ages and professional experiences who are more associated with a communication style linked to masculine stereotypes: direction, assertiveness, focus, objectivity, pragmatism, confidence, security, certainty, etc.

Helena (42 years old) "assertive communication style. More direct than measured" (...)
'Masculine. Because I'm more pragmatic, perhaps because I don't have children, I'm much more focused on objectives, much more directed towards achieving them’.

Rita (23 years old) "I would say that my communication style is more direct. I have a clear filter, but the truth is that I'm a very honest person who always says what she thinks"; (...) ‘I would say that I fit more into the stereotypes of the 'blockish' because I'm a more assertive person. Normally, women are expected to be more calm, thoughtful, and sensitive, and I'm the complete opposite of that’.

Catarina (30 years old) 'I'm assertive and sure of what I say. I have a more direct tone, and, unfortunately, I'm not very measured. I should be more (laughs). I always see both sides of situations and when I make a statement it's because I'm already sure about it and I'm quite direct and assertive in what I say.' (...) ‘I think I identify more with male stereotypes because I'm assertive and when I make a decision, I'm sure it's what has to be done. And it has to be done because otherwise I won't be taken seriously.’

Constança (21 years old) 'My communication style is probably more direct. I consider myself to be a fairly direct person who doesn't think too much about things before saying them. (...) I identify with the stereotypes of the 'blockish', without a doubt. I don't really have any so-called feminine tastes, habits, or experiences, although I don't think you have to be so linear and have these stereotypes".
In the context of public relations, professional women can also adopt a "blockish" style to make themselves 'seen and heard' or to project an image of strength and authority, when necessary (Topić, 2021), even when their personal style is predominantly feminine:

Vera (36) 'It's quite a measured style. Direct when it's really necessary to be direct, but only at the right time'. (...) 'I identify more with a feminine upbringing, where I don't have to raise my voice or speak in a more masculine tone or use language that is considered more masculine. Sometimes, in order to communicate what I need to communicate or get the information I need; I use language or communication that can be stereotyped as masculine. But in general, it's still more feminine'.

Maria (25 years old) 'It depends on the situation, but in general, I'm more thoughtful'.

Joana (24 years old) 'I try to find a balance. If there are times when the more direct side is preferred and sought after, on the other hand, I always try to think a little before communicating something. Of course, there are days when I don't think things through and go straight to the point, but I believe that the balance between the two is fundamental' (..) 'Working in a company where the majority of us are women, I would say that I follow the female model. (...) 'but perhaps I feel that men are more pragmatic, which in many cases can be an advantage. Women end up being more emotional'.

Marta, who works with mixed managers, men and women, with similar communication profiles, and even identifies with them, was unable to position herself firmly on one side, presenting a self-perception of a mixed profile, which integrates the characteristics of both stereotypes:

Marta (36 years old) 'I tend to be direct, always trying to engage in a conversation that seeks to understand how the other person is positioning themselves. At least that's how I usually talk. In terms of relationships with others, this is my personality. It always has been. And I always look for good humor. It's a valuable weapon. (...) 'The experience I have is with two managers who, despite having different genders, have the same communication style. So I'm not sure what female and male communication styles are for me. And mine is very similar, so I don't know which one I'd place myself in'.

b. Communication Styles and Stereotyping in Management

The women in leadership positions in this panel of interviewees were generally very brief in their responses, not elaborating on the type of stereotypes they see in their communication style. This lack of answers and the bluntness with which they identified their style of communicating at work reveals a typical male style:
Luísa (43 years old) "It's an institutional communication style".

Luísa (41 years old) "Direct".

Laura (52 years old) "More direct".

Judite, for her part, showed that leadership references at the start of her career can condition her communication style at work:

Judite (43 years old) "There were several phases: as a child, I had no problem communicating and as I grew up, I put up filters that made me more thoughtful and introverted. It was only at the beginning of my professional career that I fine-tuned my communication and being more direct and outgoing began to be a constant. (...) I was lucky enough to have a director, at the beginning of my professional career, when I was working at IBM, who was a leader who understood his team, had a very strong and aggressive commercial side but also a human component that allowed my communication style to be more direct and really helped me a lot for other professional experiences. This director was my first great reference.

c. Informal communication at work: Tell me "what you're talking about" and "who you're talking to" and I'll tell you who you want to be

A simple and clear definition of communication is "to make common" (Nilsen, 1957). This means that it can be easier for people to enter communion with interlocutors who have the same affinities. One type of affinity can be gender, derived from a common type of social training. In most societies, there are a series of cultural and social expectations that shape the conversations of men and women, and this can influence how interlocutors are perceived by others (Maltz & Borker, 2018).

There are several reasons why people may prefer to talk to people of the same gender (Crawford, 1995; Elsesser & Peplau, 2006; Tannen, 1994): Identification and connection, due to cultural and social factors and common life experiences; Easier communication, as they may share a similar language and communication style; Gender norms, generally more present in traditional societies, where their cultures discourage communication between men and women in informal situations; Personal comfort, as they feel more confident and secure talking about more intimate matters with people of the same gender.

However, there are many people who prefer the company and conversation of colleagues of the opposite sex at work. In the case of women, the reasons may derive from affinities in the way they think, the environment, such as companies with few women, and the
attempt to adapt to expectations of progression, breaking down gender barriers (Hochschild, 2018; Williams, 2023).

Among our interviewees, we generally found an integrative perception, without much gender differentiation. Thematic affinity predominates in most of them as a connecting element:

Júlia (38 years old) "Children and education. With both. (...) As well as work, we talk about current affairs in general. jokes".

Margarida (44 years old) "Sport, eventually, but it's the same with both men and women".

Sofia (22 years old) "Social issues, beauty, politics, society... whatever the gender".

Catarina (30 years old) "Mostly I talk about things I did at the weekend, movies I saw, general culture, news... we have a team of different ages. I interact with both, it's really both. I can do the maths, but I think it's really her for her".

Joana (24 years old) "In terms of general conversations, I don't feel that there is a difference in topics between the genders. I think these conversations end up being very positive because, every day, you get to know your colleague better and better, far beyond their professional side. This is very interesting, especially when you start to realize that a certain person is quite similar to you or that another is the complete opposite, even though you can work well with them".

