An Investigation Into Sex/Gender Equity And Inclusion In Corporate Training And Development Programmes

Thesis

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An investigation into sex/gender equity and inclusion in corporate training and development programmes

Ingeborg Kroese

Doctorate in Education

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Abstract

This study aimed to understand the role of sex/gender in corporate training. Despite significant progress, women are still underrepresented at more senior levels in organisations. The COVID-19 pandemic disproportionally impacted women and deepened this pre-existing inequality. Relevant and inclusive learning and development is crucial for career progression, and the main aim of the study was to understand whether current training practices are sex/gender equitable. A review of training theory and conceptual models highlighted that these do not recognise the role of sex/gender in training. In addition, training practice assumes that treating everybody the same, or so-called gender-neutrality of training, equals sex/gender equity. However, a multidisciplinary literature review of 78 empirical studies on sex/gender in training from across the world, revealed that sex/gender impacts access to training, how training is experienced and the outcome of training, in significant ways. Based on the literature review, I developed a sex/gender-sensitive model of training. A case study was conducted, consisting of three training programmes, designed, and delivered in a multinational corporation. A critical sociocultural research lens was adopted, approaching training as an enculturation in the company’s ways of working. The research methodology was qualitative, using semi-structured interviews with female and male training participants, training organisers, and trainers, and training document analyses. In the interviews, reflection statements were introduced to critically interrogate common-sense ways of working. Thematic analysis and a gender subtext analysis highlighted how the discourse of sex/gender-neutrality of training not only risks maintaining the status quo of the underrepresentation of women, but actually produces sex/gender inequity. Based on the case study, the sex/gender-sensitive model of training was further developed to guide how future training research and practice can become more sex/gender equitable. In addition, recommendations for future research are discussed, and a training programme for training organisers and providers is introduced to enable and empower practitioners to bring sex/gender equity into their training.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Despite significant progress, women are still underrepresented at more senior levels in organisations, with a key hurdle at the first step up to manager (Thomas et al., 2019). A survey amongst 13,000 organisations in 70 countries reported that nearly half of the organisations have fewer than 30% women entry level managers (ILO, 2019). Only 8% of Fortune Global 500 companies has a woman CEO, and only two of them are black (Hinchliffe, 2021). In a US study amongst 70,000 employees, 37% of women responded that gender played a role in missing out on a salary increase, promotion, or chance to get ahead, versus 8% of men (Thomas et al. 2017). This is maybe not surprising, given that a recent global study reported that 90% of the interviewees across 75 countries, had a bias against women (UNDP, 2020).

As a woman and international business executive, with 15 years of commercial and capability building roles in global consumer goods companies, based in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, I have personally experienced the gendered barriers that women face in a corporate environment, especially once I had children and moved to more senior roles. However, with a MSc in Economics, and working in a strong neo-liberal workplace culture, where competition, personal choice, and being in control of your own career, were dominant ways of thinking, I did not have the knowledge nor the support to question some of the workplace practices and culture. Often, I was the only female manager in an all-men team, or even the first female manager ever, when I became Sales manager for a drinks company in Pakistan. After my corporate career, I have had over 15 years of global commercial training experience as owner of my own training company, focussing on commercial training (such as sales and customer service training), communication and interpersonal skills training as well as revenue management training. My practice was strongly driven by a neo-liberal ethos, including individual responsibility, and the belief that success is a matter of hard work and commitment.

During an Open University masters’ module on critical issues in equity, diversity, and educational practice, in 2016, I started to realise that the sex of the training participants or
gendered experiences and barriers are seldomly considered when discussing training with clients, doing training needs analysis, or when designing or facilitating a training programme. In a sense my personal experience of the barriers I faced as a female corporate executive, and the differences between my situation and that of my male colleagues, was not recognised in corporate training contexts, even by myself. On the other hand, many ivy league universities and commercial organisations offer women-only leadership programmes to address the specific challenges women face to be successful in leadership positions (Harvard, n.d.; IMD, n.d.; Insead, n.d.; London Business School, n.d.). I was surprised to even find a women-only sales training programme (DevelopHER Academy, n.d.). The existence of these women-only programmes raised my awareness that corporate training programmes did not correctly address the role of sex/gender. This realisation concerned me, because relevant and inclusive learning and development is crucial for career development (and motivation, as will be discussed later), and when current training practices are not sex/gender equitable, could this be one of the barriers to the career progression of women?

Based on the above, the rationale for my EdD was to understand and research the role of sex/gender in corporate training, in order to help my own practice, but also the wider training industry and corporate clients, to become more informed about training equitability for women. During my EdD, I spoke to many corporate human resource managers, fellow trainers, and training associations, and I felt strengthened by their confirmation that the role of sex/gender in corporate training is unexplored in practice, and I had their strong support as to the need for my research.

Training will be defined more specifically in Chapter 2, however it is important to note at this stage that I am not researching training that is specifically focussed on diversity and inclusion, such as unconscious bias training or diversity training. Instead, my focus is on training that does not have a specific diversity agenda, such as selling skills and negotiation skills training, as well as more personal development training such as interpersonal skills, communications skills, and management training.
As a result of my study, I hoped to be able to better understand gender and the role of sex/gender in training, and especially to be able to develop practical recommendations for trainers, where there are opportunities to improve sex/gender equity in training. As a result, the following research objectives have guided my research:

- How does sex/gender impact the experiences and outcomes of corporate training programmes?
- To what extent do current training practices fulfil expectations of sex/gender equity and inclusion?
- What could be improved in training practices to enhance sex/gender equity and inclusion?

The structure of my thesis is as follows: in the second chapter, my research will be positioned, by a review of a wide range of sex/gender, training, and combined sex/gender in training research. The chapter will end with a sex/gender-sensitive model of training that I developed, and my research questions. Chapter 3 will discuss the methodology and methods for my research, including my theoretical framework. This chapter will end with the ethical considerations regarding my methodology and methods. Chapter 4 will focus on the data presentation and analysis, and how I interpreted the key themes from the data, continuing with a gender subtext analysis, reflecting the critical lens of my research. In chapter 5, the data analysis will be discussed in relation to the research questions. In addition, the implications for theory and practice will be discussed. The chapter will also include a discussion of the limitations of the study. Finally, in chapter 6, the impact of COVID-19 and the next steps that I have taken to impact practice will be outlined. The chapter will close with my personal reflections.
Chapter 2. Positioning my research

My research objectives imply combining two fields of study: sex/gender and training. In order to position my research, I have reviewed these fields in their own right in the first two sections of this chapter. The third section will discuss studies that researched the interaction between sex/gender and training. This chapter closes with a summary and synthesis in the form of a newly developed sex/gender-sensitive model of training, that informed my research. The research questions will be presented at the end of the chapter.

Sex/gender

The meaning of sex/gender

Terminology around sex and gender is complex and controversial (Hyde et al. 2019). Especially in popular literature, such as the mass media, gender is often implied to be the same as the sex of a person. There is however an important difference: the sex of a person refers to the assignment to either the female or male sex category, based on biological criteria such as chromosomes, hormones, and reproductive organs. The term gender refers to the looks, thoughts and behaviours associated with women and men (Hyde et al. 2019).

There are, broadly speaking, two opposing positions on sex and gender (Duckworth, Farrell and Rigby, 2016). The first discourse suggests that there are essential differences between women and men, often linked to biological differences. Flemish philosopher Vandermassen (2019) in her book Dames voor Darwin (Ladies for Darwin) agrees with an essentialist perspective when she argues that women and men are biologically, behaviourally, and psychologically different, and that these differences need to be acknowledged. From Vandermassen’s perspective, the wage gap does not exist between women and men, it is a choice gap, as women prefer to work in care jobs that pay less. From an essentialist perspective, differences between women and men are genetically determined, and while the environment impacts our development, genetics lead.

The second discourse sees the female and male subject, and the feminine and masculine gender, as a social, historic, and cultural product (Ely and Padavic, 2007). This discourse opposes a predetermined, individualistic gender identity, or gender as something a person
‘has’, and instead sees gender as interactional, a form of ‘doing’, not static but ever changing and situated (Butler, 2006; West and Zimmerman, 1987). Whereas West and Zimmerman (1987) focussed on how gender is created in interactions, Butler (2006), focussed on how the doing of gender and gender identities are influenced by discourse and gender norms (Kelan, 2010). Butler (2006) famously argued that gender is not only constructed but performed, not by a fully developed gendered subject but, instead, ‘doing’ gender leads to the production of a gendered subject. Gender is only a repetition of acts and not the expression of an inner core, and Treur (2019) argues that even mother instinct is a myth, invented to see women as emotional and best fit for care responsibilities and staying at home. In this discourse, the dichotomies female-male and femininity-masculinity can be seen as problematic, as it assumes these are fixed traits and gives the impression of an equality that does not exist (Ely and Padavic, 2007). Although femininity and masculinity are not perceived to be essential or biological in this discourse, these concepts are embodied and linked to belief systems, both external as well as internal, maintained through the pressure to comply with gender expectations. Focussing on gender as doing implies a level of freedom and fluidity in gender identity, to the point that it is argued on popular You Tube channels such as As/ls (2015), with over 10 million subscribers, that each person has the option of choosing to add the best of masculinity to the best of femininity and vice versa. Or in other words: choosing your position in the continuum between woman and man (Hofstede, 2019). Seeing gender as doing and a construction also means it is not static or ever finished, which may lead to experiences where people consciously or unconsciously adopt a very different display of gender and identity in different contexts, based for example on different values and expectations at home and at work. The different displays of gender support the view that identity is performed and constructed (Atkins and Vicars, 2016). Gender as a social, historic and cultural product is impacted by beliefs and expectations that people have about being compatible with, and accountable to, socially, historically and culturally determined constructions of what it means to be a woman or man, so called gender schemes (West and Zimmerman, 2009). These give rise to descriptive and prescriptive stereotypes about what women and men are, and should be like, leading to gender bias (Heilman, 2001).
The essential approach to gender is based on the belief that individuals can be divided into two discrete categories of women and men, the so-called gender binary, a membership that is seen as biologically determined, stable and meaningful. These assumptions have been challenged, and the gender binary is instead positioned as culturally determined and situated (Hyde et al. 2019). Paechter (2006) argues that the sense of being a woman or man is a constant and only the ways of being a woman or being a man, or femininities and masculinities, are descriptive and constructed. However, Butler (2006) contests this view and argues that biological sex is as culturally and historically constructed as gender, and although naturalized, it is not natural. Despite the challenges to the gender binary, binary thinking is persistent and continues to influence how people think and act, leading to binary-based discrimination (Hyde et al. 2019). The cost associated with the sex and gender binary is highlighted by studies that examine the negative perceptions experienced by non-binary employees, who identify outside of the women/men binary, and transgender employees, who identify with genders different from their sex assigned at birth (Dray et al. 2020). Even though sex and gender have different meanings, they are intertwined and inseparable and an integrated view is advocated (Tate, Youssef and Bettergarcia, 2014), suggesting that gender is a bundle of interrelated facets: birth assigned category, current gender identity, gender roles and expectations (gender stereotypes), gender social presentation (gender expressions) and gender evaluations of one’s gender ingroup and outgroups (gender bias). Similarly, Mavin and Grandy (2012 p219) argue: “We explicitly incorporate sex category into our understanding of doing gender because we believe it cannot be ignored in experiences of doing gender”. In this review the recommendation to use the term sex/gender will be adopted (Stinson and Cameron, 2020; Hyde et al. 2019), also because many of the studies that will be reviewed use the terms sex and gender interchangeably without necessarily reflecting on the consequences.

An important element to consider when discussing sex/gender, is intersectionality, a term introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) more than 30 years ago. Crenshaw highlighted that black women faced unique challenges because of the combined discrimination based on sex/gender and race simultaneously. The interests, experiences and needs of black women were not recognised in an approach along singular discrimination axes, as gender
was focussed on experiences of white women, and race on the experiences of black men. Later scholars have further developed the concept of intersectionality to highlight that social categories such as race, ethnicity, gender and class are connected and mutually reinforcing in their production of inequalities (Holvino, 2010; Acker, 2006). Recent articles focus on the intersection between gender and ability and highlight for example, that women with a disability earn less than women without a disability (Bend and Fielden, 2021).

In my research, gender was approached not as something we have, but instead as something we think, feel, and do, associated with identifying as a woman, man or non-binary person. Gender was seen as constructed and constrained by social, cultural, and historical beliefs and practices. However, I recognised that for my research participants, gender expressions can be based on a belief of essential, biological difference between women and men. Gender was also perceived as fluid, meaning that people could adopt multiple gender identities and expressions, dependent on context (Ely and Padavic, 2007). Butler (2006 p91) speaks of a “constellation of identifications”. I also recognised in my research that gender interacts with race, social class, and ethnicity, amongst other categories, and taking this perspective took away the pressure to confirm the existence of a unified group based on sex and gender alone, recognising that multiple experiences and points of view can be explored (Debebe et al., 2016).

Finally, the review of studies that researched the interaction between sex/gender and training will highlight that available studies in many ways support a binary view on sex and gender when dividing research samples into women and men. My research equally did not include non-binary sex/gender identities and expressions. I strongly believe that a binary approach fundamentally misrepresents human states and processes (Hyde et al., 2019), however I approached my research as a first step in greater sex/gender reflectivity in training. In the conclusions chapter (cf. p149) I will share that in future research, I plan to recognise the variability in sex/gender identities and expressions and explore the experiences and needs of non-binary and transgender people in relation to the training system.
**Women, femininities, and inequality**

Sex/gender does not just refer to expressions and constructions, it has material and structural implications in terms of inequality, especially for women:

- I define inequality in organizations as systematic disparities between participants in power and control over goals, resources, and outcomes; workplace decisions such as how to organize work; opportunities for promotion and interesting work; security in employment and benefits; pay and other monetary rewards; respect; and pleasures in work and work relations (Acker, 2006 p443).

Extensive literature has been written on barriers to career progression of women and a range of research and literature has been reviewed, some of the most recent being: Thomas et al. (2020); Bullock (2019); Debebe et al. (2016), and Stamarski and Son Hing (2015). The interest of my research is on the role of so-called second-generation gender bias, that is holding women back in progressing to more senior levels:

- ...the powerful yet often invisible barriers to women’s advancement that arise from cultural beliefs about gender, as well as workplace structures, practices, and patterns of interaction that inadvertently favor (sic) men (Ely, Ibarra and Kolb, 2011 p475).

An example of second-generation bias is gendered career paths and the negative circle these create: one of the reasons why men are seen as more suitable for leadership roles is because the path to these roles is designed for men (Ibarra, Ely and Kolb, 2013). These men-oriented career paths include working long, inflexible hours, overtime and round the clock availability, especially in managerial jobs (Cain-Miller, 2019). The solutions in terms of childcare and paternity leave can be positioned as band-aids to make unrestrained work hours possible and, when directed to women only, damage their careers disproportionally (Cain-Miller, 2019). These invisible barriers have also been positioned as the gender subtext: the often concealed organisational processes and practices that seem neutral and impersonal, however in effect produce gender differences and inequalities.
(Raaijmakers et al., 2018; Bendl, 2008; Benschop and Doorewaard, 1998). The data analysis of my research included a gender subtext analysis, as will be discussed on p119.

It is interesting to note how both discourses of sex/gender (an intrinsic difference versus a situated performance – cf. p5) can help to understand barriers for the career progression of women. On the one hand, the discourse of intrinsic difference implies a more limited opportunity for women to choose their own identity and behaviours, because they are perceived to be naturally wired differently than men. There is extensive literature describing how women and men behave differently: men seem to prefer practical problems and are directive and task oriented. Women, on the other hand, are reported to be more intuitive and creative; more cooperative, open, and empathic, are better communicators and are more participative. And while women are found to have more communal qualities (a concern for others), men are more agentic, goal directed, controlling (Desvaux et al., 2017; Eagly, Gartzia and Carli, 2014; Heim, 2014; Vinnicombe and Singh, 2010). The excluding practice that can be the result of this point of view is a gender hierarchy (Whippman, 2019) when “men can and do suggest that their own discourse, agendas and perspectives are rational, neutral and universal” (Duckworth et al., 2016 p909). A side effect of this line of thought is the tendency to close the gender gap by a “fix-the-women” approach, focusing on helping women to develop the skills and competencies they are lacking to progress, such as assertiveness (Ely and Meyerson, 2000 p105). Whippman (2019) wonders why women need to adjust to these male standards and whether it is not the men who should be more like women and allow themselves to say sorry, listen, be empathic and show emotions. Aiming to live up to male norms and behaviour is argued to lead to an erasure of the feminine, an egocentric view of the world, and “de economie van het Zelfde” (the economy of the Same) (Rasch, 2019 p120). On the other hand, when gender is approached as a performance, this may imply agency to choose ones’ behaviour. However, the performance that is expected to be successful in a masculine business environment, may mean that women are not free to choose their gender identity, and this environment can “lock people into various forms of subjectivity” (Duckworth et al., 2016 p910). Gherardi and Poggio (2001) argue that organisations do gender, meaning they not only produce goods and
services, but also create and recreate social beliefs and rules about relationships between women and men. Gherardi and Poggio (p250) compare the positioning process when a woman enters a setting dominated by men, to a gendered “dance” with various actors either accentuating or denying gender. Butler (2006) equally speaks of actors when comparing gender and gender identity to a play with actors who can all play their role a little bit differently, however they are all restrained by their script. Second-generation bias could form the script that limits the freedom to choose behaviours in order to be successful in a business environment. The impossible dilemma is well stated by Gallos (2017 p653): “Ignore the stereotypes but remain feminine”.

When gender is seen as an expression, a performance, the context is the setting for that performance. In a business environment, the context is often dominant masculinity (as will be further discussed in the next section). The importance of context in understanding gender identity and behaviour in a corporate environment is supported by a study that finds that although women may have different characteristics and attitudes, there are no differences in behaviour or aspirations between women and men in managerial positions, and organisational differences define leadership and behaviour more than gender or personality (Aarum-Andersen and Hansson, 2011). In addition to the corporate context, cultural beliefs and upbringing impact gender identity and it is important to realise that gender identities start to develop before women come to the workplace and are historically and culturally situated (Brouwer, 2010). Upbringing is gendered (Vinnicombe and Singh, 2010; Tannen, 1995) and where boys are traditionally told to be brave, girls are told to be perfect (Saujani, 2016). These gendered expectations impact leadership ambitions of girls, who feel not masculine enough to lead, or fear being disliked when aspiring to be leaders (Voelker, 2016). Not surprisingly perhaps, women are less likely to aspire to be a top executive, compared to men of the same race and ethnicity (Thomas et al. 2017). And although young women (age 22 – 29) are more interested in the top jobs than older female colleagues, Thomas et al. (2017) found that young women are still less interested, and significantly less confident, than their male peers that they can reach the top.
Based on the importance of organisational context in determining differences between women and men, a growing range of authors suggest that the focus of gender and organisation research should shift, moving from “gender in organizations” or how women and men differ, to “gendering organizations” aiming to understand the practices, power relations and work models that create and sustain gender inequalities (Calas, Smircich and Holvino, 2014 p26). The key point, according to these authors, is not whether women and men differ, but that gender differences have become an explanation for inequality and unequal distribution of power and resources within companies:

Comparative studies of women and men are not only misleading, they ultimately work to naturalise and reproduce gender divisions and gender inequality (Mavin and Yusupova, 2021 p93)

In this regard the extensive literature on the positive impact of increasing the representation of women on company performance, based on the argument that there is a difference in the way that women lead compared to men, is interesting. Most authors find only small differences, if any, between female and male leaders, while on the other hand finding that gender supportive climates are crucial to gain any positive impact of sex/gender diversity (Eagly, Gartzia and Carli, 2014). Organisational norms and promotion criteria may suppress individual differences and a more feminine style of leadership, whether performed by women or men. Due-Billing and Alvesson (2014) agree and argue against connecting sex to styles of leadership, as it essentialises differences between women and men; it reinforces descriptive and prescriptive stereotypes about how women and men lead and should lead, and it prevents critical thinking about how the context impacts how women and men lead. A style of leading should be positioned not as a psychological trait that women and men possess, but instead as an organisational cultural and structural expectation that women and men face (Due-Billing and Alvesson, 2014; Powell, 2014). Despite the popular “business case” (Hoobler et al., 2018 p2474) for increasing representation of women to enhance performance, there is mixed support that women leaders in top management positively impact a firm’s financial performance.
Intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989), as previously discussed, highlights how black women face different, and more barriers, than white women or black men, which led Acker (2009 p201) to develop the concept of “inequality regimes”:

All organizations have inequality regimes, defined as loosely interrelated practices, processes, actions, and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender and racial inequalities within particular organizations.

Holvino (2010) further develops Acker’s powerful argument for intersectionality and simultaneous processes of gender, race, and class inequality, and argues that the value of working outside the home, voluntary work and the role of family are different for women of different race and class. Often feminist research and theorizing has been focused on the experiences of white women, ignoring women of colour (Holvino, 2010).

**Men, masculinities, and the norm**

As is argued for women and femininity, masculinity should not be approached as an essential trait, but instead as constructed and culturally, historically, and socially situated (Whitehead, 2014). Masculinities are also complex, dynamic, and open to change (Connell, 2006), and differ between cultures and even within a cultural setting, such that different discourses and practices of masculinity in organizations have been identified: “authoritarianism; paternalism; entrepreneurialism; informalism and careerism” (Collinson and Hearn, 1994 p13). Referring to Butler (2006), authors suggest that masculinity, as with femininity, is not only constructed but performed, becoming a reality before being enacted by a subject (Knights and Tullberg, 2014), and that one is not free to just choose one’s masculinity, but that these choices are restrained by history, material circumstances and relationships (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). In addition, Connell (2006) suggests that masculinity (and femininity) do not only exist at the individual level but also at the collective and cultural level where they are produced and reproduced, not only in institutions, such as companies, but also at home, when couples negotiate the division of care and housework (Peukert, 2019).
An important element of masculinities is the hierarchy of masculinities: hegemonic, complicit, subordinated, and marginalised masculinities (Hearn, 2014). Most business environments are characterised by a dominance of men and a hegemonic masculinity that is culturally dominant versus other masculinities and women/ femininities (Connell, 2006), privileging individuality, rationality, competition, and heterosexuality:

It is ordinarily behaviour that is technically rational, performance oriented, highly instrumental, devoid of intimacy yet preoccupied with identity and driven by rarely reflected upon corporate or bureaucratic goals that are presumed inviolable (Knights and Tullberg, 2014 p503).

The term hegemonic is referring to a position of authority and leadership that is cultural, the role model of what is highly valued, and visible (Connell, 2006). Importantly, hegemonic masculinity is not a trait but a social process, and in a revisiting of hegemonic masculinities, the importance of recognising the agency of non-hegemonic masculinities; the possibility that sub-groups can have different hegemonic masculinities; as well as the possibility of a hegemonic masculinity that supports gender equity in the future is highlighted (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). However, while one can argue that new discourses of masculinity and involved fatherhood gain attention and traction, especially among the younger generation, Kangas, Lämsä and Jyrkinen (2019) find that even though these discourses are present at a societal level, more traditional masculinities and gender roles are still strong organisational discourses. In addition, multinational corporations seem to drive an emerging form of transnational hegemonic masculinity (Tienari and Koveshnikov, 2014; Connell, 2006). Intersectionality also plays a role in masculinities and the risk is that “WHAM’s”: white, heterosexual, able-bodied men (Hearn, 2014 p426), are taken for granted when discussing men and masculinities.

The above highlights a major difference in the performativity of masculinity versus femininity in a business environment, where femininities do not hold cultural power (Paechter, 2006). Organisations are widely perceived to reflect, value and privilege masculine practices (Knights and Pullen, 2019; Hearn, 2014; Whitehead, 2014), leading to
men and masculinity being the norm. Dzubinski, Diehl and Taylor (2019 p239) describe this masculine environment for women as:

...a social and organizational world that has been created primarily by men with male lifestyle norms and male needs as the primary orienting factors.

This is especially the case when referring to management and leadership levels being connected to masculinity (Kangas, Lämsä and Jyrkinen, 2019). In line with the concept of gender, ‘management’ is also performative, and discourse driven (Due-Billing and Alvesson, 2014). The concept of management reflects a masculine discourse: being competitive, authoritarian, controlling, individualistic, rational, and totally committed to the organisation (Whitehead, 2014). The resulting challenge for female leaders is a “double bind”: the contradiction and tension between the female gender role and the masculine leader role (Debebe, 2017 p2). Mavin and Grandy (2016 p380) offer a theory of “respectable business femininity”:

a discursive and relational process that explains the tensions women elite leaders can experience at the nexus of being sometimes privileged, embedded notions of embodied leadership as masculine, and wider expectations of acceptable embodied femininity.

The masculine leadership discourse is difficult to change as the language of management and leadership is attractive: assured, confident and determined. In addition, market forces such as neoliberalism and, more recently, a more aggressive masculinity in politics, drive individualism, competition, and rationality, maintaining a masculine way of thinking and behaving (Beinart, 2019; Knights and Tullberg, 2014).

In an environment focussed on individual performance and competition, inequality in power is a sign of success for the winners (Acker, 2006). In that regard it is important to note that Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) warn that hegemonic masculinity is not just discursive, normative, and cultural, but is a pattern of practice, how things are done, and that hegemonic masculinity is not self-producing but requires active management and control for dominance. However,
organisational practices, management and leadership are often perceived to be gender-neutral and the normal way of doing things (Hearn, 2014; Benschop and Doorewaard, 1998) and as a result, masculinities remain hidden, even to the managers practising them. These hidden masculinities reinforce a gendered association between male and leadership and the masculine discourse of management is expected from all managers (Whitehead, 2014). Men do not recognise their own behaviour as gendered because often their work environment is defined by masculine practices. As Acker (2009 p211) aptly states: “one privilege of the privileged is not to see their privilege”.

The result of the masculine environment, and the alignment between management and masculinity, is that women are more aware of their gender and feel the need to self-monitor more than men, especially when in a minority position (Bullock, 2019; Dzubinski, Diehl and Taylor, 2019). The effect of tokenism, being a numeric minority, leads to subjective experiences of difference and a climate of inequality and negative outcomes for women (King et al., 2010), while men are in their natural habitat, which can be aligned to the work of Bourdieu (1989 p43):

...when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it finds itself “as a fish in water”, it does not feel the weight of water and takes the world about itself for granted.

On the other hand, women can do masculinities too and although men and masculinities are perceived as a logical combination, it is not pre-determined (Whitehead, 2014). Mavin and Grandy (2012) discuss how women and men can do gender well and differently. Doing gender well means behaving consistent with a person’s sex category, while gender can be done differently through: “simultaneous, multiple enactments of femininity and masculinity” (p221). In their reflections upon the notion of hegemonic masculinity, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) recommend that hegemonic masculinity does not simply imply the dominance of men over women anymore, and women’s relationships with masculinities and female agency require a rethink of gender hierarchies. Not all women have negative experiences and for some women, being a numerical minority, is an opportunity to shine
Some women feel very confident and embrace a masculine work culture (Whitehead, 2014), and being the only woman can be experienced as an advantage in terms of visibility (Benschop and Doorewaard, 1998). In addition, Pruis (2019) notices a heightened self-concept and pride to be a woman. In this regard, the postfeminist discourse is interesting as it combines seemingly contradictory perspectives: feminism reconnected with femininity, and conservative and neoliberal values, such as individualism and choice; the idea that women and men are essentially different and complementary; the return to more traditional gender roles at home, as a matter of choice; and women who are no longer victims of oppression (Mavin and Grandy, 2019; Lewis, 2014). Utoft (2021, p312) describes how the postfeminist discourse has become hegemonic, severely limiting the “maneuvering [sic] space” of gender equality practitioners. The focus on personal choice may completely disregard a social reality of systemic barriers that women face (Lewis, 2014). Rottenberg (2019) echoes these concerns when discussing what she calls neoliberal feminism, with individual ambitious women purposely investing in themselves as enterprise, and carefully managing their careers and families. Importantly, Rottenberg highlights how a neoliberal feminist approach supports class, white and heterosexual privileges. On the other hand, Mavin and Grandy (2019) argue that these ambitious elite female leaders should be recognised as significant in feminist futures, because they do disrupt gender hierarchies and provoke change.

Even though men gain a lot from the current system in economic power and material interest, this comes at a cost in terms of leisure time, personal and family time and health (Knights and Tullberg, 2014). Interestingly, with the lockdown due to COVID-19, many parents worked from home, and research highlighted an increase in time spent on childcare (but not housework) for fathers (Craig and Churchill, 2020). Even though working mothers continued to spend significantly more time than working fathers on the household and childcare, the relative gap in unpaid labour between working mothers and fathers decreased. This however did not lead to higher satisfaction levels for fathers, as the increase in childcare made more fathers stressed for time and feel that their share of unpaid work was unfair, compared to pre-COVID-19, bringing working fathers closer to the experiences of working mothers. However, gender-role attitudes may have shifted when COVID-19
resulted in non-traditional arrangements. A study found that men who became unemployed due to the pandemic, when their female partners remained employed, expressed more gender egalitarian attitudes (Reichelt, Makovi and Sargsyan, 2021). On the other hand, the same study found that women who lost their jobs, while their male partners were still employed, expressed more traditional gender-roles. Given more women lost their jobs than men, due to COVID-19, the authors concluded this may reverse some of the progress achieved in gender equity over the past few decades.

The discussion of femininities and masculinities can help men recognise the opportunities for redefining masculinity in their own life (Whitehead, 2014). Hegemonic dominant masculinity does not automatically lead to a better life and some men may also benefit from a more inclusive and equitable world, desiring a less hierarchical, rational, and controlling environment (Peukert, 2019; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). In addition, I support the viewpoint of Gartzia et al. (2012) that both stereotypical masculine, as well as stereotypical feminine attitudes and behaviours, are needed for women and men to be successful in today’s business environment. The hopeful perspective is that this may lead to coalitions between women and men around the cause of gender equity (Connell, 2006).

**Training**

**Defining training**

In training literature, the terminology is often not clearly defined and sometimes ambiguous. In addition, the intertwined terms learning, development and training are reviewed in various combinations. Rücker (2017) for example, focusses on the combination ‘learning and training’, whereby learning is defined as a procedure of gaining skills, knowledge, and behaviour change, with an emphasis on the role of experience in learning. Training is positioned as more focussed on the job and not the person and aimed at the acquisition of skills. Aguinis and Kraiger (2009 p452) on the other hand, review the combination of ‘training and development’ and argue that training is “a systematic approach to learning and development to improve the effectiveness of individual, team, and organisational effectiveness”. Development is described as activities to acquire new knowledge and skills for personal growth. In their review, Aguinis and Kraiger use the term
‘training’ to include both training and development activities, and position that training defined as such, benefits individuals, teams, organisations as well as society. Finally, Salas, Weaver and Shuffler (2012) combine all three concepts of ‘learning, training and development’, whereby training is seen as part of development activities and defined as the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes to improve performance. Also, in practice, different applications of the terms training, learning and development are present. Within companies, “L&D” or Learning & Development, is a common name used for training departments and my own title for example was “Head of Learning & Development”. Other companies have training managers, or more recently, capability managers, responsible for training and developing the employees.

The distinction between training that is focussed on job related knowledge, skills and behaviours and development/learning that focusses on personal growth, is a distinction I do not recognise from my own practice. There are training courses that focus more on functional skills (such as selling skills and negotiations skills) but there are others that focus more on personal development (such as management and leadership training). The learning in any training can focus on (a combination of): affective learning (focussing on feelings, attitudes, and motivation); skill-based learning (focussing on skills, methods, and procedures) and cognitive learning (learning new knowledge and cognitive strategies) (Salas, Weaver and Shuffler, 2012; Kraiger, Ford and Salas, 1993). All three levels of learning can impact job performance as well as personal development and the distinction between the two is ambivalent (Aguinis and Kraiger, 2009). Interestingly, Huang et al. (2015 p710) position the difference between affective and skill based/ cognitive learning as a difference between ‘can do’ (called “maximum transfer”) and ‘will do’, or what will actually be implemented in the workplace (called “typical transfer”). While for maximum transfer ability is key, not surprisingly affective/motivational factors are significantly more important for typical transfer. In this regard, Huang et al. note that organisations may get a better result from training investments by investing in a trainee with average ability but high motivation, instead of a high-ability employee and low motivation.
It is important to note that training no longer purely consists of instruction led, classroom-based activities but is evolving as result of new training technologies:

...development that will soon be characterized by on-demand growth, self-study, performance support, online communities, e-coaching, blogs, wikis, knowledge bases, e-learning modules, and blended learning (Rossett, 2007 p51).

For my research, I have developed the following definition of training that most closely fits current practice: a systematic activity organised by a company for its employees, with the intent to learn and develop in the performance of a role (as individual or team) and/or to support personal growth.

