



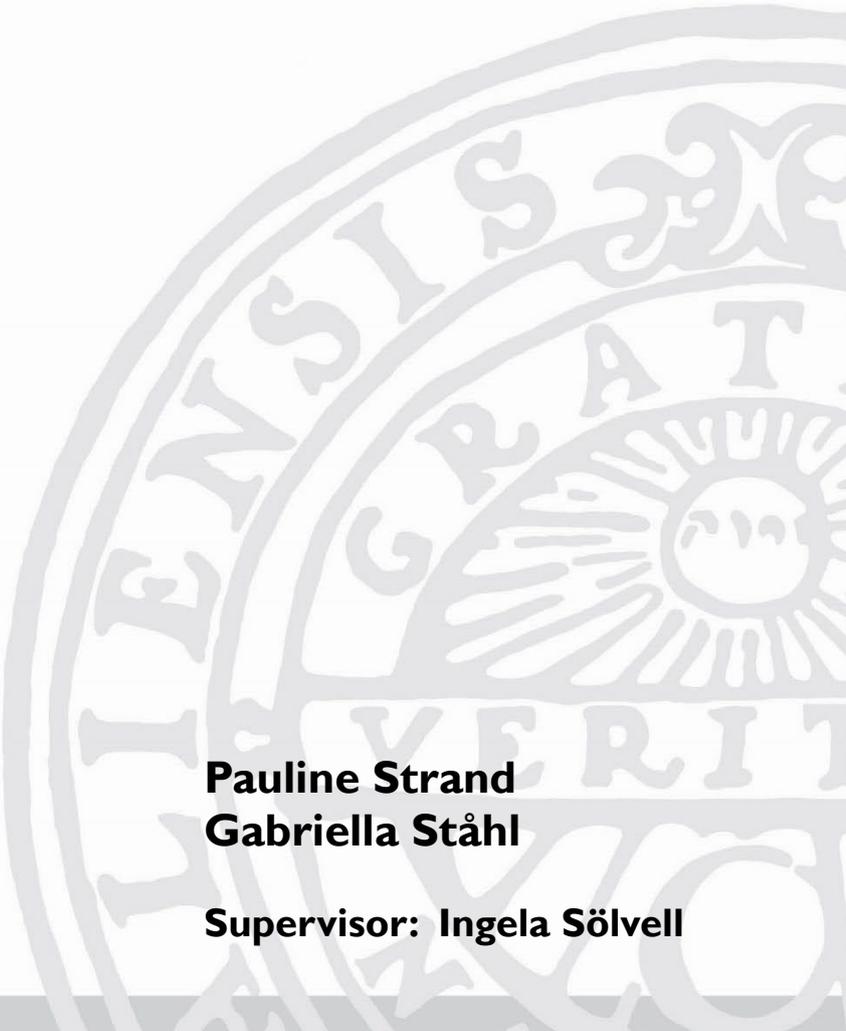
# **The Female Organization?**

**A Qualitative Survey Study on Female-Dominated Organizations**

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## **Abstract**

Previous research confirms that gender affects organizations and the overall organizational culture. Organizations are heavily gendered and, in most cases, to the disadvantage of women. It has been shown that gender bias within male-dominated organizations creates the queen bee syndrome, characterized by a lack of solidarity and hostile behavior amongst women. Because gender bias exists in all organizations, it is reasonable to believe it also exists in female-dominated organizations. This study examines the queen bee syndrome in female-dominated organizations, analyzing how the characteristics permeate the organizational culture. The study employs a qualitative research method and collects data through qualitative surveys with LiVO members, a Swedish union organization for managers within the health and care sector. The study aims to build on theory regarding the queen bee syndrome and extend knowledge about gendered organizations and female-dominated organizations. This study suggests that signs of the queen bee syndrome, to some extent, permeate the organizational culture in female-dominated organizations. However, the result also reveals that complexity and duality exist. The triggering structures that create the queen bee syndrome need to be addressed rather than the gender composition to counteract queen bee behavior.

**Keywords:** Female-dominated organizations, Gendered organizational culture, Queen bee syndrome

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

The existence of gendered labor segregation is defined as a gender imbalance within specific occupations. Such imbalance is often to the disadvantage of women, and scholars have long recognized barriers for women (Kanter, 1977), which are anchored in the organizational culture and are not to be common in male-dominated occupations (Kanter, 1977; Derks et al., 2011; Sheppard & Aquino, 2013). Literature on gender and organizations stresses how women experience difficulties at work due to patriarchal social and organizational systems (Acker, 1990). Acker (1990) proposes that gender embeds into organizations, which produce and reproduce expectations about gender in the workplace.

Recent research suggests discriminatory behavior against women is a widespread problem since it can also exist in female-dominated workplaces (Diehl et al., 2022). The informal gendered practices and interactions in different organizational contexts result in a workplace culture that challenges the work and development of women in many ways (Wright, 2013). Mainstream research on gender suggests that women face barriers, such as lack of workplace support (Taylor, 2010), exclusion (Wright, 2016), less organizational mobility (Kröger, 2017), and exposure to health risks (Östlin & Sen, 2008) in male-dominated organizational cultures. Nevertheless, the conditions for women aggravate when women also fail to support each other (Kanter, 1977; Derks et al., 2011; Webber & Giuffre, 2019), which could result in the undermining of female peers (Derks et al., 2016).

The unique challenges in woman–woman interactions (e.g., Derks et al., 2011) could play out through the devaluation of relationships among women at work. Such gendered behavior, where women treat their female peers in undermining, demoralizing, and hostile ways, describes the queen bee syndrome (Sheppard & Aquino, 2017; Derks et al., 2011; Mavin, 2008). The queen bee syndrome is a phenomenon related to gendered organizations that have been applied to describe women's situations, attitudes, and behaviors in male-dominated domains (Harvey & Tremblay, 2020). As indicated above, masculine organizational cultures drive such behaviors, which, in turn, reinforces the gender stereotyping of women (Webber & Giuffre, 2019). Research

has suggested that this phenomenon exists in all kinds of organizations. Still, it is known as more prominent in masculine organizational cultures (Webber & Giuffre, 2019) since such cultures tend to be more sexist and negatively stereotype women due to men's hierarchical superiority (Acker, 1990; Kanter, 1977; Webber & Giuffre, 2019). Thus, an intriguing question arises about why the queen bee syndrome seems to occur in female-dominated contexts but would logically be less exposed to the influence of negative stereotypes of women.

## 1.2 Problematization

The fact that gender imbalance in occupations, and consequently also in organizations, appears to be to the disadvantage of women consistently, there is surprisingly little knowledge about how gender bias between women occurs in female-dominated domains. Yet, recent research suggests that gender bias is not limited to male-dominant organizations or occupations and thus exists in all workplaces (Diehl et al., 2022). Therefore, it is possible that gender bias is prevalent in organizations where women are well-represented. When this thesis discusses gender bias, it refers to the prejudice against one gender. The increased number of women in organizations does not seem to change the experience of prejudice but is inherent at the organizational core. Thus, this corresponds with how scholars argue how there is a gender difference in minority implications related to a status difference between men and women in society (Holgerson & Romani, 2020; Watkins et al., 2018; Williams, 2013). Men in the minority do not face similar disadvantages as women in the minority; instead, men bring their gender privilege into female-dominated occupations. Men often benefit from their minority status due to status linked to masculine hegemony, legitimizing men's dominant position. Thus, male advantages exist in all organizations and jobs, even in occupations dominated by women (Williams, 1995). For example, Williams (1995) describes the glass escalator, which refers to the phenomenon that men are likely to be pushed upwards in female-dominated organizations because they are considered to belong in and enjoy high-status positions.

If men bring gender privilege into female-dominated professions, it is arguable that women hold their disadvantages and minority status even in a numerical majority. As Diehl et al. (2022) contend, research must go beyond examining women in the minority and instead focus on occupations where women are well-represented. There is thus a need for a nuance of the dominant perception of queen bee behavior or gender bias behavior of only being a phenomenon

occurring in male-dominated occupations. The increasing number of women in organizations does not seem to change the experience of prejudice. Therefore, there are reasons to believe that the problem of queen bee behavior or gender-biased behavior is more widespread than only being a phenomenon occurring in male-dominated occupations. Hence, it is arguable that gender bias against women persists in female-dominated organizations. Therefore, it is interesting to explore whether characteristics of the queen bee phenomenon among women exist in female-dominated organizations and how it permeates the organizational culture. We approach this by focusing on organizations within the Swedish health and care sector since it is a typically female-dominated occupation consisting of approximately 80 percent of women (SCB, 2020).