Sofia (22 years old) "Social issues, beauty, politics, society... whatever the gender". (...) "About personal, day-to-day issues, like series or movies they've seen or music releases, for example. About politics, social issues, where everyone gives their own view".

Rita (23 years old) "Probably about TV series or my feelings. I do it more often with a (male) friend. But people in the office also talk about work, about their children, about series, basically a bit of everything with other male and female colleagues... there's a relaxed atmosphere and people get on well".

For other women, the focus was on the diversity of the working environment, with conversations naturally adjusting to the profile of the interlocutors:

Marta (36) "It depends on the person. In other words, there may be certain situations and contexts in which, easily, if the person has a family, the topic could be the family. Or, given the current circumstances, for example, day-to-day issues. Or, for example, I'm thinking of people where the family situation doesn't apply, there are topics that we share, that are common to us, so... travel, culture. It's varied. But it depends on the person, the context, and the current situation. And in that sense, we adjust a little. As for being a man or a woman, I think it's the same. I don't have an exclusive or preferential relationship".
Carolina (25) "I've worked in three communications agencies so far. In two of them, I only had female colleagues, so there was no gender distinction, and the topics we talked about in a more 'relaxed' way were those considered "normal" among us: movies, series, books, soap operas, fashion, beauty, well-being, family, parenting, etc. However, in relation to the other agency I worked for, which was larger in terms of team size and had members of both genders, there was already a distinction between the conversations we could have when we were just women or when men accompanied us. For example, women didn't discuss the result of the previous night's derby or the final of the championship, which was already the case if we had our male colleagues with us. Similarly, we didn't discuss the best breastfeeding or waxing techniques with our male colleagues. Even so, it should be noted that parenting as a whole - with the exception of a few more sensitive topics - is increasingly of interest to the male community, so we also talked about them when we were more comfortable”.

Matilde (27 years old) "I talk a lot about recycling with all my colleagues, because it's a topic I'm very passionate about, and I always try to make sure that others have as few rules as possible and are aware of what they're doing. I interact more with male colleagues. "I don't notice any gender conversations... I don't think so. At least in my team, we're very different. There are girls who play soccer, and we all defend different political sides, it doesn't make sense to differentiate someone by gender. When there's a joke, there's no discrimination. For me, it's fair, it makes me feel good, and that we're in an environment of equality and that we can feel comfortable with each other. And that's very important”.

With several women, this connection is more easily established with female colleagues, especially when it comes to personal matters, or male colleagues because they feel less comfortable with typical women's issues, as is the case with young Constança:

Inês (25 years old) "In an informal setting, I tend to talk more to women (friends) about life plans, families, relationships, etc."

Joana (24 years old) "Probably a more personal side, I'd talk about the things I like or aspire to (the trips I'd like to take/that I'm actually going to take, the latest acquisition that I've wanted for a long time, the ways we have to find to spend more time together, for example). And I interact more with women (...) We inevitably talk about work. Even if we try to keep it off the subject during lunchtime, it always ends up being. But we also talk about the series we're each watching, what we did at the weekend, the next trip we're planning, the latest adventures of our children (who have children, of course)."

Maria (25 years old) "Fashion and beauty with friends".

Beatriz (27 years old) "Cinema, fashion, beauty and sport with women".
Vera (36 years old) "We mainly talk about family life. And also hobbies, pastimes, things I like to do, a concert I saw the day before. As far as the gender of colleagues is concerned, and although the working environment is fairly balanced in this respect, I think there is a greater sense of ease among female colleagues. And that makes me feel good".

Constança (21 years old) "Sport, current affairs, news, and individual experiences. In my life in general, I interact more with men than women, so it's also more with men that I would talk about these topics. (...) In my company and in most communications agencies (speaking only from my own experience), the number of male employees is quite small. That said, usually the few who work there tend to get together and talk more amongst themselves. As someone who generally gets on and identifies more with men, I find it a bit difficult to collaborate and interact in conversations between women, as they are different to what I'm used to and feel comfortable approaching'.

Helena was the only one who said that she only talks about professional matters in the workplace. But from what she sees in other people's conversations, she doesn't notice any differences between men and women in informal settings, which makes her feel good about the equal environment:

Helena (42 years old) "I avoid talking about personal topics, I don't think we should mix the two. I avoid talking about non-professional topics as much as possible. But if these conversations happen, they happen with all my colleagues, regardless of their gender. I only have one male colleague'. (...) "They talk about personal matters; they talk about other colleagues... and there's no difference between genders when it comes to the topic of conversation. That makes me feel very good because I like to be treated as an equal".

As for the jokes that can emerge from informal conversations, they all said there were no significant gender differences, reporting very healthy interpersonal organizational environments. Marta and Sofia's response ends up summing up most responses in this regard, even if it may imply some normalization:

Marta (36 years old) "There are few jokes. But they're not mean. It's more the 'typical woman' or 'typical man' comment, whatever the situation [laughs]. Whether it's because I don't give an answer or because I'm clumsy; yes, there are always a few jokes. But it's funny”.

Sofia (22 years old) "It depends on what we consider 'jokes' and their limits. The typical 'no-nonsense' expressions are common, not only in the workplace but also in Portuguese society."

Regarding sexist comments, we found different opinions. The younger women say they have never been the target or witnessed such a situation where they work. However, more experienced women have experienced or witnessed several cases:
Helena (42 years old) "Many. Over my 20 years, I've heard a lot. I've been a medical information officer; I've heard a lot. When I was in medical information, there were colleagues who dressed more daringly, and I distinctly remember going into an office and the doctor commenting that the colleague was new, and he didn't even know which laboratory she was from. And he said that he didn't know either because he "spent the whole time looking at her breasts'. Those were his words. 20 years ago. I was shocked, and I still remember that to this day".

Matilde (27 years old) 'I think I've seen it. These are things that happen. We've already had a guy who was fired for sexually harassing several women in the company, and one of our bosses took a very uncomfortable action towards one of the employees in front of the whole company...

Vera (36 years old) 'I've heard it too. They don't dare with me. You can tell straight away that I have zero tolerance for that kind of comment. I respond jokingly, and sometimes more assertively, I wouldn't say aggressively, but... firmly".