**Training literature**

There is extensive literature on training in a business environment, and a wide range of academic and professional literature has been reviewed. The reviewed academic training literature describes the benefits of training (Aguinis and Kraiger, 2009), training strategies and processes (Coultas, Grossman and Salas, 2012; Salas, Weaver and Shuffler, 2012; Salas and Stagl, 2011), as well as conceptual models of training elements, effectiveness, and transfer, such as most recently: Massenberg, Schulte, and Kauffeld (2017), Tonhäuser and Büker (2016) and Bell and Kozlowski (2008).

In their review of 100 years of training and development research, published in the Journal of Applied Psychology, Bell et al. (2017) mention the steady growth in training and development research and a shift in focus from simple to more complex tasks; from passive to active trainees; from the evaluation of specific training efforts and identifying factors that predicted training success to more theory driven training research, and the recognition that the effectiveness of training is dependent on the context in which it is conducted. In addition, the 1980’s showed an increased attention to a learner centred approach and the transfer of training became important. Subsequently, the interaction between contextual and individual factors that shape training outcome gained interest. The Training Transfer model of Baldwin and Ford (1988) can be positioned as the conceptual basis for many
subsequent training models. In their influential work, Baldwin and Ford (1988 p65) introduced a system perspective to training, including three components affecting training outcome: “Trainee Characteristics (ability, personality and motivation), Training Design (principles of learning, sequencing and training content) and Work Environment (support and opportunity to use)”, all three impacting the learning and retention as well as the generalisation and maintenance from a training programme. Since 2000, more articles on training and development research were published in the Journal of Applied Psychology than in any decade before (Bell et al., 2017). Continued attention was paid to the interaction of individual trainee characteristics, work environment and training design, and more recently not only the training intervention itself but also the phase before and after the training intervention is investigated in terms of the importance of trainee characteristics and work environment for transfer of training (Massenberg, Schulte and Kauffeld, 2017).

Despite this large amount of literature reviewing the specifics and impact of trainee, work environment and training design characteristics, Blume et al. (2010) in their meta-analytical review of 80 studies about prediction of training transfer, concluded that the number of strong indicators in transfer is limited, and the majority of indicators only had a small impact. Already in 1988, Baldwin and Ford argued that studies lack a theoretical framework to guide the research on individual and environmental factors impacting training transfer, based on a systematic approach, and supported by empirical research. In 2010, Gully and Chen (p47) still observed this need:

What is perhaps most needed at this point is strong theoretical guidance regarding which individual differences should be combined with which situational factors to produce particular learning mechanisms and training outcomes.

The opportunity identified is to expand our understanding of how a person interacts with the organisational context within a learning and development environment (Chen and Klimoski, 2007). Interestingly, Baldwin and Ford (1988) suggested that in the future, different types of trainees could be placed in different types of programmes to maximise transfer. This is possibly what is currently happening with women-only leadership
programmes and women-only sales programmes (cf. p3). In addition, there are major methodological concerns. The majority of research is quantitative, and in line with the reflection of Tracey et al. (2001), these studies help to further understand the role of individual and workplace factors in training effectiveness, however the correlations found cannot be interpreted as causality. In addition, Blume et al. (2010) showed that the vast majority of studies linking cognition and transfer were in a lab context. Finally, and possibly most concerning, self-reported assessments from a single source cause method bias and measurement error (Blume et al., 2010; Saks and Belcourt, 2006). As a result, Blume et al. (2010) call for a moratorium on such studies. A need is also identified to better understand how and why complex constructs such as supervisory support, organisational culture, and transfer motivation impact training outcomes, what exactly causes these positive influences and why (Baldwin and Ford, 1988). More recently, Tonhäuser and Büker (2016, p152) recommend an interdisciplinary approach to develop a more integrated and comprehensive perspective:

In the context of the scope and limitations of the currently available statistical processes, the question is raised in how far such complex relationships as the transfer process and its determinants can be sufficiently measured at all. Hence, it can be assumed that quantitative research designs reach their limitations, particularly in regard to the dimensions of determinants. Qualitative research may reach differentiated conclusions, in this regard.

It is also suggested that some factors, such as organisational support, have received a lot of attention, while others, such as social and cultural constraints, have received very little (Blume et al., 2010). In addition, a need has been identified to better understand the impact of the content of the training. In this regard, the model of Yelon et al. (2004 p101) is interesting, in that it states that the key decision criteria, leading to transfer intention, were whether “the ideas taught are indeed credible, practical, and needed”. Finally, the role of the trainer is underexplored (Tonhäuser and Büker, 2016; Bell et al. 2010), except for the research of Burke and Hutchins (2008).
In addition to the psychology-based training literature, another strain of literature focusses on learning processes and styles. Kolb’s (1984) influential Experiential Learning includes a four-step learning cycle: experiencing (CE: concrete experience), reflecting (RO: reflective observation), thinking (AC: abstract conceptualization) and acting (AE: active experimentation). The original four learning styles, associated with different positioning in the Learning Cycle, have now been developed into nine learning styles (Kolb and Kolb, 2016), dependent on how people move through the learning cycle. Kolb and Kolb argue that a learning style should not be seen as a fixed psychological trait, with the danger of learning styles becoming stereotypes, limiting individuals and their behaviour. Instead, learning styles should be seen as dynamic states, influenced by personality, but also by “increasingly specific environmental demands of educational specialization, career, job and tasks skills” (p10). Based on Kolb’s Learning Style Inventory, research has found a link between learning styles and preferred training delivery, such as classroom-based versus online (Buch and Bartley, 2002), potentially impacting the choice of training delivery, dependent on the learning styles of trainees. Kolb’s learning styles have been critiqued extensively, for example, Illeris (2015) finds Kolb’s experiential learning problematic because it positions learning as rather simple and it suggests that all learning is in some way experiential. In Illeris’ view, it is impossible to understand human learning as uniform or describe it with specific models and sequences. Illeris (p29) argues that “all learning includes three dimensions: the content, the incentive, and the interaction [between the learner and the environment that provides the learning]”.

A third strain of literature that is important for this review is the position that learning (of which training is arguably a part) should be approached not as the acquisition of knowledge by an individual, but as a process of participation in a sociocultural community of practice (Wenger, 1998; Lave, 1996; Lave and Wenger, 1991). Lave and Wenger (1991 p29) famously introduced a process called “legitimate peripheral participation”, meaning learning skills and knowledge by participating in a community of practitioners, thereby becoming a full participant in the community. Lave and Wenger argue that learning is not just situated in practice (situated learning), but that learning is integral to social practice. A well-known critique on the communities of practice approach is its lack of attention to power dynamics in a community of practice that may help or hinder participation and learning (Roberts,
There is a risk that communities of practice are perceived as places where participation and learning inevitably take place. However, a community of practice can be resistant, as well as sustain failure and reproduce oppressive conditions (Wenger, 1998). Communities of practice can have an excluding effect on participation and learning through their power structures, culture, and practices (Griffiths 2006). In the case of the representation of women, an excluding culture with long-serving male employees, hesitant to give up their positions for female newcomers, can be an issue. The argument could be that the focus in communities of practice is skewed towards learners needing to make the culture of the community theirs and to learn to talk the language of the practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991), and there is less exploration of communities of practice with a culture that is not conducive to learning or participation for all.

Despite the large amount of academic literature and research, as well as conceptual training models and frameworks, the practical implications of academic training research are limited (Bell et al, 2010). Saks and Belcourt (2006) find that companies and training practitioners rarely apply learning from training research in their training programmes. This is to some extent reflected in the professional training literature reviewed, however I do find professional authors reference academic research to support their recommendations. For example Frazier (2018), who discusses research on behavioural learning by educational psychologist Edward Thorndike, and recommends how these insights should inform trainers, and their design of training programmes. Professional membership organisations, such as the world’s largest Association for Talent Development (ATD n.d., n.p.), support “those who develop the knowledge and skills of employees in organisations around the world”. Contributions on the ATD website and in their Talent Development magazine, offer practical recommendations regarding training content, (instructional) design and facilitation, and especially virtual training technology and tools receive significant attention. However, these articles and blogs are often disguised sales pitches by training companies selling their own offering, for example in the contribution by Kadakia and Owens (2019).

In professional literature, training is positioned as the solution to a deficit: which competencies are employees required to have to successfully realise the company’s goals and objectives; which competencies do the employees currently have; and how can training
provide advanced knowledge, skills, and behaviours to close the gap (Silberman and Biech, 2015). It is suggested that the Potential for Improving Performance, or the PIP, can be calculated as the difference between the best performing employee versus the average performing employee (Bouloutian, 2009). Training is positioned as an investment, required to generate a return in terms of an increase in the organisation’s productivity, cost effectiveness and growth (Lapidus and Kazakov, 2017; SHRM, 2014), which echoes the Neoliberal view of employees as Human Capital and a focus on costs and returns (Tan, 2014). For perspective, Riddell, Ahlgren and Weedon’s (2009) study finds that companies are more concerned with the firm’s profitability than the individual employee’s learning and development, and prioritise the first over the latter. The focus on training as investment is argued to be the result of the shift of responsibility for training from the supervisors to the training experts in the 1940’s, which resulted in training emerging as a cost centre, a concern for return on investment (ROI) and a focus on improved job performance (Bell et all., 2010).

The focus on measurable results, as well as bottom line performance, is also noticed in academic literature, and is argued to potentially limit our understanding of what training can achieve. In addition, it may limit the focus of training on skills that are currently important, not recognising jobs and requirements may change (Salas, Weaver and Shuffler, 2012). Salas and Stagl (2011 p60) argue that the objectives of training should go beyond what is currently discussed:

And the conversation must encompass more than just performance, productivity, and profitability concerns, as training can also be a powerful lever for enhancing performance-related factors such as employee satisfaction, team cohesion, social capital, and organizational reputation.

Illeris (2015 p38) strongly agrees when arguing:

This implies that unmeasurable qualities such as flexibility, creativity, empathy, and openness to change and innovation — the need for which was the original reason for the introduction of the term competencies — are left out and a new and stronger concentration on the measurable and
insufficient ‘hard’ outcomes of reproductive knowledge and skills are reinforced.

This is an important observation for gender equity in training, as will be explored further when discussing career motivation of women as one of the outcomes of training (cf. p40).

**Sex/gender and training**

The notion of sex/gender as a consideration in training theory and models is almost absent. This is in line with management and organisational studies neglecting gender or even being gendered without acknowledging this is the case, seeing sex and gender as variables but not as analytical frameworks (Knights and Tullberg, 2014; Paludi, Helms-Mills and Mills, 2014).

As Swan, Stead and Elliott (2009 p432) argue:

> There is, however, a growing view that learning is relational, situated and socially reproduced. Most importantly for our argument here is that the category of the ‘social’ in social learning is rarely understood as something structured and defined by gender, race or class.

In a review of 600 multidisciplinary articles, books, and chapters by Aguinis and Kraiger (2009) on the benefits of training and development, there is no mention of women, or gender. In the rare case that gender is reviewed and incorporated in training theory and models, gender is interpreted as the binary sex category of a person, or whether trainees are women or men. Actual gender, or the thoughts, feelings and behaviours associated with identifying as a woman or a man, or the influence of situated gendered norms and expectations, are not considered. Training literature that does consider gender (actually sex category) includes Colquitt, LePine and Noe (2000), who argue there is no consistent effect of gender on learning, explaining that this is potentially not surprising, given the lack of theoretical rationale. Blume et al. (2010) only find a small correlation between gender and training transfer. An older model of training effectiveness by Tannenbaum, Cannon-Bowers, Salas and Mathieu (1993) suggests that there may be an indirect impact through expectations and desires. The only model that considers gender as an important variable, and reflects on the impact of gender stereotypes, is developed by Gully and Chen (2010) who see a potential indirect effect of gender through intervening mechanisms. In their
theoretical framework, these authors take an in-depth look at how the interaction between trainee characteristics (capabilities, demographics, personality traits and interests/values) and treatments (training design and situational characteristics) work through four intervening mechanisms to affect cognitive, behavioural, and affective learning outcomes. These intervening mechanisms are “(a) information-processing capacity, (b) attentional focus and metacognitive processing, (c) motivation, and effort allocation, and (d) emotional regulation and control” (p7). The authors further suggest (p18) that gender may impact learning through all four intervening mechanisms:

Together, these factors may be instrumental in determining training outcomes for males and females. Additionally, these effects may be pronounced in particular training contexts that highlight gender or gender-related differences such as leadership, diversity, sexual harassment, and technology. Depending on the training content and context, either males or females may exhibit superior training performance as a result of the four intervening variables.

Gully and Chen specifically stress the likelihood of interaction between gender and training when sex-based stereotypes are apparent. One of these stereotypes may be evident in Kolb and Kolb’s (2016) Experiential Learning model, when reporting an impact of gender in training based on consistent gender difference on the Concrete Experience (more women) – Abstract Conceptualization (more men) axes. Kolb and Kolb argue that one cannot draw any conclusions from this difference because even though the means are different, there is a lot of overlap between women and men.

As discussed (cf. p23), the concept of situated learning, or participation in a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991), does not acknowledge the power relations in the community of practice. This includes a lack of reflection on how power, access, and the legitimacy to participate and learn, can be gendered. Key concepts from the situated learning approach such as communities, boundaries, and identities, each have gendered aspects, leading to the conclusion that even though not acknowledged in situated learning theory, “…gender inhabits the very foundations of learning” (Salminen- Karlsson, 2005 p39).
In professional training literature, the notion of gender was equally almost absent until very recently, when in 2020 the Black Lives Matter movement forced attention to the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion in talent development. Before 2020, the notion of gender was mainly discussed in articles on women-only leadership programmes. The gender of participants was interpreted as their sex category and merely a “descriptive factor” (Silberman and Biech, 2015 p20). When discussing differences between the training participants, in order to better meet different learning needs, sex/gender was not discussed (Kadaka and Owens, 2019). One of the arguments was that human brains cannot be categorized as a woman’s brain or a man’s brain and differences in brain structure have not resulted in conclusions about differences in learning or behaviour (Shank, 2016 np):

Because there are more differences within the population of men and within the population of women than between the population of men and women, there are no reasons to develop training content that takes into account learning differences between men and women (emphasis in the original).

This point of view obviously does not address whether training content should consider differences in lived experiences, challenges and underlying beliefs and values between women and men, which led other professionals to conclude that women and men do need different coaching and training (Caprino, 2014). In addition, differences between girls and boys are potentially not so much the result of the brain that they are born with, but more the result of the expectations they face, as well as gendered experiences and stereotypes about femininity and masculinity, that can change our brains (Rippon, 2019).

In summary, sex/gender has not received significant attention in training theory and models as well as in professional literature, and the question is whether training is indeed a gender-neutral endeavour or whether this is an assumption that may result in inequitable training. This is an important question because relevant training and development is a pre-requisite for career progression (Due-Billing and Alvesson, 2014; Metz and Kulik, 2014; Streets and Major, 2014). In that sense, training is one of the levers to drive equity, and differences in access to, and participation in, workplace learning can enhance existing inequalities:
Access to high quality workplace learning, then, is not just to do with promoting economic growth, as emphasised in the government Economic Strategy (Scottish Government 2007b) but is also seen as an important means of creating a more just and equal society (Riddell, Ahlgren and Weedon, 2009 p785).

In this regard, the critique of Salas and Stagl (2011) and Illeris (2015) discussed earlier (cf. p25), is very relevant, suggesting that current discussions on the objectives of training should encompass more than performance, productivity and profitability and reproduction of knowledge and skills. The Return on Investment (ROI) thinking has an inherent risk of focussing training investments on male employees, as reflected in the studies of Keaveny and Inderrieden (1999) as well as Hoobler, Lemmon and Wayne (2014). Both studies found that women receive less organisationally supported training and education because they are more likely to leave their jobs or work part-time, as well as the stereotypical perception that women have a lack of career ambition and motivation. The research by Vinnicombe and Singh (2010) is potentially relevant, finding that fewer women than men attend Master of Business Administration (MBA) programmes, because MBAs are associated with authority and being a man, and there is a gap between the needs and experiences of women, and the MBA curriculum. And while the skills and competencies trained are argued to be neutral, authors claim these are in fact social constructions, and are in essence gendered, with higher qualifications assigned to more masculine skills and behaviours (Ely and Padavic, 2007; Benschop and Doorewaard, 1998). In addition, related research from McBride (2011) regarding the knowledge and skills framework in the National Health Service in the UK, showed that the so-called objective competency framework was tactical and opportunistic and did not support a career path suitable for women, rather was being organised around male norms. This would suggest that a competency framework and assessment without a well thought through view on how these fit with careers of women may actually exclude women.

The question is whether the argument of Gallos (2017 p655), while reflecting on teaching a course on Organizational Behaviour to underemployed women, is also relevant for training in a business context:
Our conceptions of truth, knowledge, learning, and individual development are androcentrically based. Our theories, beliefs, and educational practices have been shaped over time by a male-dominated culture... When women cannot match these learnings to their own lives or see them as relevant to their central needs or concerns, the women, not the facts, theories, and curriculums, have been termed deficient.

In order to understand whether training is indeed a gender-neutral endeavour, or whether this is an assumption that may result in inequitable training, an extensive multi-disciplinary database search was conducted. The following integrative literature review, including the tables and figures in this section, was already published in Human Resource Management Review, a high-impact journal (Kroese, 2022).

The search was conducted in the following four databases: Web of Science, ABI/inform, Psychinfo and Business Source Complete (Table 1).

### Table 1. Search criteria and databases

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<th>Term 1</th>
<th>Term 2</th>
<th>Title*</th>
<th>Abstract*</th>
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<td>Training OR Learning</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>WOS/ABI/ BSC</td>
<td>ABI/PI/ BSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>WOS/ABI/ BSC</td>
<td>ABI/PI</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training OR Learning</td>
<td>Male OR Man OR Men OR Males</td>
<td>WOS/ABI/ BSC</td>
<td>ABI/PI</td>
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* Rationale for Title and/or Abstract was based on opportunities for Advanced Search specifications per database.

WOS = Web of Science. ABI = ABI/Inform; PI = Psychinfo. BSC = Business Source Complete

In addition to “Training” as search term, the more generic term “Learning” was applied to ensure that any learning intervention that was not specifically identified as “Training”, but for example as Learning and Development, or Management Learning, would also be included in the search.
The search was limited to peer reviewed academic journal articles published in English between 2000 – 2020, with the majority of the source data collected after 2000. The research articles included in this review were all empirical research papers, focusing on training and learning experiences relevant in a business environment and public organisations such as government institutions. The role and impact of sex/gender as social construct is situated, and environments that are significantly different in their processes and structures, and training topics that are not typically offered within companies or public organisations, were not included. Excluded were research articles involving medicine, medical or health; fitness, exercise, or physical activity; outdoor training; primary and secondary education settings and teachers; vocational education and apprenticeships; music, voice and language training; military, armed forces and prison settings; religious institutions as well as developmental gender equality initiatives such as micro credit programmes and female entrepreneurship. In addition, this review is interested in the role of sex/gender in training and learning initiatives that do not have a specific inclusion and diversity objective. Hence research focusing on diversity training or unconscious bias training or gendered career barriers that are not training or learning related was also excluded. Finally, research amongst university and college students was excluded. The rational for this choice is that although research amongst students regarding experiences with training and learning may provide insights and opportunities to enhance training and development, the experience and impact of sex/gender is likely to be different in a working environment and later life phases with changing organisational, relational and societal contexts (O’Neil and Bilimoria, 2005).

Based on these criteria, checking over 10,000 titles, and reading 881 abstracts, 503 potentially relevant articles were scanned to ensure they were empirical research papers, and the research scope, methodology and source data specifics were in line with the criteria mentioned before. In addition, as quality check, journals with no Impact Factor were excluded, except in one case where the study addressed the impact of sex/gender on e-learning within companies (Chinyamurindi and Louw, 2010), an urgent topic in light of the reliance on virtual training and e-learning since the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, two studies from different databases were included (Gegenfurtner, 2020; Good and Mclean, 2001) that
were already identified before this review and were insightful and relevant to understand the role of sex/gender in training. Table 2 provides an overview of the search results.

Table 2. Search results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Web of Science (WOS)</th>
<th>ABI/Inform (ABI)</th>
<th>Psychinfo (PI)</th>
<th>Business Course Complete (BSC)</th>
<th>Taylor &amp; Francis (targeted) (b)</th>
<th>Wiley Online (targeted) (b)</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Searched abstracts</td>
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<td>287</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>881</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identified potentially relevant references</td>
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<td>156</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Removed after scanning the articles (a)</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>415</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Removed journals without Impact Factor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Pool</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) A scan of the articles revealed that the research was conducted among students, too specific, or not transferrable to training in public and private organisations. For example, the articles were on training female small business owners in developing countries or on measuring the impact of the gender of the firm owners. B) Two additional studies were included in the review (Gegenfurtner, 2020; Good and Mclean, 2001).

The final pool consisted of 78 articles from a wide range of disciplines such as Education, Human Resources, Psychology, Technology as well as Gender studies, which I organised in line with the structure of the seminal Training Transfer Model of Baldwin and Ford (1988), discussed on p20, with three components affecting training transfer: trainee characteristics, training design and work environment (Figure 1). By trainee, Baldwin and Ford referred to training participants, not an apprentice.

Figure 1. A system model of training
Although all 78 studies have been reviewed and described in detail in the published integrative literature review (Kroese, 2022), this thesis does not allow for an in-depth discussion of all 78 studies. Hence, for each training element (trainee characteristics, training design, work environment and training outcome) a short description will be followed by a summary of the reviewed studies, and subsequently, individual studies that were particularly relevant for my research will be highlighted. Relevance was based on whether the context was comparable to my study and whether the outcome informed my data analysis.

Before reviewing the literature, I would like to highlight two important observations: firstly, all the reviewed studies are based on the premise of the gender binary system, with participants divided into mutually exclusive categories of women and men, and gender considered a stable trait. Training experiences and outcomes of non-binary employees have not been researched to date. Secondly, the use of sex/gender terminology in the review reflects the terminology used by the authors of the reviewed studies. Many of the reviewed studies use the term gender, while, in effect, only measuring the sex category-based differences, without reflecting on the consequences.

**Trainee characteristics**

Trainee (or training participant) characteristics are defined in this review as the ideas, thoughts, experiences, and behaviours that training participants take with them or ‘bring along’ when they enter training. Thirty years ago, Baldwin and Ford (1988) identified three trainee characteristics: ability, personality, and motivation. In their more recent synthesis of what is reliably confirmed to impact transfer, or in other words, implementation of training, the authors suggest that personality and ability, learning states (such as mastery orientation), motivation and self-efficacy are important trainee characteristics (Ford, Baldwin and Prasad, 2018). In addition, the interests, values, and beliefs of trainees are defined as important trainee characteristics by Gully and Chen (2010), and relevant for this review. Fourteen articles have been identified that report on the impact of sex/gender on trainee characteristics from a range of journals and disciplines (Figure 2).
All but one study was quantitative, with samples divided by women and men, subsequently analysing whether the factors researched are different for women versus men. In summary, these studies reported differences between women and men in training needs, motivation, self-efficacy, learning and cognitive styles, as well as interests, beliefs, and values, leading to suggestions that these differences should impact training content, design, and evaluation. In addition, care responsibilities were found to impact perceived barriers to train and learn (Melesk, 2020), an important finding given that the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionally impacted women, especially because of an increase in unpaid care work (UN, 2020). In terms of motivation and self-efficacy, the intersectionality between age and gender was reported, possibly implying that younger generations may be more similar in motivation and self-efficacy, which may mean these differences may disappear in the future (Bausch, Michel and Sonntag, 2014).
The concern with these studies is that the conclusions imply essential differences between women and men, without measuring how and why these differences exist, nor how gendered norms and expectations impacted the differences identified. Several authors suggested reasons for the reported differences between women and men, such as socialization effects, gender roles, social status, and power imbalance (Ilie and Cardoza, 2018), masculine work environments and stereotypical gender roles (Pillay, Tones and Kelly, 2011), and the lack of female role models, networks, and mentors in industries dominated by men (Germain, Herzog and Hamilton 2012). However, these gender related variables were not measured in most of the studies and, when included, the research was only conducted with women without the opportunity to understand the perspectives of men (Gallant, 2014). Hence the risk is a focus on individual difference instead of how the training system creates and reinforces difference between women and men.

One of the studies that is particularly relevant for my research assessed the impact of gender on the ranking of leadership skills amongst educational leaders in Australia. It found that although women and men indicated the same skills that are important for leadership (cognitive, interpersonal business and strategic skills), the ranking of these skills was different (Kairys, 2018). Women ranked interpersonal and cognitive skills as most important while men ranked business and strategic skills as the most important. The author argued that this is important because leaders are often assessed on task-oriented skills and business and strategic activities first before interpersonal skills. While the author could have questioned this practice, instead the suggestion for leadership programmes was to focus on ‘re-orienting’ women in order to move into senior management roles, an example of a “fix-the-women” approach, as described on p10. Even though the context of my study is a business environment and not an educational institution, the data analysis will reflect a similar outcome in terms of the priority that corporations give to business skills, which is argued to drive masculine behaviours by both women and men (cf. p104). A second study that is insightful for my research, because it emphasised the importance of context when finding differences in training experiences and outcomes between women and men, is the study by Doyle, Findlay and Young (2012). This study focussed on learning, not training specifically, when it researched 151 hotel employees in Canada. The authors found
significant differences between female and male research participants in learning strategies, as well as outcomes, facilitators, and barriers. However, the authors themselves questioned whether these differences were driven by choice or the context in which the women were working. For example, the finding that women preferred to learn informally from working with others could be driven by a preference or a barrier in access to other types of learning. This reminded me of the argument of Ely and Padavic (2007 p1138):

...understanding how gender affects people’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (sic) at work requires shifting the object of study from sex differences to the features of organizations that constitute men and women as similar and different.

In a third study, that informed my research method, aspiring female higher education leaders in Australia were interviewed regarding notions of leaders, leadership, and female leaders, and found strong notions of gendered, traditional, and hierarchical thinking (Gallant, 2014). Male leaders were associated with hard skills and authority, while female leaders were associated with relational skills and nurturing perspectives. In an environment perceived as hierarchical, individualistic, competitive, and unsupportive of the career aspirations of women, the author concluded that these unconscious gendered views are a barrier in the development of female leadership agency. The author recommended formalised leadership courses to deconstruct gendered notions of leadership and workplace interactions, and to help develop positive leadership identities, especially for women. This approach is fundamentally different from the “fix-the-women” approach discussed before, and instead focusses on challenging common-sense knowledge and approaches in order to develop a new reality and opportunities. As will be discussed, in my research I have introduced critical reflection statements during the interviews to challenge common-sense views and allow for new interpretations of current training practice.
Work environment

In training literature, the work environment factors that are argued to influence training transfer are supervisor and peer support, as well as the opportunity to apply trained skills on the job (Ford, Baldwin and Prasad, 2018). The Learning Transfer System Inventory model (Holton, Bates and Ruona, 2000) includes similar factors, however, adds important elements that relate to company culture, such as the openness to change, defined as whether perceived group norms support or discourage the application of knowledge and skills acquired in the training. These elements in the work environment all refer to training participants who are invited to training. However, the reviewed studies showed an impact of sex/gender at an earlier stage when gaining access to training. Thirty studies have been reviewed that research the impact of sex/gender on the work environment of training and learning (Figure 3 p38). In all but two studies an impact of sex/gender is reported in the training environment. In addition to access to training, the reviewed studies discuss organisational culture, supervisor support and subordinate support.

The studies regarding sex/gender and work environment provided a more contextualised perspective than the studies that researched trainee characteristics. While often training research focussed on the meso (organisational) and micro (individual) trainee level, several of the studies on sex/gender, training and the work environment showed that macro (society) influences, such as family-friendly policies and gender-equal cultures, have a strong impact on the training participation of women in firm-sponsored training.
All but two studies that researched training access, reported that women are less likely to receive employer supported training, especially in the private sector, irrespective of working hours, career history or firm size. Gender stereotyping and sex discrimination are suggested as the core issues of the underrepresentation of women in employer supported training. In addition, organisation level policies and cultures, and especially hegemonic masculine cultures, impacted the learning and training of women in very significant ways. This was reflected not only in being able to access training, but also in terms of applying learning,
having to adjust to dominant group norms, not being heard and not being able to implement knowledge and learning, which is argued to be an important factor driving training transfer (Ford, Baldwin and Prasad, 2018). The intersectionality between sex/gender and ethnicity, class, and nationality, was highlighted in three studies (Dostie and Javdani, 2020b; Giazitzoglu and Muzio, 2020; Stalker and Mavin, 2011). In summary, the research reviewed of work environment highlighted the gendered nature of the work environment, and the importance of contextualising training research. Training and learning are not only individual but social, and training can be positioned as an enculturation, or learning the rules of the game and the profession (Giazitzoglu and Muzio, 2020; Lave and Wenger, 1991). Again, the challenge in the quantitative research reviewed was to include not only sex category but also measures of gender, such as the impact of described and prescribed stereotypes regarding being a woman or a man. In the qualitative research this was highly visible, however this research again was mostly conducted with only women, or in one case only men, which has a risk of positioning women and men against each other, and not giving both women and men a voice in gender and training research.

A study that is particularly interesting for my research, because of its similar masculine context and research ontology, is a study by Windels and Mallia (2015) who explored how learning trajectories of women in the creative industry, dominated by men, were influenced by sex and gender. They situated their study within learning as a social practice, instead of an individual, cognitive endeavour (Lave and Wenger, 1991), and described the experiences of women as they tried to move from the periphery of the creative department to the centre. The gendered construction of the department was found to be a major obstacle impacting the learning trajectory of women. Women lacked power, legitimacy, status, and community membership, which impacted job assignments and raised questions about competence and ability. In the same spirit Martin, Lord and Warren-Smith (2018) found that organisational learning is not neutral and should be recognised as based on a masculine normative model. The challenges reported by Windels and Mallia, as well as Martin, Lord and Warren-Smith reflect how the willingness to change, and strong group norms, impact training and learning, as highlighted in the Learning Transfer System Inventory (Holton, Bates and Ruona, 2000).
The reviewed studies mostly emphasised experiences of women and how corporate masculine cultures exclude women and impact on their training, learning and development. Another study that I would like to highlight, is an important and insightful exception. Giazitzoglu and Muzio (2020) investigated how men, who were brought up in a working-class culture, were forced to play the rules of hegemonic masculine corporate culture and learn how to behave, interact, and present themselves according to the dominant masculine culture in order to be accepted. The authors specifically mentioned the induction training programme as one of the occasions where the rules of the game were learned:

At inductions, participants are introduced to what form of masculinity they are expected to enact, and what cultural capital they are expected to display and enact, as part of their professional roles. In other words, at induction, participants learn what an ideal man looks like, acts like, and sounds like to be seen as a credible employee... (p77).

This research highlighted that training can be an important tool to reinforce corporate culture and teach people the “rules of the game” (Giazitzoglu and Muzio, 2020 p76). In other words, training as an enculturation, which influenced the sociocultural lens of my research. The third study that I have highlighted is by Hoobler, Lemmon and Wayne (2014), because its context is very similar to the corporate context where my research is positioned, and it focussed on the role of the line manager, an element that is consistently mentioned as an important variable in training research (Ford, Baldwin and Prasad, 2018). In addition, supervisory practises are positioned as one of the four organising processes that produce inequality (Acker, 2006). Hoobler, Lemmon and Wayne researched managerial aspiration and found that managers (both women and men) rate the career motivation of women lower than men, despite many control variables such as job performance and education level. This perceived lower career ambition resulted in fewer development opportunities (challenging work assignments, training and development, and career encouragement from their managers), which in turn resulted in lower career motivation for women. These findings of perceived lower career ambition are in line with gender role bias and, importantly, they highlight the impact of training not just on knowledge, skills, and
behaviours but also on motivation. The authors suggested that the perceived lower career ambition, and as result lower development support, is one of the reasons why women are underrepresented at senior levels. My data analysis similarly shows how being invited for training has a strong motivational aspect for women (cf. p98). As discussed, from a training theory perspective, other authors questioned the current focus of training as tool only for productivity, knowledge, and skills (Illeris, 2015; Salas and Stagl, 2011).

**Training design**

Training design elements, or the specifics of the training intervention, that impact the implementation of training in the workplace, are identified as, for example, the learning strategies used (such as the use of cases, examples, discussions), the demonstrations during training, the use of error management strategies, designing practice of the learning tasks, and ensuring trainees have transfer goals (Ford, Baldwin and Prasad, 2018). Other models add content validity: the extent to which training content reflects job requirements (Gully and Chen, 2010; Holton, Bates and Ruona, 2000). Twenty-three studies researched the interaction between sex/gender and the training intervention and all but two studies found an impact of sex/gender (Figure 4, p42).