### 1.3 Purpose

This study aims to examine whether traits of queen bee behavior among women exist in female-dominated organizations and how it pervades the organizational culture. The study approaches the overall culture since the queen bee syndrome closely intertwines organizational culture. This study investigates the Swedish health and care sector, which is generally numerically dominated by women, to address the purpose. Given this purpose, the thesis strives to nuance the dominant perception of queen bee behavior only existing in male-dominated organizations since these challenges appear to be far more widespread.

### 1.4 Research Question

*How does the queen bee syndrome permeate the organizational culture in female-dominated organizations?*

## 2 Literature Review

*This chapter presents an overview of previous research that will comprise the theoretical framework. The initial section outlines a theoretical background on gendered organizations and organizational culture to understand the underlying processes driving gender biases against women. Furthermore, this thesis draws from research on minority behavior among women in male-dominated occupations, such as lack of solidarity and the queen bee syndrome. The chapter finalizes with a theoretical conclusion as a basis for the analytical approach.*

### 2.1 Theoretical Background

In order to understand the persistence of the queen bee syndrome in organizations, we find it essential to clarify how it connects to the processes of gendering organizations and (re)production of organizational culture. Therefore, this section provides a background to the underlying problem of how robust processes that construct gender drives gender biases. Using organizational culture is, thus, simply a means through which to identify queen bee behavior in female-dominated organizations and not as a part of our analytical framework.

#### 2.1.1 Gendered Organizational Culture

One must understand that it is impossible to separate gender from organizations. It is an essential component and crucial to consider when trying to understand organizations and their culture (Acker, 1990; Britton, 2000). This stream of research builds on the idea of gender as socially constructed (West & Zimmerman, 1987), where organizations are doing gender. Doing gender in this setting refers to how organizations produce and reproduce ideas about gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Thus, as every organization has its unique culture, it consists of gendered assumptions about women and men (Acker, 1990). It means that gendered stereotypes, values, and assumptions about masculinity and femininity reflect and emboss the organizational culture (Alvesson & Billing, 2009). In other words, all components of organizational culture are influenced by and influence the perception of gender.

The fact that gender closely intertwines with organizational culture is because it consists of gendering processes through which organizations become gendered (Acker, 1990).

Consequently, gendered organizational cultures create and maintain gender differences, building and driving stereotypical ideas about men and women. However, research on gendered organizations suggests that negative stereotypes about women are not simply a result of a numerical minority but how masculinity is more valued than femininity because dominant cultural beliefs about women and men are inherent in all organizations and their cultures (Acker, 1990; Britton & Logan, 2008; Williams, 2013).

### 2.1.2 Gendered Organizations

Interestingly, the examination of gender within organizations has shifted over time. Early research has applied a gender-neutral approach, not acknowledging gender as a crucial component (Mills, 1988; Kanter, 1977), while scholars such as Acker (1990) and Britton (2000) emphasize gender as a crucial element impossible to separate from the organization. Acker's theory (1990) of gendered organizations posits that organizations are gendered on a structural and cultural level, where gendered expectations about employees' attitudes, behaviors, and interactions permeate all parts of an organization. In other words, gendered stereotypes embed all organizations, typically disadvantaging women and favoring men (Ely et al., 2011; Holgersson & Romani, 2020; Watkins et al., 2018). These disadvantages comprise, for instance, hindering the advancement of women (Webber & Guiffre, 2019), workplace support (Taylor, 2010), and exclusion (Diehl et al., 2020). However, this view contradicts Kanter (1997), who suggests that disadvantages are tied to numerical minorities. Instead, it suggests that the disadvantages reflect the masculine hierarchical superiority in society (Mavin, 2006), which indicate that these disadvantages might also reflect in the female-dominated organizations this thesis examines.

The advantages of men embed into organizations through the processes of gendering (Acker, 1990). These processes reflect and reproduce gender divisions (e.g., practices/structures that produce divisions such as wages, hierarchies, power, and subordination) through policies and formal practices. The gendering processes also include the organizational culture that influences beliefs and behavior and everyday interactions among organizational members (Holgersson & Romani, 2020). These processes construct women's and men's behaviors, attitudes, and experiences. Hence, these gendering processes arguably create the underlying gender hierarchy that underlies the problem of why women are disadvantaged at work by men and other women. In other words, all gendered practices in female-dominated organizations reflect a masculine

hierarchical superiority that disadvantages women and negatively affect interactions between female peers.

The gendering of organizations thus implies that all gendering processes subordinate women in all organizations despite the numerical majority of women. Just as patriarchy embeds in gendered systems in organizations manifested through misogynistic attitudes and behaviors toward women (Marvin, 2006), the gendering of organizations functions as a framework to explore relations between women. Thus, this illustrates the underlying processes of how gender closely intertwines with organizations and how biases, such as the queen bee syndrome, both reproduce in the organizations and reproduce the organizational culture.

### 2.1.3 Masculine Organizational Cultures

Research on gender and organizations shows that an essential factor in reproducing masculine hegemony is the continuous norm of favoring men and masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity shapes gender relations and permeates all organizations and cultures (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Acker, 1990), and it is well-established that masculine organizational culture exists in all organizations. However, dominant research still focuses on examining this culture in male-dominated organizations and its barriers for women (e.g., Derks et al., 2016; Sheppard & Aquino, 2017), yet later indications point to its existence in female-dominant organizations (Diehl et al., 2022). Moreover, scholars such as Derks et al. (2016) and Webber and Giuffre (2019) contend that masculine organizational culture tends to stereotype women negatively that triggers behaviors such as lack of solidarity and queen bee syndrome, which we elaborate on in the below section. Nevertheless, as negative stereotypes about women are inherent in the culture and as it permeates all organizations, we argue that such stereotyping may trigger similar behavior in female-dominated organizations.

Ultimately, the gendering of organizations reflects the hierarchical superiority of men in society and embeds gender stereotypes, which creates male advantages and female disadvantages in organizations. The negative stereotypes about women, in turn, reflect in the organizational culture, which embeds gender biases that give rise to barriers against women, such as lack of solidarity and queen bee behaviors. Such behavior reinforces the gender hierarchy and the

negative stereotyping of women, which again amplifies the gendering of organizations. Hence, the spiral goes on.

## 2.2 Theoretical Framework

*The following sections present the theoretical framework, including literature on gender bias and the queen bee syndrome.*

### 2.2.1 Triggering Structures

As the theoretical background outlines, the processes of gendering organizations embeds gender stereotypes favoring males and disfavoring females. These negative stereotypes about women embed gender biases that create barriers against women. The barriers embedded in the organizational culture in male-dominated organizations (Diehl et al., 2022), such as lack of solidarity and queen bee behaviors, reinforce the gender hierarchy and the negative stereotyping of women, which again amplifies the gendering of organizations.

Organizational gender biases manifest in various forms, ranging from subtle to overt (Diehl et al., 2020). Subtle biases involve barriers that arise from cultural beliefs about gender and workplace structures, practices, and interactions that unintentionally favor men (Ely et al., 2011). Gender stereotyping by women is typically perceived as more legitimate and less likely to be interpreted as sexist as it is a non-typical source of bias (Derks et al., 2011). However, bias does not have to be traditional or obvious to have adverse effects (Sterk et al., 2018). For instance, Mavin et al. (2014) contend that women continue to perceive that mistreatment from other women is more severe and unexpected than from men, and prejudice on gender expressed by women provides a strong legitimacy for women's disadvantaged position at work (Derks et al., 2011). Therefore, expressed biases by women function as triggering structures that can give rise to barriers against female peers.

Furthermore, by reviewing the literature on women-women relationships, Webber & Giuffre (2019) identified barriers to solidarity between women in male-dominated industries. They contend that the barriers are partly a consequence of negative stereotypes about women and the devaluation of relationships between women at work, for instance, gendered stereotypes about

women as queen bees. Moreover, previous research asserts that negative stereotypes about women in male-dominated cultures trigger hostile behavior among women toward their female peers (Acker, 1990; Derks et al., 2016; Nkomo & Rodriguez, 2019). In a study by Derks et al. (2011b), examining females in senior positions, both experiencing and exerting queen bee behavior, they argue that sexist organizational cultures drive queen bee behavior, where women undermine other women. Thus, queen bee behavior is a response to gender bias and is a consequence of gender discrimination in the workplace and not its cause (Mavin et al., 2017; Webber & Giuffe, 2019); in other words, it is an outcome of gendered organizations. In conclusion, the devaluation of women's relationships, negative stereotypes about women, and sexist cultures also constitute triggering structures that create conditions where queen bee responses can arise.