Margarida (44 years old) 'Even in relation to me specifically. Once, when I was in my early 20s, I was applying for a job coordinating a team and I was asked directly if I was going to have children or not, if I was Catholic or not. It was the chairman of a Portuguese company, a large company, who thought I was of childbearing age. And when I told him that I wasn't going to have children at that time, he told me that it was impossible because I was at the age where I was thinking of having children. He was Catholic, against contraception and we got into an argument about it. It was a sad argument, but I ended up getting the job'.

Catarina and Carolina pointed out that this phenomenon could be associated with leadership by men or women:

Catarina (30 years old) 'You can't tell the difference, personally I've only experienced one comment like that, an employee who made that kind of tasteless joke, but he's no longer with us." (...) "The fact that there are no sexist comments makes me feel very good in my job, fortunately, I don't feel that there is any prejudice in the company itself, because most of the managers are women, and this gives confidence to other women".

Carolina (25 years old) "Yes, in one of the agencies I worked in - one of the ones run by men".

d. Informal communication between managers and teams

Although there are only four leaders on this panel, here too the perceptions are distributed in accordance with the variations between the employees. Judite and Laura like broader issues and discuss them with all employees, regardless of gender:
Judite (43 years old) "I really like the universe of stories, culture, traditions, and gastronomy and I like to discuss these topics with both men and women, it's the same in this case. There's no difference between the sexes."

Laura (52) "I talk to both. Perhaps more about the essence of being human and the truth in relationships. A bit about everything".

Isabel assumes that she prefers topics more related to the female universe:

Isabel (41 years old) "Cinema, fiction, linguistics, content development (i.e. scripts, storylines). Especially with women. Women talk more about family than men and about personal care, beauty rituals."

And Luísa who closes herself off to interpersonal relationships, but it's not clear what her motivations are behind this. However, one can sense in Luísa's previous answers a certain hurt for the different treatment she has received throughout her career because she is a woman and black, which is in line with the double jeopardy inherent in the concept of intersectionality (Holder, Jackson & Ponterotto, 2015; Kea-Edwards, Diaz & Reichard, 2023; Mayberry, 2018). This raises an interesting avenue for exploring this issue in future studies:

Luísa (43 years old) "I don't really cultivate personal communication in the work context. So, I think it's always topics that have to do with the space or work issues. I don't have conversations about personal tastes, I don't talk about politics, vacations... At the moment, I interact more with men, because they're usually my bosses." (...) 'I pass by. I work alone in an office, and I hardly ever leave. I go in and greet people; I go out and say goodbye. In this place I don't see much of the group conversations because I have an office where I'm isolated.'

As for sexist comments, Judite and Laura say they have never noticed them throughout their careers, while Luísa and Isabel say they have. However, Isabel stresses that the situation is improving:

Luísa (41 years old) 'Much less these days. People think it, but they say it less and less'.

c. Dress code as an element of non-verbal communication

The dress code is an important factor in non-verbal communication. The way a person dresses can convey messages about their identity, social status, personality, and even their intentions (Rubinstein, 2018). In a formal work environment, it is common to have a more conservative dress code, with more formal and discreet clothes, to convey an idea of professionalism, seriousness, and respect for the institution and its clients. On the other
hand, a technology company may favor a more informal dress code, with more comfortable and even casual clothes, to convey a message of creativity, informality, and innovation (Cismas, 2022; Cutts et al., 2015).

On the other hand, the way a person dresses can also affect others' perception of their competence, confidence, and leadership skills (Cuddy et al., 2011; Karl et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2018).

Whether a dress code is imposed or adhered to in a company may depend on the sector, the organizational culture, and the company's values. Some companies may consider that a formal, uniform dress code is important to convey a professional and serious image to clients and partners, while others may value the creativity and individuality of employees more (Powell, 2020).

In the Public Relations Industry, in general, there are some aspects linked to dress that help to give credibility to individuals and companies, such as professional dress, linked to a code imposed by the company; or strategic, when the way of dressing adapts to the occasions, in order to create a positive image in line with professional identity (Fitch, 2020; Kaser et al., 2009).

In the case of the women interviewed, the dress code is generally strategic:

Helena (42 years old) "In everyday life it's all very casual, at events it's formal or casual chic. When we're talking about institutional events, it's always at least casual chic, for the ladies it's a little dress, without having to wear a gala dress." (in everyday life) "... it's never been mentioned, but the truth is that it's actually very casual, very informal, jeans, a sweater, flat shoes, because you have to walk a lot".

Inês (25 years old) "There is no formally stipulated dress code (...) there is an expectation that we adapt the way we dress to the context, for example, if we know there is going to be a meeting with a client or someone outside the agency, we shouldn't wear sneakers, for example. In practical terms, they ask for a clean and sober style. I personally like to dress up and I've never been singled out for dress code, but I don't agree that if there isn't a formal, defined dress code, this should be an issue, as the question of style is very subjective, and I don't always agree with what the boss says is formal".

Joana (24 years old) "It already existed, so to speak. When I joined the agency three years ago, we couldn't go to work in jeans or sneakers. In the last year or so, things have changed, also due to the arrival of a new CEO. There's more freedom for everyone to wear what they feel comfortable in, always bearing in mind that when we have meetings with clients or know we're
going to receive someone, there has to be greater attention. And frankly, from what we've seen, it's not because we go to work in jeans or sneakers that people are less presentable - quite the opposite. (..) Yes, the expectation is that people won't show up at the office in ratty pants or beachwear, for example. Which I think is perfectly normal. We work closely with clients, journalists, influencers, etc., and there has to be a minimum of care in our presentation”.

Rita (23 years old) "There is no dress code on a normal working day. The only dress code that exists only applies when we have meetings with specific clients and it's a bit more formal. It doesn't confuse me, I think it makes sense, we shouldn't restrict individual freedoms, but we should also be aware of certain things at more important times. In these situations, I look for an outfit that fits in and is a little more classic. (..)In fact, people in my company are just as likely to wear more formal clothes as they are to wear more casual clothes, there's really no rule in this regard unless it's for important meetings with external bodies. I think that makes perfect sense”.

Júlia (38 years old) "There is a concern about image on important days, but in general there is no imposed dress code. (..) In our position there is always an expectation about how we present ourselves. Our image is our first means of communication, even before we introduce ourselves to anyone. Normally we are free to dress according to our personal tastes. I don't feel it's even an issue. It's natural”.