The reviewed studies researched the interaction between sex/ gender and computer supported and online learning, which is very relevant considering the COVID-19 pandemic and virtual training delivery, as well as the content of the training and training material, group dynamics, and finally group composition. In addition to the empirical studies reviewed, it is worthwhile mentioning a meta-analysis of 57 intervention-based leadership studies on the impact of gender on the outcome of leadership interventions, such as leadership development programmes, based on the different expectations of male and female leaders, their style and effectiveness, as well as the impact of gender stereotypes (Avolio et al. 2009). The results suggested that overall there is a limited difference between women and men, in terms of the impact of leadership interventions, however the study described how the impact for women and men varied with the nature of the intervention, focus of intervention impact, leadership theory applied, sample characteristics and study setting. The authors suggested that in the design and structure of leadership development programmes, gender differences should be considered.
In the empirical studies reviewed, the interaction between sex/gender and training design was analysed from several perspectives. In terms of online or computer/mobile supported training, a careful conclusion could be drawn that sex/gender seems to influence attitude towards and use of online, computer or mobile based technology in training, only when a sex/gendered impact on computer self-efficacy and literacy is measured. The sex/gender differences reported were that women’s decisions to use e-learning were more based on ease of use, while for men the perceived usefulness of e-learning was more important (Okazaki, 2012; Ong and Lai, 2006). Sex/gender in combination with age, education and country culture are important intersectional considerations, impacting ease of use and self-efficacy for women and men and, with younger generations, these sex/gender differences
may become less significant. However, considering the reliance on online learning and training since the global COVID-19 pandemic, sensitivity to the gendered nature of attitudes towards the use of online learning is important. In terms of training content, studies highlighted that training material and concepts can have a strong gendered meaning even when perceived as neutral and objective. Training participants operate in a gendered world and have gender schemes that lead them to interpret the training material in a gendered way. Group composition was reported as another important consideration in training design, understanding the gender dynamics, norms and behaviours that impact the learning of the ‘other’, who in the literature reviewed, were the women. The impact of group composition was found to be culturally situated (Bayeck et al., 2018). Several studies discussed women-only leadership programmes which were positioned as a safe environment for women to learn, build self-confidence, develop their identity, and share experiences, as women working in masculine work environments, dominated by men. It became clear that the experiences of women with barriers and role conflicts are not easily brought up in mixed gender training, for fear of being seen as weak or uncommitted (Lämsä and Savela, 2014; Clarke, 2011, Debebe, 2011). However, women-only programmes are not unproblematic as they may run the risk of essentialising ‘women’ and thereby maintaining a gender binary, not exploring and accepting multiple roles and identities that men and women have (Selzer, Howton and Wallace, 2017). In addition, questions were raised about the impact of these programmes on the career development of women, and whether personal and organisational context allowed for application of learnings. A relevant question may be whether women who did participate advanced faster than women who did not participate (Knipfer et al. 2017).

Important to highlight is a study amongst employees from four large companies in South Africa that had implemented e-learning for more than 5 years. This quantitative study is very similar in context, though not method, to my research and contradicts that virtual/online training is a potential barrier for women. The study showed a higher level of CSE (Computer Self Efficiency), PEU (Perceived ease of use), PU (Perceived Usefulness) and BI (Behavioural intention to use) for female than male participants, a result that greatly surprised the researchers (Chinyamurindi and Louw, 2010). Interestingly, this study could
mean that, for younger generations, e-learning may actually support greater sex/gender equity for women. The authors commented that qualitative research is needed to understand the results, advice I incorporated in my research methodology. The authors also recommended to include age as a variable in future research, which is one of the reasons I aimed to include training programmes in my research that were targeted towards different levels of seniority.

Training programmes are often developed around a set of competencies, or the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed to successfully perform a role. A comparison between the required level of competency versus the current level of competency determines the training need (Salas and Stagl, 2011), an approach which was also apparent in my data analysis. Competencies are often positioned as gender-neutral and objective in training programmes; however, skills and competencies are argued to be social constructions, and in essence gendered (Ely and Padavic, 2007; Benschop and Doorewaard, 1998). This view is confirmed by two studies, that are important to highlight. First is a study by Blithe (2019) who reflected on her work as a strength-based trainer and found that, even though the programme texts did not reveal any explicit gendering, in practice strengths were valued in unequal ways and linked to binary gender categories, perceived as either a typical male strength or female strength by the trainees. Training participants drew on their existing binary views of femininity and masculinity and the skills associated with women and men, and the way the material and training were interpreted was not in line with the actual training text. The second study analysed 266 business cases published by a large Canada based publisher between August 2013 – 2014 (Sharen and McGowan, 2019). Only 19% featured a female leading character and only in 37% of these cases was the female lead character the sole focus, versus 65% in the case of male lead characters. In addition, the presence and voice of the female lead was less dominant than in cases with male leads. In terms of quality, women lead characters were represented as less visionary and creative, risk averse, less rational and decisive, with fewer interorganisational collaborations, less agentic, with less challenging experiences that develop identity, more emotional, cautious, less certain, more ethical and focussing on details at the expense of the bigger picture. Female lead characters were positioned as assertive though. Finally, there was a strong
need to establish the credibility of female lead characters which was non-existent with the male lead characters. The authors argued that although cases are positioned as neutral, they reflect a hidden curriculum that reinforces gender stereotypes and as a result maintain status quo of underrepresentation of women in leadership. Hence, the authors argue, a trainer’s role is not just to teach skills to do a job, but also to embrace the social context in which the skills will be applied. The emphasis on the role of the trainer will also be a key outcome of my research, as will be discussed later.

A final study, that is important to highlight, is by Stead (2014), who interviewed six women who experienced action learning as part of a leadership development programme. This study is very similar to my research in terms of business context and research participants, with the exception that participants in this research were only women, whereas my research included both women and men. Action learning focuses on peer learning, solving real business cases and challenges. The experiences of the women highlighted the perceptions of gendered power dynamics in action learning, and the dominance and confirmation to masculine norms, which impacted the leadership development of the women interviewed. The women were not able or willing to share their feelings about gender power dynamics, possibly driven by the dominant principle of trust and togetherness in action learning, making it difficult to raise differences and gender challenges. The author emphasised the high demands on facilitators (and arguably trainers) to be able and willing to discuss issues of gender, power, and interests. This was a key finding in my research as well, especially since trainers who participated in my research mentioned they felt they were not qualified or trained to have these discussions.

Training outcome

Training outcome in the training literature is approached from different perspectives such as generalisation and retention (Ford, Baldwin and Prasad, 2018); proximal outcomes and distal outcomes (Kozlowski and Bell, 2009); skill expansion (short term), transfer (mid and long term) and organisational success (long term) (Tonhäuser and Büker, 2016); affective reactions, utility reactions, declarative knowledge and application based knowledge (Tracey et al., 2001) and an encompassing model used by Gully and Chen (2010) (based on Kraiger,
Ford and Salas, 1993), that suggests three outcomes of training: cognitive outcomes (knowledge and the structure of knowledge); behavioural outcomes (training transfer, skill generalisation and adaptation); and affective outcomes (attitude, motivation, satisfaction, self-efficacy and perceived utility). The eleven studies reviewed in the area of sex/gender and training outcomes are fragmented in terms of outcome measures. Nine out of eleven studies reported an impact of sex/gender on training outcome (Figure 5).

**Figure 5. Overview of reviewed articles - Training Outcome**

The Training Outcome research is sex-category based and decontextualised in its data collection. However, reference was made to gendered environments, stereotypical gender roles, masculine cultures, and the ability to implement and benefit from training, to explain the reported lower levels of training implementation intention, training satisfaction, post-training behaviours and career prospect for women. Important perspectives are the influence of dominant norms and practices on motivation for training, ability to implement, and opportunity to benefit from, training. In one study, the training outcome research showed the dangers of quantitative, sex-category based, decontextualised research with for example the recommendation to add women to increase trainee satisfaction (Giangreco et al., 2010).
An important study to highlight, because it contradicts the majority of studies reviewed, focussed on the difference between female and male training participants in their reaction to training, and specifically subjective task value and motivation to transfer training to the job (Gegenfurtner, 2020). The study found no difference between female and male training participants, except for attainment value, which relates to the importance of doing well on a task related to their own sense of self. The author recommended that theoretical models on training effectiveness, which consider gender as a prominent factor, are unproductive, that gendered training strategies are redundant, and that claims of gender differences are overinflated and costly. Given these strong statements, and the literature discussed up to now that reported an impact of sex/gender in training, it is worthwhile to interrogate this study in more detail and the following considerations are offered: first, one could question the theoretical foundation of the hypotheses, that subjective task value and motivation to transfer are impacted by sex category, based on research highlighting similarities and differences between women and men in arguably different areas: job satisfaction, family-work identity, career aspiration, verbal skills, and leadership effectiveness. Secondly, the trainees entered the programmes voluntarily, so very likely went through a selection process to ensure the course content and training approach met their training need. Thirdly, the one area where one could theoretically expect a difference in the measures between women and men is in attainment value, which relates to the sense of self. The sense of self and identity work is critically important for the development of women (Clarke, 2011;Debebe, 2011) and, not surprisingly, a difference was found on this measure, which was not discussed. Finally, this research measured interest, intent and motivation, not actual implementation, which is, as has been discussed, when barriers may arise for women. This study argued that it confirmed the gender similarity hypothesis. However, the gender similarity hypothesis strongly advocates the importance of context in understanding differences and similarities between women and men (Hyde, 2014), whereas this study emphasised only sex category and not gendered contexts.

A second study, that is important to look at more closely, researched training satisfaction and implementation (Bradley and Lee, 2007). The importance of this study is that it researched an information technology training that, in terms of content, could typically be
perceived as training where sex/gender does not play a role, because using an IT system may not rely on the same level of interpersonal dynamics as, for example, communication training or leadership training. However, the authors who researched university employees in the USA around an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system implementation, found a significantly lower level of training satisfaction for women than men and a stronger need for more training for women than men. This is an important finding because training satisfaction was found to impact the use of the ERP system. The authors questioned whether the training methods were appropriate for women and men or whether maybe the use of the system was different for women and men. This research highlights that is important to understand any gendered differences in the realities of a job, to ensure that training is effective for both women and men.

**A sex/gender-sensitive model of training**

The reviewed literature on sex/gender, training, and sex/gender in combination with training, brought together theoretical and empirical literature from different disciplinary and regional perspectives. As discussed, current training theory and practice does not recognise the role of sex/gender. However, the reviewed literature has shown that sex/gender impacts training in many, important ways. Of the 78 multidisciplinary studies from all over the world, conducted between 2000 – 2020 on sex/gender in combination with training, 90% of the studies reported an impact of sex/gender in training, either in the work environment, trainee characteristics, (the interaction with) training design and/or training outcome. Based on these 78 empirical studies, I developed a sex/gender-sensitive model of training as per Figure 6, to synthesize how sex/gender impacts employee training.

The sex/gender-sensitive model of training I developed is in response to the criticism of Baldwin and Ford (1988) and Gully and Chen (2010) that training research lacks theoretical guidance on how individual and environmental factors interact and impact training. It also responds to the suggestion that in training research, social and cultural constraints have received very little attention (Blume et al. 2010). Instead of perceiving my model as a fully developed theory on the role of sex/gender in training, I see the aim of the model as a disruption of the default narrative that employee training is sex/gender-neutral.
Figure 6. A sex/gender-sensitive model of training

- Society
  - Gender cultural orientation
  - Employment protection
  - Family policies such as childcare and parental leave
  - Country training culture
  - Social norms in terms of part-time/full-time work

- Intersectionality
  - Age
  - Education level
  - Race
  - Ethnicity
  - Nationality
  - Class

- Work environment
  - Hegemonic masculine cultures
  - Male dominance in leadership positions
  - Gender job and role stereotyping
  - Gendered power and privilege
  - Gendered access to training
  - Gendered opportunities for workplace learning
  - Gendered supervisor support
  - Gendered subordinate support
  - Sexual harassment
  - Diversity and inclusion policies and initiatives

- Gendered realities, schemes, norms, and expectations

- Personal Circumstances
  - Care responsibilities
  - Maternal/paternal leave
  - Part time/full-time work

- Trainee Characteristics
  - Lived gendered experiences, beliefs, opportunities, challenges, and needs, impact a trainee’s:
    - Professional identity development
    - Level of self-efficacy
    - Training needs and priorities
    - Training design needs and preferences
    - Perception of capacity to transfer
    - Learning and cognitive states/styles
    - Motivation to train and learn

- Training Design
  - Gendered nature of content, focus, and theories
  - Gendered competencies (ranking and gendered associations)
  - Sex/gender group composition
  - Gendered group dynamics, norms, and behaviours
  - Gender sensitivity of facilitation
  - Enculturation/reflection of company dominant culture

- Outcome
  - Perceptions of importance; visibility and inclusion of gendered perspectives, and experiences
  - Gendered training relevance
  - Gendered training satisfaction
  - Gendered ability to transfer
  - Gendered career progression
  - Gendered wage gap
The model reflects how many of the elements of current training theories and models, are gendered, or in other words, that being a woman, man or arguably non-binary training participant may first impact to what extent these important elements are available to the training participant, for example access to training and supervisory support. Second, the model highlights that areas such as learning states, motivation, and efficacy may be different for women and men, dependent on lived gender experiences, challenges, and needs. This confirms the suggestion by Gully and Chen (2010) that sex/gender may impact training participants’ information processing, focus, motivation, and emotions.

The model also includes additional factors that have not been included in theories and models to date, such as societal gender culture, family friendly policies, gendered norms and expectations, personal context such as care responsibilities and subordinate support. The importance of these additional factors may mean that current theories and models are mainly applicable to male learners. In addition, the impact of intersectionality is included as an important consideration, addressing that gendered experiences interact with, and are impacted by, for example, the trainee’s race, age, class, and ethnicity.

The model also reflects that the thoughts, beliefs, and behaviours of training participants are not independent of the environment but socially and culturally situated and constrained or supported by gendered environments, norms and expectations, opportunities, and barriers. Instead of regarding the work environment, training design and trainee characteristics as separate elements, impacting training outcome (Tonhäuser and Büker, 2016; Burke and Hutchins, 2008; Baldwin and Ford, 1988), the trainee characteristics are positioned as embedded in, and impacted by, a gendered environment. This allows for an understanding of training as a gendered practice, and the role of the structure, culture, and processes in organisations (Sheerin, Hughes and Garavan, 2020). Instead of an individual effort, training is a situated, collective, and social effort (Lave, 1996; Lave and Wenger, 1991). Importantly the sex/gender-sensitive model of training highlights the gendered nature of situated learning (Salminen-Karlsson, 2005).
The vast majority of the sex/gender impact reported in the reviewed studies disadvantages women and femininities, and hence it could be suggested that training that positions itself as gender-neutral is in fact gender blind with the risk of supporting continuation of sex/gender inequality or, as Griffith (2006 p392) argued: “as ever with philosophical and theoretical attempts to be neutral, it tends to the masculine”. In an analysis of the absence of gender in literature on lifelong learning, Rogers (2006) stated that the absence of gender is not value neutral but a silent form of violence, that reproduces traditional power structures. A gender-neutral approach to training and training theories may not reflect the gendered reality of differences, especially when not acknowledging the barriers that women and non-hegemonic men face in a hegemonic masculine work environment, dominated by men.

Research questions

Guided and informed by a newly developed understanding of how the training system is gendered, as reflected in the sex/gender-sensitive model of training, and the issues for women and femininity that were highlighted, my research focussed on understanding the role of sex/gender training in a corporate environment. The barriers for career progression of women in companies (cf. p9) could be maintained and supported by current training practices. Who has access to training and especially who is invited to participate in more aspirational leadership training, or talent programmes, creates the context from which women distil how successful behaviour is defined and who is eligible for leadership positions. In addition to the gendered training dynamics discussed, women and men may receive messages about the ‘script’ (Butler, 2006) and the behaviours, expertise and knowledge that are successful and appropriate (Griffiths, 2006). In that sense, training is not only part of, but helps to create the gendered business context that women and men operate in.

Research questions

- What is the role of sex/ gender in corporate training programmes, as experienced by the participants, organisers, and trainers of these programmes?
- What role do current training practices play in sex/gender (in)equity?
- Can training practices become more sex/gender inclusive and equitable?
Chapter 3. Methodology and methods

This chapter will begin by discussing the theoretical framework that guided my research, my ontology and epistemology. Next, my research methodology and design, quality criteria, method of data collection and method of data analysis will be discussed. Finally, I will reflect on the ethical considerations that guided my research.

Ontology

The ontological position guiding my research was constructivist, meaning that reality is created in social interaction. I do not believe there is one reality in terms of unambiguous categories of women and men, or feminine and masculine gender that automatically results from the female and male biological sex categories, with uniform needs, desires, and behaviours. Gender was approached not as something we have, but instead as something we think, feel, and do, associated with identifying as a woman, man or non-binary person. In my view, gender is constructed and culturally, historically, and socially situated, leading to a complex and fluid reality in which truth cannot be measured. The concept ‘gendered’ was used as an adjective in my research to signal a difference in impact between sexes/gender identities.

In addition, sex categories and gender, as systems of difference (Ely and Padavic, 2007), are related to power and connected to other inequality regimes such as class, race, and ethnicity wherein power is expressed through the control of resources, agendas, and behaviours (Benschop and van den Brink, 2014; Holvino, 2010; Acker, 2006). The needs and experiences of women are systematically ignored in society and in workplaces, women are not equally represented in corporate leadership positions and are still paid less for the same work as men (Criado-Perez, 2019). However, this reality is not fixed and independent but created in social and cultural interaction and hence can be changed. Beliefs and attitudes or constructs (the way we see the world) can be challenged to develop new constructs. In this sense my ontology was critical in terms of wanting to challenge common beliefs and practices, as well as believing that knowledge, and hence training, is related to more powerful positions.
The world of training, and learning through training, was not perceived as an absolute reality. Training was approached not as the acquisition of knowledge by an individual, but as a process of participation in the sociocultural practice of a community (Wenger, 1998; Lave, 1996). In addition, learning was not only approached from a cognitive perspective, but also included affective and behaviour/skills components (Kraiger, Ford and Salas, 1993). In line with developments in the training literature (cf. p20), the learner was seen as an active participant in the learning, not as a passive recipient. Learning interacts with events in the environment, both within an organisation as well as in the wider society (Bell et al., 2017; Kolb and Kolb, 2016). Therefore, it was important to not only understand the individual sense making of training and learning experiences but also how the thinking and development is based on the participation in a culture, such as a profession, a company, or a society (Ottsen, 2019; Lee-Ashcraft and Lockwood-Harris, 2014). Kumra (2014, p280) calls this:

…’becoming a professional’ is much more than simply acquiring technical competence. It comprises a way of ‘being’...

In that sense, training can be regarded as a culturally organised activity by the company where the training takes place (Scott and Palincsar, n.d.), which also links to the idea of a “script” for doing gender (Butler, 2006). In a company, training is part of enculturation, or learning the way we do things, as was highlighted in the research by Giazitzoglu and Muzio (2020), discussed on p40. This applies to doing gender as well as the topic of the training (sales, leadership, meetings etc):

In addition, one becomes a member of a reference group of peers who share a professional mentality, and a common set of values and beliefs about how one should behave professionally. This professional orientation shapes learning style through habits acquired in professional training and through the more immediate normative pressures involved in being a competent professional (Kolb and Kolb, 2016 p11).

Bourdieu (2018 p109) argued that human beings are at the same time biological beings as well as social agents who exist in and through their relation to a social space or “fields”:
Social space, [is] an abstract space constituted by the ensemble of subspaces or fields (economic, intellectual, artistic, academic, bureaucratic, etc.) owing their structure to the unequal distribution of a particular species of capital...

From this perspective, a training environment is more than relationships and objects/subjects, but more like a “field of forces” (James, 2011 p3), with different compositions of economic, cultural, and social capital, as well as power:

Social fields are spaces of competition, in which there are inequities in access to the stakes (capitals) of that competition, and the form in which this competition is carried out is through practice (Rawolle and Lingard, 2013 p124).

Training environments as “fields of forces”, related to resources and power, are also reflected in research by Riddell, Ahlgren and Weedon (2009) who found that the learning culture of a company (impacted by the knowledge intensity of the industry) can entrench existing inequalities. Learning cultures can vary from on-going learning being expected and supported as a way of life, and employees responsible and ambitious to maximise learning and careers, to a more limited approach to learning, focussing on skills to do jobs more effectively with less interest in the employees’ growth and development.

These different perspectives on training require a critical lens. Bourdieu (2018) stressed the importance of challenging common-sense ideas, as what seems the nature of things is actually a difference produced by social logic. Training programmes, organised and conducted in a business environment, potentially reinforce a social logic, or a ‘script’ for expected and accepted behaviours, which may impact the equity and inclusion of sex and gender. As discussed before, the concept of ‘script’ is derived from Butler (2006) who compared the performance of gender to actors in a play, who can all play their role a little bit differently, however all have to follow their script. This role of training as part of reinforcing a social logic, or script, became even more important for my research when considering the essence of the multitude of theories surrounding gender equity, such as: Role Congruity Theory- gender stereotypes create expectations regarding suitable roles and
behaviours within roles (Eagly and Karau, 2002); Status Construction Theory - unequal social status is assigned to the sexes (Ridgeway, 1991); Theory of Tokenism – numerical underrepresentation leads to subjective experiences of difference (Kanter, 1977). All these theories highlight the importance of society and organisational culture, impacting the social construction of gender and expectations regarding suitable gender behaviour and roles (Hoobler et al., 2018; Powell, 2014).

Based on the above, the theoretical framework for my research was critical socioculturalism, an interest in experiences of the individual but focussing on how participation in the broader cultural, social, and institutional context shaped the training experiences and learning. I applied this theoretical framework as a way of looking at my research, a way that works for the purpose of my study, instead of suggesting that this perspective exclusively represents the intrinsic nature of training and learning (Cobb, 1994). The difference between sociocultural and constructivist theory in education is explained as the latter being focussed on the individual whereas the former is concerned with the participation in a culture: individual knowledge (maths as an active construction) versus knowledge as a discipline (maths as an enculturation). In that sense socioculturalism is a broader perspective than constructivist theory:

A sociocultural theorist, when interpreting a learning situation, might attend to the broader social system in which the learning is happening and will draw interpretations about an individual’s thinking and development based on his or her participation in culturally organized activities. An account of learning and development through the lens of constructivist theory, in contrast, is concerned with the individual - and the ways in which sense making happens through the individual’s accommodation of experience (Scott and Palincsar n.d. p4).

Although the sociocultural and constructivist perspectives complement each other in understanding learning and development, a sociocultural approach helps to move away from a focus on individual differences between women and men towards a focus on the conditions for the possibility of learning. For this aim, it is not required to understand individual cognitive development but rather to move outside the training setting and
consider how the wider sociocultural context impacts experiences of sex and gender, and training equity and inclusion (Cobb, 1994). In addition, in socioculturalism, there is focus on the norms and discourses prevalent in the practice community (Scott and Palincsar, nd), which is important for the critical element of my research. As discussed before, criticality in my research is applied to challenging common beliefs and practices that may lead to gender inequity in training. My aim was not to stop at understanding lived experiences but understand why these experiences are what they are and what can be done to address any social conflict resulting from and implied by these (Lincoln and Guba, 2016). Criticality was reflected in all stages of my research as outlined in Table 3.

**Table 3. Criticality in the research design**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ontology</th>
<th>Recognising a reality of inequality, power, and privilege</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Epistemology</td>
<td>Recognising that knowledge claims are part of ‘regimes’ of truth and related to power, inequality and exclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>Stimulating critical reflection with participants to create a “cognitive shift” (Hoyt and Kennedy, 2008 p218), embracing the “emancipatory function of knowledge” (Scotland, 2012 p13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>Gender subtext analysis: concealed organisational processes and practices that seem neutral and impersonal, however in effect produce and reproduce gender differences and inequalities (Raaijmakers et al. 2018; Bendl, 2008; Benschop and Doorewaard, 1998)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Epistemology**

My epistemological position was that of subjectivism, looking at individual experiences, beliefs, and attitudes, however recognising that these experiences and interpretations are socially constructed and influenced by power structures. These experiences are not absolute but historically, socially, and culturally situated. The knowledge that people have about their social world, and their experiences and beliefs, may be impacted by inequality and may contribute to the status quo of power relations. In the broad range of experiences, I was not
assuming one is more true or better than the other. Not all women may have excluding experiences and some men may also have excluding experiences, and the diversity of the experiences reflects the diversity of being and ‘doing’ woman and man (Butler, 2006; West and Zimmerman, 1987). It was less interesting for the purpose of my research to understand how gender and learning are socially constructed during training programmes. Instead, the aim was to understand people’s attitudes, beliefs, and experiences regarding the interaction between sex /gender and the different aspects of training, the training outcome, and the sociocultural context.

A key challenge for my research that I came across in the gender literature was the recognition that common-sense views would significantly impact my research when exploring how and why sex/gender played a role in experiences with training. This was firstly based on the finding that most women deny gender discrimination, even when data confirms it is the case, and they know that women in general experience discrimination (Crosby, 1984). One of the interesting reasons Crosby stated is that people apparently need a vision that the world is just and that they engage in cognitive distortions to convince themselves that this is indeed the case. In addition, Crosby suggested that people cope better when they blame themselves for their fate and stating that one is discriminated against is emotionally and socially disturbing, which is confirmed by more recent research of Kantola (2008). Similarly, system justification theory suggests that people are motivated to justify existing social and economic systems, even at the expense of self-interest, in order to reduce “uncertainty, threat, and social discord” (Jost, 2019 p263). As a result, “even members of disadvantaged groups would-for psychological reasons- want to believe that the existing social system is legitimate and justified” (p265; emphasis in the original). This could be one of the reasons why personal choice is often mentioned as the reason for the underrepresentation of women (Hoobler, Lemmon and Wayne, 2014; Stellinga, 2009).

Secondly, the Women in the Workplace 2017 report (Thomas et al. 2017) highlights that a third of female respondents agreed that women are well represented in their company, even when only one in ten leadership positions in their company was a woman. One can assume that this is because under-representation is seen as the result of personal choices and not structural barriers (Acker, 2009). Benschop and Doorewaard (1998 p802) point to
the strength of rationalisation processes and how the explicit statement of equal opportunities for women covers practices of inequality:

...there is no gender inequality and if there is, it has nothing to do with gender but with history, individual excellence and coincidence.

The concern with common-sense beliefs was even more apparent when considering the observation by Metz and Kulik (2014) that women may be losing their ability and motivation to recognise gender inequity as the focus on individual differences, and the dominant comparison between historic versus current positions of women, makes it impossible to recognise group-based disadvantages. Based on the challenges and concerns with recognising the impact and role of sex/gender, the other area that I wanted to explore, and hence was part of my epistemology, was how insights and reflections on ‘common-sense’ training and development practices, can lead to increased consciousness, agency and changed beliefs about the self and the ability to identify potentially excluding practices. Or in other words, to understand if and how “the emancipatory function of knowledge is embraced” (Scotland, 2012 p13).

My epistemology was critical in terms of an understanding that what and how people learn, is part of ‘regimes’ of truth and related to power, inequality and exclusion. Knowledge that people have is not neutral as it can lead to, and influence, powerful positions. With a critical position the researcher can have an active role, is an integral part of the research (Robson and McCartan, 2016), and can establish transformations with participants instead of for them (Scotland, 2012). I would have struggled to be detached in the discussions with participants and I was relieved to read about the option to have equitable conversations with my participants and be allowed to show my own vulnerability and share personal information (Petersen, 2011), expecting that by speaking about our experiences we can change and rework some of our interpretations and identify some of the power relations, common-sense assumptions and contradictions (Nind, Boorman and Clarke, 2012).

An epistemological challenge in my research was how to establish whether expressed thoughts, feelings and behaviours are expressions of gender (Ely and Padavic, 2007). Is it
only when the participants themselves interpret these as connected to a sex category or gender, or it is me as researcher assigning these expressions to culturally established gendered ways of thinking, feeling, and acting? Assigning a gendered meaning to an expression can actually be self-producing (Hearn, 2014) and raises difficult questions: “what is specifically masculine about particular masculinities?” (Collinson and Hearn, 1994 p10). Connell (2006) defends the need for the use of the concepts of femininity and masculinity as a way of naming the participation of women and men in the area of gender, in order to differentiate from other areas in social life. Consequently, the criteria for femininities and masculinities should recognise the way that women and men themselves define womanhood, manhood, self-identity and the ‘other’ (Collinson and Hearn, 1994), which became one of the areas of discussion with my research participants (cf. p76).

Ely and Padavic (2007 p1138) suggest you should not focus on differences between women and men, but instead focus on the features of organisations, or in my case corporate training programmes, that impact women and men differently or similarly:

In this view, sex difference is simply a signal of historical, cultural, and organizational processes in need of explanation.

The main aim of my research was not to compare the voices of women and men, but to understand the interaction between sex/gender and the training programmes researched. While the qualitative studies with research participants that were reviewed as part of the literature review (cf. p39) provided a more contextualised perspective on not just sex differences but gendered environments and experiences, only three of these qualitative studies were conducted with both women and men in the same research. This seemed a missed opportunity in terms of understanding the perspectives of both women and men and the ability to reflect on femininities as well as masculinities. In addition, Due Billing and Alvesson (2014) argue that only including women in qualitative studies may lead to self-serving bias and moral storytelling, whereby the female interviewees position themselves with only positive attitudes and behaviours, and men and masculinities with only negatives. Women and men can both ‘do’ femininities and masculinities and are both impacted by social, cultural, and historical beliefs and practices.
The key rival proposition of my research was that being a woman or man and femininities and masculinities play no role and that the personality of the trainee, such as being an extrovert or introvert, drives training experiences and outcomes, independent of the sex or gender of the individual training participant.

**Research methodology**

Based on my ontology and epistemology, and my aim to explore, understand and interrogate experiences, values, and assumptions, as well as underlying social and cultural beliefs and practices, a qualitative research methodology was chosen. Whereas quantitative studies would assume one objective reality, my position was an ontology of multiple realities and meaning that is contextual (Twining et., 2017). In addition, my research questions focussed on the how and why, and not on what or how many, or in other words on understanding, not measuring, for which a quantitative approach would have been more applicable (Robson and McCartan, 2017; Dasgupta, 2015).

The vast majority of the research in this area to date was quantitative, correlational research in which causality cannot be concluded (Tracey et all, 2001 – cf. p22). Gender was measured as a binary position, assigning a value of either 0 or 1 to categorize training participants as woman or man, interpreting gender as a fixed sex category. Quantitative binary research may lead to false notions of essential biological differences between women and men without consideration for the social, cultural, and historic context, and how these differences are not essential but constructed and hence can be deconstructed. In addition, self-reported questionnaires may only reflect gender stereotypes present in the culture researched (Due Billing and Alvesson, 2014). Gender reflects how people think, feel and act as a woman, man or non-binary person, in a specific context. This is very relevant in the context of training, a situation in which “...workers actively seek ideas by juxtaposing their memories with what they see, hear, feel and do during training” (Yelon et al., 2004 p99). In addition, a quantitative binary measurement of the impact of a sex category does not incorporate power differences, or understand the social processes during the training, for example participation in the group setting. Nor does it consider how organisations and
training settings may support or hinder femininities and masculinities. As Hoobler et al. (2018 p2491) argue:

“As a social construction, gender should be measured as such. Stated previously, using biological sex as a proxy for gender is not adequate to tease apart the complexities associated with what gender is...”.

While social category-based research can be helpful and important to show (in)equality, it is important to move beyond sex category based, binary, decontextualised research and consider the interrelated facets of gender including, but not limited to, gendered norms and expectations, beliefs, and values. Calas, Smircich and Holvino (2014) suggest that gender in organisation research is exhausted and instead focus should be on how organisations are gendering. This level of complexity is difficult to capture with quantitative correlational studies and qualitative research is needed to understand the complex dimensions of the role of sex/gender in training and understand why and how sex/gender impacts training. In my research, a qualitative methodology provided a chance to explore the “deep cognitive structures through which we perceive, organise, interpret, and act on cues from the environment” (Debebe et al., 2016 p232). Finally, a qualitative methodology enabled me to challenge dominant narratives that help sustain cultural and social practice.

Research design

Case Study

The design for my study was an exploratory case study approach with the aim to explore if and how sex category and gender impact employee training in a corporate environment. The rational for a case study was based on my need to understand the complex social phenomena of training experiences, the fact that my main research question focussed on “how” training is experienced, that I had little control over the behaviours of my participants and that my topic of research is contemporary and situated (Yin, 2018). In addition, a case study aims to understand the dynamics in a single setting (Eisenhardt, 1989), which is appropriate for my research given the fluidity of gender (dynamics) and the importance of
context (setting). Finally, a case provides a connection between practice in context, theory, and research, which is especially relevant to my study (Rule and John, 2015).