### 2.2.2 Queen Bee Syndrome

The queen bee syndrome is a phenomenon related to gendered organizations typically applied to describe the situation and attitudes of women in male-dominated domains (Harvey & Trembly, 2020). As such, mainstream research on the queen bee syndrome has examined queen bee stereotypes in male-dominated contexts, such as among police officers (Derks et al., 2011a), academia (Ellemers, 2004), and IT (Harvey & Trembly, 2020). Staines et al. (1974) introduced the queen bee label in the 1970s, and research has drawn on the concept to explain the tension in women-women interactions at work (e.g., Derks et al., 2011, 2016; Webber & Giuffre, 2019).

The queen bee label typically describes women in leadership positions who succeeded in male-dominated workplaces engaging in suppressing behavior toward female subordinates who appear as a threat (Staines et al., 1974; Arvate et al., 2018). For instance, Derks et al. (2011a) concluded that when examining senior women in male-dominated occupations, women tend to be less supportive of other women, simultaneously as they denied gender discrimination was still an issue in their workplace. Some studies show that women exert such behaviors to fit the masculine organizational culture, contributing to gender discrimination (Arvate et al., 2018; Derks et al., 2016; Sheppard & Aquino, 2017). Consequently, queen bee behavior contradicts the female solidarity advocated in society and maintains structures that discriminate against women. However, scholars such as Mavin et al. (2017) and Webber and Giuffre (2019) stress that it is essential to recognize that queen bee behavior is due to gendered stereotypes and not an inherent

quality of women not supporting other women. Thus, the concept does not aim to capture traits of individual women but negative stereotypes that drive such behaviors.

Research on queen bee behavior points to a phenomenon of vertical conflict, aggression, and competition between woman managers and their female employees (Sheppard & Aquino, 2013). However, such behavior is possibly far more widespread than exclusively existing in the described relationship, manager to subordinate. Drawing on Mavin's (2008) argument that hostile relations between women can occur vertically, from managers to subordinates, as well as horizontally, i.e., between same-level peers, thus we can arguably assume that the queen bee phenomenon exists in all levels and directions within organizations. Given that the background of biases from other women is more severe as a non-typical source of bias (Derks et al., 2011; Mavin et al., 2014), it might amplify the phenomenon in female-dominated organizations existing at all levels. In conclusion, drawing on previous research on queen bee behavior helps us explore the relationship between women and their female peers at all levels.

### 2.2.3 Queen Bee Behaviors

The queen bee syndrome is an established effect suggesting that some women treat their female peers in an undermining, demoralizing, and bullying manner. Women are rarely physically aggressive towards other women; instead, queen bee behaviors imply more socially aggressive behavior, including social exclusion, social isolation, social alienation, and backbiting, i.e., talking about someone behind their back (Harvey, 2018). Kanter (1977) argues that it is sometimes difficult for women as minorities to support each other due to tokenism, i.e., when one's gender is significantly underrepresented, which maintains negative stereotypes about women. Thus, workplace interactions between women can be a source of either competition or support (e.g., Rodriguez, 2013). Epstein (1980) argues that there is more support among women in a female-dominated context, and the facilitation of solidarity behavior between women in female-dominated organizations may vary.

However, it is questionable whether scholars unfairly scrutinize women's conflicts at work by focusing on negative behavior among women. Examining queen bee behavior may negatively stereotype women and blame women for gender inequality at work (Mavin, 2008). Further, Mavin (2008) asserts that research does not problematize the queen bee label enough as it

possibly reinforces the gendered status quo. Nevertheless, this thesis is not striving to label individual women as queen bees but to shed light on signs that can indicate traits that could be destructive to women at work. Furthermore, Webber and Giuffre (2019) discuss how future research should examine the conditions for support among women to help eliminate gender inequality at work. However, England (2010) argues that gender equality has stalled due to small cultural and institutional changes in the devaluation of women. Thus, highlighting the biases women may face in female-dominated organizations is a way to create more awareness of the devaluation of women at work.

#### 2.2.4 Lack of Solidarity

Women in male-dominated occupations, particularly in leadership positions, sometimes distance themselves from their female colleagues and, thus, have been accused of not showing solidarity (Sheppard & Aquino, 2013). When examining the lack of solidarity among women, scholars often refer to queen bee stereotypes (Webber & Giuffre, 2019; Sheppard & Aquino, 2017). When the gender composition becomes more balanced, Kanter (1977) noted that minority members become allies, which forms the basis of what is known as sisterhood and solidarity behavior. Solidarity behavior is multidimensional, spanning from forming alliances, companionship, and commitment to changing social structures to behaviors of showing loyalty. Solidarity behavior also involves expectations of support and alignment between women (Mavin, 2008). However, research examining the queen bee syndrome builds on assumptions about solidarity and sisterhood among women and women as natural allies. Consequently women are typically automatically labeled as queen bees when failing to show or deviate from such behavior. Mavin (2006) argues that the queen bee labeling contributes to painting women as villains and blaming women for inequality. Applying the concept might drive the belief that such behavior exists among women and enhance the assumption about solidarity among women. Therefore, it is essential to be careful when building on these assumptions.

Moreover, Sheppard and Aquino (2017) describe that women in male-dominated occupations tend to compete with their female peers due to scarce organizational resources. Generally, there is more competition between women than men, and women tend to obstruct other women from success (Sheppard & Aquino, 2013). Individuals perceive same-sex others as more similar to themselves than the opposite sex because they typically occupy similar positions and levels

within organizations. They are, in turn, perceived as more suitable targets for comparison and induce more envy (Duffy et al., 2012). Women's competition and hostile behavior toward other women will increase when organizational resources or opportunities appear less accessible or scarce (Derks et al., 2020). Consequently, same-sex relations between women could become tense. In conclusion, women-women interaction in female-dominated organizations might be tense partly due to a tendency to perceive other women as a threat.

## 2.3 Theoretical Conclusion

Previous research describes how negative stereotypes about women, devaluation of relationships among women, and sexist cultures trigger hostile behavior among women toward their female peers, which is a consequence of gender discrimination. These triggering structures are a part of the analytical approach to identifying behaviors that may indicate negative stereotyping of women or favoring stereotypes of men. Triggering structures is thus a theoretical categorization enabling the identification of tendencies or signs that, in turn, could risk developing queen bee behaviors.

Besides considering the triggering structures, the chapter also specified typical behaviors related to the queen bee syndrome. Previous research points to socially aggressive behaviors that include social exclusion, isolation, talking badly about someone behind their back, and lack of support. These behaviors undermine, demoralize, and close to bullying, creating barriers to solidarity among women. Since this study examines how the queen bee syndrome permeates the organizational culture in female-dominated organizations, the described behaviors thus constitute the second theoretical categorization. However, this category also includes tendencies of behaviors that indicate support. Moreover, queen bee behavior constitutes a barrier to solidarity among women. This categorization includes tendencies that indicate companionship, support, allyship, and behaviors that indicate a lack thereof.

In conclusion, the foundation of the analysis consists of; (i) *triggering structures*, (ii) *queen bee behavior*, and (iii) *lack of solidarity*. With these categories, the study set out to examine how queen bee behavior characterizes the organizational culture in female-dominated organizations. The categorizations facilitate both the analytical process and the understanding of queen bee behavior in organizations and the conditions creating it. Although the categories are separated,

the analysis should partly integrate the theoretical categories as they closely interconnect. For example, the triggering structures can also be queen bee behavior and vice versa. However, the purpose of dividing the categories is to understand them more.

The study approaches the overall organizational culture as the queen bee syndrome closely intertwines the culture. Based on the previous reasoning that women's minority status persists despite a numerical majority, stereotypes about women arguably permeate the organizational culture in female-dominated organizations. Furthermore, as we argue that queen bee behavior can occur from managers to subordinates and between same-level peers, the foundation of the analysis focuses on the queen bee phenomenon existing at several levels.

## 3 Method

*This section elaborates on this study's methodological approach and data collection based on this thesis's purpose and research question.*

### 3.1 Research Approach

This thesis aims to examine whether traits of queen bee behavior among women exist in female-dominated organizations and how it pervades the organizational culture. More specifically, answering the research question: *How does the queen bee syndrome permeate the organizational culture in female-dominated organizations?* Due to the explorative nature of this study, qualitative research is appropriate to answer the research question. A qualitative research design is characterized by creating a deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Bryman & Bell, 2017), which aligns with the purpose of this study. Applying a qualitative approach allows us to interpret and analyze our empirical material (Bryman & Bell, 2017) regarding the organizational culture in female-dominated organizations, how it is gendered, and how the queen bee syndrome permeates the culture in female-dominated organizations.