Maria (25 years old) "There is no dress code (...) it varies according to the situation. A more formal dress code is expected at meetings or events with clients and a relaxed dress code in everyday life”.

Marta (36 years old) "What is practiced is a certain informality. Basically, we manage it depending on the meetings we have scheduled, and, in that case, we have to be more formal”.

Constança (21 years old) "In my organization we have a very informal atmosphere, where everyone is free to dress how they want. (..) Of course there are work situations, such as meetings or video calls with clients, which suggest more formal dress and a more careful presentation, but each employee has the freedom to choose what formal means in that context”.

Sofia (22 years old) "It doesn't exist. The company is very liberal when it comes to everyone's individuality. (..) As long as the employee doesn't present themselves in a completely unreasonable way, there are no restrictions whatsoever”.

According to Carolina, the dress code depends on the organizational culture, and the process of fitting in is done by osmosis, by observing what is worn by others:

Carolina (25 years old) "In the three agencies where I worked, the dress code wasn't something formally established, written down, or presented to us as a rule when we arrived at the company. It was, however, something that was easily observed, just by looking at colleagues and superiors to realize "ok, here it's normal to always wear high heels, dresses or suits, careful
make-up” or, on the contrary, “ok, here it's normal to come in every day wearing sneakers or jeans and no make-up”.

Vera, an advisor to the Portuguese government, and Catarina, a coordinator of groups abroad, have a dress code that is due to the specific nature of their roles.

Vera (36 years old) “Yes, it's more formal. There are no prohibitions, but you know that in a more formal environment, where there are meetings, where you have to accompany government officials, you have to pay some attention. It's about finding a balance between each person's style and not giving up that style, adapting it a little to this requirement of a certain formality (...) It's easier to say what I feel I can't wear. It's sneakers, sports shoes and jeans. We've all internalized that it's not as appropriate to wear them”.

Catarina (30 years old) “People in hostels have to wear a vest, that's all. (...) As it's not a classic formal office, there's no idea that you have to look all pretty. I've had pink hair and I've never felt anything”.

f. The attire of managers

The leaders on our panel also follow the same trends as the other professionals:

Luísa (43 years old) “There isn't. (...) We have the notion that depending on the calendar we have to present ourselves. If we have initiatives with the president, we know that we have to present ourselves a bit better, because other entities will be there. But there are also days when there's nothing going on and the president isn't there, so we wear something more discreet, like sneakers. When there are events, we wear a suit, a blazer, a skirt, a dress... high shoes, as much make-up as we need, mentally we protect ourselves so that we go in a certain way. I feel this is normal. It's part of it. As a PR person, I'm used to adapting my style of dress to the place where I'm going to work”.

Judite (43) “There is no dress code. There is common sense, and we know that when there is a meeting with a Partner, for example, a blazer always looks good. (...) There's no informal expectation either. But as I consider myself to be a person who likes to take care when it comes to presentation and the way I dress, I give this topic some importance. But it's only on a personal level”.

Isabel (41) “Business casual, you don't need a suit, but jeans are used. (...) “There's an implied code that people shouldn't wear shorts, for example, or jeans/t-shirts. But it depends on the job. Roles more linked to factory work are more informal in terms of dress code”.

Laura (52) “Yes, you could say that there is. But it's not strict. I adapt to what I have to do".
2.3. Leadership and Socialization

2.3.1. Leadership

In this study, as with other countries included in EUPRERA’s project on Women in Public Relations, leadership was one of the major dimensions. We presented our interviewees with a list of attributes drawn from literature and asked them whether they thought their bosses or managers possessed them, and then whether they thought they had or manifested them. While most of them elected being sensitive to people, having operational skills being politically savvy, and being self-confident as main self-characteristics, while referring to their managers these features did not come in the same position, as being self-confident was the most voted (Figure 15).

Additionally, as our participants had both male and female bosses, we wanted to understand if leadership characteristics varied in function of sex, as literature has pointed out. Figure 16 reveals the differences perceived by our respondents when their most direct supervisors are men and women: aggressiveness, for example, was only pointed out for men and women led in being sensitive to people's perception, but also in being able to promote oneself. Men were more attributed with having operational skills and being analytically competent, whereas women as bosses scored higher on features of being managerially motivated, self-confident, and politically savvy. Although these answers only
amount to a total sample of 19, these results tend to reflect some stereotypes related to gender and leadership, as aggressiveness and more technical skills are linked to males (Figure 16).

Figure 16 – Leadership characteristics per male vs. female boss/manager

The interviews provided an insight into the perceptions of female public relations professionals about the best style of leadership, based on masculine and feminine traits. It is important to remember that the differences between female and male leadership should not be generalized or simplified into rigid stereotypes, as both sexes can display a wide spectrum of leadership styles and individual characteristics (Embry et al., 2008). However, scientific research suggests some general tendencies that can be associated with female and male leadership. Although these tendencies are averages and should not be applied to all people based on whether they are male or female (Lawson, et al., 2022), we can list some differences associated with gender profiles (e.g. Brown, 1979; Hoyt,

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 2 - Gender dimensions of leadership style</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication styles</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>More collaborative and empathetic communication; greater propensity to listen and consider a variety of perspectives before making</td>
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</table>
In a very general way, the literature associates women with transformational leadership and men with transactional leadership (Angus, 2020; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Maher, 1997). However, Steffens, Viladot and Scheifele (2019) point out that rather than defining leadership styles based on the gender of leaders, there should be a concern to integrate diversity and complementarity into organizational leadership. On the other hand, it should be considered that these classifications of styles of leadership linked to some communication styles (De Vries et al., 2010) are strongly influenced by a country’s culture (Lopes & Romana, 2012; Rego, 2022), as Norton (1978; 1983) has shown: countries with a low cultural context (USA, England, Northern Europe, etc.) tend to develop masculine leadership and communication styles, while countries with a low cultural context (Mediterranean countries, including Portugal, Oriental countries, among others) adopt predominantly feminine leadership and communication styles, according to the dimensions mentioned above.