An alternative design I have considered was action research. Especially given the emancipatory purpose of my research, as I am hoping my research will contribute to establishing more sex/gender equitable training. Hence, the opportunity of action research to not just explore, describe or explain but also to facilitate action, was potentially very attractive (Robson and McCartan, 2016). Action research could also be appropriate, given my critical research lens. However, my main concern was that I would not have the time during my EdD to conduct action research. Action research requires multiple cycles of problem identification, developing an intervention or change, implementing the change and evaluating the outcome. After evaluating the outcome of an intervention or change, the cycle is repeated and a revised intervention implemented and evaluated (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). In addition, to be able to suggest meaningful and beneficial change ideas, further exploration was needed first, especially in the context of a corporate environment, for which a case study was the most appropriate design. Another alternative design to a case study that I considered was evaluation research, based on the idea that I could draw on evaluation research to understand the training outcome for women and men (outcome evaluation), and/or to understand what happened during the training programmes (process evaluation) as it relates to sex/gender. Robson and McCartan (2018) outline that evaluation research is aimed at assessing effects and effectiveness. These authors also recommend that evaluation research should look beyond whether specified objectives have been met, and consider unplanned processes and outcomes, which would align with my objective to investigate and explore the unknown. However, Clarke (1999) positions evaluation research as aiming to establish the value or worth of a programme or intervention, which was not the purpose of my research. In addition, instead of developing new knowledge, Clarke outlines that evaluation research aims to understand how and to what effect existing knowledge is applied. In my research the aim was to fill the gap of knowledge regarding the role of sex/gender in training. Finally, evaluation research can potentially be sensitive and political (Robson and McCartan, 2016; Clarke, 1999). In my situation, a clear sensitivity would have been towards the training company delivering the
programmes, who may have felt they (and the programme) were evaluated on an aspect (the role and impact of sex/gender), that was not discussed or agreed with the client when designing the programme. In addition, with evaluation research, you need criteria to measure, and a position you can compare your results with. In my research that knowledge was not available. I can imagine Evaluation Research being appropriate when sex/gender equity is a specific, agreed element of the programmes researched, but at this stage I decided it was not an appropriate design.

Small scale studies have been the basis of many established theories in the social sciences (Rule and John, 2015), and building theory from case study research is appropriate when the aim is to provide a fresh perspective on a topic that has been extensively researched, such as training (Eisenhardt, 1989). On the other hand, I support the position that the complexity and unpredictability of social life and human agency makes the development of a generalised theory, that fully explains and predicts, impossible. Developing a best possible explanation that provided relevant insights for practical actions was the aim (Thomas, 2010). This position was also presented when discussing the sex/gender-sensitive model of training as a disruption of the default narrative that employee training is sex/gender-neutral (cf. p48).

The rationale for my case study research was to contribute to the sex/gender-sensitive model of training and address areas that existing research inadequately addresses (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007), such as the why and how of the impact of sex/gender; gender as thoughts, feelings and behaviours; and hearing the voice of women and men. The prior construction of propositions, in line with the sex/gender-sensitive model of training, is an essential part of a case study design. The goal of a case study is to make analytical generalisations not statistical generalisations, or as Yin (2018 p38) describes: a case is not a sample but “the opportunity to shed empirical light on some theoretical concepts or principles”. In my research process, the relationship between the sex/gender-sensitive model of training and the case was dialogical, whereby the evolving model defined and refined the research and the case helped to develop new perspectives on the model (Rule and John, 2015. Important to note though is that the sex/gender-sensitive model of training
can stand on its own feet and the case is an additional but not sole justification: one cannot say that the model is true because I showed you an example (Siggelkow, 2007). A final rationale for a case study design was the relevance for practice: by describing the case company training departments and professional trainers will be able to compare their experiences with the case and relate to it, creating “face-value credibility” (Bachor, 2002 p20). A case study involves the development of stories that people can connect to, that provide insights in order to understand a situation within a particular context (Thomas, 2010). In that sense, the added value of a case study is that it can be motivational in terms of supporting the importance of the research questions, inspirational in terms of developing new ideas and perspectives, and illustrational in terms of a real life example that people can relate to (Siggelkow, 2007).

Opponents of a case study design question the value of individual cases. The main issue stated is generalisability, or how relevant the singular is for the general (Tight, 2021). I have reflected on this concern, and especially on the credibility of my research, and the ability to impact training practice in general, when my research was only conducted as a single case, within a specific context. As will be discussed, my case was a typical case (cf. p65) in terms of the approach to employee training. However, the company that hosted my research is widely perceived and reported as a company that actively promotes and supports sex/gender equity. The benefit of conducting my case study within this company was, as actually suggested by one of the research participants, that if an impact of sex/gender in training is found in a company like the host company, it can be found in any company or organisation. This enhanced the credibility of my research, as well as the fact that such a well-regarded company supported my research. The other key approach to address the concern of credibility of my case study was that it was conducted based on a compelling theoretical proposition (the sex/gender-sensitive model of training), which was developed after an extensive literature review. The case study could hence be positioned to “empirically enhance” this theoretical position to allow for analytic generalisation (Yin, 2018 p38). The concerns with a case study design have progressed from an issue with the singular, towards the quality of the methods use, such as the validity (Robson and
McCartan, 2016). Hence, the quality of my case study approach has been a key focus area in my case study design and implementation, as will be outlined in the next section.

The case in my research (Table 4) consists of a single case with embedded units of analysis (Yin, 2018; Baxter and Jack, 2008).

**Table 4. Defining the case**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Case</th>
<th>The experiences of women and men working in the same company, who attended the same corporate training programme.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Embedded unit of analysis</td>
<td>Three corporate training programmes organised by the same company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources of data collection</td>
<td>- Interviews with individual training participants, who attended the selected training programmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Interviews with the programme leaders of the selected trainings programmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Analysis of training documentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Interviews with trainers of corporate training programmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Researcher field notes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The rationale for a single case with embedded units was to enable me to understand and explore the context of the training programmes within one company, while considering the influence of different programme content and designs (Baxter and Jack, 2008). In addition, the case was chosen to present a typical case, or an example of how corporate training programmes are organised and conducted (Rule and John, 2015). On the other hand, the case will always be particular within the context described (Thomas, 2010).

**Quality criteria**

To ensure my case study research was rigorous and trustworthy, several quality measures have been incorporated when designing and conducting the research. Quality criteria typically considered for case study research are: construct validity, internal and external validity and reliability (Yin, 2018). On the other hand, Lincoln and Guba (1986) suggest parallel criteria to assess a study’s trustworthiness that are more relevant for qualitative
constructivist research: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. These criteria will be discussed in more detail, after which I will summarise how I have incorporated these in my research.

Construct validity questions whether the case study investigates what it aims to investigate, what the link and evidence is from literature and theory to the research questions, the measures, data collection, data analysis and finally conclusions (Gibbert, Ruigrok and Wicki, 2008). For my case this meant defining what I mean by sex/gender and developing the sex/gender-sensitive model of training that allowed me to compare and contrast my data. On the other hand, the purpose of my case study was exploratory, to understand how gender and sex category play a role for women and men in a particular training setting, opening up the opportunity to challenge and redirect the constructs and relationships conceptualized in the sex/gender-sensitive model of training. From this perspective, adequacy of data was important, making sure the case selected was purposeful and the embedded units varied, with a few strong open ended questions, the possibility to triangulate data and looking out for disconfirming experiences (Morrow, 2005).

Objectivity in quantitative research refers to distancing the researcher from the researched. In qualitative research, the distance between researcher and researched is often intentionally decreased, and subjectivity cannot be avoided:

...qualitative researchers acknowledge that the very nature of the data we gather and the analytic processes in which we engage are grounded in subjectivity (Morrow, 2005 p254).

In the parallel concept of confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1986), the focus is on neutrality of the data, not the researcher (Krefting, 1991) and the question is whether the findings represent the situation being researched rather than the beliefs of the researcher, and hence making the research process and decisions explicit is important.

Internal validity questions whether the argument and reasoning in data analysis of the case study is plausible and supporting the conclusions. This requires a research framework,
pattern analysis and triangulation of different perspectives (Gibbert, Ruigrok and Wicki, 2008). The parallel concept of credibility (Lincoln and Guba, 1986) recognises that there are multiple realities and asks whether the researcher recognises and captures those realities so that participants recognise the descriptions (Krefting, 1991). This requires researcher reflexivity, field journals, participant checks, triangulation as well as thick descriptions of experiences and context (Morrow, 2005; Krefting, 1991). In addition, variation should be able to be explained and the suggestion is to look at and report a range of experiences not the average (Krefting, 1991).

External validity questions whether case-based theories can be applied to other settings as well (Gibbert, Ruigrok and Wicki, 2008). As discussed before, my research aimed for analytical generalisation (Yin, 2018). This required providing details of the context of the case as well as the rationale for choosing a specific case. The parallel concept of transferability (Lincoln and Guba, 1986) suggests that the researcher needs to provide sufficient information about themselves as researcher, the research context and process as well as the participants, to allow others to judge whether the research findings are transferrable (Morrow, 2005; Krefting, 1991). In this regard it was important to give readers an idea whether the case was a typical case, an extreme case, an influential case or a diverse range of cases (Baxter and Jack, 2008). This will be discussed when I explain the selection of the training programmes for my research (cf. p71).

Reliability in quantitative research means that the objective is to ensure that a different researcher can follow exactly the same approach, conduct the same study and arrive at the same conclusions (Yin, 2018). In a qualitative case study, it is rare to be able to repeat the same case, as the participants and the context will both have developed and changed. The parallel concept of dependability (Lincoln and Guba, 1986) suggests that the emphasis should be on making the research process explicit and repeatable (Morrow, 2005).

In addition to the above criteria, Lincoln and Guba (1986) developed a fundamentally different set of criteria for interpretivist and constructivist paradigms: fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity and catalytic authenticity. These criteria were very
relevant for my research and have also been considered. Fairness means presenting and supporting all constructions and values in a balanced way, which in my research has been addressed by including both women and men in the research and presenting a range of perspectives, not just an average view.

The authenticity criteria refer to the meaningfulness and usefulness of the research. Ontological and educative authentication were addressed in my research through the use of statements to stimulate critical reflection, not only aiming to understand the experiences and meaning that participants have, but also to help participants understand their own and other constructions of the world and how these are rooted in cultural and socially situated value systems. To be able to accomplish authentication, it is important to understand the context and culture as well as have rapport with the participants (Morrow, 2005). My own business background and knowledge of the company and consumer goods industry, as well as years of experience as a training professional, were important in achieving authentication. In addition, educative authentication was the aim of asking the training participants to provide their perspectives on the data analysis, when interested to do so (an option was provided to express interest on the consent form, cf. Appendix 1, p186). All the training participants confirmed their interest and four participants responded with positive feedback on the data analysis. This leads to the importance of the last set of Lincoln and Guba’s criteria for my research: catalytic (and tactical) authenticity refers to the importance of stimulating action and ensuring the research is empowering, which was the purpose of presenting the research findings to the host company to enable them to enhance the equitability and inclusiveness of their training programmes. In addition, the aim was to share the research findings with the training community to support professional trainers in delivering gender equitable and inclusive training. The train-the-trainer programme that I developed based on my research will be further discussed on p148.

A summary of how I have addressed the quality criteria in my case study is provided in Table 5.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Usual case study research criteria (a)</th>
<th>Parallel qualitative research criteria (b)</th>
<th>Quality measures implemented in my research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Construct validity</td>
<td>Construct validity</td>
<td>- Theoretical framework (the sex/gender-sensitive model of training) developed to guide my research and data analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Multiple sources of evidence and triangulation of data: between training programmes; interviews and training documents; programme participants and programme owners; female and male participants; training participants and trainers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Purposeful case definition and selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Chain of evidence in methods of data gathering, analysis, and interpretation provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Participants review of data analysis and opportunity to comment provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Rival proposition developed and analysed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectivity</td>
<td>Confirmability</td>
<td>- Multiple sources of evidence and triangulation of data (see above)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Researcher reflectivity: field journal and research diary developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Participants review of data analysis and opportunity to comment provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Chain of evidence in methods of data gathering, analysis, and interpretation provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal validity</td>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>- Theoretical framework (the sex/gender-sensitive model of training) developed to explicitly guide my research and data analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Rival proposition developed and analysed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Multiple sources of evidence and triangulation of data (see above)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Participants review of data analysis and opportunity to comment provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Researcher reflectivity: field journal and research diary developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Description of the company, the training context, the training programmes, and participants provided (as far as anonymity allowed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External validity</td>
<td>Transferability</td>
<td>- Description of the company, the training context, the training programmes, and participants provided (as far as anonymity allowed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Describing myself as researcher in the introduction and reflections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Strong rational for case study approach and case selection provided</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Conceptual model of impact of sex/gender in training for application outside the case

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reliability</th>
<th>Dependability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chain of evidence in methods of data gathering, analysis, and interpretation provided</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study database developed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study protocol developed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership agreement and research process with host company formalised</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fairness</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Including voices of both women and men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing a range of experiences, not an average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants review of data analysis and opportunity to comment provided</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ontological and educative authenticity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stimulating critical reflection based on statements regarding sex category and gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing opportunity to reflect on constructions of sex and gender in training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants review of data analysis and opportunity to ask questions and comment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Catalytic and tactical authenticity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presentation of research results to host company and key stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with one host company provided the participants with the opportunity to influence the training practices at their company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Train the Trainer programme for training companies/professionals to learn/discuss opportunities to enhance gender equity and inclusion (cf. p148)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Method of data collection**

**The company**

The company where the research took place is a large consumer goods company with over 150,000 employees operating in more than 100 countries. The company is committed to employee learning and development through a combination of formal, functional and leadership training, as well as offering internships, mentoring, coaching and development opportunities. The company has a long-standing commitment to gender diversity and inclusion and a gender balanced workforce and has achieved equal representation of women and men at management level. The future focus of the company is to continue to
work on creating equal opportunities for women (and other under-represented groups) at senior management and leadership levels, where women are still under-represented.

**Training programme selection**

The selection of training programmes for my research (sampling not being the right case study terminology according to Yin, 2018), was purposeful as well as convenient (Plowright, 2013). The selection was purposeful in regards to the need for information-rich training programmes, that allowed for a reflection on my conceptual framework (the sex/gender-sensitive model of training), and the exploration of different constructs, as well as the relationship between them (Dasgupta, 2015; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). In addition, a range of subjects and seniority of participants was felt important to provide the richness of data required. The selection was convenient as there was a dependency on which training programmes were planned and hence could be part of the research. The company’s Global Leadership Development Team shared with me which programmes were scheduled to run in 2020, including the subject, the number of invitees, the seniority of the target audience, training design and location. Because of the global COVID-19 pandemic, training programmes had to be delayed or cancelled including two of the originally selected face-to-face courses. Two alternative training programmes were selected that had been converted to a virtual delivery. The COVID-19 pandemic limited the opportunity to include additional programmes in the research. A third consideration was the importance of specifying the relevance of the case (Eisenhardt, 1989) and the aim was to include a diverse set of training programmes that are typical for a large company to provide for their employees, although the designs may differ for each company, in order to allow the case to be relevant and illustrative for a wide audience of researchers and practitioners. Fourthly, programmes were selected that ensured a consistency in programme delivery for the training participants without a large element of individual coaching.

Based on the above, three programmes were selected (Table 6). The first was a leadership programme, rolled out to more than 2300 mid-career and senior leaders in the company over a period of two years. The objective was to share the new leadership standards and equip the leadership with the requirement to be successful in the 21st century with its changing rules of agility, purpose, ambiguity, and speed of change. The specific instance that
was researched, took place in the Netherlands. The second programme was functional, a programme well established with a long history within the company. The objective was to teach foundational skills to employees who either recently started in the function or needed to expand their understanding of the function. The specific instance that was researched, was focussed on employees in North America. The third was a senior leadership programme, aimed at leaders around the world who recently had, or in the near future would, move into a senior leadership position and aimed at supporting these senior leaders in making that transition.

Table 6. Training programmes included in the case

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme 1</th>
<th>Programme 2</th>
<th>Programme 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Format</strong></td>
<td>Face-to-face classroom</td>
<td>Fully virtual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Blended with a combination of face to face and virtual sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Training participants in the instance of the programme researched</strong></td>
<td>42 participants; 20 women, 22 men</td>
<td>19 participants; 16 women, 3 men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9 participants; 5 women, 4 men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Training participants interviewed</strong></td>
<td>1 woman, 3 men</td>
<td>2 women, 1 man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 woman; 1 man</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All three programmes were conducted in English. The nationality of the participants in the sessions was not documented as part of the research, but in the interviews, a wide range of nationalities, as well as expatriate experiences were shared. This reflected the international character of the company workforce, independent of the location where the programme was run. In addition to the training participants, for each of the programmes the programme owner, or the employee within the company leading the development and roll out, was interviewed, so three programme owners in total. Finally, four trainers were interviewed, who were not the trainers of the selected programmes, as will be explained on p79.

**Semi-structured interviews**

The interviews conducted with the participants, programme owners and trainers were semi-structured. This gave the participants the freedom to expand and direct the conversation,
while also ensuring as much important information as possible was collected (Yin, 2018; Dasgupta, 2015). Interviews can provide rich data especially when the researched event is infrequent, such as attending training (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). Given a case study is about the particular within context, the interviews provided “a window on a time and a social world that is experienced one person at a time, one incident at a time” (Rubin and Rubin, 2005 p14). As outlined in my ontology and epistemology (cf. p52), my belief in gender identities that are fluid, that gender is not automatically linked to biological sex, as well as the need to ensure that gender equity and inclusion is not just a female issue, drove the importance of not only hearing the voice of women but also the voice of men in my research.

Allowing participants to expand when desired and lead the conversation with their own stories enabled me to explore different layers of meaning (Andrews et al., 2013), and helped me to understand how experiences were influenced by the historic, social and cultural context, as stories represent both experiences and the realities from which they derive (Squire, 2013). This provided me with the possibility to acknowledge individuality in the experiences and explore complexities and contradictions. In addition, it was a flexible method that gave me the opportunity to dive deep into certain aspects (Costley, Elliott and Gibbs, 2010). It also enabled me to recognise how, through the stories we tell, we claim an identity, and share our beliefs and values (Loots, Coppens and Sermijn, 2013; Phoenix, 2013). The stories and experiences shared also revealed different narrative identities in different contexts (Squire, 2013), and in all the interviews the exploration of context was crucial.

The downside of interviews is potential bias with the interviewees aiming to impress the interviewer and “retrospective sensemaking” by the interviewees (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007 p28). In my research I have tried to manage this concern by organising different phases in the interviews, ranging from discussing the experiences with training, to asking about the role of sex/gender and finally, joined critical reflections. This enabled me to hear the different voices as will be discussed further on p151. In addition, I did not approach the interviews as a reflection of reality but as a construction of reality by the interviewees.
(Kantola, 2004). Retrospective sensemaking can be seen as an element of reality construction.

Another potential risk with interviews is that interviewees divulge information that may harm them (Costley, Elliott and Gibbs, 2010). In my research this meant that interviewees could make contributions that were personal and sensitive, or critical of the company, managers, peers and/or the training or trainer. These contributions would be very important to understand how training practices impact equity and inclusion, however when reported insensitively, might have impacted the position, relationships and/or career development of the participant. I have noted this risk in the OU ethics application and the approach in my research was to ensure the approval of the participants with the transcript, and strict anonymization when using specific quotes. This approach received a favourable response from the Ethics Committee’s review. Three interviewees edited their transcript, one of them considerably, and the edited transcript was subsequently used in the data analysis. In addition, a statement was added from the company in the email that they sent out to the training participants regarding my research, to confirm that they are content for staff to be open and honest about their experiences.

**Critical reflection**

To stimulate critical reflection in the interviews with training participants, the work of Hoyt and Kennedy (2008) guided the way I conducted my research. These authors analysed how the beliefs of young women about themselves, and the opportunity to see themselves as leaders, changed when a broader concept of leadership was shared. The young women in their research started to see themselves as agents for change and felt empowered to value their experiences and identities by raising their consciousness and providing safe places to explore. In their study, a “cognitive shift” (Hoyt and Kennedy, 2008 p218) was observed, which enabled the women to conceptualize themselves as leaders by altering how leadership is constructed. My aim was to understand whether I could achieve such a cognitive shift and create awareness of how current training and development programmes possibly create or maintain common-sense gendered constructions and practices, and how this impacts the training outcome for women and men. To achieve this, critical reflection was introduced during the second part of the interviews. After participants shared their
experiences with the training and their perspectives on the role of sex category and gender in the first part of the interviews, critical reflection statements from research and literature on the careers of women, and gendered work environments were shared in the second part of the interviews. The rationale for the selection of the chosen statements was that they stimulated my own critical reflection during my literature review. Core to these statements is that they explore areas of difference between women and men, for example in careers, and barriers to career progression. After the first programme researched, I realised that the statements that reflected academic research about women’s/men’s ways of knowing and women’s/men’s objectives to learn, were not appropriate, because how would participants know how the other sex thinks/learns? As a result, the statements were changed for the subsequent interviews, and focussed on gendered lived experiences, work environment and training design (see Appendix 3, p190 for an overview and development of the critical reflection statements). After sharing each statement, we discussed how the participants felt about these statements, the meaning of these statements for training and development programmes, as well as whether these insights changed the views and interpretation of experiences that were shared in the first part of the interview. These insight-based discussions and reflections, and the knowledge created in these reflections, were co-constructed between the participants and myself and I played a more active role in these reflective discussions and considerations than in the first part of the interviews.

The introduction of the critical reflection statements may resemble a Stimulated Recall Method (SMR). SMR is a method that involves a video or audio recording of a subject in action (for example a teacher teaching a class), and afterwards replaying the recording, and asking the subject to share their thoughts and decision-making processes during the event. The recording is used as a tool to enable the participant to “relive” the event (Calderhead, 1981 p212). The intent of SRM is to recall the thoughts at the time of the event, and a main validity issue is that participants may alter their account of the cognitive processes, for example to present themselves more consistent or favourably (Lyle, 2002). In my research, statements were also used to stimulate reflection, however contrary to RSM, it was the specific intent to understand how the statements changed the narrative and interpretations of the participants and invite a “reordering of perceptions” (Lyle, 2003 p873).
Training participant interviews

After the selected training programmes were completed, the company sent an email to the participants of the training inviting them to participate in the research, along with the research information letter and consent form attached (cf. Appendix 1, p186). The interviews were conducted between February 2020 and November 2020, either face-to-face, Skype/Teams or telephone interviews, and lasted between 40 to 70 minutes. The interviews were either conducted in Dutch or in English, dependent on the preference of the interviewee.

After having researched the 1st programme in January 2020, and having analysed the data and reflected on the interviews, I realised I was assuming how the research participants interpreted gender, which raised confusion at later stages of the interview. This finding relates to the epistemological challenge that I described (cf. p58) about who defines what gender is. In subsequent interviews, I first asked participants if they were willing to share their interpretation of gender, to better understand their experiences and perspectives. In addition, I specifically explored the rival proposition that personalities were more important than the sex/gender of a training participant (cf. Appendix 2, p189 for the development in interview questions).

For the first programme researched in January 2020, the participants were given the choice between face-to-face interview (when geographically possible), Skype or Microsoft Teams interviews, or telephone interviews. The intent was to allow geographically dispersed participants to participate and to be responsive to time constraints, preferred interview location and time, allowing for greater flexibility, and possibly to accommodate any desires for greater anonymity (Lo Iacono, Symonds and Brown, 2016; Irvine, 2011). After the COVID-19 pandemic started, in February 2020, no more face-to-face interviews were conducted and only the option of either a telephone or Teams interview was offered. In total, one participant was interviewed face-to-face, two via telephone and six via Skype/Teams. An important discussion is whether the mode of the interview impacted on the depth and quality of the data collected, and the answer to that question is complex (Weller, 2017). Table 7 shows an overview of positives and negatives of each mode.
### Table 7. Evaluation of interview mode

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positives</th>
<th>Negatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Face-to-face</strong></td>
<td>Physical presence can create feelings of self-consciousness (Adams-Hutcheson and Longhurst, 2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Access to complexity of communication in terms of emotions, gestures and tone of voice, which impact the interpretation and meaning making, as speech is seen and heard, both by the researcher but also the participant (Barr, 2013)</td>
<td>- Researcher can be more self-conscious, feeling more limited in the opportunity to study questions and take notes. (Weller, 2015),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- People may be too shy to be interviewed remotely or self-conscious participants, for example as result of hearing impairments, may be deterred from taking part in online or telephone interviews. (Weller, 2015)</td>
<td>- Time and place limitations, cost of travel (Lo Iacono, Symonds and Brown, 2016; Janghorban, Roudsari and Taghipour, 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Opportunity to reflect on the interaction between mode and space, and seeing the interview as a performance and the location as the stage, impacting the conversation (Weller, 2015).</td>
<td>- Participants may speak less and provide fewer details or elaboration (Irvine, 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Telephone</strong></td>
<td>- More interjection by the researcher to compensate for the lack of non-verbal communication which disrupts the flow and alters the interaction (Weller, 2015).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The lack of visual clues can decrease interviewer effect (Deakin and Wakefield, 2014)</td>
<td>- Loss of context and visual clues may mean an important loss of data, in regards to the ‘presentation of self’ and impression management (Goffman, 1959)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Being able to concentrate on what is said because the physical and the context are not visible (Hanna, 2012).</td>
<td>- The complexity of communication in terms of emotions, gestures and tone of voice, may not be interpreted correctly both by the researcher but also the participant (Barr, 2013).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Time pressure and travel cost may favour telephone interviews versus face-to-face interviews (Deakin and Wakefield, 2014)</td>
<td>- Emotional and affectual responses may be different when some of our senses are filtered through a screen than in person, creating a sense of discomfort or disruptions of flow, when we are not able to share smells, sounds, food, drink and bodily senses (Adams-Hutcheson and Longhurst, 2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skype/Teams</strong></td>
<td>- More easily cancelled than face to face interviews (Deakin and Wakefield, 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The advantage of providing enhanced visual clues versus telephone calls (Weller, 2015).</td>
<td>- The loss in social contact may be compensated by the extra time and comfort when speaking from participants’ own homes (Iacono et al., 2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Communicating via a device (such as a computer) can feel natural, creating a different but comfortable atmosphere (Adams-Hutcheson and Longhurst, 2017)</td>
<td>- Relative anonymity of online interviews may have created an environment where participants find it easier to share and be authentic compared to face-to-face interview (Lo Iacono, Symonds and Brown, 2016; Janghorban, Roudsari and Taghipour, 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The loss in social contact may be compensated by the extra time and comfort when speaking from participants’ own homes (Iacono et al., 2016)</td>
<td>- Some participants may experience remote online interviews having less “pressure of presence” (Weller, 2015 p17) with the possibility to only focus on talk and no other expectation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Relative anonymity of online interviews may have created an environment where participants find it easier to share and be authentic compared to face-to-face interview (Lo Iacono, Symonds and Brown, 2016; Janghorban, Roudsari and Taghipour, 2014)</td>
<td>- Time pressure and travel cost may favour skype versus face-to-face interviews (Deakin and Wakefield, 2014)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In summary, key areas to consider when interviewing by telephone or online versus face-to-face are the opportunity to build rapport (or ease in interaction, trust and togetherness), depth of discussions and lack of (or limited) non-verbal communication (Lo Iacono et al., 2016; Weller, 2015). The question whether the mode has impacted data depth and quality is difficult to assess for my research. Even though telephone interviews are perceived as a viable option for qualitative interviews (Hanna, 2012), a degree of visual presence seems beneficial for in-depth interactions, and telephone interviews may have provided less opportunity to build rapport, and may have solicited less depth and opportunity to jointly reflect in my research (Weller, 2015; Irvine, 2011). The use of online video calls has widely expanded and diversified and there is strong evidence that video calls can create valid, reliable data, and are no longer a secondary option to face-to-face interviews (Lo Iacono, Symonds and Brown, 2016). Concerns with Skype/Teams as the medium have reduced, given the exponential growth of its use during the COVID-19 pandemic, and hence technology will be increasingly unnoticed (Adams-Hutchinson and Longhurst, 2017). In addition, I share the view that all communication is mediated, and one is not necessarily more natural or artificial, but instead, all interactions are structured and moderated by customs, context, and expectations. On the other hand, exposure to full visual clues and context is an additional benefit of face-to-face interviews and especially in my research, as space or location can give an impression of status and power (Weller, 2015). Being able to see the choice of location, signs of rank and gender expressions was important additional data: the beautiful corner office in a newly build office building communicated success and power and provided valuable contextual information for a specific interview. In addition, as the researcher, being able to show myself in my professional business outfit possibly enhanced the rapport and respect for me as a peer and interesting conversation partner.

Concluding, the mode of the interviews reflected the aim to provide participants a certain level of control over the research process (Hanna, 2012), flexibility and responsiveness to participants practical considerations, geographical locations and mode preferences, the importance of providing a range of communication options (Weller, 2015) and the impossibility to meet face-to-face after the outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. I would suggest these rationales outweighs any concerns with data quality.
Programme leader/ owner interview

In addition to the training participants, the programme leader, also called owner, of each training programme was interviewed: the company employee who was part of the design team, whose role typically included developing a training design brief, the needs analysis, working with a provider to develop the training, development of evaluation criteria and management of the implementation. The company’s Global Learning Team connected me with the programme leader via email whom I subsequently invited for an interview. For each of the three programmes, one owner was interviewed via Skype/Teams (cf. Appendix 4, p192 for the interview guide). The interviews were all conducted in English and ranged from 46 – 51 minutes. The main objective of the interview was to understand the background of the programme, the objectives, the design principles and intended outcomes, and understand how sex category and gender played a role in the programme design, if any.

Trainer interviews

As a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic, two of the three training programmes that were originally agreed with the company were cancelled/ postponed. This paused my data collection and provided the opportunity to reflect on how I would share the outcomes of my research with my practice, fellow trainers, and corporate clients alike. I also realised I had missed including trainers in my research to gain their perspective on the role of sex/gender when designing and facilitating corporate training. The selection of trainers was again purposeful as well as convenient (Plowright, 2013), when I contacted the network of trainers I partner with when supporting global clients. Four trainers agreed to participate in an interview (cf. Appendix 5, p193 for the interview guide), which were all conducted in English, and which ranged from 47 – 74 minutes.

Field notes

After each interview I wrote down my impressions and thoughts as to how I felt as a researcher and how the interview went, which questions should be improved, added, deleted. In addition, I wrote down notes on what I learned, emerging themes, new ideas to research in literature and how the interviews differed from previous interviews (Eisenhardt, 1989).
Training documentation

The company shared with me a wide variety of training documents such as the training programme invitations, workshop slides, accompanying books, facilitator guides, time plans and schedules, videos and articles that were part of the pre-work and/or workshop presentation, handouts, and homework instructions. The company decided which materials could be shared, also based on intellectual property rights of the training providers.

Method of Data analysis

Interviews

All interviews were transcribed verbatim, using Wreally Transcribe, to develop word documents which were shared with the participants for approval. Minor edits were requested by two interviewees and accordingly implemented, such as correcting terminology that I misheard. One participant made significant changes to the transcript, after reflecting on the responses given. The requested changes focussed on changing informal language and expressions to more formal ones. To analyse the transcripts, I conducted thematic analysis using Atlas.ti qualitative analysis software. Thematic analysis is “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun and Clarke, 2006 p79). The rational for using thematic analysis was that it is a flexible approach and helps to both reflect reality and understand what is below the surface (Braun and Clarke, 2018).

Coding was done in a two-step process (Table 8), first adding semantic codes, followed by latent coding, defining codes as “a little bit of meaning” in the text (Braun and Clarke, 2018, np). For both sets of codes, a hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding and theme development was followed.

Table 8. Coding process

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The deductive coding for the semantic codes started with designing a codebook based on the literature and research to date (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006) as reflected in the sex/gender-sensitive model of training (cf. p49). The downside of a deductive approach is a bias for finding what I am looking for and not being open to new ideas and connections (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). However, in my data analysis, inductive codes were developed in addition to deductive codes, when I came across important bits of meaning that were not discussed in my literature review, such as how interviewees define gender (cf. Appendix 6, p194 for the semantic code book).