The ultimate goal of this study is to explore and understand the queen bee syndrome on a deeper level and in a new setting where it has not been studied before. Our interest in the subject starts with a theoretical observation of hostile behavior among minority women in male-dominated organizations and the curiosity to examine its existence in female-dominated organizations. Thus gender bias which causes hostile behavior seems to exist in all organizations. Moreover, previous research about the queen bee syndrome in male-dominated organizations constitutes the foundation for collecting and analyzing empirical data. Due to the nature of this study, the abductive methodological research approach is suitable. Abduction is a methodological research approach involving the interaction between empiricism and theory to better understand the studied reality (Bryman & Bell, 2017). The abduction logic examines a phenomenon in relation to other observations (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012), which corresponds with this study as we explore our theoretical standpoint in a new setting to nuance the dominant perception of queen bee behavior only existing in male-dominated organizations since these challenges appear to be far more widespread. The abductive approach allows us to utilize and compare existing theories as a foundation and starting point and the collected data to identify patterns. Hopefully, this

allows us to gain a more profound understanding (Kennedy & Thornberg, 2018) of how the queen bee syndrome permeates the organizational culture in female-dominated organizations.

## 3.2 Female-Dominated Investigation Context

Siggelkow (2007) argued that when deciding what to study, the researcher must have in mind the purpose of the study. In some cases, a random selection is appropriate, but in others, researchers need to be very thorough and specific in their choice and pick a study object that stands out to fulfill the study's purpose (Siggelkow, 2007). To address the purpose of our study, which is to investigate how the queen bee syndrome permeates the organizational culture in female-dominated organizations, it requires participants that are members of female-dominated organizations. One of Sweden's most prominent female-dominated industries is healthcare, which consists of 80 percent of women (SCB, 2020). Therefore, we found LiVO (Leaders in health and care) and its members as suitable participants in this study. LiVO is a union organization for managers within the Swedish health care sector, social services, and elderly care. Throughout the thesis, it is referred to as the Swedish health and care sector. LiVO aims to support managers within the previously mentioned fields in their role as managers, motivate them to lead, give them the courage to drive change, be innovative, and overall be competent managers (LiVO, 2022). Consequently, the respondents of this study will be solely managers.

## 3.3 Data Collection

The study applies a qualitative survey method to explore the queen bee syndrome in female-dominated organizations. More specifically, focusing on how managers perceive and describe the organizational culture in female-dominated organizations within the Swedish health and care sector to identify the characteristics of the queen bee syndrome. The application of surveys within the context of qualitative research is relatively limited. Braun et al. (2020) argue that qualitative surveys are still a relatively novel and often invisible or side-lined method. However, Braun et al. (2021) assert that qualitative surveys are compatible with research with a qualitative nature and purpose. Qualitative survey datasets can provide richness and depth when viewed entirely, even if individual responses might be brief (Braun et al., 2021).

When collecting data through surveys, respondents answer the same questions in a predetermined order, limiting the possibility of asking respondents follow-up or supplementary questions (Saunders et al., 2012). On the other hand, surveys enable the participants of this study to formulate their answers over time and return, modify and dilate their answers. Qualitative surveys often receive critique for losing the depth of data compared to interviews. Barun et al. (2021) argue that such critique is unjustified. They argue that survey data can generate deep, rich, and complex data and tends to be more focused and “on target” than interviews.

Qualitative surveys offer several benefits to both researchers and participants. For instance, respondents tend to declare more personalized answers as they provide a high anonymity level since participants do not meet the researcher (Braun et al., 2021). We find it beneficial for the respondents to feel anonymous and avoid unfavorably negative feelings when answering questions about their workplace culture. Besides already mentioned advantages, employing surveys prevents the researcher from influencing the respondent, which arguably could happen when interviewing.

LiVO annually conducts surveys and has routines, systems, and statisticians to conduct surveys effectively. LiVO assisted us in administering and collecting the data since we did not get access to their membership register. Therefore, LiVO was the sender of the information letter, which included the link to the survey.

### 3.3.1 Operationalization of Theoretical Propositions

According to Bryman and Bell (2017), operationalization is the bridge between practice and theory. In this section, we will present how we will describe how we have operated in order to concretize our somewhat general research questions;

- *How does the queen bee syndrome permeate the organizational culture in female-dominated organizations?*

We dissected the research question into theoretical categories to approach our research subject.

- Survey themes: overall *organizational culture, perception of gender composition and gender differences, and queen bee behaviors.*

The theoretical framework for this thesis is mainly literature regarding the queen bee syndrome, lack of solidarity, and what triggers such behaviors. The purpose is to explore the queen bee syndrome in a new setting, female-dominated organizations, and gain new insights. Because this thesis aims to examine whether traits of minority behavior, the queen bee syndrome, among women, exist in female-dominated organizations and how it permeates the organizational culture, we decided to design a survey focusing on partly questions regarding organizational culture. Beyond the questions examining the organizational culture, the participants in the survey answered questions connected to the queen bee syndrome.

The questions specific to the queen bee syndrome were formulated as eight estimation statements. The estimation statements were derived from previous research presented in the theoretical framework regarding the queen bee syndrome. Firstly, the first four estimation statements contradict the queen bee syndrome. As presented in the theoretical framework, lack of solidarity is an outcome of one of the queen bee syndrome (Sheppard & Aquino, 2013; Webber & Giuffre, 2019). Therefore, we formulated statements on the support between colleagues, if it is ok to make mistakes, helpfulness between colleagues, and if colleagues are happy for each other's success, which is arguably the opposite of a lack of solidarity. The estimation questions were formulated in this manner to receive answers indicating signs of the queen bee syndrome by staying neutral and without influencing the respondents by exclusively asking estimation statements with a negative undertone. The four last estimation questions covered typical queen bee behavior such as conflicts, undermining, talking behind backs/gossip/social isolation, and competition between colleagues.

### 3.3.2 Surveys

Surveys often consist of a combination of open and closed questions. Open or open-ended questions allow respondents to answer the questions freely, while closed questions provide alternatives. Open questions are more suitable in exploratory research when striving for more detailed answers, often applied in semi-structured and in-depth interviews (Saunders et al., 2012). Since our study is explorative, the survey consists of several open-ended questions to gain a deeper understanding of the perception of the overall organizational culture and the gender composition related to the organizational culture. This study approaches the overall culture based on the argumentation that the queen bee syndrome closely intertwines the culture. Therefore, to

examine the extent of queen bee behavior, one must first understand the overall culture. The purpose of the first question, “*how would you describe the culture at your workplace?*” was thus to understand the extent of the queen bee syndrome among the respondents and their organizational culture.

Besides the open-ended questions about the overall culture and gender composition, we included statements related to queen bee behavior derived from the literature review to explore whether such behavior permeates the culture. For example, the final question included the statement: “*to what extent is the culture of your workplace permeated by talking behind backs, gossip, or social isolation.*” The statements were answered on a scale, from *to a large extent* to *not at all* (see appendix 1). Structurally collecting data, i.e., within the frame of our research question, allows us to compare the different answers from the managers. Furthermore, as typical for interviews, the survey was concluded with a final open question inviting the respondents to share additional information. The concluding question could generate valuable and unexpected data (Braun et al., 2021).

As in this study, when there are many respondents, it is time-consuming to process and analyze the responses (Saunders et al., 2012). On the other hand, since the respondents answered all questions in writing, it did not require transcription, which can be very time-consuming. The survey (see appendix 1) also consists of demographic questions to collect data to provide context to the research (Braun & Clarke, 2013). For instance, the gender of the respondents, level of management, size of working groups, and gender composition on both operational and unit levels. The question concerning gender composition at unit-level and organizational levels enables us to refine the study to only the managers in the most female-dominated organizations.

As mentioned above, the qualitative survey method is a fixed design, meaning that it is not possible to clarify any questions or evolve questions during data collection. Thus, piloting, i.e., pretesting the questions, is essential when applying qualitative surveys (Braun et al., 2021). Braun et al. suggest testing the survey on 5 percent (for large samples) of the anticipated sample. However, since our time frame was limited, in formulating the survey questions, the survey was tested on friends and family, colleagues, and our collaboration partner, LiVO, who has much experience conducting surveys on similar issues. Testing the question was to assess whether the questions were easy to understand and align with the aim of this thesis.

Moreover, the piloting led to reformulating and clarifying some of the questions, considering word choices, and splitting questions into separate ones. For instance, the two-part question “*how do you perceive that gender composition affects culture in the workplace? Are there positive and negative aspects?*” was split into separate questions to ensure the answers address all aspects of the question. Hence, the question became, “*how do you perceive that gender composition affects culture in the workplace?*”. Followed by the two separate questions, “*what are the positive aspects?*” and “*what are the negative aspects?*”.