In the interviews we conducted, we asked PR professionals how they defined their leadership style, regardless of whether they held leadership positions. And we found essentially female perceptions of leadership, from the youngest to the most experienced in the profession. Only Helena, 42, who does not hold a leadership position, stands out from the rest. And in the women leaders, we could see a mixture of feminine and masculine traits. And we also found a convergence between their self-perception as a leader and their idea of ‘effective leadership’. To make it easier to read the answers, we present a table with the shared perceptions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teamwork</th>
<th>Decision making</th>
<th>Conflict management</th>
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<tr>
<td>Promote a collaborative working culture, valuing diversity of opinion and seeking consensus.</td>
<td>Adopt a more directive and hierarchical approach in their teams, guided by authority.</td>
<td>Make decisions based on objective analysis and rational considerations; more results oriented.</td>
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<td>Prioritise the well-being of their teams and therefore tend to make decisions after carefully considering the emotional and social implications. More relationship oriented.</td>
<td>More likely to use dialogue and negotiation in the search for conflict solutions, to prioritize the maintenance of relationships.</td>
<td>Seek practical and quick solutions and can address conflicts more directly.</td>
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2010; Koenig et al., 2011; Sczesny et al., 2004; Zaccaro et al., 2008):
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<th><strong>Self-Leadership</strong></th>
<th><strong>Effective Leadership</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Female type perception</strong></td>
<td><strong>Constança (21 years old) &quot;Honesty, assertiveness, good relationship with the team/people&quot;</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Constança (21 years old) &quot;As a leader, I am a very calm and patient person, always open to different opinions and perspectives, never expecting people to have the same opinion as me and do what I want&quot;</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sofia (22 years old) &quot;Honesty, assertiveness, good relationship with the team/people&quot;</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Sofia (22 years old) &quot;I'm a demanding leader who expects a high degree of professionalism from her peers. I'm also a close leader, who is there for whatever is needed and who will always be there for the team&quot;</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sofia (22 years old) &quot;Thoughtfulness, critical thinking, people management, decision-making, ability to listen and reflect&quot;</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Rita (23 years old) &quot;I'm an assertive person and have no problem taking on a leadership role. I always try to find solutions and be practical. However, I like to listen to others and their ideas, I think this is very enriching for any final product. Basically, I'd say that I'm assertive, but I'm also a person who takes other people's problems very much into consideration and I'm sensitive to these cases&quot;</strong></td>
<td><strong>Rita (23 years old) &quot;Determination to make decisions, ability to listen to other people's ideas and feedback and, finally, trust and transparency so that a feeling of security can be conveyed, and everything is always clear&quot;</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Joana (24 years old) &quot;I know that I am organized, motivated and that I try to keep others motivated and in a positive spirit to achieve their results, I try to make them believe in them. (...) I think that some characteristics that I could highlight would be: organization, ability to motivate others, seeking constant support for others. I'm incapable of letting anyone down&quot;</strong></td>
<td><strong>Joana (24 years old) &quot;Ability to support and defend the team, belief in the company she works for, sensitivity, ability to listen to others and welcome suggestions&quot;</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Inês (25 years old) &quot;I'd say my main characteristic is dialog and the ability to delegate tasks, (...) I tend to trust, eliminate barriers and hierarchies between teams (...) I like to leave people to their own devices and let them manage their work&quot;</strong></td>
<td><strong>Inês (25 years old) &quot;Communication skills, the ability to analyse teams, the ability to adapt your style to the people you work with, the ability to look at each person individually and enhance their characteristics, rather than trying to mould all employees to develop the same skills.&quot;</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Beatriz (27 years old) &quot;I always listen to the people I work with and who work for me, thinking about people first is thinking about the best of the company&quot;</strong></td>
<td><strong>Beatriz (27 years old) &quot;Understanding and team spirit&quot;</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Matilde (27 years old) &quot;My strongest skill is being motivational and making people believe. And always bringing a team spirit&quot;</strong></td>
<td><strong>Matilde (27 years old) &quot;It's about showing that you genuinely care about others. The most important thing is to create a space where people's ideas are heard and not have that mindset that what you're saying doesn't matter. (...) What I see with my former leader is that this was false, and he didn't genuinely care about the people around him&quot;.&quot;</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Carolina (25 years old) &quot;Although I haven't yet held a leadership position, I think that, if I were in that role, I would try to emulate what I experienced with some of my previous managers: trying to create a good working environment within the organization by encouraging the work of colleagues and employees, appreciating their skills and successes and supporting them in overcoming any difficulties they might face. I would always</strong></td>
<td><strong>Carolina (25 years old) &quot;Empathy, empathy, empathy. I never tire of defending it. Knowing how to put yourself in the other person's shoes, seeing through their eyes, thinking through their heart, listening to what they have to say. Don't think we're superior just because we're in a higher position. The more empathetic managers can be, the better they will understand the needs - both for personal improvement and to support professional improvement - of their employees.&quot;</strong></td>
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try to listen attentively to them and help them overcome obstacles and improve so that they could develop in their careers and feel satisfied with their work”.

And lead with the door open, never closed”.

Maria (25 years old) “I'm thoughtful, balanced, attentive”.

Catarina (30 years old) “I always try to convey the idea that anything can be done, that problems are not the end of the world, they can always be solved, and my job is to help them find solutions. I try as much as possible not to 'boss them around', because I don't think that works. It's important for teams to be autonomous”.

Maria (25 years old) “Thoughtfulness, assertiveness and confidence”.

Catarina (30 years old) “Communication is the most important thing. Calmness, and having the ability to step back from the problem, take a step back, see the big picture, and see what you need to do to solve a problem, or to respond to a specific request”.

Marta (36 years old) “I know how to listen, and that's especially important because we work as a team. I also believe that I transmit trust, that I can delegate and allow creativity to flourish”.

Marta (36 years old) “Collaborative spirit, knowing how to listen, in-depth networking/social skills, knowing how to delegate tasks”.

Vera (36 years old) “I don't really consider myself a leader. I would say that I have characteristics that I don't give up in any role, which are being upright, not accepting injustice, not using other people’s work to get ahead or to give myself credit, and these values are very important to me”.

Vera (36 years old) “Treat everyone equally, consider everyone's opinion, consider that everyone's work is important. Establish some working methods that don't always favour some people over others. Find a method in which everyone is useful. And set an example. It's not enough to command, just because you have that power, you have to set an example”.

Júlia (38 years old) “I like to share. And I'm very generous in that respect. When I lead a team or a project, I always share, put everyone on the same level and try to instil the idea of belonging to that project. It usually works. The team works better, and the results are excellent”.