After coding all text in detail, the individual codes were placed in code groups. These code groups captured:

1) the experiences of the training participants regarding the specific training programme they participated in. In addition, the attitudes, beliefs, and experiences with the role of sex and gender during training in response to specific questions about the role of sex/gender (Code Group: Participant perspectives)

2) the experiences and perspectives of the programme owners regarding the specific training programme they designed, as well as the attitudes, beliefs, and experiences with the role of sex and gender in training in response to specific questions about the role of sex/gender (Code Group: Programme Owner – PO perspectives)

3) the perspectives of trainers on the role of sex and gender based on their experiences with designing and facilitating corporate training programmes (Code Group: Trainer perspectives)

This coding structure allowed me to compare unprompted experiences, about training participation and design, with the experiences shared after being asked to reflect on the role of sex and gender, or in other words, interrupted and uninterrupted voices (Pleines, 2020). It also allowed me to triangulate the responses on the role of sex/gender between training participants, programme owners and trainers. This triangulation was further supported by double coding and developing a separate code group that specifically captured
experiences and perspectives on how sex/gender impacted the training system, in line with the structure of the sex/gender-sensitive model of training (Code Group: Gender and the Training System). In this code group, experiences and perspectives that reflected the rival proposition (the role of personalities, cf. p60), were separately coded and hence signposted. The objective of these semantic codes was to understand to what extent the constructs as identified in my theoretical model and the relationships between them were recognised, changed or expanded by the participants (Eisenhardt, 1989).

As a final step in the semantic coding, the responses to the critical reflection statements, regarding gendered lived experiences, work environment and training design (cf. Appendix 3, p190), were coded (Code Group: Critical Reflections). This enabled me to understand if and how critical reflection impacted the beliefs, attitudes, and interpretations of experiences with the training, when comparing these responses with the responses captured in the code groups discussed previously, as well as to triangulate this data again between training participants, programme owners and trainers. During the grouping process, all quotations, codes, and code groups were read through again, checked for meaning, and if necessary, renamed and reorganised.

As a next step, a layer of latent codes was added, signifying what underlying assumption and ideas were expressed, critically interrogating the interviews and programme material in terms of gender subtext analysis and training as sociocultural activity with: “the explicit reference to underlying processes, assumptions and meanings that account for specific representations of social practices” (Benschop and Doorewaard, 1998 p791). It was at this stage that my coding moved from experiential coding to a more critical orientation (Braun and Clarke, 2018), being more interrogative and starting to analyse the data with a critical sociocultural paradigm, aiming to understand how participation in the broader cultural, social and institutional context shapes the interactions and experiences (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Gender subtext refers to often concealed organisational processes and practices that seem neutral and impersonal, however in effect produce gender differences and inequalities (Raaijmakers et al. 2018; Bendel, 2008, Benschop and Doorewaard, 1998). Building on the overview of forms of gender subtext by Bendl (2008), the latent codes and
code groups developed for my study are presented in Appendix 7, p195. The gender subtext analysis will be further discussed in the data presentation and analysis chapter (cf. p119).

**Training documentation**

The format of the training documentation that was shared by the company varied widely. The documentation included word documents, powerpoint presentations, emails, excel files, books and You Tube videos. Hence it was not possible to import all these files into data analysis software, and analysis was conducted using excel. Line by line and image by image, the material was interrogated, and a file developed in excel with quotes and descriptions of images. First, I analysed how female and male characters were positioned and described in the material, for example, if and how women and men were represented and in what ratio, as well as what women and men were doing and how women and men were described. Secondly, I captured the references made to gender diversity and inclusion in the training material. These two analyses were in line with semantic coding, describing what is said/written. As a next step, the documentation was interrogated more critically, in line with the latent coding of the interviews, to understand the underlying assumption and ideas. This analysis was specifically focussed on locating content that was positioned as neutral, but that in fact had gendered connotations, based on my literature review and the gender subtext analysis of the interviews. For example, substantial pre-work for a training programme, as part of a programme invitation, could interfere with care responsibilities, the majority of which is still handled by women (UN, 2020). As a result, significant amounts of pre-work could support a model of the unencumbered (male) worker (Acker, 2006). Other examples would be when training design included the organisation of break out groups or a reflection on experiences in the breakout groups, without considering the sex/gender ratio or dynamics. Finally, the training material was interrogated to capture notions of training as sociocultural activity, for example in references made to the training reflecting the company culture and language, as well as accountability for implementing the trained practices and values.

This document analysis approach allowed me to contextualise the experiences shared by interviews, and to triangulate the data between the three sets of interviews (training participants, programme owners and trainers) and the training documents.
The data was subsequently analysed from different dimensions such as the training programme, the data source, women/men and participant/ programme owner/trainer to understand within-group similarities and intergroup differences (Eisenhardt, 1989). Collecting a variety of data from several data sources, provided a rich opportunity for triangulation to increase the trustworthiness of the findings (Bachor, 2002; Eisenhardt, 1989). In addition there was a frequent overlap between data analysis and data collection in my case study research (Eisenhardt, 1989), which was helped by starting the data analysis at an early stage (after the first programme). This also informed the subsequent data collection and analysis. In other words, my data analysis approach was dialogical:

There is a constant backward and forward motion between theory and the practice of research as well as between the different stages of the research process (Rule and John, 2015 p8).

Finally, the code groups from the interviews and the document analyses were connected into themes (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). To define themes, I reflected on the central core of the codes and document analyses and how these connected with my research question and the literature (Braun and Clark, 2018).

To ensure accuracy of my interpretation (Bachor, 2002), and inspired by the same approach in the research of Hoyt and Kennedy (2008), I shared the data analyses and discussion with the training participants in a word document, via email, and asked for their perspective. Four participants responded, ranging from no input to strong support. In addition, one participant stressed the requirement of employees to conform to the company dominant culture, signalling the importance of researching training as a sociocultural activity.

**Ethical Considerations**

The OU Human Resource Ethical Committee reviewed and gave a favourable opinion on my research methodology, design, and documents, such as the consent form and information sheet. The ethical guidelines that were considered when designing and conducting my research, and when agreeing the ethical guidelines for my research with the host company,
were based on the Ethical Appraisal Framework (Fox and Askham, n.d.). This framework outlines four dimensions of ethical thinking: consequential (research should be worthwhile); relational (research should be conducted respectfully); ecological (research should be conducted responsibly) and deontological (research should be ‘done right’). A full outline of ethical considerations according to this model, has been included as Appendix 8, p196. In summary, special attention has been paid to discussing with the company how to deal with potential criticism by the participants regarding the company and the training. In the research information sheet that was agreed with the company, participants were invited to share open and honest feedback (deontological dimension). In addition, access to the training material and handouts for me as researcher, but also being a competitor as training provider, has been discussed and a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) has been signed between the company and myself before sharing any training material (ecological dimension). In addition, ensuring the anonymity of the participants (relational dimension) was an important ethical concern. For this reason, the host company was informed that reporting would not be done per training programme to increase the level of anonymity. In addition, when quotes are used in this thesis, no dates are mentioned, as interview dates may have been (automatically) scheduled in business agendas, accessible for colleagues and hence with a date, the participant could be identified. The use of pseudonyms is often not enough to ensure anonymity and confidentiality as people working in the same office or department may recognise the information provided and I have been very careful and selective in my quotes to ensure individuals cannot be identified (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). Other important ethical considerations were firstly, the language the interview was conducted in (deontological). I have provided the participants a choice between English and Dutch. This may have meant that non-native English or Dutch speakers were disadvantaged when conducting the interview compared to native English or Dutch speakers. As one of the participants mentioned, it is easier to talk about experiences, feelings, and emotions in your mother tongue. Especially in telephone, but also Skype and Teams interviews, when facial expressions, emotions and gestures are not visible or possibly distorted, interviewing in a second language may impact communication and transformation of meaning (Barr, 2013). In addition, the fact that I am also not native English, may have impacted the wording and interpretations of my questions. To address this concern, all participants were provided with a transcript of their interviews to allow for checking and, if so required, the questions and
answers could be run through translation software to ensure the answers were satisfactory. Secondly, the ethical impact of online research has been considered (Deakin and Wakefield, 2014). The impact of giving consent online has been raised as an issue in online interviews, as well as the identification of the participants (Deakin and Wakefield, 2014; Sullivan, 2012). In my research, all the participants sent their consent forms via their business email address from the host company. The same email was used for Skype or Teams invitations and mobile numbers were provided from the business email addresses used. Hence, I believe identification and consent have been managed appropriately. Another potential concern is that video and phone calls are experienced as less formal and recording less visible, with the risk of participants divulging more than in a face to face interview (Weller, 2017). This was addressed by sending the participants the transcripts to check. Three participants asked to remove or change parts of their transcript, and the edited transcripts were subsequently used in the data analysis. Data security can be another concern with online interviewing and for this reason I have recorded the conversations on a separate recording device and software (not Teams or Skype), and the recordings have subsequently been saved to my password protected laptop computer and not in the cloud. In line with my OU Data Protection registration, the recordings were deleted after approval of the transcripts, and only the anonymous transcripts kept for analysis.

**Summary**

In this chapter I have outlined the methodology and methods for my research. The ontological position for my study was relativist. My theoretical framework was critical socioculturalism, focussing on how participation in the broader cultural, social, and institutional context shapes the training experiences and learning. Criticality in my research centred around challenging common beliefs and practices that may lead to gender inequity in training. I outlined how criticality was reflected in all stages of my research: the ontology, epistemology, data collections and data analysis. My epistemology was subjectivism, and I discussed that an epistemological challenge was the strength of common-sense beliefs about gender and training. To address this challenge, I introduced statements during the semi-structured interviews to enable participants to critically reflect on their training
experiences. Based on my ontology and epistemology my research method was qualitative, with a case study design, including a single case with three embedded units of analysis. My research took place within one global consumer goods company, and included three training programmes, with different content and designs, and aimed at different levels in the company. I interviewed training participants, programme leaders and trainers, as well as reviewed extensive training documentation. The data was analysed using thematic analysis, including both semantic and latent codes. Semantic coding elaborated on the sex/gender-sensitive model of training (cf. p49), whereas the latent codes were based on a more critical analysis, namely a gender subtext analysis. In the next chapter, the analysis of the data will be presented, starting with the themes that I identified in the data, followed by a more critical analysis on the role of training in gender (in)equality, and reflecting on training as sociocultural activity.
Chapter 4. Data presentation and analysis

This chapter is organised in two sections. The first section will discuss the three themes that I have identified in the data. In addition, a special section on sex/gender in a virtual learning environment is included, which is relevant given the conversion to virtual training as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The second section will present a gender subtext analysis, based on a more critical approach to the data analysis.

Thematic analysis

In qualitative research, data is symbolic and needs to be interpreted (Twining et al. 2017). This involves judgment, that needs to be explicit (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). The themes that I identified in the data were based on the literature review, and my own practical experience, that there is a disconnect between ignoring the role of sex/gender in training versus the gendered experiences and barriers described by women and men, who do not comply with the dominant model of masculinity (hegemonic masculinity, as described on p14). The themes identified in the data are judged to shed further light on this disconnect, in the context of my case. The quality criteria that were adhered to in the research design (cf. p69) should support the credibility and reliability of my interpretations. The following three themes have been identified: the problematic concept of gender-neutral training, the problematic concept of decontextualised training and the importance of awareness. In line with the research of Kantola (2008), the quotes will highlight whether they were shared by a female or male interviewee. In addition, the quotes will specify whether they were shared by a training participant, programme owner or trainer. These specifications enabled the triangulation of data and are important in this chapter to highlight the different interactions and experiences with sex/gender and training.

The problematic concept of gender-neutral training programmes

When talking about gender, interviewees had different views on what gender meant to them. On the one hand, male interviewees tended to view gender as the distinction between, and descriptions of, women and men. The exception was a junior level male training participant who first gave the biological definition of sex, then followed up by saying:
The other definition of gender is your self-realisation of your self-identity...of which gender you feel like you are a part of (Tom – male training participant).

Female interviewees tended to see gender more as a construct, a perspective, impacted by norms and expectations. The majority of female interviewees reflected on how their views had developed from seeing only two genders (woman and man) to now realising there are more than two genders, and that gender is fragmented and diverse:

It started off as ok you're either man or woman based on what sex you were assigned at. But as I have gotten older, I have learned more about well ok maybe you know, sometimes that can change over the course of your life. And how I guess society views you is also very [sighs], I guess it's just very complex. Where I stand now is that I think gender is different. It should be pulled apart from I guess like the sex you were assigned at birth. And gender is much more of a personal construct, a belief (Julia – female training participant).

The above aligns with the different views about gender (cf. p5) as either essential or gender as a form of “doing” (Butler, 2006; West and Zimmerman, 1987) including the understanding of the impact of culture on gender perspectives, and how these views are not fixed but develop with age and experiences.

In the interviews and training documents, the term gender was used to describe the position and experiences of women and men, not so much to describe femininities and masculinities as thoughts, feelings, or behaviours. This was most likely driven by the common use, in a business environment, of the terminology “gender diversity and inclusion” when discussing the representation of women and men.

Irrespective of the views of what gender means, all interviewees strongly believed that women and men are, and should be treated as, equal, and people should be judged on their capabilities and not their sex or gender:

For me gender is a perspective, because for me, everybody is the same. Because for me what is important is the personality, the skills, and the
actions. And during all my life, I am driving my view that it is not about gender, just about the people, their capabilities, and their actions (Suzy – female trainer).

The male interviewees emphasised that they do not make any distinction between men and women, often based on a life and work history of working with women:

I see women at work always as my peers. I never saw them as a different sex that I had to deal with differently. So, I am not consciously sitting there like I am a man, so I need to be more careful or provide more opportunities. I just see everybody at the table as equal (Henk Jan - male training participant).

Effia, a male trainer, had the same perspective:

I suppose it comes from my background, and my operating and my approach to people. I feel I rarely make a difference on the gender of the person... And it distresses me as well that people do make a difference.

When asked about the specific training programmes recently attended, training participants did not feel that being or identifying as a woman or man played a role in their experiences, or that there was any differentiation in the training:

In the way we were treated, we were exposed to information, or in the way we do the exercises, it was always the same. There was absolute blindness, I think (Sonus - male training participant).

None of the participants felt that their interactions with peers during the training were in any way affected, either positively or negatively, by being or identifying as woman or man and/or feminine or masculine behaviours, even when being the minority sex in the training. This ‘gender blindness’ of the training programmes is by design, as all three programme owners shared that the training programmes did not consider sex/gender, or diversity and inclusion in general, when designing, implementing, or evaluating the programmes:
We didn't really consider anything around, not just gender, but I guess diversity in general. We didn't really think about it (Karen - female programme owner).

Two of the programme owners added that there are training programmes specifically targeted at senior women to address any specific challenges that female leaders face. In addition, as part of the preparation for the programme design, interviews are conducted with senior leaders and an effort is made to ensure that the panel is a mix of female and male leaders. In addition, the models used in the training design are tested with a diverse audience:

(The company) tested the (framework) with a mixed group of employees, with a balance of age, genders, and cultural backgrounds to check that they could all understand them and feel motivated (Facilitator Guide).

The training material reviewed showed a very balanced presentation of women and men in the pictorials used, the care duties they perform in the pictures, and the use of female and male protagonists in case studies. An example of a strong female protagonist in a case study is:

The stories that people told about (female name) were heroic and consistent. They were stories of how she resolved internal differences, saved customer accounts and brought fiscal discipline. In each story there were common themes in terms of style and values. In the stories people told about (male name), there were no recurring themes. The stories were told for surprise value — “that’s how he did it that time, but then let me tell you about this other time...” (Case Study – Coaching guide).

This is notably different from the research of Sharen and McGowan (2019) that found a strong underrepresentation of women in business cases (cf. p44).

Finally, also the trainers shared that sex/gender was not a consideration when designing or facilitating training:

No, I think it shouldn't play a role. Because when we design our training, we don't know whether this will be addressed to women or men. So, we have
to design it as if we were talking to a woman or a man, no difference (Nikos – male trainer).

The training programmes are focused on equipping the participants with the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed to succeed in their (new) roles, also reflecting that the world has changed, and what got you to where you are today is not necessarily what will be successful in the future.

The finding that sex and gender are not perceived as impacting the training experience is in line with the training models discussed in the literature review (cf. p26). Another area that aligns with the reviewed literature, is the view that personality is a key factor in training experiences. In one of the programmes the participants were asked to complete a character assessment to understand the roles they are most comfortable with. Another programme used archetypes, or personas, to enable participants to describe the roles they play or the inner forces they can build on:

No, I don't think we took gender into consideration at all. I think it was more about like what is the persona of attendees attending this programme. Actually, it was more about people personality (Charlotte – female programme owner).

Tom, a male training participant also assigned behaviours to personality rather than gender:

Over the course of ... days you definitely saw people become more interactive. I think it was not necessarily because of gender but because of personal shyness. People get a bit scared to ask questions and speak.

A viewpoint which is confirmed by William, a male trainer:

I wouldn't say it (masculine and feminine behaviours and attitudes) affects a training a lot. It is the way, it is definitely the tone in which things are done and handled, but it also has to do with the personality and the character of the person, the way the person is handling things...

Whilst another male trainer, Effia, also accentuated that it is individuals who matter, rather than gender:
There are 12 individuals in the room. Be they are male; be they are female. You know I understand on a personal level, how do I say this, I look at the individual rather than the gender. And I try to get a quick steer as to what is the best way to deal with them, I suppose as an individual within the group and how they are going to participate within the group as well.

In this regard, femininities and masculinities are seen as personality traits, available and applicable to both women and men:

I find personality more important than gender. I also work with very masculine women. Who are also very dominant (Francois – male training participant).

This perspective aligns with the perspective of Paechter (2006) who argued that masculinities and femininities are ways of being a woman or man and are descriptive (cf. p7). From my coding one can see that masculinity was described as a strong personality, dominant, pushy, wanting to be the best, and a directive leadership style. Femininity was seen as more considerate, balanced, keeping teams together, sensitive to feelings, and a coaching leadership style.

In summary, the views on training as shared by participants, trainers, programme owners and training documentation alike, reflects current training theory and models, that training is gender-neutral, however that personality plays an important role (cf. p26).

In parallel though, experiences were shared that started to cast doubt on the gender-neutrality of training, even though these experiences did not challenge the perceived gender-neutrality of training at this point in the interviews. An area mentioned by multiple participants was the interaction between care responsibilities and duration, location, and intensity of the training, including overnight pre-work, potentially disproportionately impacting women. One female programme owner, Karen, said:

I can imagine myself personally I would have found it really challenging for example to disconnect from family life because I play a bigger role in the life of my family. But we didn't take any of that into consideration.
Another female programme owner, Charlotte, agreed:

Definitely I think this year because of Covid, if you are a working parent, this programme would have been very difficult to join. Because it was very intense... And then working parents of course I would say working mums because usually what Covid has shown that working mums are struggling more than working dads.

This feedback is confirmed by literature finding that women are still doing the majority of care responsibilities and are disproportionately hit by COVID (UN, 2020). The literature review highlighted the gendered nature of access to training, and how care responsibilities can be a barrier to learning and training (cf. p34 and p38). Not recognising and incorporating the interaction between training and care responsibilities, may reflect an assumption of trainee participants as ideal unencumbered workers (Acker, 2006).

The interaction between training and care responsibilities does not only affect women. The opportunity to go home in the evening during training also benefited working dads:

I know it has pros and cons if you are training somewhere else in the world and you are not at home a lot. I am a young dad. We share the duties at home. For me it is quite nice that I can put the kids to bed at night. That is a very important thing in our family (Henk Jan – male training participant).

Not only do care responsibilities interact with the logistics of the training, but they can also impact the conversations during training, when discussing for example the barriers women encounter when working part-time, and when discussing lived experiences:

But the difference you can see when people talk about their lives. Men were not very much talking about the kids, cleaning and all the household stuff, whereas the women were (Sonus – male training participant).

Another area where the gender-neutrality of training started to be challenged, was in the social interactions during training. Especially the trainers noticed a difference in social dynamics dependent on the women/men balance. William, a male trainer said:
You hope that there is diversity in the group, then it would still be fine, you still would have a decent workshop. But if you have females in the room as well, I think it is much better. And sometimes it can also change the way men are behaving... Let’s be honest, men can be quite chauvinistic and rough and direct in certain ways.

Suzy, a female trainer agreed:

I think the behaviour of the men changes when there are women in the room. They have more limits in the way they speak, the respect for the females.

While there is no reference to the relative presence or proportion of women in William’s and Suzy’s experiences, it is interesting to relate their experience to the findings of Kanter (1977) in her seminal study regarding token women. Tokens in a group are numerically underrepresented (for example as race, class, or gender), and rare in their context. As such they are treated as if they are representing their category. In the sales training Kanter researched, men actually exaggerated displays of masculine behaviours and attitudes, when token women were present, versus when only men were present. Kanter argued this reflects boundary heightening between dominants and token. Another finding of heightened boundaries that Kanter found was that dominants use interruptions, such as apologies, to the tokens in order to underscore and reinforce differences. Nikos, a male trainer, observed this dynamic as well:

I have heard several times the expression "excuse me ladies but I have to swear now". Yes, I have seen that many times. If there are 10 men and 2 women, they feel that they can use expressions...that they are allowed to use it: "sorry ladies". But if it is 50/50, this is not the case. So, I've seen it, I've seen it many times unfortunately.

Suzy, a female trainer, showed how underrepresentation of women could be detrimental to women:

I observed this in my last training. We had about 14 men, and one woman in our room. Everyone talked about the day and the woman was speaking last.
She was the last. And when she started to talk, one man interrupted her to complete her sentence. I had to say: "just one sec, let her finish her sentence please". And when she finished, he started to explain what she was talking about. And this was not necessary because she spoke very well.

These experiences seemed to confirm findings in the literature of gendered power dynamics in training, potentially negatively impacting the development of women (Stead, 2014).

This impact of women/men ratio is reflected in the experience of two female participants in one of the company’s training programmes that had a majority of women in the training:

... perhaps this is a reflection of working with a majority of female students, maybe that is a reflection. Do you bring out that kindness? (...) They were all very soft-spoken and good listeners, no one was trying to get the spotlight. Which again is my experience working in certain areas that are male heavy (Sophia – female training participant).

This positive experience with a majority of women in the group, is confirmed by Julia, a female training participant:

But having it skewed more towards women I guess positively impacted me. Because you know I found myself identifying more. Like oh here are other women who are in the same boat as me.

The social dynamic and impact of a dominance of men in groups is reflected in the literature in research that finds women speak more and are more confident in an even representation (Dasgupta, McManus-Scircle and Hunsinger, 2015). It is also reflected in research discussed previously that describes how being a numerical minority resulted in women becoming “tokens” for all women, resulting in negative processes of increased visibility and attention, exaggerated differences, and gendered stereotypical expectations (Kanter, 1977). It is important to note that Kanter argues that these processes also apply to other kinds of tokens facing similar contexts, such as when men are tokens in a group of women or being the only blind person amongst sighted people. In addition, Kanter argues that the status of the “token” is important for the content of the interactions, a finding confirmed by William,
a male trainer, when asked what the impact of the under-representation of women is in training:

I think it's also a question with the females what roles they have. If they have a more senior role then the people are listening.

Based on the above it is maybe not surprising that psychological safety is one of the reasons women-only programmes exist: they allow women to discuss the issues they face, without the risk of being seen as weak or incompetent (Ely, Ibarra and Kolb, 2011). This experience was shared by Beth, one of the programme owners, when reflecting on a women-only leadership course:

It just happens to be that the conversations and the unlocks and insights during the programme, and the kind of vulnerability, and actually topics of discussion, tend to be different because you are in a cohort of all women...
It is actually all quite, you know, leadership driven gender-neutral content.
It's just the way in which it is actually discussed, dissected and kind of distilled, happens to be from that lens.

Despite the above experiences, the women/men balance in the training group was not a consideration in the invitations for the training programmes researched, as confirmed by the programme owners. A training cohort typically reflects the balance within the function or level that the training is targeted at. Logistics and required minimum number of participants determine the training group composition, potentially maintaining, and even reinforcing, the status quo of women – men representation. It also not a topic of discussion between trainer and clients:

For me I get the list, I have yet to speak to the HR manager who organises the training to say: are we sure we got a gender balance. I have never asked that question. I have never considered that. I'm just happy that there are 12 people, and the training is going ahead (Effia - male trainer).

This view is consistent with current training theory and models (cf. p26) that do not discuss sex/gender composition or social interaction during training. The women/men balance in a
training group typically just reflects the women/men balance in the work environment (function, level, and company).

The finding that women/men representation was not a consideration in the programmes researched is important for gender equity and inclusion for another reason as well. For two of the programmes researched, participants had to be nominated, and two female training participants shared how excited they were:

Early this year I opened my computer, and I had the invite: you have been nominated. And to me I was incredibly flattered and happy (Sophia – female training participant).

And then when an opportunity arrived for the training, he asked me to join, and I was very flattered (Edith – female training participant).

The two male interviewees who were invited for these programmes, did not show the same level of excitement about being invited:

When they (the company) write a good letter to you: you have been nominated by us to join this or that, of course you say yes to it. But I didn't know very much about the content (Sonus – male training participant).

In my research diary, I noted how these experiences reminded me of “the importance of being asked” as an example of gendering processes (Benschop and Doorewaard, 1998 p796). The motivational aspect for women of being invited for training is confirmed by research that finds that training is not only important for capability development, but also for developing the motivation and career aspiration of women (Hoobler, Lemmon and Wayne, 2014).

Not only is participation in training personally motivating, but there is also a strong career building element, as training participants and programme owners alike shared how important the networking opportunity of these programmes is:

The big thing, what people love about this programme, is all the networking. People you actually meet at (this training programme) are
colleagues and friends for life afterwards (Charlotte – female programme owner).

Important to note is that women’s lack of access to networks is cited as a major barrier to career advancement (Ely, Ibarra and Kolb, 2011).

Another area where training is less gender-neutral than initially perceived is in the presence of female role models, especially with more junior cohorts:

And I thought it was great the fact that the leaders evaluating our work and listening to the final presentations, they were female. And again, it is something that you typically don’t see when it goes up to the senior leadership, it starts to flip, and you see a lot more males than females (Sophia – female training participant).

Same-sex role models are argued to be particularly important for women, because they undermine stereotypical expectations, increase self-efficacy and signal that women can be successful (Streets and Major, 2014; Ely, Ibarra and Kolb, 2011). On the other hand, Utoft (2021) warns that the use of role models fits very well within a postfeminist paradigm and may reinforce the notion of self-determination and meritocracy.

In addition, training may not be gender-neutral because the gendered attitudes and behaviours of the trainer impact the learning experience:

The person who conducted the training, the leader of the training, was quite a dominant male, who was very authoritarian during the training (Francois - male training participant).

Finally, the most fundamental challenge to the concept of gender-neutral training was shared by Sonus, a male training participant:

When you start with gender equality and gender balance, first we need to define the targets, which are mostly masculine. So, the training is about being so good...that we grow more, we are in more markets, more profit, that you are more creative, that everyone likes you so that you can realise
your dreams in this company. The training, the definition of the training is masculine.

What Sonus described is that the essence of training in a corporate environment is not to support gender equity and inclusion, but to support a neo-liberal agenda of individual success, competitiveness, rationality, and growth. And Sonus questioned whether in a dominant masculine corporate environment, gender equity and inclusion objectives are compatible with current training practices. This concern echoes the discussion of a Human Capital approach to training, and how a focus on measurable results and company profitability, limits the discussion on what training can achieve (cf. p25).

Tom, a male training participant, noticed a similar limiting approach in training:

I feel like they could have dissected it (stereotyping) a bit more. Especially with kind of everything that has been happening this year: the black lives movement, you have got the movements in terms of women equality. And I think that was something that was a bit missed in terms of the connections to contemporary movements today. Which could have opened up a bit more (Tom – male training participant).

Concluding, what becomes apparent is that spontaneous views and experiences that training is gender-neutral coexist with more fragmented and reflective experiences that sex and gender impact the training experience. This may mean a confirmation of the argument of Swan, Stead and Elliott (2009 p434):

Gender-neutral training and development programmes are often highly gendered and gendering, encouraging the take up of particular versions of femininity and/or masculinity.

The problematic concept of decontextualised training

Whereas the training was experienced as a sex/gender-neutral, safe learning place where people were friendly and cooperative, when asked to reflect on gendered barriers and experiences, as part of the critical reflection statement during the interviews, all female interviewees shared experiences of gendered barriers in their work environment.
Suzy, a female trainer, shared how women’s contributions are ignored:

But one day I was having lunch with other women, and we were talking about it, and they tell me oh I have the same problem...sometimes I tell an idea, and nobody listens. And then a man says the same thing, and everybody is like wow.

A different barrier is the directive leadership styles of men as shared by Anne, a female training participant:

What I experienced in meetings with males and females...I see a lot of males acting with a typical directive and persuasive leadership style, whilst I see a lot of females being much more cautious, much more in the coaching, in the affiliate style. So, I don't see people flexing in their styles. I see different camps.

Interestingly, Whitehead (2014) argues there is a direct relationship between authoritarian management/leadership style and dominant expressions of masculinity.

A challenge shared by Sophia, a female training participant, reflected what is widely reported as the double bind that women face (Debebe, 2017), resulting from role incongruity (cf. p15):

So, these are the challenges that I experience, as a female. How can I get my point across without being perceived as weak, and be respected? But at the same time not losing your own essence as a female...

Another experience of role incongruity was noticed when giving feedback:

Male managers, in my experience, are more straightforward. Like they’re able to remove their own personal feelings from it. They are just kind of like, this is how you are behaving, this is negatively impacting the way you run the business, correct and let's move on. Whereas the women they, they want to make you feel like...they feel almost bad for giving you that feedback (Julia - female training participant).
Interestingly, Sheering, Hughes and Garavan (2020) report a similar finding that male managers were more direct in their communication styles, and female supervisors were not always clear, which can be an important reminder that a direct, stereotypical masculine communication style can be appropriate and appreciated. On the other hand, research showed that the standards may be different for women and men, when finding that both female and male recipients reported significantly more anger when discipline was delivered by women (Atwater, Carey and Waldman, 2001).

Julia, a female training participant, shared how she felt asking questions is not appreciated in an environment dominated by men:

You ask a lot of those clarifying questions and they’re almost like, they will never tell you, but you kind of get that feeling oh, they just want to move on, like you are kind of wasting time. And then I will start apologising and I’m like I’m sorry I just want to clarify one more time because I don’t want to move on without understanding. And then I almost get kind of like this patronising tone and then that just makes me not want to ask as many questions.

Finally, Suzy, a female trainer, shared her experience with gendered hiring processes, reflecting the gendered organisation processes as described extensively by Acker (2006):

I know when they were in the process of putting someone new in my place, HR asked the company responsible for recruiting for this position, please we need a man. Because our CEO can’t work with a strong woman. So, we need a man (Suzy – female trainer).

Importantly, these barriers and experiences do not impact all women in the same way and Julia, a female training participant, felt that race and ethnicity interact with being a woman:

And I’m almost wondering, the cultural expectations, first of like the women, there is always that, and then getting on to race, the expectations of you being a woman kind of shifts slightly depending on which, I would almost say, like your expectations of for example, an Asian woman...Whereas like maybe if you’re white or maybe if you’re black or
Hispanic or whatever, the woman expectation gets filtered down differently.

Julia’s experience is an important reminder that not all women are the same or treated equally. Increasingly gender literature emphasises the importance of intersectionality, recognising that areas of difference and inequality, such as gender, race, and class, are connected and reinforcing (cf. p7). For myself as a white researcher it is an important reminder that white women can be privileged compared to women of colour, as result of systemic inequality (McIntosh, 1988).

In response to these challenges, female interviewees shared how they conform to the norm:

I am always more aggressive, I am more competitive (...), because I need to be like a man. Because my peers are men, all the time. So, to be equal we needed to have similar behaviours (Suzy - female trainer).

This experience is also reflected in the research by Bullock (2019), finding that women had to be less feminine in a workplace dominated by men.

Edith, a female training participant, used the expression “wearing a mask” to express how she conformed:

So, I said, to survive I need to be a bit more assertive, I need to adapt. Again, it is about “personas”, something I learnt really in my career, I have always practiced wearing a mask. This mask is more assertive, more decisive.

These responses echo one of the rules that Gherardi and Poggio (2001 p253) describe for women to be successful in a male dominated work environment: “behave like men”.

The fact that this could have negative consequences for women was well worded by Sophia, a female training participant:

I think it would be very helpful, I think all in all, even for the mental health of females out there, to not be told or be pressured to follow that, to be put in this box (being aggressive and assertive).
This concern is shared by Whitehead (2014 p455), expressing that women may be compelled to behave in ways that may be “existentially, emotionally and organizationally problematic for them”.

In addition to these gendered barriers and experiences shared by women, both female and male interviewees shared experiences of a dominant, aggressive, authoritative style of management and leadership:

But all in all, I think there is this perception that being aggressive, that being very assertive, that means success, and these are traits associated with male employees. (Sophia – female training participant).