### 3.3.3 Respondents

The respondents of this study consist exclusively of managers at different levels, from first-line managers to higher levels of managers (see Appendix 1). The survey was sent to all LiVOs members consisting of 8269 managers. In total, 1 261 participants submitted their answers to the survey. The response rate varied on each question, and all respondents did not provide answers to all questions. Thus all were not included in the study. However, since the question regarding the overall organizational culture and the queen bee statements are the most central for the purpose of this study, the criteria for answers to be included was for the respondents to have answered these two essential parts.

Additionally, we made a delimitation and only included the responses from the respondents stating that they are working within an organization or team where the gender composition is at least 90 percent women and 10 percent men. The purpose of the delimitation was to explore the most female-dominated organizations. After sorting the surveys based on the criteria above, the delimitation resulted in the final dataset consisting of the responses from 719 managers. Among these managers, 57 percent are first-line managers, 27 percent are middle-managers, 7 percent are senior managers, 7 percent are operations/company management, and 2 percent disclosed other types of managers. Of these, 87 percent are women and 13 percent men.

### 3.3.4 Managers as Respondents

In this study, the respondents are managers within the health and care sector. The reasoning behind choosing managers as respondents is that we argue that the creation and recreation of organizational culture is something managers more or less take part in and are responsible for,

making them suitable as respondents in the survey. Compared to other organization members, managers are more aware of group dynamics, values, jargon, behavior, overall culture, etcetera. Managers exist on different levels within the organizations, and their responsibilities vary heavily. However, they all participate in the active work with organizational culture and observe the culture on several levels.

Furthermore, Derks et al. (2011a) examined senior women within a male-dominated domain, and they investigated both the experience of queen bee behavior and their exertion of it. Thus, we believe that examining managers enables capturing their experience of hostile behavior from other women or among their female peers and indications of whether they engage in queen bee behaviors or contribute to creating the triggering factors. Therefore, we argue that managers are suitable respondents for the aim of this study, taking into account that they have themselves undergone the process of becoming managers and the potential struggles it might imply. However, this reasoning strengthens the argument to use female managers as respondents, but we argue that the male managers also provide insights as observers.

Managers, however, cannot be considered entirely unbiased, and it is essential to emphasize that the manager's perception is only a perception and not the absolute reality. Because managers arguably have such a vital role in creating and recreating the organizational culture, they could have an embellished picture of the organizational culture. Nevertheless, even if they might be biased regarding their group and leadership, they could provide us with meaningful insight regarding the overall organization, observations from other teams, and their interaction with other managers at the same management level, above and below them. As presented before, Mavin (2008) argues that hostile relations between women can occur both vertically and horizontally.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

Initially, in the first stage of data processing, we received the data from LiVO. All data was anonymized and presented in an Excel spreadsheet, where the respective respondents' survey answers were in separate rows, and the respective question in each column. This way of presenting the complete survey enabled us to select the data within each column and delimit the data to only the most female-dominated organizations. As mentioned, the data was delimited to

only include the answers from the respondents who stated that they worked within a team or organization where the gender composition is 90 percent women and 10 percent men. Furthermore, as the survey was conducted in Swedish, all citations have been translated to English as accurately as possible.

The data processing began by coding the empirics to identify common patterns through repetitions and deviations in the data set (Bryman & Bell, 2017). The codes, in turn, were organized according to the survey themes: *organizational culture*, *gender composition*, and *queen bee behavior*, which also structure the presentation of the empirical findings. For example, codes such as *hierarchy*, *domination techniques and suppression culture*, *jargon*, *behaviors*, and *companionship* were organized under *organizational culture*. For the analysis, the theoretical categories derived from our theoretical framework, *triggering structures*, *queen bee behavior*, and *lack of solidarity*, guide the analytical approach (Bryman & Bell, 2017). The theoretical categorizations also structure the chapter of analysis and discussion.

### 3.5 Ethical Considerations

When conducting qualitative research, it is essential to consider ethical principles (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Four areas of principles are crucial to consider: *harm to participants*, *lack of informed consent*, *invasion of privacy*, and *deception*. Throughout the process of this thesis, these principles have been taken into account. Although the principles are separate, they somewhat overlap (Bryman & Bell, 2011). To address these principles, the respondents received an information letter informing them about the thesis's purpose and that participation was voluntary, and the possibility to end the survey without submitting any answers at any time or leaving out questions.

Furthermore, they were informed that participation was completely anonymous through the survey tool employed by LiVO. We did not get access to their membership register, and when receiving the data, it was anonymized. The information letter also included a link that provided information on how LiVO handles personal data in compliance with GDPR.

## 4 Empirical Findings

*The following chapter presents the empirical findings from the survey. The findings are structured by the categories; overall organizational culture, gender composition, and queen bee behavior.*

### 4.1 Organizational Culture

*This section presents the findings connected to the overall organizational culture.*

#### 4.1.1 Hierarchy

The empirical finding shows that when the respondents describe the overall culture, many respondents describe the organization as heavily hierarchic. There were many comments regarding the organization being very hierarchic or/and strictly controlled by the top management. In connection to this, respondents expressed that they experienced that the communication between the management team and other managers “lower” in the hierarchy did not operate in the way they wanted. Numerous respondents described the organizations they work in and the organization culture as a “culture of obedience” with a perception that they are not allowed to question things.

Some respondents described the overall culture as a “culture of silence,” yet without further explanation. The respondents described the culture of silence as partly driven by fear of reprisals and the risk of social exclusion. Furthermore, another perception was that the overall culture has deteriorated due to the emergence of a culture of silence. Below citations exemplifies this.

*Partly a culture of silence, fear of reprisals if you do or say the wrong things, this goes for higher up in the organization.*

Female, Senior Manager

*There is a culture of silence where only the words of the operations manager apply. If you disagree, you risk social exclusion.*

Male, First-Line Manager

Overall, there were perceptions about tensions between managers on different levels, especially with top management. Respondents explained that the top management does not lead by example and that there exists a kind of manager contempt, especially against female managers, as exemplified below.

#### 4.1.2 Domination Techniques and Suppression Culture

In the initial question regarding the overall culture, recurring descriptions indicate that domination techniques and suppression culture are prevalent. The respondents express that the higher-level managers or the board typically perform domination/suppression techniques, which respondents experience as offensive. One respondent describes how very harsh suppression techniques occur because of too many women in the workplace. However, there is a belief that the suppression culture is only apparent to managers and not organizational members, meaning it only occurring among manager peers. It is also evident that domination techniques and suppression culture exist among managers. The below citations about the overall organizational culture corresponds with several respondents' perceptions;

*[..] You are not allowed to question. [..] You are not allowed to talk about the work environment in the management team. Culture of silence. Senior managers exert domination techniques.*

Female, First-line Manager

*[..] among managers, there is a culture of exerting domination techniques [..], backbiting of manager colleagues, and scapegoating.*

Male, Senior Manager

### 4.1.3 Jargon

The respondents described the behaviors and the jargon at their workplace, and it was evident that it is rough at times and lacks forgiveness or understanding. Some respondents express the harsh jargon or tone arising due to the pressure to perform and extensive workload. In addition, other words describing the jargon were, for instance, disrespectful, reserved, rude, hard-working, macho culture, accusatory, etcetera.

This code somewhat overlaps with the previous code because the respondents occasionally mentioned the harsh jargon simultaneously as they pointed out that the organization is top-managed and hierarchical. Nevertheless, numerous respondents communicated that even though the jargon could sometimes be harsh, they still found the communication and the relations between colleagues to be fun and lighthearted. The harsh jargon did not seem to bother them too much.

Furthermore, the respondents describe an overall culture as closed, tuff, and harsh. They describe the culture as partly lacking openness where expressions of difficulty or fear of disclosing errors or opinions stand out from the empirics.

### 4.1.4 Hostile Behaviors

Based on the answers to several questions in the survey, many respondents express less pleasant behaviors such as engaging in gossiping, talking about someone behind their back, intrigues, concurrence, and envy among their peers. It is common among members of the groups and even on a manager level. According to the respondents, engaging in such behavior is related to women or as a consequence of the majority of women, and a recurring perception of more men in the workplace would reduce such behavior.

*More conflicts arise when the proportion of women in the working groups increases.*

Female, Operations/Company Management

Furthermore, competition and competitiveness between women are evident, whereas other women are a threat. The respondents describe an inherent rivalry and envy between women and a tendency of being condescending, scapegoating, and fault-finding among female peers. Moreover, some express that it is challenging to be a female manager over other women or in a female-dominated occupation. Among the respondents, there is a perception of women not supporting each other and judging their peers harder. Some express a lack of community within the group as well. These perceptions are also described as on the verge of bullying and devaluing behavior, a bullying culture driven by informal leaders.