Júlia (38 years old) "competence, truth, sharing and security”.

Margarida (44 years old) “They tell me that I’m a very dynamic person and that they really enjoy working with me because I delegate tasks, let people grow, 'bang their heads against the wall' and learn from their mistakes. I give a lot of autonomy, but I also give responsibility. And so I've had good experiences with the people I work with because they end up being grateful for the experience”.

Margarida (44 years old) “You need to have great respect for others, know how to listen and how to teach and 'let go'. And a sense of humour too. Work is meant to be fun, that's how I see it. I usually make sure that the people who work with me have a good time, and that they have good memories afterwards”.

Helena (42 years old) “Leading by example and that's my leadership style. It's setting very well-defined objectives, putting them into practice myself and passing them on to others” (...) “I'm a very pragmatic person in professional matters. I'm there to work, and my friends are outside my workplace. That's not to say we don't have an excellent relationship, but personal matters... no, thank you very much” (...) “I really admire a woman I had as a leader who was a very entrepreneurial person, and not complicated. She was very objective, very practical, she made things happen. And that's what I am too”.

Helena (42 years old) “A leader has to lead by example and be very sure of what he wants, and he has to be firm in his intentions to make the team believe in his mission. And fulfil it with commitment, motivation and zeal. You have to individualize each case. And one thing that I think is very important, but not always feasible, is to put people in charge of the tasks for which they are best suited”.

Luísa (43 years old) “Experience, authority,

Margarida (44 years old) “Experience, authority,
own thing independently. I only lead at the end. Along the way, people do things as they see fit. And at the end, when it's time to show the work to the president, I decide”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laura (52 years old)</th>
<th>&quot;Self-confident, with operational skills, emotional and sensitive to people&quot;</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Laura (52 years old)</td>
<td>&quot;Respect and trust in the team&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<th>Isabel (41 years old)</th>
<th>&quot;I'm frank, direct and collaborative&quot;</th>
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<tr>
<td>Isabel (41 years old)</td>
<td>&quot;Empathy. Decision-making ability&quot;</td>
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<th>Judite (43 years old)</th>
<th>&quot;I'm somewhere between a democratic leader and a motivational leader. I really value the importance of the team being part of decisions, taking their ideas, suggestions and criticisms into account, identifying opportunities for continuous improvement of tasks (Kaisen methodology) and the organisation as a whole. I like to encourage everyone's participation to achieve the common goal by acting on the emotional level of the teams. Motivation draws out the best potential in each person and has the ability to unite through words. It's the contagion effect. It infects the team with confidence and optimism, so I think I also fit into the motivational leadership style&quot;.</th>
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<td>Judite (43 years old)</td>
<td>&quot;Being seen as an example; Being attentive to your team; Praising in public and reprimanding in private (inspired by the situational leadership of coach José Mourinho); Giving continuous constructive feedback; Recognizing merit - leadership based on meritocracy; Cultivating the team's individual and collective emotional intelligence; The leader should always ask for support or help when he needs it. Always seek to be informed and surround yourself with good advisors&quot;.</td>
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Despite this apparent conformity, there was no generalization regarding the preference for a male or female leader among our interviewees. Only one of the interviewees had only female leaders, and another only male leaders, while the rest had experience with leaders of both genders and, in the case of several, simultaneously. It's worth noting that most respondents place the person, and not the gender, as a factor of preference in leadership:

Joana (24 years old) "I don't think I've ever thought in this way: 'I'd like to work for a man', 'I'd like to work for a woman'. (...) 'I can say that I don't have a preference'. (...) 'Now I work 'somewhat' for my coordinator, although I don't see it like that either. I work for the various clients I have and for the agency, trying to get the best results, particularly with the support of my coordinator. I can say that I would like (and I do, because fortunately this is my reality) to work with someone who believes in the team, in the company, and who is looking for the best for the team”.

Inês (25 years old) "In both situations there were things I liked and others I would have improved, I can't decide based on gender alone' (...) 'For example, I admire my current boss for being able to reconcile career and family, which is a personal wish. However, I don't see myself in all the decisions this person has made throughout the process, in particular the inability to disconnect from work and delegate during maternity leave".
Margarida (44 years old) "I've never thought about it. I've had male and female managers. Maybe I prefer working with men, but it's not very clear to me. Maybe it flows better if it's a man. However, I've had great experiences with female managers. With 25 years of experience...".

Constança (21 years old) "Yes, I've experienced both situations. I don't think I should generalize, because each person is different. However, I felt more comfortable and open-minded working for a man, because I think men are more relaxed and cope better with pressure and, consequently, with the people they lead".

Júlia (38) "It's not a question of preference. They both have qualities and defects. I wouldn't put it like that. I always prefer to work for people who are competent, fair and have a sense of humor. And one way or another I've managed to do that."

Rita (23 years old) "The two organizations I joined had men as directors, but my most direct bosses in both companies were women. I have no preference".

Marta (36 years old) "No. Not at all! Actually, they both have quite similar personalities. They're both very open, very transparent, and very honest. They're both very similar, yes".

Only two of the professionals were unequivocal in their preference for female bosses and the other two for male bosses:

Matilde (27 years old) "Women have more empathy to understand other people's sides of things. They are more supportive. And when you have a woman as your boss, it's easier to look at her and think 'that's what I want to follow', while with a man it might not be so easy to make that connection. There's always a barrier, a difference between us, if it's with a male boss."

Carolina (25 years old) "I think I prefer working with women, although I recognize that perhaps this isn't a completely established opinion. It simply comes from the fact that, of the three managers I've had, the one with whom I established the greatest empathy and who valued my personal and professional skills the most was my female director, while the experience in the other two agencies, led by men, was not so positive. However, the experience as a whole wasn't more positive or more negative simply because the management was female/male."

Catarina (30 years old) "Men, because teams with a majority of women are more difficult to reach a consensus with, and for everyone to row in the same direction. We always have a lot on our minds, and we always must do a lot at the same time, and we end up neglecting the idea of 'if she did this, she must have a reason'. I think it's harder for us to be calm enough to see things from the outside. It's possible, but you must draw attention to yourself. Men are less 'I know best'. And in a big team, which must row in the same direction, it's more difficult with women".
Helena (42 years old) ‘I prefer male leaders. They're more pragmatic, more objective, not so attached to the personal. I'm not used to seeing men talking about their children, these mundane matters” (...) ‘sometimes it's not so pragmatic to work with female managers’.