Francois, a male training participant agreed and added that these behaviours are displayed by women and men alike:

I have no issue with saying without any restraint that most men and women operating at levels above me are all very likely dominant and slightly aggressive.

As discussed in the literature review (cf. p14), these types of behaviours are described as ‘hegemonic masculinity’, which characterises most commercial and non-commercial organisations (Knights and Tullberg, 2014). And the data confirms the literature in finding that hegemonic masculinity is no longer exclusively connected to men (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). These behaviours impact the entire organisation, as shared by Edith, a female training participant:

And it (traditional, authoritative leadership style) does not only affect the women, it affects the entire organisation. It creates an atmosphere of mistrust (Edith – female training participant).

What Edith described is that a traditional, authoritative, leadership style centres around command and control: telling people what to do and strict follow up to ensure what was instructed is actually done and achieved. As a result, teams may not feel trusted, or take ownership for the course of action and there is a tendency to put the blame on someone else or another department when targets are not met.
The training programmes researched did not include or reflect these experiences, and the data would suggest four reasons for this decontextualisation: firstly, training is focussed on knowledge and skills at a conceptual level; secondly, training is focussed on individual growth and assumes individual responsibility for growth; thirdly, training intends to teach the company’s way of doing things, not necessarily leaving space to reflect individual or contextual circumstances; fourthly, the training design assumes that training participants can share any (gendered) issues or barriers, which may not be the case. These four reasons will now be discussed in more detail.

First, training is focussed on knowledge, skills, processes, and behaviours on a conceptual level. Interviewees speak of a toolbox or a checklist they take from the training that can be applied back at work. However, the context, or learning and development in a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) is not part of the training. Julia, a female training participant, shared how she felt that the training only covered the basics and that the interpersonal connections, and being able to understand people in terms of gender and race, are much more important for business success, but these are not part of training:

But how do you make the most of those interpersonal connections and get all the benefit out of it, that we really don't get training for. That's kind of left up to you.

This observation reminded me of the argument of Selzer, Howton and Wallace (2017) that three levels need to be addressed to develop female leaders: the personal level, the interpersonal level and the organisational level, levels that are connected and interrelated.

In addition, it reflects that career progression is not only dependent on competencies but also “social acceptance and approval” (Broadbridge and Simpson, 2011 p477). This may reflect the observation by Bourdieu (2002 p282) that human capital, despite its “humanistic connotations”, focusses on “economism”, and ignores cultural and social capital. As Atkins and Vicars (2016) argue, dominant masculinity may be the required social and cultural capital, a requirement that may be ignored in current training practice.

The context in a business environment is not only diverse but also political and power infused, and this potentially creates a disconnect between the training and reality at work:
In the training itself, people are very cooperative, but in the world outside
the training, this behaviour is not always appreciated (Francois – male
training participant).

And as one male trainer said: “There is one thing having a tool kit, there is the other thing
actually the ability to use that toolkit” (Effia – male trainer). Maybe not surprisingly, given
the gendered barriers and hegemonic masculine work environment discussed before, two
female training participants shared how they valued having a personal coach as part of a
training programme to support them in transferring the training to the workplace.

Second, the basic premise of training is individual growth and individual responsibility for
growth, asking training participants: “What needs to change in your conversations, actions
and behaviours” (Facilitator Guide - emphasis added). However, one could argue that our
conversations, actions, and behaviours are always in a context that may be enabling or
restraining. Even when recognising that developmental journeys and obstacles are different
for women and men, the training material for one of the programmes stated it is not going
into detail about variations between men and women, as it is only playing a small role and
fundamentally, we are all human. This reminds me of the words of Adichie (2014 p44) “of
course, I am a human being, but in this world, things happen to me because I am a female”.

In the same programme, stories were shared of women who faced extreme hardship and
still found ways to thrive, which is inspiring, but may also give the impression that people
(women) who do not make it, did not try or work hard enough. This was reflected in the
views of one of the trainers that gendered barriers can be dealt with by focussing on areas
that are under your control (your knowledge, skills, processes, and behaviours) and being
highly skilled:

One of the ways that she can deal with that (gender barriers), is to actually
be highly skilled. And really work through the process and all of that... And I
think that's really, really important. And leave aside gender, leave aside...I
mean, people use things to mask their lack of capability (Effia – male
trainer).
The focus on individual responsibility for growth was further reflected in the choice rhetoric that it is an individual’s responsibility to fit in a certain context, without questioning that context:

Because I think it is part of a choice, if you want to be in negotiations, if you want to be a key account manager, then sometimes you will have a tough time and stiff opposition. And it sometimes gets a bit loud, that is part of it. So, you need to be the right type of person to do this (William – male trainer).

Third, the training programmes’ main purpose is to teach the participants the company’s way of doing things, not necessarily leaving space to reflect individual or contextual circumstances. As one female programme owner, Beth, described what the training should achieve: “This is the standard behaviour and mindset that we expect of our people”. Another female programme owner, Charlotte, used the term “the company’s way”, when explaining what participants were taught, an expression that was also used by several training participants to describe what they learned from the training.

The training participants spoke of a common language they have learned:

The training is doing two things: firstly, develop and work on ... skills, and secondly it creates a common language amongst peers (Henk Jan- male training participant).

Beth, a female programme owner, confirmed that a common language is the intent of the programme and part of the design objectives:

How do we offer things that will ensure that they (company leaders) will be introduced to this language and to these concepts?

The programmes provide not just common language but also tools, as Walter, a male training participant, said:

It is mainly that we have a corporate framework, we want everyone to understand that, and we have a couple of tools, and we want everyone to understand and use the tools.
Henk Jan, a male training participant, shared how a common language and tools help to interact with peers, not having to invent the language, and how he did not experience these as restricting:

For me it is more a facultative tool and shared framework that you can apply, but not that I am obliged to use them.

This response implies agency, or the feeling that the training participant is in charge, controls actions and consequences, or in other words, is in the driving seat (Moore, 2016). The training material in one of the programmes speaks of “core behaviours, or a compass to guide and inform”. However, the fact that these frameworks are embedded in hiring and performance review practices would suggest more an expected, than optional behaviour:

This is the standard behaviour and mindset that we expect of our people...
It is also what we have built into assessment for how we give performance feedback, how do we assess leadership potential, is all based on this model (Beth - female programme owner).

The effect may be that training supports the pressure to conform, a dynamic observed in the work environment, independent of training, by Sonus, a male training participant:

There is an unseen social pressure which makes us conform. Conform to whatever you see in the average, so you also mix yourself into that average and whoever comes into the group, also mixes himself into the average ...
We have very little space for underlining our personality, preferences in the way behave, talk, or write.

These experiences may reflect how training defines the “possible field of action” (Foucault, 1982, p790) and can function as a subtle form of power:

The exercise of power is not simply a relationship between partners, individual or collective; it is a way in which certain actions modify others (p788).

In addition, two female programme owners shared another training practice that could reinforce conformation and status quo, which is to interview current senior leaders and ask
for their input, to understand the training needs of the target audience of the training, thereby potentially imposing current behaviours and values on the next generation of leaders. A valuable recommendation in this regard is shared by Sell (2020) who recommends inviting subject matter experts (SMEs), such as current leaders, to view their expertise through an equity lens, considering their position in relation to others in terms of, for example gender, race, class, and sexuality, and how this position may impact their experiences differently from learners with different positions or privileges. Importantly, this may require that senior leaders are trained to understand the impact of sex and gender, equity, and inclusion.

Fourth, the training design assumes that training participants can share any (gendered) issues or barriers, and that the facilitators of the training programme can stimulate critical reflection and “tease out” (Beth – female programme owner) biases, assumptions and cultural norms and expectations. However, the question is whether training participants would feel it is acceptable to do so:

If you are the only woman amongst men (in training) and you feel very confident, you could say: hey guys, this is what you are saying but this (gendered experience) is an experience you probably do not have. But it could also be that you then conform to the group (Walter - male training participant).

The difficulty with sharing gendered experiences in training confirms research by Stead (2014) discussed in the literature review (cf. p45) who found that female training participants were not able or willing to share their feelings about gender power dynamics. The opportunity to share gender related concerns and experiences is also mentioned as one of the key rationales for women-only leadership programmes, as women fear the risk of being perceived as weak or not committed (Clarke, 2011; Debebe, 2011; Lämsä and Savela, 2014). Even though the trainers expressed a focus on ensuring that all training participants are included, it becomes clear that sharing personal, gendered experiences is not easy in a training programme, because of the risk of being seen as weak or incompetent. In the training material for one of the programmes for example, the ideal of an unencumbered worker, having autonomy, able to manage distractions, be at your best and show personal
mastery at all times, is pervasive. And if sex/gender conversations do happen, Effia, a male trainer, shared that they mostly occur in 1-1 side conversations. William, a male trainer, spoke of the social fear, the fear of being afraid what other people say about you. The positive intent of trainers is to treat everybody the same, however this may mean potentially not recognising different lived experiences, and strengthening the need to conform:

It's more a one size fits all. It is more of the same. The thing is of course, we are trying as a trainer to treat a woman the same as a man. So, we try not to make any differences (William – male trainer).

Interestingly, two training participants made the link between training and marketing and how the company invests heavily in understanding their consumers to target their marketing, but a similar effort is not done for understanding training participants and targeting the training to employees’ circumstances and needs.

Both the problematic concepts of gender-neutral training, as well as decontextualised training, may impact the sex/gender equity of outcome of training, or who gains from the training in terms of learning and career progression. The literature review and sex/gender-sensitive model of training highlighted how sex/gender may impact the outcome of training (cf. p45). An important example in my data was that two out of the four women mentioned the need and value of personal coaching to transfer training to the workplace, as for example expressed by Anne, a female training participant:

And this is just having the theory... but then you go back to work. And I think for me the link from training to a more personalized or coaching ...that I find more valuable.

This reminded me of the study of Bryans and Mavin (2003 p123) who found that for the female managers they interviewed, training was not helpful to learn to become a manager:

In the questionnaires, the women had emphasized the influence of previous managers, both good and bad, as being helpful in learning to become a manager. Importantly for organizations and management educators,
training and management education were identified as being ‘not very’ or ‘not at all helpful’.

**The importance of awareness**

Gendered experiences and sex-based inequality can be present, but unrecognised as such (Ely, Ibarra and Kolb, 2011; Acker 2009). In the data, awareness played a key role at several levels. Firstly, the awareness of inequity between women and men. This awareness amongst female research participants was based on personal experience, and female peers or sponsors, realising that the challenges women may face, are systemic:

And we started this group two years ago with another female director, CFO's, CEO's and C level positions and had in two weeks 300 women in our group, with senior positions in retail or ex-positions in retail. So, we started to talk about our difficulties, we started to talk about our walls, and how to pass these obstacles. And it was amazing because we realised that we are not alone. We are not by ourselves (Suzy – female trainer).

Awareness about sex/gender-based inequity amongst male interviewees was based on company diversity and inclusion initiatives, or the experiences of female relatives and friends, but Effia, a male trainer, not having personally experienced these gendered barriers or challenges said:

I suppose that as an individual I, not just go with the flow, but I don't think deep enough about certain things and that certainly is one that I haven't given any major thought, around the whole gender piece. Because it has never... probably because I am male, it has never affected me.

Tom, a male training participant, shared a similar perspective:

I think for me, I grew up with the experience of taking people as who they are, kind of putting aside their race, their religion or like their gender or sexual orientation. You just notice who they are and look at their personality so to speak. So, for me I haven't really thought about it to be honest.
This reminded me of the research of McIntosh (1988) stating that the privilege of the privileged is not seeing that they are privileged. McIntosh noticed that men are unwilling to admit they are privileged, even while noticing women are disadvantaged. This could explain why all male interviewees shared the importance of other areas of difference that they did personally experience the impact of, such as a society’s culture, hierarchical levels, work experience or functional department:

I always feel you have to be careful when you are the only finance or supply chain person amongst seven marketeers, as very assertive, loud behaviour can erupt. And all these cool stories. You can be very impressed by this and scale yourself back, I have experienced that. So, I think this is more important than gender (Henk Jan – male training participant).

This potential lack of awareness of the impact of sex/gender-based inequity and gendered behaviours can lead to a lack of awareness of the impact of these behaviours on equity and inclusion:

But they (traditional hierarchical leaders) don't realise the impact they have, or they don't realise how much potential they keep locked in people by acting the way they act (Edith – female training participant).

Secondly, awareness played a key role in identity development. Several male training participants described how training programmes helped them become more aware of themselves, and the term “transformational” was frequently mentioned in this regard. Two female interviewees shared that awareness led to a discovery that power and femininity can go together, and they spoke of being able to be themselves and finding their own words:

When I realised, I can be more, more caring, more me, I started to change my way and started to speak with my own words. And it worked (Suzy – female trainer).

Acker (1990 p147) describes the production of “gendered components of individual identity”, as one of the gendering processes in organisations. Equally, Gherardi and Poggio (2001), find that the acceptance of women as equals in a work environment dominated by men can mean a denial of feminine gender identity. The rediscovery of the feminine identity
is what was described by these two female interviewees, and how they became aware of, and challenged their masculine attitudes and behaviours, as part of their identity at work. One could argue this a form of resistance against a form of power, an important concept in the work of Foucault (1982).

In my research, awareness played a crucial role, based on the critical reflection statements that were asked in the second part of the interviews (cf. Appendix 3, p190). The subsequent discussions focussed on whether training programmes should recognise and address gendered experiences and challenges, masculine work environments and the impact of the current approach to training as gender-neutral. These discussions created an emancipating awareness and “cognitive shift” (Hoyt and Kennedy, 2008 p218) with all interviewees, women and men alike. Before the critical reflection statements, the interviewees did not view sex category or gender having an impact in training, as described at the beginning of the data analysis. This confirmed the finding in literature that organisational practices are often perceived to be gender-neutral and the normal way of doing things (Benschop and Doorewaard, 1998). But based on the critical reflection discussions, interviewees shared how their views had changed. Karen, a female programme owner realised that gender diversity and inclusion can be part of training design:

So, I guess it just really made me think about the fact that it (gender diversity and inclusion) wouldn't be something I have considered but it probably should be.

The critical reflection led to the realisation that treating women and men the same, and not being concerned with (or care about) gender, is not the same as being gender inclusive and equitable, as shared by Sonus, a male training participant:

I think through discussing with you I have moved from being blind to being more helpful to gender balances. I thought I don't care (about genders) but I can do more than just saying I don't care...That was my takeaway for myself, so it is a new thinking. And we can be rich by offering a new way of teaching which is gender friendly.

Three interviewees stated that discussions of gender-based experiences and contexts would be like addressing “the elephant in the room” because it would recognise that the world
outside of training is not fair and equal. And not discussing an unjust world is like sugar coating reality:

    As I said I never thought about it, the fact that in training we try to be, if you like, as politically correct as possible. But the world is not politically correct, the world is not just, and if we make it look ok, people will sugar-coat it (Edith – female training participant).

The expression sugar-coating reminded me of the research, discussed on p57, that people apparently need a vision that the world (or their company) is just (Crosby, 1984), and that people are motivated to justify existing systems (Jost, 2019). Sugar-coating may reflect the reluctance to see organisations as political instead of rational and gender-neutral which may hamper a critical discussion of gender (in)equity (Amstutz, Nussbaumer and Vöhringer, 2020).

Having discussions of gender-based experiences and contexts, with women and men together, was argued to be very important by several interviewees, in order to create change. As one female interviewee described, it would give men the language to understand and women the language to explain.

At its core, the interviewees realised that what seemed to be a good thing at the start of the interview, gender-neutral training, was actually, a missed opportunity:

    It's not about cancelling gender. It is what I was saying at the start, it was gender-neutral. But gender-neutral is flattening, it is not an enrichment per se (Edith - female training participant).

Sonus, a male training participant, agreed and added that gender blindness does not benefit either women or men:

    I have my own realities as a man. And a woman has her own realities and responsibilities as a mum. As the design of the workshop is “genderblind”, let’s assume that, it does not do a great favour to both genders. It is not inclusive by design. It is just blind/ ignorant.
It is interesting how the term ‘blindness’ is also used by Thun (2019), who revealed gender blindness in academic organisations, an environment where inclusive excellence and legal gender-equality measures mean that gender biases and gender discrimination are difficult to discuss and address.

With this heightened awareness, interviewees were able to suggest several opportunities to improve gender equity and inclusion in training, ranging from understanding how frameworks and implementing tools can impact women and men differently:

Look, it could be let's say, in fact writing the training course... if I stop and ask myself the question: what I have written so far, is there any chance that it affects differently let's say women or man? If the answer is yes, why is that? (Nikos - male trainer).

to being actively aware of how gendered norms and expectations are reproduced in training:

So, I noticed that in the (...) exercise for example...Just looking back I am under the impression that in most groups, the guy was the one speaking about this, and I feel like we tend to expect women not to be as well rounded in that sort of topic. I think these stereotypes... perhaps we don’t even realise that we are repeating them (Sophia – female training participant).

In addition, interviewees suggested that sex/gender equity and inclusion can be achieved by being aware of gendered realities, when deciding on the logistics of the training and having sex/gender diversity and inclusion actively build into the design and facilitation of the training.

On a more fundamental level, as one male training participant commented, it requires companies and trainers to respect the diversity of the training participants and explicitly give these a role in training instead of sharing frameworks and tools. This means complexity and potentially additional investment, but one size fits all may not benefit all. The majority of the interviewees mentioned this is not an easy task, as gendered norms and expectations are deeply engrained in our societies and company cultures. This concern reflects the
argument that workplaces are a primary site for constructing gender and that workplaces impact and interact with society regarding gendered norms, expectations, and behaviours (Acker 2006), as well as that such practices at home and at work maintain and reinforce each other (Júlíusdóttir, Rafnsdóttir and Einarsdóttir, 2018).

Another concern that was raised was how gender discussions could be incorporated in training that is conducted in different countries and cultures:

So, if you say for instance something that is not ok in the Netherlands, because of gender balance, and you are in Saudi Arabia and you have the same discussion, that is not as applicable when you are stating like your corporate stance on the issue (Tom - male training participant).

In addition, a perceived challenge was that designers, trainers and facilitators need to be observant, sensitive, knowledgeable, and capable:

But then it would also need a gender aware group of trainers... Teaching this language. Because they need to speak a language that is gender inclusive but not gender cancelling (Edith – female training participant).

Stead (2014), as well as Ely, Ibarra and Kolb (2011), also emphasised the high demands on facilitators and trainers to be able and willing to discuss issues of gender, power and interests. Currently, trainers may not feel qualified to have these discussions:

I also feel I am not qualified or trained to get into that identity discussion, that personal discussion (Effia - male trainer).

Finally, the trainers mentioned that training cannot change a company’s culture. However, based on the discussion above, I would argue that not recognising and addressing gendered norms, expectations, experiences, and barriers in corporate training programmes may support the status quo and a missed opportunity for training to support gender equity and inclusion. As Sharen and McGowan (2019) argue: a trainer’s role is not just to teach skills to do a job, but also to embrace the social context in which the skills will be applied.
**Sex/gender in virtual training**

In the year of the data collection, 2020, the global COVID-19 pandemic heavily impacted the ways of living and working. Working from home became the norm and the pandemic forced companies to convert their face-to-face training programmes to virtual, online delivery. As outlined in the training programme selection section (cf. p71), of the three programmes in this research, one programme was face-to-face (before the pandemic), one blended (converted during the pandemic from face-to-face to virtual) and one programme completely virtual (during the pandemic). An important question was if, and how, the transformation to virtual training, that is expected to continue (Donovan, 2021), impacts the findings regarding the role of sex/gender in training. Especially since Ellsworth et al. (2020 p3) argue, when discussing remote work environments, that “non inclusive dynamics among on-site teams have the potential to be amplified in a remote context”.

The literature review (cf. p42) highlighted that attitudes towards virtual learning can be gendered, with women’s decisions to use e-learning more based on ease of use, while for men, the perceived usefulness was more important. In addition, the impact of sex/gender on ease of use and self-efficacy perceptions interacted with age, education, and country culture. This section draws together the experiences regarding the role of sex/gender in virtual training that I identified in my data.

The training participants in a virtual programme felt the virtual setting helped to create a more even playing field between women and men. Julia, a female training participant shared that the dominant and demanding behaviours of men seen in face-to-face meetings were gone:

> You know what, I think now that I think back on it, I think it actually helped the women in the group shine a little bit more... All of that (dominant demeanour of men in in-person meetings) went away I think in a virtual setting because the only thing you could interact through with that person, was the content of what they were saying (Julia - female training participant).
Tom, a male training participant, recognised the equalizing impact of a lack of psychical presence:

I think the environment you're in virtually is you have a screen, you have your camera on, it's really about your voice. Like your body language doesn't have as much of an impact. Whether you are standing up or sitting down or type of I guess domination. It's not there. It is very neutral playing ground. Which is I think also an element of removing gender stereotypes. So, it's an even playing field, I think.

This lack of dominant physical presence is even more apparent when cameras are off and Sophia, a female training participant, experienced more mindful behaviours:

I think in a face-to-face type of environment, I think there are a lot more interruptions because again you do have the visual to help. During the training again we did not have our cameras on for most of the time. I think people were mindful of let me listen to what this person has to say or let me wait until this person finishes typing. I think everyone was mindful of that. So, it was really positive.

Another advantage of virtual training programmes that was mentioned, was the opportunity to attend training from home and not having to travel. In addition, Walter, a male training participant, mentioned that face-to-face multi-day training often included evening bar time, and the convening of the ‘old boys’ network, which could be very difficult for women in his experience. This reminds me of an interview I did with a female board member who mentioned that evening bar time during multi-day meetings was one of the most excluding experiences, as the only woman in the team. On the other hand, combining training from home with care responsibilities, which may be invisible for fellow participants and trainers, may make attending from home even more challenging.

A virtual environment can also mean that categorising fellow training participants as woman or man is more pronounced, in order to establish one’s relation and connection to the other participants:
...being in a virtual setting we didn't have our cameras on all the time, and you could only just hear voices. And so, I almost felt that I was grabbing onto the person’s gender, or my perceived gender of them, like the only way of getting some sort of personal connection. Instead of what does the person look like, or wear or anything. Like that was all taken away (Julia - female training participant).

This resonates with my own experience, both as a training participant as well as a facilitator, to feel the need to picture who the participants are, and if and how these people are connected to me in terms of, for example, their sex, race, or age. In a virtual environment, especially when cameras are off, trying to assess whether a person is a woman or man, based on their name and voice, is one of the few identifiers available (even though names and voices can be deceptive). It would be interesting to understand whether a more pronounced female/male sex categorization in a virtual environment with cameras off, reinforces a binary perspective on sex/gender, not being able to see the fluidity in sex/gender expressions.

A potential concern for gender equity, as shared by a trainer and a programme owner, was that virtual training programmes tend to have a reduced scope, shorter duration, more individual work, and less teamwork, and hence bringing in a discussion on gender diversity and inclusion may become harder. Finally, balancing women/men representation may be more challenging when people have to be grouped by time zone.

The above suggests that the switch from face-to-face to virtual sessions does not need to be more challenging for gender equity and inclusion and could actually be supportive, however a more conscious effort needs to be made to include gender and equity and inclusion in the training design and facilitation.

**Gender Subtext Analysis**

To further assign meaning to the data, the data was interrogated a second time, and more critically, in order to develop an understanding whether current approaches to training
actually may produce sex/gender inequity. The critical lens was in the form of a gender subtext analysis, referring to often concealed organisational processes and practices that seem neutral and impersonal, however in effect produce gender differences and inequalities (Raaijmakers et al., 2018; Bendl, 2008; Benschop and Doorewaard, 1998). A gender subtext analysis means explicitly focussing on the “underlying processes, assumptions and meanings that account for specific representations of social practices” (Benschop and Doorewaard 1998 p791). It is argued that many organisational practices, while seemingly neutral, in reality maintain a binary and hierarchical difference between women and men (Bendl, 2008). Research highlights that practices and processes, such as: recruitment, hiring and promotion; how the work is organised; and social interactions at work, produce inequalities (Acker 2009). The company in which my research took place is strongly committed to a formal policy of gender equality, and hence a gender subtext may reveal a “gender inequality-that-cannot be” (Benschop and Doorewaard, 1998, p803).

Whereas the gender subtext and gendering processes, described in the literature reviewed, focussed mainly on the inequity of women, and while I recognise and oppose the under-representation of women in corporate (leadership) positions, I believe the gender subtext analysis can and should also be relevant for marginalised men, for example men who do not identify with dominant, hegemonic masculinities. This view is supported by the argument of Atkins and Vicars (2016) that men who act outside of hegemonic maleness face similar issues as women. In my interviews I did not focus on interrogating experiences of marginalised and restricted masculinities, and how these were reflected in the training, which could be an area for future research. However, with an understanding of the exclusion of women and the feminine, lessons can be learnt for marginalised men as well.

Building on the overview of forms of gender subtext by Bendl (2008), I will discuss seven areas of gender subtext that can be recognised in the data, which will each be discussed in more detail:

- The excluding practice of dominant, hegemonic masculinities is ignored
- Gendered perspectives and lived experiences are excluded
- The impact of power and privilege is neglected
- Concepts are positioned as neutral but that have gendered implications
• The mantra of choice
• Positioning women as ‘the other’
• Femininity is decoupled from women

**The excluding practice of dominant, hegemonic masculinities is ignored**

In the work environment described by the research participants, hegemonic masculinities (performed by both men and women), restricted behaviours and opportunities at work (cf. p103). In addition, gendered societal expectations towards women and men, for example regarding part-time work and career focus, defined expected and accepted masculinities, that restricted workplace behaviours and career choices. The barriers and challenges that the female interviewees experienced in the work environment highlighted a major difference in the performativity of femininity versus masculinity in a business environment (cf. p14). This is especially the case when referring to management and leadership levels that are strongly connected to masculinity (Kangas, Lämsä and Jyrkinen, 2019). Hegemonic masculine environments may equally negatively impact men who do not adhere to stereotypical male lifestyle and behavioural norms.

When current training programmes do not recognise and address the excluding practice of dominant, hegemonic masculinities in the work environment, these programmes risk (unconsciously) maintaining the status quo. Current programmes seem to accept that organisations reflect, value and privilege masculine practices, impacting both women and men (Knights and Pullen, 2019; Hearn, 2014; Whitehead, 2014). However, not only may the status quo of sex/gender equity be maintained, sex/gender inequity can actually be produced, by normalizing that the excluding practice of dominant masculinities in the work environment is not a topic for discussion or consideration. This invariably will strengthen the dominance of hegemonic masculinities and weaken the position of femininities and non-hegemonic masculinities. In addition, gender inequity is also produced because the training outcome may not be equitable, when failing to recognise and address how cultural, structural, and material circumstances provide or hamper opportunities to implement the training. When not reflecting that one group faces structurally different and more significant barriers than others, this implies that people who do not make it, did not try or work hard
enough. When training does not reflect the barriers and needs that women and the feminine face, training will create inequity by enhancing the development of men more than the development of women. An important issue is that the training programmes researched did not analyse training evaluations by sex/gender, which resulted in a gender data gap (Criado-Perez, 2019), or not knowing whether training meets development needs of women, men and non-binary people.

**Gendered perspectives and lived experiences are excluded.**

It became apparent in the interviews and programme material that the role of sex and gender, as well as diversity and inclusion were not distinct topics of the programmes (cf. p91), which could confirm the finding that in the development of managers and leaders, gender is a blind spot (Stead, 2014). Other notions of difference, such as functional differences or differences in personality, were stated as more salient than gender differences, especially by the male interviewees (cf. p92). However, these alternatives might themselves be gendered as, within those, men and masculine practices and dominance may still have the advantage (Adichie, 2014; Ely and Padavic, 2007). The importance of including the lenses of women was shown in the reflection on a women-only leadership programme by one of the programme owners (cf. p97), confirming the literature on women-only leadership programmes that these programmes provide a safe environment to share gendered experiences and barriers without the risk of being seen as weak or incompetent (cf. p43). The reported benefits for women to be able to reflect on the training concepts and implementation from a sex/gender perspective, implies that gender-neutral does not automatically mean gender equitable (Criado-Perez, 2019). The concern being, as Benschop and Doorewaard (1998 p800) aptly state, that:

> The identical treatment for all often impairs women. The organisational culture gives priority to the emphasis on equal opportunities rather than the recognition of the unequal practices” (emphasis in the original).

From this perspective, the exclusion of gendered perspectives and lived experiences produces inequity, because it hampers the development of women.
The exclusion of gendered experiences and realities may be comparable to the issue of micro-invalidation, one of three racial micro-aggressions identified by Sue et al. (2007). While focusing on race, Sue et al. argue that micro-aggressions can be equally powerful and detrimental for other social categories such as gender and sexual orientation. Micro-invalidation is characterised by communications and environments that:

Exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color (sic) (Sue et al. 2007 p274).

Two themes within micro-invalidation seem especially relevant for my study: the first theme is colour blindness, or the pretence that a white person does not see colour or race. This aligns with the finding in the interviews with male training participants, who shared that they do not notice the sex of their colleagues:

So, I see women at work always as my peers...I have also never seen them as a different sex who I need to deal with differently...I just see everybody as equal (Henk Jan - male training participant).

The second theme is the denial of individual racism. Examples given for this theme are “I am not a racist. I have several Black friends” (Sue et al. 2007 p276). This reminds me of the many times male participants in my research mentioned they are gender blind because they have grown up with working women and have many female colleagues:

So, my mum is a..., my sister is a..., in my life most of my bosses were women, also my peers and employees...are mostly women. So, my life is about working and living with women...I think I am very much gender blind (Sonus - male training participant).

Tom, another male training participant, had the same perspective:

I grew up with a sister and a mum so in terms of my personal relationships with females it is totally fine.

Sue et al. argue that micro-aggressions are detrimental, as they impair performance and create inequities.
As discussed in the introduction, an important revisited stance on gender subtext is to no longer focus only on gender, but to incorporate intersectionality as an important aspect of inequality, meaning that gender, race, class, ethnicity and other areas of difference are interconnected and reinforce their impact on equity and inclusion (Benschop and Doorewaard, 2012). This means that future research needs to investigate not only whether the perspectives and lived experiences of women are included in training, but the experiences of which women are included. As outlined before, the question could equally be asked which men are included, and how intersectionality plays a role in the case of the inclusion of marginalised men and masculinities (Hearn, 2014).

The impact of power and privilege is neglected.

The data showed that development, and especially leadership development, is approached as an individual and gender-neutral endeavour. However, it is argued that development is a social action and construct, and that power and privilege, access to resources and being able to decide on the rules of the game, shape behaviour and development opportunities (Fox-Kirk, 2017; Stead, 2014). Gender is a symbolic capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2013), and context may enable or restrain the actions of women and men, as discussed above in the subtext of excluding practice of dominant, hegemonic masculinities. Not incorporating a discussion on power and privilege in development programmes can be positioned as a way by the powerful or the elites to maintain status quo and gender inequalities. Raaijmakers et al. (2018 p25) argue that groups with different access to power and resources will produce different “learning truths”. From this perspective, neglecting the impact of power and privilege, and only seeing the “learning truth” of the powerful and privileged, could actually produce gender inequity. To disrupt could mean that (leadership) development needs to be approached as social action, and gendered context needs to be part of the discussions:

This requires the development of a different set of skills than has been taught traditionally in training programs (sic). A move away from ‘leader centric’ theories of organizing and toward an understanding of the impact of context on individuals is required (Fox-Kirke, 2017 p445).
Simpson and Ituma (2009) argue that managers need to recognize how power and privilege create dominant practices and how their own actions maintain and support these practices. As an example of what this could mean, is that currently one of the programmes instructs participants that leaders:

know their people: their purposes, aspirations, skills, capabilities, strengths, and areas of opportunity (programme guide).

A contextualised, sex/gender-sensitive instruction, from my perspective and in my own words, could mean adding that leaders understand how gendered environments enable some and limit others; that leaders understand how power and privilege impact ambitions and opportunities; and that leaders consciously help their people to navigate and improve the work environment.

It is important to realise that power is not always manifest. Benschop and Doorewaard (2012) recommend paying attention to hegemonic power processes which are concealed, hybrid and often positioned as common-sense and rational. It could be argued that individual notions of leadership and dominant masculine behaviours are forms of hegemonic power processes. The concept of privilege is an interesting perspective in this regard, as it helps to understand common-sense processes, and how the privileged may not see that experiences that are perceived as “neutral, normal, and universally available to everybody” (McIntosh, 1988 p8), are in fact only available to those who belong to the privileged group. An example would be that men have the privilege of not having to think about how to be seen as both credible and masculine, while for women, femininity and credibility results in role incongruity and the double bind dilemma (Debebe, 2017), as is shown in the following experience of Walter, a male training participant:

They (names of female leaders) are people who are so inspirational as a person that you realise they did not have to give anything up of their femininity or person or mother role or whatever, one way or another.