*We do not support each other as women.*

Female, First-line Manager

*Competition, rumors and gossip.*

Male, First-line Manager

Like the quote above, the same respondent also communicates that he believes a numerical majority of women positively affect the culture in that it creates a humble and caring culture.

#### 4.1.5 Companionship

In contrast to the findings above regarding hierarchy, harsh jargon, domination techniques, etcetera, the respondents also disclose a culture with much communality and support among colleagues. There was also a described sisterhood among female colleagues and how women understand each other. There was a recurring description of a good climate among the respondents despite female dominance and harsh but sincere.

*A good and happy atmosphere that is supportive and open-hearted.*

Female, First-Line Manager

Simultaneously, as some describe the organization as top-managed and that a culture of silence exists, many respondents describe their organization as good, open and open-minded, accepting, supportive and warm. Two respondents described the organizational culture as follows;

*Open and warm, with functional teamwork. There are shortcomings in conflict management, but they are improving.*

Female, First-line Manager

*Pleasant. Community and teamwork. There is a willingness to support and help each other.*

Female, First-Line Manager

## 4.2 Perceptions of Gender Composition

The respondents were asked, “*In what way do you perceive that gender composition affects the culture in the workplace?*” A general perception was that the numerical dominance of women negatively affected the culture. It was evident that many respondents believed that male colleagues would improve the culture and soften the jargon. Some expressed that men, in particular, could make the workplace less “whiny,” calmer, and lead to fewer conflicts. Moreover, many respondents shared a similar perception that male colleagues improve the culture to be healthier and more positive. It was also a belief that men tend to reduce bullshit and rumors.

*I wish for more male colleagues. It would soften the jargon.*

Female, First-line Manager

*We need more men to have a healthy culture.*

Female, Middle Manager

Many respondents communicated that they wished for more men in general and a more balanced and equal gender composition in their organization. Others expressed that they, in general, wanted a diverse workplace where different perspectives could be combined and create a more dynamic workplace. The wish for gender balance was generally expressed but expressed explicitly by one respondent like this;

*I always strive for 50/50 to raise status, reduce intrigue and gossip, and create a workplace where you talk to each other and help each other. I think it is easier if we have a mixture of age and gender where you have different experiences and knowledge of the profession.*

Female, Middle Manager

A large group of respondents described a preference for a more even gender composition in their workplace as it would positively affect or improve the culture. However, a contrasting perception was also evident. Many respondents did not believe gender influences the culture or had not thought about gender in terms of culture or its implication on culture.

#### 4.2.1 Perception of Gender Differences

When asking the respondents about the perception of gender differences regarding behaviors, treatment, and expectations, 32 percent believed there is a difference between men and women, 56 percent did not believe there is any difference, and 11 percent answered: “do not know.” When further elaborating on how these differences manifest, some respondents describe that male colleagues often receive special treatment. One frequent description was that they perceive that male colleagues are taken more seriously and that their opinions are valued more by the organization's management team. Many reported differences in salary, respect, and power. It was also evident that many perceived female colleagues as “curled” and “babied” their male

colleagues. Furthermore, male colleagues get away with not performing their tasks while women are expected to work harder than their role description. Below citation exemplifies many of the respondents' perceptions:

*[..] it feels like they (men) get a little curled up by other women. Tougher to be a female leader among women?*

Female, First-Line Manager

It was also evident that the respondents experience a difference where men are less exposed to scrutiny, gossip, and talk behind their back. Additionally, there is a perception of men receiving more support and acceptance of men making mistakes than women. Many respondents also describe that, in general, men receive better treatment and have a higher status than women.

*Men are less exposed to bullshit.*

Female, Middle Manager

#### 4.2.2 Perception of Females and Males

Considering the male special treatment found and described somewhat of the opposite was also communicated. Respondents perceived that male colleagues are expected to be more rigid and be able to handle criticism without it hurting their feelings or complaining in the workplace. Overall it was possible to see patterns in the respondents' answers regarding female and male behavior and expectations. Recurringly respondents communicated that it was more important for females to discuss different issues and topics while the men had a more direct and objective way of communicating. Beyond this, numerous respondents also reported that men have an easier time being direct in their actions and better self-confidence. For example, if they want to be promoted, they ask to be promoted, while the females are more passive and wait to get promoted.

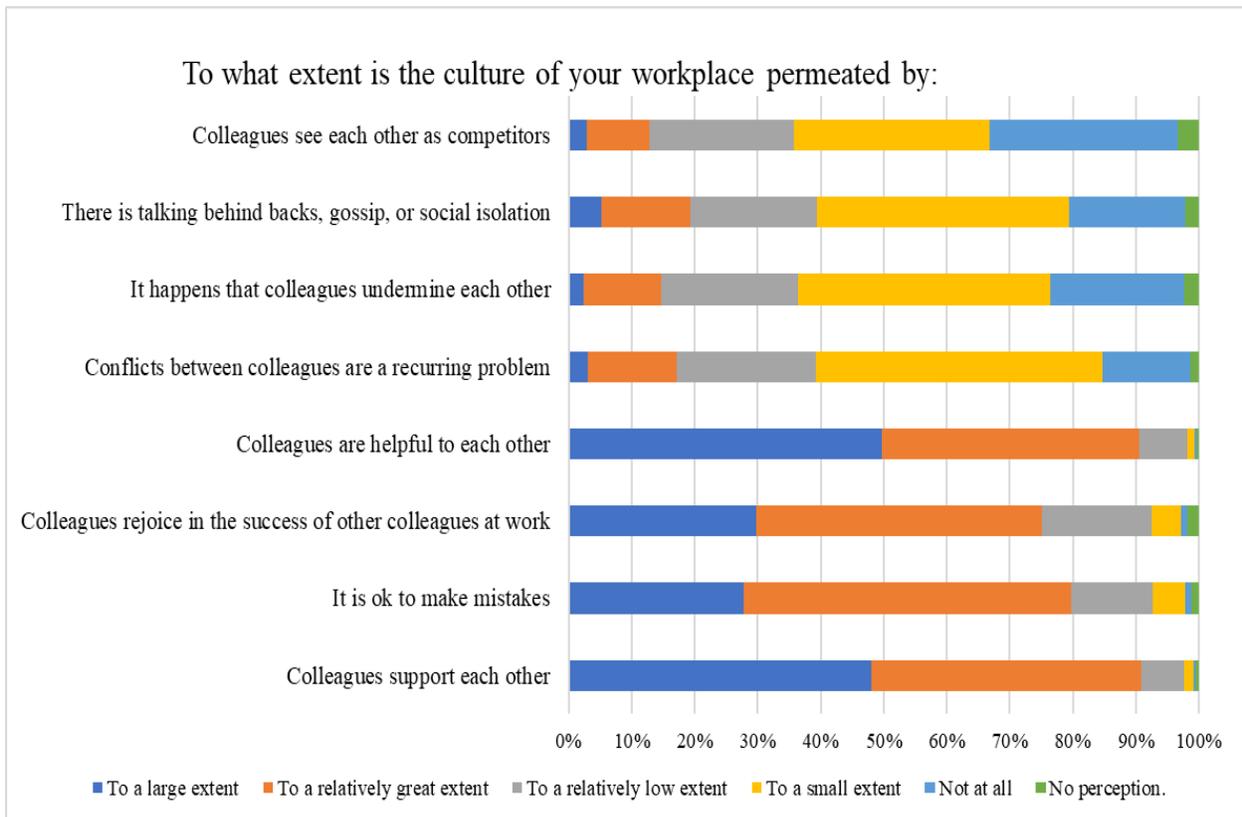
*Unfortunately, this will be a generalization, but men expect clearer answers. They do not need to "ventilate" to the same extent. Men do, to a greater extent, resolve conflicts directly with the person concerned without involving the boss.*

Female, First-Line Manager

### 4.3 Queen Bee Behavior

*The final question in the survey consisted of eight statements related to queen bee behavior derived from previous literature.*

#### 4.3.1 Diagram 1: Statements About Culture



The above diagram summarizes the final questions in the survey, where the respondents answered eight statements about their organizational culture related to the queen bee syndrome. In many ways, the estimations correspond with the findings from the first question about the

overall organizational culture. Most of the respondents perceive the culture as very supportive, which is permeated by colleagues supporting each other. It is acceptable to make mistakes, colleagues are happy for other colleagues' work success, and colleagues are helpful to each other. However, considering the other statements, it is evident, to different degrees, that the respondents perceive that different hostile behaviors permeate the culture, such as conflicts, gossiping, undermining colleagues, social isolation, etcetera. When asking about the overall organizational culture and typical queen bee behavior, there seems to exist a duality within the organizations examined. There are signs indicating that queen bee behavior exists simultaneously as behaviors of solidarity and companionships exist that counteract hostile behavior.