The leaders were asked whether they preferred to have teams made up of women or men. Only Luísa (43 years old) said she preferred working with women. The other two who answered the question did not distinguish between gender and the value of their teams:

Judite (43) 'It's the same. The important thing is to think as a team with several personalities that complement each other. (...) I defend the DISC methodology (dominance, influence, stability, and conformity), in a team we need these four personalities, whether they are men or women”.

Isabel (41) 'No preference’.

2.3.2. The socialization process and professional attitude

Socialization refers to the process by which individuals learn and internalize the norms, values, behaviors, and skills needed to participate effectively in a particular society or group (Eagly, 1987). The type of socialization plays a key role in how we relate to each other at work, in interactions with colleagues, and leadership (Heilman, 1983). From an early age, girls are often exposed to gender stereotypes that can influence their career choices (Halim, 2016; Jackson, 2007; Solbes-Canales et al., 2020). Also, within women in public relations, the impact of socialization can be observed in various ways. If women are socialized to believe they are better suited to professions that emphasize interpersonal skills, communication, and empathy (Andsager & Hust, 2005), this can shape both their career choices and their attitude at work.

Socialization also shapes socio-cultural expectations of women, i.e., it can also expose them to specific challenges and barriers in their careers. If cultural expectations limit leadership opportunities for women, this can influence their progression in the field of public relations, affecting their attitude toward professional aspirations (Wood, 2008).

Socialization often encourages women to value interpersonal relationships and networking. In public relations, where building relationships is crucial, these social skills can be an advantage (Flynn, 2014). However, women with family commitments can face barriers in professional networking. This can affect their career progression or their decision to start a family (Al-Jenaibi, 2011; Fritz & Van Knippenberg, 2018; Shen, 2019).
Whether socialization takes place in essentially female environments (with the mother, grandparents, etc.) or male environments (father, brothers, cousins, etc.) can influence communication style, social interactions, and future leadership skills (Brody, 2013). For example, a socialization process more closely linked to female figures can emphasize values such as empathy, collaboration, and interpersonal care. People socialized in this way may be more likely to create emotional bonds with colleagues and a cooperative work environment. And more typical socialization in male caregivers can develop a traditionally masculine style, such as assertiveness and competitiveness. In these cases, women may feel more comfortable in professional environments dominated by men, whether leaders or work teams (Halim & Ruble, 2010).

Among our interviewees, we found a majority socialization pattern, which was the presence of the mother or another female figure, although after childhood there was greater heterogeneity with the integration of peers:

Helena (42 years old) ‘I spent more time with my mother, and my group of friends was very heterogeneous, with boys and girls...’.

Inês (25 years old) ‘I grew up in Lisbon, in a middle-class family made up of a mother, father and two children. For quite a long time (about 7 years) I lived with my mother a lot more, because my father was sent to another address for work. Both at school and at home, as I have a brother a year older, I always played with both boys and girls.’ (…) ‘My favorite activity tended to be playing with ‘nenucos’, but I don't think that was due to any external influence. In terms of extra-curricular activities, I've always been in common classes with my brother, chosen by our parents (swimming and horse riding, for example), and also activities chosen by me (ballet, for example)”.

Matilde (27 years old) ‘I spent more time with my mother or with friends (girls)’ (…) ‘I always liked to be at home playing with myself, making big houses for the Barbies, always doing things with myself and not so much in groups”. Then it was a normal youth, go Joana (24 years old) ‘When I was a child, I was brought up more with my grandparents, having only gone to school when I was 5 years old, before entering the first year of school. Then I can say that I was always more accompanied by my mother and grandmother, especially from the moment my father had to go abroad to work (I was in the 3rd cycle, and he only returned when I was working as a consultant)”.

Catarina (30 years old) ‘I spent more time with my mother, in fact my mother brought me up on her own. When I started to become a teenager and go out at night, I found it easier to meet boys, but then it went in phases. It was a very good environment, I always had lots of cousins, and I grew up with them a lot’.
Júlia (38 years old) "I grew up in a small town and always spent a lot of time with girls and boys, and there was a certain tendency to get together more with girls".

Maria (25 years old) Type of socialization: "I lived in a small town, spent a lot of time with friends and, on a family level, more time with my mother” going out at night, going to Vera (36) "I spent more time with my mother... I’d never thought about it, but I think I spent more time with girls. I grew up in an environment... wow... That's strange. An environment surrounded by adults, little contact with children my age, an environment with absent parents, more with grandparents, a closed environment in terms of social relationships, it was very school-home, and with little access to culture: books, movies, music...”.

Marta (36 years old) Type of socialization: "In terms of mother and father, I had a mother at home to provide support, given that there were three of us, although my mother also helped my father. But it was my mother who was there for me throughout my childhood and schooling. Dad was there, but it was Mum who really did it. On outings... Well, from 15 to 18 I was always very much accompanied by my brothers". (...) "I have two older brothers. I've always been a bit of a 'tomboy' in the sense that I grew up with my older brothers and their friends were also my 'bros'. This was more of a social thing. But from the age of 18 I ended up gaining my own circle of friends and then I was clearly with both boys and girls. It wasn't something I questioned".

Only two of our interviewees mentioned the strong presence of a male caregiver during their childhood and adolescence. However, they stressed their preference for female friendships at some point. Only Beatriz, 27, looking back, said she had a childhood and adolescence in a gender-balanced environment:

Rita (23 years old) 'I grew up with my mother, my father, and a younger sister. Of course, I played with dolls and did 'girly things', but deep down I was the typical tomboy. Every weekend I would go for a walk with my father, and we would go to various parks and gardens. My father taught me almost every sport I know, and I always preferred being outside to being at home. Nowadays, most of my friends are girls, but when I was younger, I mostly hung out with boys".

Sofía (22 years old) 'I've always been very close to my father, although I have a good relationship with my mother. As far as friends go, I've always had more affinity with girls because we have more in common, but I've always had two or three boyfriends who have stayed with me over time”.