Part of the problem is that the dominant group is not taught to see privilege, and as a result, sexism (and racism) is seen as individual acts of meanness, not as institutionalised processes. An important learning for me was reading McIntosh (1988 p4) and realising that
my white privilege can be compared to the privilege of men, and I realised that as a white person:

My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture.

McIntosh sees as our chief task to be explicit about the effects of privilege systems in particular contexts. In line with Bourdieu (2018), the question is: who benefits from the current practice of not discussing sex and gender during training programmes? This could bring out tensions between what is said and what is done, in terms of diversity and inclusion (Fox-Kirk, 2017; James, 2011). I would argue that current so-called gender-neutral approach to training, benefits the unencumbered worker (Acker, 2006), dominance of men, and masculine behaviours and attitudes.

**Concepts are positioned as neutral but that have gendered implications**

Concepts introduced within the training programme are positioned as neutral, but in reality, can be gendered or have gendered implications, in two ways. On the one hand, O’Neill, Hansen and May (2002) argue that a society’s culture creates understandings of femininities and masculinities as well as social role expectations (expectations of gendered behaviours). When certain skills and behaviours are seen as feminine, such as interpersonal skills, empathy and people orientation, the self-image and the masculine norms of organisational behaviour can prevent men and masculinities from adopting these perceived feminine skills. On the other hand, concepts such as leadership, can be positioned as sex/gender-neutral, but in fact have gendered connotations. Transferring training is not done in a social vacuum and numerous studies have shown that organisational cultures and practices are gendered (Fox-Kirk, 2017; Ljungholm, 2016; Ibarra, Ely and Kolb, 2013; Gherardi and Poggio, 2001; Acker, 1990).

An example of a leadership concept, presented in one of the training programmes, is autonomy, defined as the opportunity to direct your own life and work, recommending that “to be fully motivated, you must be able to control what you do, when you do it, and who you do it with” (MindTools, nd np). It is interesting to consider the relationship with two frequently mentioned trainee characteristics that are important for training outcome: self-
efficacy - the personal belief in one’s ability to perform and be successful; and the locus of control - the perception of whether events are under one’s control (internal locus of control) or controlled by others (external locus of control) (Gully and Chen, 2010). An internal locus of control positively influences self-efficacy, which is one of the factors firmly agreed to positively impact training transfer (Ford, Baldwin and Prasad, 2018). Autonomy as a leadership trait is positioned, in the training programme researched, as neutral and unembodied. However, Gully and Chen (2010) suggest that gender impacts on perceived control and self-efficacy. This impact does not necessarily imply essential differences between the sexes, but women may experience a more external locus of control, because their actions are restricted by the context, such as by care responsibilities and gendered barriers to career progression (Acker, 2009). The autonomous employee resembles Acker’s concept of disembodied worker: a fulltime, unencumbered, work-oriented employee, often more reflective of the realities of men than women. From this perspective, training programmes that position a concept such as autonomy, that has gendered implications, as gender-neutral, can in effect create gender inequity, because these programmes create men-oriented requirements for career progression. Or as Thun (2019 p176) states, in the context of academia:

...the criteria of excellence are not objective, neutral and universal, and they are more difficult to achieve for some academics than for others — usually women...

This relates to the question whether women and men have the same opportunity to own and develop their own identities at work (Swan, Stead and Elliott, 2009), especially since research shows that female leaders feel they have to become a less feminine self at work, not showing any weakness or emotions (Bullock, 2019). Not surprisingly, identity work is mentioned as one of key focus areas for women, in women-only leadership programmes (Ely, Ibarra, and Kolb, 2011).

**The mantra of choice**

Training programmes are designed to be “a safe place for everybody to share, learn from each other, experiment and grow” (Facilitator Guide). In line with the analogy of a “mask”
used by a female interviewee mentioned before (cf. p103), it is a place where Henk-Jan, a male participant, can take off his mask:

Put me in a place where it is tough and difficult, then I can wear the mask and I will get through. But because we did not have to do that (in the training), the training had much more impact.

Within this discourse of training as a safe place, the approach in the training programmes was to provide the opportunity and environment for training participants to reflect on the role and impact of sex and gender, when the participants choose to do so:

That first unpacking of people's natural leadership style can be quite interesting and can actually be fuel for further discussions as it should be in terms of reflecting back on 'How did you present yourself in that activity, were you in your comfort zone, were you not in your comfort zone, in telling other people what to do or in being told what to do, and why is it that? (Beth – female programme owner).

However my data (cf. p109) confirmed other research that showed it can be difficult to discuss gender related issues in a training environment, for fear of being seen as weak or uncommitted (Stead, 2014). The implicit challenge is that if you do not bring up gendered challenges, then that is your own choice, without any consideration of whether the dominant practices allow for these discussions to happen, or whether the group composition is such that it is felt inappropriate. In their research regarding power relations in leadership development, Nicholson and Carroll (2013 p1243) find:

Some participants may not feel they have the ability, voice, language or power to resist the preferred identities or ways of doing identity work, even if they wanted to, owing to the disciplining effects of normalizing judgment, mutual surveillance and confessionary activities.

From this perspective, the mantra of choice creates gender inequity, because it prevents gendered experiences and barriers being discussed, and as a result negatively impacts the development of women.
The trainers/coaches play an important facilitating role in discussing gendered experiences and barriers, as argued by Edith, a female training participant (cf. p116). However the question could be asked whether trainers are willing, and able, to have these discussions, deal with emotions and be aware and reflective of gender issues (Stead, 2014). In the context of identity development as part of a leadership development programme, Nicholson and Carroll (2013 p1240) suggest that facilitators are “hierarchical figures that invited, sanctioned, disrupted, supported and challenged”. This is an often-neglected power relation, within a training context, that became evident in the concerns that two male training participants had with the dominant, hegemonic masculine approach of a trainer in their programme.

*Positioning women as ‘the other’*

The gender subtext of positioning “women as the other” (Bendl, 2008 p56) interrogates the discourse that positions women as different from the male norm. In my data this became apparent with the practice of women-only training programmes. As Karen, a female programme owner shared, when deciding on a development journey for an employee, the company would look at hierarchical level, function, and special talent pools, such as being a senior woman. While the intent is positive in terms of recognising gendered barriers and a focus on supporting female leaders, the result is positioning women as different or ‘the other’, attaching women to the ‘gender’ model while men are linked to the ‘job’ model (Bendl, 2008). Training programmes that position women as ‘the other’ can in effect create inequity, as Karen, one of the programme owners realised:

> We ran a programme for general managers that was focussed on women, and actually some of them actually found it a bit offensive that it was a female cohort. Now I think there is a general perception that: “hey I am as good as anybody else. I don’t want any special treatment” ... I think we might have got this one a bit wrong.

Interestingly, already in 2002, an article describing the experiences of the International Training Centre of the International Labour Organization (ILO) realised the same:
Until December 1999, a Women in Development Program (sic) had been delivering effective women and gender courses. However, this happened somehow in isolation from the rest of the activities in the Training Department. For a successful and effective mainstreaming though, gender equality concerns have to be incorporated in **each individual training action** across the board (Cavazza, 2002 p89; emphasis in the original).

A separate but related issue could be that positioning female leaders as ‘the other’ in need of separate programmes, means a focus on a few women, and not challenging the structures and cultures in need of change. Or in other words, “target only a few of the players and leave the game and its rules intact” (Benschop and van den Brink, 2014 p335).

**Femininity is decoupled from women**

Literature on effective management, teamwork and leadership styles and practices suggests a trend towards what is stereotypically called feminine orientation: transformative, communal, people oriented, and facilitating instead of directive ways of working (Due-Billing and Alvesson, 2014; Broadbridge and Simpson, 2011). In the training programmes researched, this is evident by, for example, the inclusion of emotional intelligence, empathy, and the concern for others and the environment, as important employee characteristics. Interestingly, on the one hand this is called ‘de-masculinization’ (Due-Billing and Alvesson, 2014), and on the other hand, ‘re-masculinization’:

> ... practices and processes previously coded (and celebrated as) ‘feminine’ have been re-shaped and brought into the masculine domain (Broadbridge and Simpson, 2011 p474).

Although seemingly positive, the challenge is that this re-masculinization is twofold: firstly, it does not necessarily address or challenge the dominance of masculine discourses itself or the gender hierarchy. Research finds that companies attach higher value to task-oriented skills than interpersonal skills (Kairys, 2018), and that communal skills are less effective for promotion to most senior positions (Eagly, Cartzia and Carli, 2014). This was confirmed by the experience of Francois, a male training participant when stating that in the company everybody just has to perform and to achieve that, a certain level of masculine behaviour is
always encountered. Relentless competition, profit orientation and challenging growth targets, may allow organisations limited space to really support a more feminine orientation (Due-Billing and Alvesson, 2014). In addition, a more feminine style is seen as more suitable in situations of poor company performance, while masculine styles are associated with successful companies (Ryan, Haslam and Hersby, 2010). Secondly, the enhanced appreciation for the feminine is decoupled from women, and the challenges and under-representation women encounter in a business environment (Bendl, 2008). Or as Hearn (2014 p425) aptly points out: “Masculinities may change... but the power of men less so”. Adding femininity to a repertoire of identities and behaviours can be experienced as manipulative (Nicholson and Carroll, 2013), confirmed by Francois, a male training participant:

   So, I know of a few leadership meetings in which people who do not show very feminine behaviour normally, suddenly started to show feminine behaviour for example. Actually, a bit like in a theatre.

Femininity decoupled from women, adds femininity as an optional behaviour and perspective (Bendl, 2008). The curriculum becomes more feminine, however, only valued when performed by otherwise masculine men and women (Swan, Stead and Elliott, 2009). From this perspective, training programmes that decouple feminine attitudes from women, and bring the feminine into the masculine, produce inequity by reinforcing the gender hierarchy (Broadbridge and Simpson, 2011).

The seven areas of gender subtext presented in this section all refer to underlying and hidden ways in which current training practice may not only maintain, but actually produce gender inequity. This are important insights considering my second research question, as will be further discussed in the next chapter.

**Summary**

This chapter first presented an analysis of the three themes that I identified in the data: the problematic concept of gender-neutral training programmes, the problematic concept of decontextualised training and the importance of awareness to understand the role of
sex/gender. The data analysis outlined the many ways in which sex/gender can play a role before, during and after training, but that awareness is needed to be able to recognise this. In addition, data analysis regarding the impact of COVID-19 and the conversion to virtual training, was discussed, showing how virtual training can be both supportive, but also a challenge, for sex/gender equity in training. In the second section, a gender subtext analysis was presented, and a more critical analysis of the data was conducted. Building on the framework of Bendl (2008), seven areas of gender subtext were explored to understand how training may maintain and even produce gender inequity. The next chapter will discuss how these findings informed my research questions and the implications for theory and practice.
Chapter 5. Discussion

This discussion chapter begins with a summary of how the data informed the research questions, followed by a discussion of training as a sociocultural activity. Next, the implications for theory and practice will be outlined, and the limitations of the study recognised.

Informing the research questions

The following section is organised according to my three research questions.

RQ1. What is the role of sex/gender in corporate training programmes, as experienced by the participants, organisers, and trainers of these programmes?

The data analysis has shown that, initially, identifying as a woman or man did not play a role in the experiences of the training participants. No questions were asked, and no experiences shared, about identifying or expressing as a different sex/gender than the sex assigned at birth (transgender) or as non-binary individual. In addition, gender in the form of behaviours or attitudes, described as masculinities and femininities, did not play a role in the initial exploration of experiences of the training participants either. There was no recollection of either sex or gender in any way affecting the training experience or outcome, and training participants felt the training programmes were gender-neutral and inclusive. The interviewed programme organisers (called programme owners) and trainers shared that the sex/gender of the participants, and sex/gender diversity and inclusion, did not play a conscious role when designing or facilitating training programmes, except when it concerned training specifically focussed on diversity and inclusion, such as women-only leadership programmes. The analysis of the training documentation confirmed the absence of an awareness and recognition of sex/gender.

The above outcome confirms current training theory and models, as well as professional literature, that suggest that sex/gender does not play an important role in training, and is merely a descriptive factor of training participants, as discussed in the literature review (cf. p26. This outcome also supports the rival proposition of my case study, namely that being or
identifying as a woman or man and femininities/masculinities do not play a role, but that it is the personality of the trainee that drives training experiences and outcomes, independent of the sex/gender of the individual training participant. In addition, all male interviewees shared that other areas of difference impacted them, such as hierarchical levels, work experience or functional department.

However, an important finding in my data was that the impact of sex/gender is not always recognised, which is confirmed by research that suggests that the processes of sex/gender inequity can be hidden, consciously or unconsciously (Benschop and Doorewaard, 2012). As the interviews progressed and the role of sex/gender was further discussed, interviewees started to describe several ways in which sex/gender impacted the training experience, design, and facilitation. In addition, during the second part of the interviews, statements were introduced to stimulate critical reflection (cf. Appendix 3, p.190). These statements were based on gender and training literature that describes gendered lived experiences, gendered barriers and needs, dominant masculine work cultures and the absence of a recognition of sex/gender in training literature. The data analysis highlighted how interviewees started to recognise the role of sex/gender in training, for example, in the interaction between care responsibilities and the timing, duration and intensity of the training, and in stereotypical gendered roles and behaviours during the training, for example in the division of tasks in break out groups. Concluding, participants realised that sex/gender can play an important role before and during training, potentially impacting the outcome of training, but that these gendered dynamics were not recognised in the training design or facilitation. Hence, the data analysis suggested that the concept of gender-neutral training, or training that assumes sex/gender equity means treating everybody the same, may be problematic.

In addition, interviewees shared how the work environment favoured dominant masculine behaviours and values, which created barriers for women and the feminine. All the female interviewees shared experiences that reflected how the masculine work environment negatively impacted them. In addition, dominant masculine work cultures also limited male interviewees in their behaviours, in terms of what was expected and required to be successful. These gendered realities, barriers and needs in the work environment were not
recognised or addressed during training, but potentially impact the relevance and transferability of the training. This led to the suggestion that the decontextualisation of training, or focusing training on the competencies of the individual, and not the gendered realities outside of the training, is the second problematic concept of current training practice.

These findings confirm the conclusions from the literature review and the subsequent sex/gender-sensitive model of training that I developed (cf. p49), that sex/gender can play an important role before, during and after training, which may impact a training participant, potentially resulting in inequity in the outcome of training. For example, the data analysis highlighted that personal coaching, to support the transfer of training to the workplace, was mentioned by two female training participants, but not male training participants. Comparing my data with the sex/gender-sensitive model of training, my case study of training in a corporate environment confirms the model in several ways, as shown in Table 9.

Table 9. Sex/Gender-sensitive model of training – confirmed elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal circumstances</th>
<th>Care responsibilities 1) impact the ability and willingness to travel and be away from home for training, 2) impact the flexibility to attend longer and/or more intense training programmes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trainee Characteristics</td>
<td>Lived gendered experiences and challenges impact training needs and design preferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intersectionality</td>
<td>Gendered lived experiences are connected with other social categories such as ethnicity and nationality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work environment</td>
<td>The work environment (especially at leadership level) is characterised as hegemonic masculine and reflecting a directive leadership style. This culture sets expectations for what it takes to be successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society environment</td>
<td>Gendered expectations in terms of care responsibilities, ambition, and work practices (part-time, full-time work), impact work environment and personal circumstances</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Training Design

- The location, duration and timing of training impacts the ability to combine work and family responsibilities.
- Women/men ratio during training impacts gendered social dynamics during training.
- Masculine norms and expectations impact the opportunity to share gendered experiences and barriers.
- Training concepts and theory, positioned as gender-neutral, can in effect be gendered, having different meaning and implications for women and men.

Training Outcome

- The training may not acknowledge the importance of gendered perspectives and experiences.
- Women (and marginalised masculinities) may not be able to transfer training to the workplace in the same way as men, as result of dominant masculine cultures and hierarchies.
- The training may not include the skills, knowledge, and behaviours that women (and marginalised masculinities) need to be successful.

My case study also further developed the sex/gender-sensitive model of training, as shown in table 10.

**Table 10. Sex/gender-sensitive model of training – additional insights**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trainee Characteristics</th>
<th>The interpretation and meaning of sex/gender varies, based on personal histories, social and cultural context, gendered experiences, values, and beliefs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Training Design</td>
<td>Multi-day training may include evening bar time, exclusion of women and convening of the old boys’ network.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The level of pre-work required impacts the ability to combine work and family responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decontextualised training models and theories ignore hegemonic masculine company cultures, power, and privilege</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presence of female and male leaders as role models, especially at leadership level, communicates who belongs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trainers’ gendered behaviours and attitudes impact inclusivity of learning (of women and men)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Training needs analyses and evaluations do not ensure the inclusion of the perspectives and needs of women and men. This leads to a potential data bias and a gender data gap (Criado-Perez, 2019)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Whether training is face-to-face or virtual may impact the role and impact of sex/gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The training may not have provided women and men the opportunity and language to explain and understand gendered experiences, barriers and needs. Women may require personal coaching to be able to implement the training in a masculine environment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So-called gender-neutral, decontextualised training, does not recognise or address the role of sex/gender before, during and after training. As a result, current training practice does not challenge, but maintains the status quo of sex/gendered inequity.

The data analysis also highlighted the importance of awareness in realising the role of sex/gender. The discussions enabled the interviewees to problematize common-sense approaches to training, as reflected in current training theory and models (cf. p26), wherein the role of sex/gender is not acknowledged. In other words, the data analysis highlighted the “emancipatory function of knowledge” (Scotland, 2012 p13). As a result, the participants were able to identify opportunities to design and develop more gender equitable training, as will be further discussed on p139.

RQ2. What role do current training practices play in sex/gender (in)equity?

In order to understand the role of current training practice in sex/gender (in)equity, a gender subtext analysis was conducted. The gender subtext focus provided the analytical tools to describe training processes, practices and concepts that seem neutral but, in reality, support gendered realities and inequity (Bendl, 2008; Benschop and Doorewaard 1998). Seven areas of gender subtext were analysed; the excluding practice of dominant, hegemonic masculinities is ignored; gendered perspectives and lived experiences are excluded; the impact of power and privilege is neglected; concepts are positioned as neutral but that have gendered implications; the mantra of choice; positioning women as ‘the other’ and finally, femininity that is decoupled from women.

In summary, the gender subtext analysis highlighted that when training does not recognise, and address, the excluding practice of dominant masculinities and masculine cultures, it
maintains the status quo of the dominance of men (especially at senior level), as well as masculine behaviours and practices, whether performed by women or men. But ignoring excluding masculine cultures and practices may also produce this reality by indicating that not challenging these practices and values, is the norm. There is also the implication that people who are not successful (after the training), did not try or work hard enough. The analysis also suggested that the exclusion of gendered perspectives and lived experiences in training may produce inequity, because it hampers the development of women and the feminine. A comparison was made between the exclusion of gendered experiences and realities and the issue of micro-invalidation, a concept that originated in critical race literature, highlighting how realities of people of colour are excluded, negated, or nullified (Sue et al. 2007). The analysis emphasised the importance of acknowledging intersectionality, ensuring that the gendered perspectives and lived experiences of all women are included. When power and privilege are neglected in training, women (and other marginalised sex/genders) may never receive the resources, knowledge and skills needed to be successful after the training. In addition, the analysis highlighted that gender inequity may be produced, because the training may only see the “learning truth” of the powerful and privileged (Raaijmakers et al., 2018 p25). Privilege enables the privileged to see their experiences as universally available, not recognising the gendered barriers and challenges that women face. Neglecting power and privilege means that the privileged will never learn how their behaviours produce inequity, consciously or unconsciously. In addition, the gender subtext analysis discussed how neutral concepts may in fact be gendered, i.e., have different implications for women and men. Not recognising the gendered nature of concepts such as leadership may create inequity by setting expectations for what it takes to be successful, while the gendered realities and barriers make it more difficult for women than men to achieve. Training programmes are designed to be safe places for sharing, learning and development. The expectation is that participants have a choice to discuss gendered experiences and barriers. However, the analysis regarding the mantra of choice, described how sharing gendered experiences and barriers risks being perceived as weak or uncommitted. The mantra of choice may create inequity because it prevents gendered experiences and barriers to be actively included in training design and facilitation. As discussed in the context of gendered perspectives and lived experiences being excluded from training, this may negatively impact on the professional development
and career progression of women. Positioning women as ‘the other’, for example in women-only leadership programmes, may produce inequity by signalling that women lack something that men, as natural leaders, have. And it takes away the opportunity for men to understand and challenge their own masculinities and the way they ‘do’ men. The final subtext analysis interrogated a femininity decoupled from women. The data confirmed a re- or de-masculinization of working, with an emphasis on stereotypically more feminine styles of working, such as emotional intelligence and a care for others. The analysis described that femininity decoupled from women may produce inequity, by making feminine values and behaviours optional, and by not denouncing dominant masculine behaviours and attitudes.

Concluding, the gender subtext analysis highlighted how current gender-neutral training content, concepts and approaches may in fact create gender inequity and exclusion in very distinct ways, supporting the “gender inequality-that-cannot-be” (Benschop and Doorewaard, 1998 p803). Hence my data suggested that the absence of a recognition of the role of sex/gender in training is not value neutral but risks reproducing traditional power (Rogers, 2006), supporting the continuation of the underrepresentation of women and marginalised masculinities.

RQ 3. Can training practices become more sex/gender inclusive and equitable?

The data analysis included a range of suggestions how to make training more sex/gender inclusive and equitable. First, findings from the data highlighted the important consideration that sex/gender means different things to different people. In my research, almost all male participants equated gender with the biological sex category of a person, while the female participants perceived gender as an identity or an expression, independent of the biological sex category one was assigned to at birth. These different perspectives on gender reflect the two discourses on gender as discussed in the review of gender literature (cf. p5), whereby gender is either seen as an essential consequence of ones’ sex, or as a form of doing, a performance, independent of ones’ sex (Butler, 2006; West and Zimmerman, 1987). The practice of referring to the representation of women as gender diversity and inclusion, in a business environment, probably does not help to clarify the difference between sex and gender and may actually reinforce the understanding that gender equals ones’ sex category.
Confusion around sex/gender terminology limits the capability to engage in discussions around sex/gender equity and inclusion in practice in several ways: firstly, not understanding the difference between sex, based on biological characteristics, and gender as thoughts, feelings and behaviours associated with women and men, risks essentialising differences between women and men as biologically determined and hence fixed; secondly, not having heard the perspective that gender is a social cultural construct, impacted by the social, cultural and historic context, may limit the ability to interrogate the role of gender stereotypes and bias, as well as organisational processes and structures that position women and men as different; thirdly, not having been exposed to the challenges to the gender binary from a biological as well as psychological perspective (cf. p7), may continue to sustain prejudice and exclusion of non-binary people, including, but not limited to, transgender and intersex people; finally, equating gender to sex category makes gender equity a women-issue instead of understanding how the thoughts, feelings and behaviours of men are also gendered, and how individuals with non-dominant masculinities may also face exclusionary practices. Based on the above, the first suggestion to make training more sex/gender equitable, is to bridge the gap between academia and practice, by sharing with training organisers and providers, foundational knowledge about the meaning of sex/gender. Second, one of the key learnings from the data is that the awareness of training providers and organisers of the role of sex/gender in training, and the ability to recognise how sex/gender impacts training experiences and outcomes, is a prerequisite for more sex/gender equitable training. In addition, the data highlighted that training providers need to be able and willing to engage in discussions on the role of sex, gender, power, and privilege in their training sessions. As will be discussed in the conclusions chapter (cf. p148), I have developed, and piloted, a train-the-trainer programme to enable training organisers and training providers to recognise, reflect and adjust their training programmes to support sex/gender equity. Third, the interviewees made important suggestions on how to make training more sex/gender equitable (cf. p115), such as understanding how frameworks and tools can affect women and men differently when designing a programme; being actively aware of how gendered norms and expectations are reproduced in training; being aware of gendered realities when deciding on the logistics of the training, and finally, having sex/gender diversity and inclusion actively build into the design and facilitation of the training.
Training as sociocultural activity

One of the elements in the sex/gender-sensitive model of training is that training can be seen as enculturation, communicating, and instilling the company’s culture and expected behaviours. This was based on research that highlighted how induction training programmes taught men, who were brought up in a working-class culture, to enact the dominant masculine company culture, in order to be accepted (Giazitzoglu and Muzio, 2020 – cf. p40). The role of training as enculturation is also reflected in my ontological position (cf. p53) that training teaches participants how to become part of a profession, or communicates the script of expected values, attitudes, and behaviours. As outlined, the concept of ‘script’ is also reflected in the work of Butler (2006), in terms of the expected ways of ‘doing’ gender in the company context.

My data confirmed that training can be seen as a form of enculturation. For example, training participants shared that they learned to speak a common language, and programme owners shared that the training instilled the company’s way of leadership. All three training programmes provided templates, frameworks, and processes for employees to implement at work. These frameworks and templates were perceived as helpful by the training participants, but they can also be seen as a script for success, especially because the programme owners shared that these frameworks and expected behaviours were part of assessments and performance feedback, and hence career progression. From this perspective, training can indeed be seen as a form of enculturation and reinforcing a normative expectation of what it means to be a competent employee and professional (Kolb and Kolb, 2016).

The perspective that training is an enculturation is especially important given the absence of recognising and addressing the role of sex/gender before, during and after training. Not discussing and challenging gendered experiences, barriers, and privileges, can, as a result, become part of the script of expected behaviours. This invariably will support the status quo of gendered hierarchies. In addition, the gender subtext analysis (cf. p119) argued that it may also produce gender inequity by communicating to newcomers that ignoring the role of sex/gender is the norm. In other words, as Nicholson and Carroll (2013 p1230) write about
power and leadership development programmes (LDP’s), referring to Foucault’s study of the subject and power:

In summary, LDPs can be characterized by a subtle form of power as individuals submit themselves to the rules and logics of a disciplinary regime while simultaneously participating in its production by internalizing its discourses and engaging in mutual surveillance.

As discussed (cf. p108), training can be seen as a form of power and part of an organisation’s effort to “structure the possible field of action” (Foucault, 1982 p790). Based on my data analysis and findings, I would suggest that a critical sociocultural research lens enabled a perspective beyond the construction of sex/gender by individual trainees towards a focus on how training is an integral part of a gendered environment, with an opportunity to maintain or disrupt this environment. This may be important, as Korte (2012 p23) argues, because emphasising the sociocultural instead of the individual as resource, offers “greater potential for improving learning, performance, and well-being”.

Implications for theory and practice

Findings from the data collated from the first training programme highlighted the important consideration that sex/gender means different things to different people. Discussing the meaning of sex/gender became a crucial part of subsequent data collection. For future research, an important implication is that before researching the impact of sex/gender, the meaning of sex/gender needs to be explored and clarified with research participants. In addition, using statements to stimulate critical reflection during the interviews was a new method, as far as I know. The discussions based on the statements showed how people’s perspectives and interpretations can change, when a researcher provides different lenses. Future research on the role of sex/gender needs to enable and empower participants in order to get meaningful, valid results, especially when common-sense beliefs in gender-neutrality are the default discourse.

Currently, the impact of sex/gender is not sufficiently reflected in training theories, models, professional training literature, or practice. The sex/gender-sensitive model of training (cf.
developed as part of the literature review, and further developed based on my own data, is a first step in recommending a more equitable and inclusive direction for training theory and practice. Future research can enhance the sex/gender-sensitive model of training and include additional constructs and relationships. Specific attention can be paid to further understanding the role of sex/gender in the outcome of training.

The reviewed literature that led to the sex/gender-sensitive model of training was mostly quantitative, focussing on identifying and quantifying differences between the female and male sex-categories. In quantitative research, gender is interpreted as a fixed, binary position, assigning a value of either 0 or 1 to categorise training participants as a woman or a man. As argued, this may lead to false notions of essential biological differences between women and men without consideration for the social, cultural, and historic context, and how these differences are not essential but constructed. Gender reflects how people think, feel and act, and is a complex concept that includes identities, expressions, stereotypes, and biases. My data analysis showed that dominant masculine cultures, power, and privilege impacted gender expressions, behaviours, and identities. This level of complexity is difficult to capture with quantitative correlational studies and further qualitative research may be needed to understand the complex dimensions of the role of sex/gender in training.

The qualitative research reviewed as part of the literature review, focussed mainly on the experiences and barriers of women, missing the opportunity to understand the perspectives of both women and men, and identifying excluding training and learning experiences of a wider range of marginalised gender identities. In addition, qualitative research that only listens to the voice of women may lead to self-serving bias and moral story telling (Due Billing and Alvesson, 2014). I chose to also include the voice of men, to understand how men ‘do’ and experience sex/gender in training. This is important and recommended for future research, as it reflects the real world where women and men together perform gender, thereby producing a gendered environment - the theory of performativity (Butler, 2006). The concern that including men in the research may mean supporting their privileged position, can be overcome by positioning the experiences of men within a reality of power and privilege, as I have done in my research (Broadbridge and Simpson, 2011).
Limitations of the study

This case study research was small scale, and because of COVID-19, additional data collection opportunities were limited. In addition, the research is situated within one company with a strong culture of commitment to gender diversity and inclusion. This context may not be applicable to other training programmes and contexts. Furthermore, the participants who decided to participate in the research may already have been engaged and interested in sex/gender equity discussions, more so than other training participants.

Qualitative studies are not statistically generalisable to other contexts and in this instance the inability to collect as much data as anticipated will have further impacted on the relevance to other companies. One could also argue that the introduction of the critical reflection statements resulted in manipulated voices versus naturally occurring voices (Pleines, 2020). However, it could also be argued that the joined, interviewee and interviewer, explored reflections and considerations enabled ‘common-sense’ beliefs and attitudes or constructs (the way we see the world) to be challenged in order to develop new constructs. The ethical considerations concerning the use of the statements are further discussed on p150.

Summary

This chapter started with outlining how the data informed my research questions. It described how my data reflected a wide range of instances where sex/gender plays a role in corporate training, as experienced by the participants, organisers, and trainers of these programmes. On the one hand, the data confirmed elements included in the sex/gender-sensitive model of training (cf. p49), such as the impact of gendered care-giving responsibilities on the ability to attend training. On the other hand, my data added new elements to the sex/gender-sensitive model of training, such as female and male role models during training. My research highlighted the importance of awareness in realising the role of sex/gender, given the strength of common-sense beliefs and practices. In response to my second research question, about the role current training practices play in sex/gender (in)equality, the conclusion was that current gender-neutral training content, concepts and approaches may in fact create gender inequity and exclusion in very distinct
ways. This means that the absence of a recognition of the role of sex/gender in training is not value neutral but risks the continuation of the underrepresentation of women. The third research question was if and how training practices can become more sex/gender inclusive and equitable. I described how the understanding of the meaning of sex/gender can and should be enhanced, and that training organisers and providers need to be more aware and enabled to recognise and address the role of sex/gender in their training. In addition to awareness, training facilitators need to be enabled and empowered to address diversity, equity, and inclusion in their training sessions, especially since they shared that they currently do not feel equipped to do so. In this chapter I also outlined that the data confirmed my ontological position that training can be seen as a sociocultural activity, and a script for accepted and expected behaviours. Next, the impact for theory and practice was discussed, including the recommendation that sex/gender should be an important consideration in training theory and practice. Finally, the limitations of my small-scale study were acknowledged.
Chapter 6. Conclusions

This final chapter begins with a reflection on how the COVID-19 pandemic increased the need to understand the role of sex/gender in training, and how the pandemic impacted my research. This is followed by how my research will support and impact training practice, as well as my plans for future research. Finally, I will reflect on my role as researcher and my personal reflections on the EdD journey and where I now find myself.

The impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic, that started in Europe in February 2020, increased the importance of reflecting on the role of sex/gender in training for two reasons. First, the pandemic deepened pre-existing inequalities (UN, 2020). One of the pre-existing inequalities was the representation of women in organisations, and the signs are that the pandemic worsened this situation:

“In fact, one of every four women in senior-level positions — more than two million of them — are now thinking about dialling back their job responsibilities (reducing work hours, moving to a part-time role, or switching to a less-demanding job), taking a leave of absence, or leaving the workforce altogether (McKinsey & Company, 2020 n.p.).