## 5 Analysis

*This chapter analyzes and discusses the empirical data and compares the findings based on the derived theoretical categories; triggering structures, queen bee behavior (suppressing and hostile behavior), and lack of solidarity.*

### 5.1 Triggering Structures

When analyzing the empirical material, it is evident that several triggering structures exist in the described organizational culture in the examined female-dominated organizations. For instance, some describe reverse discrimination to men's advantage when describing the experienced difference between men and women in treatment, expectations, and behaviors. Such advantages include less exposure to scrutiny, more acceptance of mistakes, and having their opinions more valued than women's. Furthermore, it was perceived that male colleagues have an easier time advancing in the hierarchy and higher salaries than female peers with the same role. These stated differences between men and women, which can be interpreted as discrimination or reverse discrimination, constitute what previous research contends as possible triggering conditions (Derks et al., 2011b).

However, it was apparent that this was not the perception of all respondents. A contrasting perception of the overall culture, described as open, permissive, and warm, indicates no difference between women and men. Arguably, this counteracts the triggering structures to queen bee behaviors arising. Nevertheless, some respondents stated that there were exclusively women at their unit or organizational level. Hence the perception of differences in treatment, behaviors, and expectations between men and women is limited. Therefore, in those organizations, the aspect of triggering structures, the difference between men and women, i.e., discriminatory behavior, may not be applicable and may have affected the perception.

Furthermore, there was a generally negative perception of women. The empirical findings further describe less favorable characteristics of women, such as “whiny,” the tendency to conflict with other women, and talking about someone rather than with them. These perceptions of women were also believed to affect the culture negatively. When ascribing women such characteristics, it contributes to the negative stereotyping of women, which is in line with Acker (1990), Derks et

al. (2016), and Nkomo and Rodriguez (2019), who argue that negative stereotyping of women may trigger hostile behavior among women. Thus, it may suggest that these perceptions of women contribute to negative stereotyping. Negatively stereotyping women is not necessarily evidence of queen bee syndrome within an organization. It indicates that such a triggering factor might evoke behaviors in line with the queen bee syndrome within these female-dominated organizations.

Similarly, the positive stereotyping of men, such as the perception of male colleagues improving the culture and that they will decrease the tendency of conflicts, backbiting, and gossiping, also contribute to internalizing these stereotypes and amplifying the gendered processes (Acker, 1990). Consequently, the expectation of women to exhibit such behavior also entails that women are judged by these beliefs as well. Although the described stereotypes about masculinity and femininity benefit males and typically disadvantage females are not a sign of queen bee behavior itself, it suggests that structures that trigger queen bee behavior exist in the examined female-dominated organizations. However, if the structures creating queen bee behavior exist within an organization, the queen bee syndrome can assumably exist in the organization.

Furthermore, the perception of men improving the overall culture composes both a triggering structure in how it contributes to gender stereotyping and may indicate a sexist culture. Thus, these structures intertwine, and when analyzing the triggering structure, it becomes apparent that they are also challenging to separate. Perhaps it is possible that the different triggering structures also amplify their strength, increasing the risk of evoking queen bee behavior. Although the respondents disclosed behaviors or beliefs that relate to triggering structures and not specific behaviors related to the queen bee syndrome, it could increase the risk of undermining and hostile behavior among women arising (Derks et al., 2011, 2016; Webber & Giuffre, 2019). Therefore, these identified triggering structures within the examined health and care sector organizations could affect the extent of queen bee stereotypes permeating the organizational culture.

On the other hand, the negative description of women related to queen bee stereotypes continues to negatively stereotype women (Mavin, 2006), thus reinforcing such beliefs deeper into the organizations' gendering processes. We also find it reasonable to question whether this behavior is unique to women. Could this be a human response to bias and structural disadvantages? The

idea of the queen bee syndrome could be argued to be very simplifying and built on different biases and stereotypes regarding women.

## 5.2 Lack of Solidarity

The managers describe behaviors that indicate a lack of solidarity among female colleagues, such as low communality and rivalry. As previous research states, the lack of solidarity is one of the most prominent features of minority behavior (Kanter, 1977). One of the initial assumptions of this thesis was that women hold their minority status despite a numerical minority due to male superiority in society. The empirical findings thus correspond with Kanter on how women often fail to support other women. The respondents display behaviors such as rivalry, scapegoating, lack of support, and lack of companionship. Since lack of solidarity is an outcome of queen bee behavior (Webber & Giuffre, 2019), queen bee behaviors precede lack of solidarity. Hence, the behaviors indicate tendencies of queen bee syndrome in these organizations within the health and care sector.

Furthermore, competition among women was evident in the empirical findings. Some managers among the respondents describe an inherent rivalry between women and a tendency to be condescending, scapegoating, and fault-finding. The described rivalry among women corresponds with previous research that contends that women tend to perceive other women as a threat (Staines et al., 1974) and suitable targets for competition (Duffy et al., 2012; Sheppard & Aquino, 2017). Moreover, some managers express that it is challenging to be a female manager over other women or in a female-dominated organization. A possible reason for it being challenging might be the described rivalry. Overall, the empirical findings also indicate a strong tendency of tension among managers, both same-level managers, between levels of managers, and between managers and the group. This observation confirms the assumption based on Marvin's (2008) argument that hostile behavior occurs vertically, from managers to subordinates, and horizontally, with same-level managers. However, whether these tensions constitute behaviors resembling the queen bee syndrome was not further elaborated on by the respondents. The tension occurring on different levels illustrates the risk of the queen bee phenomenon existing in these constellations and not solely in the relationship, as described typically within the mainstream research (Arvate et al., 2018).

Previous studies propose that workplace interactions between women can be a source of either competition or support (e.g., Rodriguez, 2013). The empirics partly align this research, where it is possible to observe a duality indicating a culture characterized by support and communality and a lack thereof. Many respondents communicated a good and open organizational culture characterized by friendship, warmth, open communication, etcetera., and behaviors suggesting the opposite. Similarly, the duality was evident through the estimation statements related to queen bee behaviors. Accordingly, the estimations indicate that support and acceptance permeate the organization's culture, while descriptions of the overall culture partly demonstrate the opposite.

Regarding the statements, the respondents' estimations did not fully correspond with the queen bee behaviors (Staines et al., 1974; Arvate et al., 2018). However, these findings suggest that lack of solidarity, queen bee behavior, or support should not be approached through an either-or perspective. The empirics indicate a significantly more complex relationship where solidarity and queen bee behavior can permeate a culture simultaneously. Thus, in line with Mavin (2008), who criticizes the automatic labeling of women as queen bees when showing tendencies of non-solidarity. The interpretation of such behavior pointing to the queen bee syndrome must thus be careful. However, the duality indicates a fragmented culture where a coexistence of queen bee behavior and solidarity behavior might exist.

Furthermore, as respondents describe, managers higher up in the hierarchy exert sanctions if questioning decisions, giving rise to a culture of obedience and silence where there is a fear of reprisals such as social exclusion. Consequently, this may risk creating an oppressed culture, which, in turn, can induce non-beneficial conditions that arguably can function as a triggering factor as queen bee behavior are a response to cultures.

### 5.3 Queen Bee Behavior

The empirical findings indicate that gossiping, conflicts, backbiting, and undermining of colleagues are common within female-dominated organizations. Previous research suggests that these are common traits of queen bee syndrome (Harvey, 2018; Arvate et al., 2018; Staines et al., 1974). Beyond the data derived from the estimation statements, answers describing the overall organizational culture and gender composition tangent descriptions of behaviors and beliefs

resembling the queen bee syndrome. Many managers describe the jargon as harsh, disrespectful, rude, and accusatory. Besides jargon, intrigues, concurrence, and envy among their peers were evident. Given these findings, one could argue that the descriptions of the overall culture correspond with the previous research (e.g., Derks et al., 2016). However, by only assessing the final question in the survey, which included eight statements related to the queen bee phenomenon, the traits or behaviors are not as prominent as in the empirics generated from the open questions in the survey.

Reasons for the queen bee phenomenon not being apparent in the statements may be due to, as discussed in previous literature, gender bias being subtle (Diehl et al., 2020). Moreover, it might not be perceived as bias or discrimination as mistreatment from other female peers is a non-typical source of bias (Derks et al., 2011) and thus being neglected. Another plausible reason is that the queen bee syndrome manifests in other forms than the included statements in the questions and thereof not captured. On the other hand, the most straightforward answer might be that queen bee behavior does not permeate the culture in female-dominated organizations to a large extent. In conclusion, combining the results illustrates an ambivalent interpretation that indicates a fragmented organizational culture that permeates contradicting behaviors. These findings further exemplify the complexity of the nature of organizational culture.