Beatriz (27 years old) "In a normal and healthy environment, balanced in terms of tasks and hobbies between father and mother, as well as with friends".
Of the four interviewed leaders, two (Isabel and Luísa) said that their mothers were the most present in their socialization process and the other two (Laura and Judite) reported male socialization environments, through brothers and male friends:

Isabel (41 years old) "Very balanced, but more time with women, due to the many divorces in my immediate family".

Luísa (43 years old) "I was born in Angola and came to Portugal when I was two. I lived in Costa da Caparica until I was 12 and then came to live on this side of the river (Lisbon). And I lived here until I was 30 with my mother." (...) "The kind of environment was middle class. My father died when I was 10. I spent my whole life with a maternal upbringing, always being educated by my mother. And when I went out at night, it was more often girls".

Laura (52 years old) "I grew up in a very healthy environment with lots of friends, especially in the countryside and out playing. There was always a lot of adventure, too, in the Arrábida mountains and on the beach because I was a girl scout in the 70s and 80s. I spent more time in the street with my friends".

Judite (43 years old) "My parents come from humble beginnings, brought up in villages in the north and from a very early age they started working to help support the family. At the age of 14 they were already in Lisbon, staying with relatives, doing small jobs, as was very common at the time. (...) As I have a younger brother who is two years old, from a very early age we started playing in the street, playing ball, marbles, riding bikes and we always had friends in common. My brother even belonged to the Men's Academic Tuna of the Faculty of Letters of the University of Lisbon - Inoportuna - and during this phase I accompanied them a lot to various festivals".

Another important aspect to highlight is the strict upbringing that three of the women leaders were subjected to:

Luísa (43 years old) "I had a strict upbringing. I went to the Father Cross boarding school, and I had a Catholic upbringing, and a strict upbringing".

Judite (43 years old) "I had a rigid and somewhat conservative upbringing from my mother".

Isabel (41 years old) "Let's say a democratic rigidity".

This detail is interesting, as the literature points out that rigid education can bring challenges and opportunities to individuals in terms of their attitude to and toward work (Larzelere, Morris & Harrist, 2013). Although a rigid/strict/structured education can have challenges and limitations, it can also offer some specific advantages in the professional context. It should be noted that the interpretation of "rigidity" can vary, but advantages
associated with a more structured education have been demonstrated, such as the ability to develop solid organizational, deadline, and time management skills; focus and determination in individuals; respect for authority; strong work ethic; high standards of performance, greater preparation for highly structured environments, among others (Dimmock, 2011).

2.3.3. The influence of personal and professional backgrounds

All the interviewees, both leaders and non-leaders, considered that their personal and professional history contributed to build their communication style, as well as their perception of self-leadership. Below are just a few of the responses that are most illustrative of the opinions gathered:

Rita (23 years old) “My assertiveness is very much related to the fact that my communication style is direct. As for my background, I’d say yes too because I learned a lot from my parents to have these two sides: assertiveness from my father and sensitivity from my mother”.

Constança (21 years old) “I think the way I am, thanks a lot to my upbringing and background, allows me to be a very calm and open leader, but also very honest and direct”.

Isabel (41 years old, Leader) “There isn’t much difference between the way I act personally and professionally. I express my point of view and my opinions frankly and directly, but with empathy”.

Judite (43 years old, Leader) “My two leadership styles have always been with me. As a child, I remember my mother telling me that I cared a lot about others and that I always had that drive to push people forward and motivate them. Throughout my life, many friends and colleagues would and still do turn to me for opinions and advice and I even did some mentoring at a university. I like to think that we are as a whole achieving greater goals. I like to motivate others and that others cultivate a sense of belonging to the team and the organization”.

Joana (24 years old) “I’ve always felt very supported on a personal level, and I know how comforting it is and I try to do the same for others. My mother has always believed in me and motivated me a lot to achieve what I wanted (she was one of the few who supported me 100% in following the course I wanted, despite so many others saying I wouldn’t have a job afterward). As for organization, I think it’s something that, although I saw in my mother, I developed on my own”.

Matilde (27 years old) “I think our leadership experience is a reflection of everything we’ve experienced before. I see this with leaders I have now who have had a completely different path to mine, and this is reflected in their way of leading. I spent six years in an international youth
organization, where the main objective was to develop leadership in young people, and my leadership style comes from that experience”.

Catarina (30 years old) “I was brought up to be as independent as possible. My mother was single and had to teach me how to do things. That's always been my background, and, over time, I've incorporated it into the way I am and, of course, the way I work”.

Carolina (25 years old) “Because I consider myself to be a very empathetic person, I find it easy to put myself in other people's shoes and see through their eyes, understand their motivations and what drives them to act in a certain way. (...) I don't consider myself to be selfish at all. (...) I don't consider myself to be selfish at all and I even find it difficult to be alone, I feel a great need to have people around me, so I think that, if I were in a leadership position, it would naturally be easier for me to go and celebrate some good news or a success in some initiative with my employees than alone in my office, behind closed doors. I think that, because I felt better in the agency where this was the director's spirit, that's why I see myself more in her example”.
Final Notes

To sum up, our main findings should be highlighted:

- Younger women don’t perceive a differential gender treatment, but rather a "generational gap", tending to normalize the situation vs. older women and leaders saying that women have a longer way to prove themselves and be promoted.

- Perceived equal demands for work effort, regardless of family responsibilities - double journey. Family issues are generally perceived as the greatest career obstacles for women. We also found Portuguese female practitioners' career obstacles, especially related to maternity.

- Concerning leadership, most did not express any preference for bosses being men or women. But some highlighted the pragmatism and seriousness, typical of male leadership, while others underlined the advantage of working with female bosses because they were more supportive and empathetic. And most women in leadership positions said they had a more masculine communication and leadership profile. Some interviewees' opinions seem also to be linked to the Queen Bee syndrome (Topic et al., 2020).

- Regarding communication, almost all women perceived it was not good for their careers to be extroverted, spontaneous, or direct. They claimed to be careful in verbal ("heard many sexist comments" especially with male bosses) and nonverbal communication (clothes not "too revealing"). Moreover, most women in leadership positions said they had a more masculine communication and leadership profile.

- As for personal context, a typical "girl" socialization was perceived for most, supported by mothers or grandmothers, thought leaders (40-55 years old), and grew up more with men (fathers and male friends).

Portugal's political history with 50 years of dictatorship placed women in a domestic context and still seems to affect Portuguese female practitioners in the strategic communication industry.
References


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