It is essential to maintain a critical approach when assessing whether behaviors are relatable to queen bee syndrome. Research examining the queen bee syndrome has received criticism for not problematizing the label enough. Mavin (2008) asserts that applying the concept reinforces the gendered status quo. However, whether these behaviors appearing in the empirical findings could be labeled as queen bee syndrome or not, they are still detrimental to women. Thus, labeling is arguably not the primary issue.

## 6 Concluding Remarks

*This concluding chapter presents the main findings of this study and a discussion concerning limitations and future research.*

### 6.1 Conclusion

This thesis aims to examine whether traits of queen bee behavior among women exist in female-dominated organizations and how it pervades the organizational culture. More specifically, answering the research question: *How does the queen bee syndrome permeate the organizational culture in female-dominated organizations?* The study approaches the overall culture based on the argumentation that the queen bee syndrome closely intertwines the culture. Therefore, to examine the extent of queen bee behavior, one must understand the overall organizational culture in the examined organizations within the Swedish health and care sector.

Analyzing the empirical findings clarifies that the structures triggering the queen bee syndrome are present within the organizational culture in the examined female-dominated organizations. The results suggest that gender bias exists, which disadvantages women in the organization. Thus, if these female-dominated organizations carry the structures creating queen bee behavior, the queen bee syndrome may risk becoming prevalent in the organization.

Some of the identified organizational culture characteristics show that most respondents describe their culture as open, warm, and supportive. They seem to feel supported by their colleagues, and the majority do, to a large extent, not consider their colleagues as competition. Consequently, all findings do not correspond with the queen bee syndrome as a duality appears to exist where the findings contradict. Partly, some respondents describe their organizational culture in terms of typical queen bee stereotypes or behaviors assembling the phenomenon, while some of the findings directly contradict such findings. For example, it is evident that the culture is characterized by support and lacks solidarity behaviors. Thus, this study indicates that the queen bee syndrome, to some extent, permeates some female-dominated organizations and the triggering structures giving rise to queen bee behaviors are more apparent than the actual behaviors. In contrast, behaviors that directly counteract queen bee behavior also permeate the organizational culture to a relatively large extent. In conclusion, organizations are more complex

than either supportive or lacking solidarity among women, as the empirical findings point to a fragmented culture.

*So, how does the queen bee syndrome permeate the organizational culture in female-dominated organizations?* We can conclude that queen bee behavior pervades the culture to some extent, simultaneously as counteracting behaviors. However, the triggering structures embedded in the culture that are the foundation and starting point for queen bee behavior exist to some extent. The underlying reason why the duality and complexity of these organizations exist is difficult to pinpoint. However, potential reasons can be discussed. We argue that the duality is multidimensional, as it reflects the gender hierarchy in society. These behaviors are not inherent characteristics of women but a response to women's subordinate status in society and all organizations and not purposely suppressing other women at work.

One of our main arguments was that negative stereotypes about women and gender bias exist in all organizations. It creates structures that discriminate against females. Consequently, women consider each other competitors because of scarce resources and power. We argue that the structures that trigger the queen bee syndrome need to be changed to create organizations without the queen bee syndrome and healthy organizational culture for women. More equal workplaces with equal opportunity must be prioritized. Balanced gender composition and diversity are stated by previous research and by the managers who participated in the study to have many advantages. However, making the workplace more diverse might not make a difference if the underlying structures remain. It requires changes beyond focusing on the number of women and men within organizations. As it closely intertwines with the organizational culture, it is essential to work actively to shed light on these challenges to create changes in the cultures carrying the devaluation of women.

This thesis's theoretical contribution is primarily that the queen bee syndrome is not something that exclusively occurs in organizations where women are a numerical minority. Thus, the thesis has nuanced the dominant perception that queen bee syndrome only exists in male-dominated organizations as these challenges appear to be far more widespread. Regarding the practical contribution, the findings emphasize the importance of working towards more equal organizations with equal opportunities to create sustainable organizational cultures.

## 6.2 Limitations of the Study and Future Research

When analyzing the study's potential limitations, it could be beneficial to compare organizations with different gender compositions, such as comparing one female-dominated organization with a male-dominated organization and an organization with a more balanced gender composition. Comparing the different organizations would have given the study an extra layer for the analysis, and it would have been possible to compare differences and similarities. As stated before, we believe that the harmful structures are the reason behind the queen bee syndrome, but does gender composition also have an impact? Comparing organizations with different gender compositions should shed extra light on this question.

The qualitative survey method employed in this study generated a large amount of data. However, being able to ask follow-up questions would have been beneficial. Numerous respondents contributed interesting information where follow-up questions would have allowed us to receive more detailed descriptions and further elaborations. Thus for future research, combining surveys and interviews, or only interviews to generate more detailed descriptions and dig deeper into the research topic.

Another intriguing area of research to further investigate, in connection to this topic, is the queen bee syndrome among marginalized groups or minorities in organizations, specifically whether all marginalized groups show similar behavior as women. As Acker (2006) argues, gender is one dimension of inequality, and when discussing inequality, it is essential to consider aspects beyond gender, such as class and ethnicity. In this study, we only focused on gender, which can be argued to be simplifying the matter but considering all aspects of intersectionality are more complex to capture and too extensive to investigate within the frame for this thesis. However, it is an interesting aspect of queen bee syndrome that future research should investigate.

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# Appendix

## Appendix 1: Survey

1. **Gender**  
Woman/Man/Rather not say
2. **Age**  
-44 years, 45-54 years, 55 - years
3. **In which region do you live?**
4. **What is your managerial level?**  
First-line manager, Middle manager, Senior Manager, Operations / Company management, Other types of manager, not a manager. If the answer is 'not a manager,' the survey ends.
5. **In what area do you work?**  
Health care, Elderly care, Other social service areas than elderly care, Other areas in care or care, I do not work in care and nursing. The survey ends with the answer 'I do not work in health and care,' the survey ends.
6. **How many employees do you have who are directly subordinate to you in your current position?**  
1–10, 11–20, 21–30, 31–40, 41–50, 51–75, 76 or more.
7. **7. How do you estimate the distribution of women and men**  
7a on the unit you are directly responsible for?  
7b at the overall organizational level?  
Answer options with intervals:  
90% women and 10% men, 80% women and 20% men, 70% women and 30% men, 60% women and 40% men, 50% women and 50% men, 40% women and 60% men, 30% women and 70% men, 20% women and 80% men, 10% women and 90% men.
8. **How would you describe the culture of your workplace?**
9. **How would you describe the stated values of the workplace and the desired behaviors that you work according to?**
10. **How would you describe the general jargon and behaviors in the workplace?**
11. **How do you perceive that gender composition affects culture in the workplace?**  
11a What are the positive aspects?  
11b What are the negative aspects?
12. **Do you experience any differences between colleagues depending on whether they are men or women regarding expectations, behaviors, and how they are treated?**  
Yes, No, Do not know
13. . If so, in what way?
14. What are the main reasons why you:  
14a. would recommend others to work in the business solely based on the workplace culture?  
14b. would not recommend others to work in the business solely based on the workplace culture?
15. **To what extent is the culture of your workplace permeated by:**

Colleagues support each other.  
It is ok to make mistakes.  
Colleagues rejoice in the success of other colleagues at work.  
Colleagues are helpful to each other.  
Conflicts between colleagues are a recurring problem.  
It happens that colleagues undermine each other.  
There is talking behind backs, gossip, or social isolation.  
Colleagues see each other as competitors.

Scale: To a large extent, to a relatively great extent, to a relatively low extent, to a small extent, not at all, no perception.

## Appendix 2: Information letter

Hi,

Welcome to a survey conducted by the union Ledarna within Vård och Omsorg (LiVO), where you are a member. We hope you are willing to give us five minutes of your time to answer pressing questions about the culture at your workplace.

Click here to start the survey.

LiVO is conducting this survey in collaboration with two students from Uppsala University. The purpose is to examine the organizational culture in female-dominated occupations to understand the importance of gender composition.

By participating, you contribute to the healthcare sector becoming more attractive and developing. The more people who participate, the more we can trust the answers. Your voice is important!

If you can not answer the entire survey at once, you can take a break and continue where you left off. You answer anonymously - LiVO will not take part in what you have answered.

The survey is open to answer until 29 April.

Information about how we process your personal data is available here:

<https://www.ledarna.se/om-ledarna/personuppgifter-och-dataskydd/personuppgifter-om-dig-som-ar-medlem/>

If you have questions about the survey, please email Camilla Svanström at x or Gabriella Ståhl at x.

If you have other questions about the survey, you are welcome to contact LiVO's chairman Jenny Wibacke at x.

Greetings,

The board of LiVO