Research found that the gender gap in working hours grew by 20-50 percent, because mothers reduced their working hours more than fathers (Collins et al., 2021). Hence, it is more essential than ever to reflect on the role that training has in maintaining or changing the current sex/gender inequity in organisations. Second, with pressure on revenues and profits, companies and organisations may have to reset priorities and reallocate resources. Training budgets may have to be revisited, or reduced, and, in line with governments being called on to have gender sensitive budgeting (Criado-Perez, 2019), a similar call may go out to training budgeting in organisations. A sex/gender-sensitive training budget must reflect on which training is still provided, who has access to these training programmes, whose realities and needs are reflected in the training, and what is the impact on sex/gender equity and inclusion.
The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted my research in several ways. First, two of the three programmes, originally agreed with the company, were cancelled and not converted to a virtual design, within the timeframe of my research. These were functional programmes, both in areas with traditional dominance of men and masculine cultures. Including these could have potentially provided even more and different insights into the role and impact of sex/gender in corporate training. Second, the pandemic limited the overall availability of training, and the company was not able to offer more programmes for me to research. This however had the positive effect that I decided to include trainers in the research, whose experiences and perspectives proved to be very insightful and important. Third, analysing the impact of the conversion from face-to-face to virtual training became an unexpected aspect of my research. Although this added another element to review and analyse, it did make my research more relevant for the future, as it is expected that virtual training will continue to expand (Donovan, 2021). My data showed that there are pros and cons for sex/gender equity in the conversion to virtual training programmes, and future research needs to further explore and validate the different factors and relationships. Finally, as a result of the cancellation of the originally selected programmes, and having to wait for alternative (virtual) programmes to be offered by the company, my data collection was significantly delayed. This however allowed me the time to reflect on how, after my EdD, I can optimally engage, enable and empower trainers, and support future training practice to become more sex/gender equitable. This resulted in designing and facilitating a pilot train-the-trainer programme, that will be discussed in the next section.

**What’s next**

My intent is to share the sex/gender-sensitive model of training and my research via academic journals and professional associations. I have started to write blogs for the Association for Talent Development (ATD), and I have written a journal article for the Human Resource Management Journal (under review). In addition, I have been invited to join 20+ researchers in the multidisciplinary research hotspot Gender and Power in Politics and Management, organised quarterly by Radboud University in the Netherlands.
Based on my research, and my own journey as a researcher, I would suggest that informing and educating the business community about the complex, and sometimes controversial, terminology of sex and gender (Hyde et al., 2019), is a prerequisite for insightful discussions around the role of sex/gender at work and, more specifically, training. The difference in the interviews between the initial responses, and the discussions based on the critical reflection statements, was stark, and mirrored my own journey, and how knowledge enabled and empowered me. Only after I was confronted with academic gender literature and research did I realise all I did not know. This changed my perspectives and opened up so many new realities, as it did with the research participants. The question is how to bridge the gap between academia and practice in order to stimulate these critical discussions and reflections and support real change. With the aim of trying to answer this question, I developed two mini lectures on sex/gender, that are now shared with the business community, as well as training organisers and facilitators. Please find the links below:


In addition, I developed a train-the-trainer programme for corporate trainers in response to Gewirtz and Cribb (2006 p147), that ethical reflective researchers seriously consider “the practical judgements and dilemmas of the people we are researching”. The rationale for this programme was built on the learning from my research and the literature review, that training designers and facilitators need to be able, and willing, to discuss issues of gender, power, and interests (Stead, 2014). Trainers need to be observant, sensitive, knowledgeable, and capable, and be able to speak a language that is gender inclusive but not gender cancelling, a view expressed by Edith, a female training participant. However, the interviewed trainers felt they are not equipped to have these conversations.

The train-the-trainer Gender Equity in Training programme was an 8-week blended learning programme that included independent reading, reflection activities, scenarios and working on a real-life case. In addition, three (in the second pilot, four) 1-hour virtual meetings in MS Teams were included, with the objective to discuss and reflect on the independent
activities, and how the learning could be incorporated in training design and facilitation. The programme was developed around three themes: what we mean by gender; gender and the training system; and how to bring gender equity into training (cf. Appendix 9, p202 for the programme roadmap, and Appendix 10, p203 for a selection of recommendations to enhance the sex/gender equity of training programmes).

Two groups of four trainers from five different countries participated in two pilots and the feedback supported the need for, and value of, the programme (Table 11).

**Table 11. Feedback from train-the-trainer pilot**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback from train-the-trainer pilot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The programme made me realise that I was looking but not seeing”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I found out that although I believed to be rather sensitive regarding gender (actually sex), it is now clear to me that I was just scratching the surface”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I am confident that I will improve as a professional and this will be just the first step of this excellent training”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The fact that shook me most is that it took only 3 hours of sessions plus the homework to forget the -now completely outdated- beliefs I had regarding gender equity”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I now understand what I need to watch out for and how I can influence my training and the outcome of the training”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The programme helped me really think more deeply about the concept of gender especially in terms of language used and training materials”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My intent is to continue to develop this train-the-trainer programme and offer it to interested trainers and corporate clients alike, and hopefully build a community of practice for trainers and training organisers, committed to support sex/gender equity and inclusion.

**Future research**

My plan is to continue to research the role of sex/gender in corporate training, as an affiliated researcher. In my future research, I would like to specifically recognise the fluidity in sex/gender identities and expressions and explore the experiences and needs of non-binary and transgender people in relation to the training system, currently not reflected in the reviewed studies, or my own EdD research. In addition, while my research started to
explore how the role of sex/gender may be different in face-to-face training, versus an online set up, I can further develop this understanding, which is especially important since it is projected that training will continue to expand on, and refine, virtual learning and hybrid learning, with a blend of virtual and face-to-face programmes (Donovan, 2021). Questions to be asked, for example, could be around 1) the role of sex/gender in body language and physical presence in face-to-face training, versus the use of camera and voice in virtual training, 2) the opportunity to discuss sex/gender equity and inclusion in face-to-face versus virtual sessions, given the latter are often shorter, and 3) virtual versus face-to-face gendered group dynamics and interactions.

Reflections

This section will start with outlining a summary of my reflections regarding the impact of my own experiences, beliefs, and values on the research. This will be followed by a reflection on how the EdD journey impacted me over the past 3.5 years.

Researcher reflectivity

As a former female executive in global consumer goods companies, selling products ranging from diapers to soft drinks, I have personally experienced the barriers that women face. The gender, equity and diversity literature reviewed since 2016 created a “cognitive shift” (Hoyt and Kennedy, 2008 p28), allowing me to move from feeling responsible for my own career choices, to understanding how organisations are gendered and gendering (Calas et al., 2014). Based on this experience, I wanted to share the power of knowledge, through my EdD research, and enable people to question current training practices. However, this created the risk of me being biased and focussing only on experiences where sex/gender played a role, as well as leading my participants. To address this risk, I staged the interviews in such a way that I could first hear the training experiences of my research participants without any reference to sex or gender, followed by specifically asking for the impact of sex and gender in the training, and finally stimulating critical reflection based on statements (cf. Appendix 3, p190), and an active role of me as researcher. The question is whether providing the statements and critical reflection was empowering or leading my research participants, even though the intent of sharing of the statements was to embrace the
“emancipatory function of knowledge” (Scotland, 2012 p13) and apply the criteria of ontological and educative authentication (Lincoln and Guba, 1986). See Table 12 for the interview phases, my role and the risk of leading the participants.

Table 12. Leading or emancipating in the interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview phase</th>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Phase 2</th>
<th>Phase 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What was discussed</td>
<td>Participant’s context and experience with the training</td>
<td>Participant’s views on the role of sex category and gender in the training</td>
<td>Joined reflection on statements. Participant invited to critically reflect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher role</td>
<td>Listening, clarifying</td>
<td>Directing: asking specific question regarding impact of women/men; femininities/masculinities</td>
<td>Co-construction of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk of leading participants along the following process:</td>
<td>Sex category/ gender not considered in training</td>
<td>Now it is mentioned, feeling it may play a role but not really an important issue</td>
<td>Feeling the need to acknowledge that sex/ gender has an impact and needs to be considered</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I do recognise there is a risk of “retrospective sensemaking by image-conscious informants” (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007 p28). The way I addressed this concern, was by being transparent in my data analysis and conclusions, and making the different phases of the interviews visible, and drawing distinct conclusions from the interviews before and after critical reflections, in terms of the role of sex/gender in training experiences. In the data analysis I presented the different voices in my data: the experiences of the interviewees, before and after the co-construction of knowledge, based on the critical reflection statements. The data analysis included coding and organising these experiences into themes, to attach meaning and be able to compare the uninterrupted and interrupted voices (Pleines, 2020), while at the same time ensuring that these experiences were not positioned in such a way that the original meaning or intent, was distorted.

Another area where my own experiences, beliefs and values played a significant role was in the approach of a gender subtext analysis, hence this should be open to ethical interrogation (Schwandt, Lincoln and Guba, 2007). Informing the reader about the extent of
which the analysis is the informants’ voice versus the researcher’s voice, is recommended to enhance the believability of case studies (Bachor, 2002). A gender subtext analysis presents the critical paradigm and interpretation of the researcher and not necessarily the research participants’ experiences or viewpoint. The risk was that by focussing on, and foregrounding, the gender subtext analysis, the research participants and research audience may have felt that sex/gender issues were created or overemphasised. I managed this potential critique by offering the gender subtext analysis as a second level analyses, and by providing the full chain of evidence on how I arrived at the conclusions, intending to give readers the opportunity to reflect, consider and agree or disagree with the analysis. In addition, I shared the data analysis (including the gender subtext analysis) with the training participants, to ask for their perspectives. The four participants who responded were supportive of the analysis and conclusions.

A third topic for reflection is what the impact has been of me being a female researcher/interviewer, especially when interviewing men. Rubin and Rubin (2005) argue that interviews can produce better results when the interviewer and interviewee have a different sex. However it is also argued that differences in ways of communication (based on different socialisation) between women and men may impact woman-man conversations and hence cross gender interviews (Heim, 2014; Rubin and Rubin, 2005). I recognise that I was conscious in my interviews with men that there was a balance between being professional, but not overly assertive, non-threatening and careful not to be seen as biased or siding with women (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). Especially in the critical reflection part of the interviews, when discussing the barriers to the career progression of women, that was challenging at times. With female interviewees, the challenge was different, and I felt the need to be careful not to create an “us against the men” feeling of solidarity. It helped that the statements were based on academic research, and I realised that reading out the statements, instead of explaining, was the most neutral approach. An advantage in all the interviews was the common background that I shared with the research participants as business executives in multinational companies, as well as trainer, and I could see many of the participants checked my LinkedIn profile before the interview. This created a level of trust that I knew what I was talking about and knew their world (Rubin and Rubin, 2005).
Finally, I recognise the active decisions and subjectivity in identifying, selecting and reporting the themes from my data analysis. However, especially in practice-based research, it is argued that an active role to create knowledge is implied:

“...practice connects ‘knowing with doing’...knowledge consequently does not arise from scientific ‘discoveries’; rather it is fabricated by situated practices of knowledge production” (Gherardi, 2000 p218).

**My EdD journey: the highlights and challenges**

To say the last 3.5 years have been an emotional and intellectual challenge is an understatement. Combining my training practice with a busy family and doctoral study and being confronted with a global COVID-19 pandemic, required constant juggling for time, energy, and attention. At the start of my journey, I was unfamiliar with research lenses, ontology and epistemology, thematic analysis, and software packages such as Mendeley and Atlas.ti. A steep learning curve indeed. Having said that, I truly experienced the “emancipatory function of knowledge” (Scotland, 2012 p13) that I aspired to in the first Progress Report I wrote in 2018. Sometimes it is difficult to recollect that there was a time that I did not know the difference between sex and gender, or the hidden barriers to the career progression of women, or had never heard of intersex people. Through my study and research, I feel I entered a completely new landscape and I take great pride and joy in training my peers on how to design and deliver more sex/gender equitable training and help build a bridge between the landscapes of practice and academia.

My research journey was not without its challenges. Throughout my research I have struggled with the choice between a focus on the underrepresentation of women versus a broader perspective on sex/gender equity, that included a wider range of marginalised gender identities, such as non-binary and transgender people. I strongly believe that a binary approach fundamentally misrepresents human states and processes (Hyde et al., 2019). But in a sense, my research still supports a binary view on sex and gender, dividing my research participants into women and men, even though I have reflected on how the findings can apply to not only women, but other marginalised gender identities (cf. p120). The recommendation of a fellow doctoral student, who researched experiences in
education of transgender people, was invaluable when she recommended approaching a focus on the equity and inclusion of women in my research, as a first step, while acknowledging the challenges of a gender binary perspective. In future research, I would like to specifically recognise the variability in sex/gender identities and expressions, with the aim to understand the experiences and needs of non-binary people with training, currently not reflected in my research.

In addition, I have struggled with the critical lens of my research. On the one hand it enabled me to interrogate the literature and my own data, moving from a focus on differences between women and men, towards understanding gendered and gendering organisations. A critical lens also enabled me to see the impact of power and privilege, and the unequal distribution of resources. On the other hand, I felt disciplined by what I thought my audience of corporate clients and trainers could accept as critique of their work environment, training policies and practices, especially when discussing power, privilege, and common-sense concepts (Amstutz, Nussbaumer and Vöhringer, 2020). And I felt disciplined by my own background as an economist raised within neo-liberal values and practises of individualism, rationalism, and meritocracy. Given all I know now, it is at times agonizing to listen to webinars that discuss how women lead differently than men, or negotiate differently than men, or have different strengths than men, while the social, cultural, and structural processes, or systemic issues behind these differences, are often not explored, leaving an impression of essential differences between women and men. And I sense that when I bring up the underlying social, cultural, and structural processes in virtual meetings, or in discussions during a face-to-face discussion, it causes discomfort. This may reflect the research by Crosby (1984 – cf. p57), that people apparently need a vision that the world (or their company) is just and that they engage in cognitive distortions to convince themselves that this is indeed the case. Crosby argued that people cope better when they blame themselves for their fate and stated that when one is discriminated against it is emotionally and socially disturbing, which is confirmed by the research of Kantola (2008). The reluctance to discuss systemic issues behind the differences in outcomes between women and men, may also reflect the reluctance to see organisations as political, instead of rational and gender-neutral, which may hamper a critical discussion of gender (in)equity (Amstutz, Nussbaumer and Vöhringer, 2020). Not surprisingly perhaps, in the business
environment, increasing gender diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) is often positioned, not as social justice, but as a rational argument, or a business case: sex/gender DE&I is worthwhile because it positively impacts firms’ and teams’ performances (Dixon-Fyle et al. 2020).

To be able to influence the corporate agenda, in terms of the representation of women and sex/gender equity and inclusion in training, I will continue to have to find a balance between critically interrogating the systemic issues concerning training and, what is called in business, ‘taking others with you’. I strongly relate to the term “maneuvering” (sic) suggested by Utoft (2018 p302) to express this reality of having to negotiate with myself and others, in order to make sense of a situation and develop solutions. As part of the research consent form, I had offered the training participants the option to read the data analysis and conclusions and provide their perspectives. All of the training participants selected this option and half of them provided their perspectives after reading the data analysis and conclusions. I was greatly relieved to read the overwhelming support and enthusiasm for the data analyses and conclusions, including the critical gender subtext analysis, which strengthened my resolve that the required balancing act can be done.

Finally, sometimes the future of sharing my research, possibly writing a book or book chapter, and hopefully further developing my research, is daunting. However, what guides me going forward is a quote from one of my favourite female authors: Elif Shafak in the *Forty Rules of Love*, (2010 p136):

Fret not where the road will take you. Instead concentrate on the first step. That’s the hardest part and that’s what you are responsible for. Once you take that step let everything do what it naturally does, and the rest will follow. Do not go with the flow. Be the flow.
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Appendix 1. Research Information and Consent Form

Research Information Sheet

An investigation into gender equity and inclusion in corporate training and development programmes

Dear participant in [ ]

This research is part of my Doctorate in Education Research at the Open University in the UK. The study examines the experiences of female and male trainees with equity and inclusion in corporate training and development programmes.

The research will consist of individual interviews that will last 1 hour, which can be conducted in person, via phone or skype, at a time that is convenient for you. In the first part of the interview, we will discuss your experiences with the training X that you have recently attended. In the second part, I will share insights and research about learning and development, and we will subsequently reflect on these insights.

The interviews will be in English and will be audio recorded and transcribed, however all information collected will be anonymous (that is, your contributions cannot be connected to you). If I refer to specific remarks or comments in my research report, a pseudonym will be used for the participant who made the comment, instead of actual names.

After having transcribed and anonymized the interview, I will send you a word document with the transcription of your interview for you to check and approve the content to become part of my research. If I have not heard from you after 2 weeks of sending you the transcription, I will assume you agree with the content. After I have analysed all the interviews, if you are interested, I would also like to share with you my data analysis and conclusions, and understand your perspective, in order to enrich my research.
Any recorded and transcribed data I collect will be stored securely in electronic form on my personal computer, which is password protected and backed up continuously. Your personal email and name will be deleted after you have approved the transcription, unless you have mentioned on the consent form that you would like to receive the data analysis and conclusions as described above.

I will write up the results of this study in a thesis which will be submitted to the Open University for assessment in October 2021. I will also present these research findings to your company.

The research will be carried out in accordance with the ethics guidelines of the British Educational Research Association and the Open University in the UK. If you want to talk to someone else about my study, you can contact my supervisors: Dr. Diana Harris at d.harris@open.ac.uk or Dr. Gill Clifton at g.clifton@open.ac.uk.

If you are interested in participating in my research, could you please send me an email on Ingeborg.kroese@open.ac.uk, before X, 2020. You are free to withdraw from the research at any time before or after our interview has taken place, without giving a reason, until you have approved the transcription.

Thank you for reading this information sheet.

Yours faithfully,

Ingeborg Kroese

Date

This research project has been reviewed by, and received a favourable opinion, from the OU Human Research Ethics Committee - HREC reference number: 2971. http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/
INFORMED CONSENT FOR
An investigation into the gender equity and inclusion in corporate training and development programmes

Your name: ____________________________________________

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated X, 2020 for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw before or after the interview up to my approval of the transcript, without giving reason.

3. I understand that taking part in this study involves taking part in an audio-recorded individual interview.

4. I understand that the information collected in the interview will be used to write a thesis that, upon approval, will be publicly available.

5. I understand that the research findings will be presented to the Company and may be used to publish academic and professional articles.

6. I agree that the data gathered in this study will be anonymous and will be stored securely in paper or electronic form for future research by the researcher. My name and email address will be deleted after I have approved the transcript, unless I like to receive the data analysis and conclusion.

7. I would like to receive a copy of the data analysis and conclusions and give my perspectives on these. After I have given my perspectives, my name and email address will be deleted.

8. I understand that quotes from my interview may be used in the research report and thesis, but will be anonymous, meaning they cannot be connected to me.

Your name
Ingeborg Kroese,
Doctoral Researcher

Date
Signature

This research project has been reviewed by, and received a favourable opinion, from the OU Human Research Ethics Committee - HREC reference number: 2971. http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics
# Appendix 2. Interview guide training participants

**Interview Questions Programme 1**

1. The Interviewee  
   a. Can you tell me a bit about yourself?

2. Training experience  
   a. Could you tell me why you participated in this training?  
   b. What has been your experience with this training?  
   c. What did the training tell you about what is expected to be successful in X within the company?  
   d. How do you feel about implementing what was recommended during the training?

3. Gender and Training  
   a. Do you think your experiences have in anyway been affected by you being or identifying as a man/woman? If so how? Example  
      i. How did the training reflect the reality of what you experience at work?
   b. What kind of roles did masculine and feminine behaviours or attitudes play or not play during the training? Was there a barrier or encouragement for either? How comfortable did your feel with this training environment? Examples?  
      i. If it would have been a men-only/ women-only course, what would have been different?

**Interview Questions Programme 2,3**

1. The Interviewee  
   a. Can you tell me a bit about yourself?

2. Training experience  
   a. Could you tell me why you participated in this training?  
   b. Having now gone through the training, how did the training meet your needs?  
      i. reflect the reality of what you experience at work?  
      ii. how do you feel about implementing what was recommended during the training? (Ability (skills, knowledge) – Motivation)  
   c. What did the training tell you about what is expected to be successful in X within the company?

3. Gender definition and gendered training experience  
   a. Different people have different perspectives on what gender means. Would you be willing to share your thoughts on what gender means for you? When unclear “definition” of gender  
   b. Do you think your experiences with the training have in anyway been affected by you being or identifying as a man/woman? If so how? Example? And outside of the training in the workplace: are your experiences impacted by you being or identifying as a man/woman?  
      i. Explore if and how (instead of gender) key personality descriptors are linked to training experience such as extrovert/ introvert, openness  
   c. What kind of roles did masculine and feminine behaviours or attitudes play during the training? And outside of the training in the workplace? How does this impact you? Examples?  
   d. What are your views on the inclusiveness of the training?
Appendix 3. Critical reflection statements

When you reflect on the training you just had, what would your perspective be on the following statements:

1. **Women and men are found to have different lived experiences, careers and challenges. To what extent should training programmes recognise and address this?**

   “Of course, I am a human being, but in this world, things happen to me because I am a female” (Adichie, 2014, p. 44). Where men often have linear careers, careers of women often have different phases, each with different challenges and needs: the idealistic achievement phase; the pragmatic endurance phase; and the reinventive contribution phase (O’Neil and Bilimoria, 2005). In addition, women are responsible for the majority of unpaid care work (Criado-Perez, 2019). Women-only Leadership Training programmes are positioned as safe learning places where gendered experiences can be shared without the risk of not being taken seriously as a professional (Debebe et al., 2016).

2. **Corporate work environments are often characterised by dominant masculine behaviours and attitudes, impacting diversity and inclusion. To what extent should training programmes recognise and address this?**

   Most business environments are characterised by a dominance of men and hegemonic masculinities, a masculinity that is culturally dominant (versus other masculinities and women/femininities) and visible, privileging rationality, competition and heterosexuality (Kangas, Lämsä and Jyrkinen, 2019; Knights and Pullen, 2019; Hearn 2014; Knights and Tullberg, 2014; Connell, 2006; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). The gendered construction of work was found a major obstacle impacting the learning trajectory of women. Women lacked power, legitimacy, status and community membership which impacted job assignments and raised questions about competence and ability. (Martin, Lord and Warren-Smith, 2018; Windels and Mallia, 2015)
3. In the design and facilitation of training, often the gender of participants is merely seen as a “descriptive factor” (Silberman and Biech, 2015 p20) and gender is not perceived as very relevant. To what extent does this impact equity and inclusion of training programmes?
78 studies, reviewed as part of my doctorate literature study, researched the interaction between sex category and/or gender and the training intervention. In 90% of the studies a difference was found in how women and men and/or femininities and masculinities interacted with various elements of training.
Appendix 4. Interview guide programme owner

1. Objectives
   a. Why was this training programme organised?

2. Logistics
   a. Who was invited? Who decided who was invited?
   b. How many people will participate in this course?
   c. How many years will the course run for?
   d. Who developed and facilitated the programme?
   e. Is it the same programme worldwide?
   f. How do you evaluate the programme?

3. Programme development
   a. Who decided on the programme content and approach?
   b. How is training content embedded in the organisation: expectations/reviews? Is there an expectation in terms of behaviours?
   c. How is the culture of the company reflected in the training?

4. Gender
   a. Was the sex of the participants a consideration when the programme was developed in anyway?
   b. Did women/men representation play a role in the invitations for the programme?
   c. Did gendered behaviours and attitudes (masculinities/femininities) influence the content of the programme in anyway?
   d. When the training was designed, was the impact on gender and diversity and inclusion considered?
   e. Do you evaluate the training by sex category?

5. Programme material
   To understand the context of the material, I would like to have a look at the training material, prework and invitations and I have signed an NDA
Appendix 5. Interview guide trainers

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself?

2. Different people have different perspectives on what gender means. Would you be willing to share your thoughts on what gender means for you? When unclear ask for personal “definition” of gender

3. In your experience is training affected by the participants’ sex, so whether they are or identify as a woman or a man in anyway? If so, how? Example?
   a. How does that impact you as trainer?
   b. Any changes in the virtual environment?

4. In your experience do masculine and feminine behaviours or attitudes in anyway affect training? If so, how? Example?
   a. How does that impact you as trainer?
   b. Any changes in the virtual environment?

Critical reflection statements

   a. Women and men are found to have different lived experiences, careers and challenges. To what extent should training programmes recognise and address this?
   b. Corporate work environments are often characterised by dominant masculine behaviours and attitudes, impacting diversity and inclusion. To what extent should training programmes recognise and address this?
   c. In the design and facilitation of training, often the gender of participants is merely seen as a “descriptive factor” (Silberman and Biech, 2015 p20) and gender is not perceived as very relevant. To what extent does this impact equity and inclusion of training programmes?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semantic Codes (derived both deductive and inductive)</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Code Group</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>All interviews</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Defining gender</td>
<td>What are the views of the interviewee on what gender means</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Defining gender</td>
<td>Importance of gender</td>
<td>How the interviewee describes the importance of looking at sex and gender (before critical reflection)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Defining gender</td>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>How the interviewee describes being and/or becoming aware of sex and gender discussions</td>
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<tr>
<td>All interviews</td>
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<td>Defining gender</td>
<td>Origin of gender understanding</td>
<td>How the interviewee describes the origin of the stated views and descriptions of sex/gender</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Describing sex/gender</td>
<td>Interchangeability</td>
<td>How the interviewee mentions other areas of difference in relation to gender (race, class, ethnicity, other)</td>
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<td>Gender and the Training System</td>
<td>Work Environment</td>
<td>How the interviewee describes the work environment (for example culture, policies, practices)</td>
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<td>Critical Reflection</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Gendered experiences and barriers</td>
<td>How the interviewee views gendered experiences and barriers and the extent that training programmes should recognize and address these</td>
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<td>Critical Reflection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dominant masculinity</td>
<td>How the interviewee views dominant masculine behaviours and attitudes and the extent that training programmes should recognize and address these</td>
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<td>Critical Reflection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>DBE discussion in training</td>
<td>How the interviewee views the role of gender, diversity and inclusion discussions in training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Reflection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Training as gender neutral</td>
<td>How the interviewee views the impact of seeing gender merely as a descriptive factor on equity and inclusion of training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvements to increase equity and inclusion</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Opportunities for improvement</td>
<td>What improvements can be made to make training more equitable and inclusive in terms of sex and/or gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvements to increase equity and inclusion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pre requisites for improvement</td>
<td>What is needed to implement these improvements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant perspective</td>
<td></td>
<td>Programmes Owner (PO) perspective</td>
<td>Training objective PO</td>
<td>How the PO describes what the training is intended to deliver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant perspective</td>
<td></td>
<td>Programmes Owner (PO) perspective</td>
<td>Training invitations</td>
<td>How the PO describes who is invited for the training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant perspective</td>
<td></td>
<td>Programmes Owner (PO) perspective</td>
<td>Training development PO</td>
<td>How the PO describes how the programme was developed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant perspective</td>
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<td>Programmes Owner (PO) perspective</td>
<td>Training evaluation</td>
<td>How the PO describes how the programme was evaluated</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant perspective</td>
<td></td>
<td>Programmes Owner (PO) perspective</td>
<td>Role of sex/gender</td>
<td>How the PO describes how sex and gender were considered when designing, implementing and evaluating the programme (before Critical Reflection)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant perspective</td>
<td></td>
<td>Trainer perspective</td>
<td>Training objective Trainer</td>
<td>How the trainer describes what a training is intended to deliver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant perspective</td>
<td></td>
<td>Trainer perspective</td>
<td>Training development Trainer</td>
<td>How the trainer describes how sex and gender play a role during the implementation of a programme (before Critical Reflection)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant perspective</td>
<td></td>
<td>Trainer perspective</td>
<td>Role of trainer</td>
<td>How does the trainer describe the role of a trainer in (gender) equity and inclusion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Appendix 6. Semantic Code Book**

- **Defining Gender**: Describes the views of the interviewee on what gender means.
- **Importance of gender**: How the interviewee describes the importance of looking at sex and gender (before critical reflection).
- **Awareness**: How the interviewee describes being and/or becoming aware of sex and gender discussions.
- **Origin of gender understanding**: How the interviewee describes the origin of the stated views and descriptions of sex/gender.
- **Interchangeability**: How the interviewee mentions other areas of difference in relation to gender (race, class, ethnicity, other).
- **Work Environment**: How the interviewee describes the work environment (for example culture, policies, practices).
- **Gendered experiences and barriers**: How the interviewee views gendered experiences and barriers and the extent that training programmes should recognize and address these.
- **Dominant masculinity**: How the interviewee views dominant masculine behaviours and attitudes and the extent that training programmes should recognize and address these.
- **DBE discussion in training**: How the interviewee views the role of gender, diversity and inclusion discussions in training.
- **Training as gender neutral**: How the interviewee views the impact of seeing gender merely as a descriptive factor on equity and inclusion of training.
- **Opportunities for improvement**: What improvements can be made to make training more equitable and inclusive in terms of sex and/or gender.
- **Pre requisites for improvement**: What is needed to implement these improvements.
- **Training objective PO**: How the PO describes what the training is intended to deliver.
- **Training invitations**: How the PO describes who is invited for the training.
- **Training development PO**: How the PO describes how the programme was developed.
- **Training evaluation**: How the PO describes how the programme was evaluated.
- **Role of sex/gender**: How the PO describes how sex and gender were considered when designing, implementing and evaluating the programme (before Critical Reflection).
- **Training objective Trainer**: How the trainer describes what a training is intended to deliver.
- **Training development Trainer**: How the trainer describes how sex and gender play a role during the implementation of a programme (before Critical Reflection).
- **Role of trainer**: How does the trainer describe the role of a trainer in (gender) equity and inclusion.
## Appendix 7. Latent Code Book

<table>
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<th>Latent Codes (derived both deductive and inductive)</th>
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<td>Describing the underlying assumptions and ideas impacting sex and gender equity and inclusion</td>
<td>Interviews and programme materials</td>
<td>Gendered subtext</td>
<td>Gender exclusion and neglect</td>
<td>The exclusion and neglect of gendered lived experiences and perspectives</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Women as the &quot;other&quot;</td>
<td>Reinforcing that women are seen as The Other. Even when living up to masculine standards</td>
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<td>Femininities not embodied</td>
<td>Positioning a femininity that is decoupled from women and female underrepresentation</td>
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<td>Duality and hierarchy</td>
<td>Reinforcing binary perspectives (women vs. men; female vs. male, rational vs. emotional etc.) with hierarchical implications</td>
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<td>Male/Masculine normativity</td>
<td>Failing to address the excluding practice of dominant masculinities</td>
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<td>Neutral but gendered concepts</td>
<td>Positioning of (training) concepts and processes as neutral that are in fact gendered</td>
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<td>Impact of power and privilege</td>
<td>The neglect of the impact of power and privilege</td>
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<td>Mantra of Choice</td>
<td>Positioning that bringing up gendered experiences is a matter of own choice and interests</td>
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<td>Training as Socio Cultural activity</td>
<td>Common culture/language/approach</td>
<td>If and how does the training install a common culture, create the same language or a similar approach amongst trainees</td>
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<td>Reflecting trends</td>
<td>If and how does the training reflect trends in business and society</td>
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<td>How does the training reflect and install expectations in regards to thoughts, feelings and behaviours impacting sex and gender</td>
<td>Agency</td>
<td>How does the training impact or create agency: the feeling that the interviewee is in charge, control actions and consequences, is in the driving seat (Moore, 2016)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Script</td>
<td>Whether and how the training prescribes how to act and behave during or after the training</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 8. Ethical guidelines

Based on the Ethical Appraisal Framework (Fox and Askham, n.d.) there are four dimensions of ethical thinking that have been incorporated in the design and implementation of the research. This appendix outlines how the research addressed the key considerations within each dimension.

Dimension 1. Consequential ethical thinking: research should be worthwhile

Benefits for individuals/ groups and organisation
The reason why the company agreed to support and host my research is that they believed the outcomes may help them in achieving greater gender diversity, specifically increased representation of women at more senior levels, by taking away any barriers to learn and develop for women. This meant that there was an obvious benefit for women to participate, however this also meant that there was a risk that the male trainees perceived the research only to be beneficial to women, and more competition from women for limited numbers of senior management jobs as a threat. Hence it was important to outline in the research information sheet that the purpose of my research is to understand how gender impacts training experiences for both men and women. This was one of the reasons why I changed the title of my research from “An Investigation into the Equity and Inclusion of Women in Corporate Training and Development Programme” for my Initial Study, to “An investigation into the role of gender in corporate training and development”.

Benefits for society
A key objective throughout the research journey was to disseminate my research findings to professional training associations, such as the Association for Talent Development (ATD) and diversity and inclusion networks, such as the Leading Executives Advancing Diversity (LEAD) network) to enable other trainers and companies to enhance the diversity and inclusion of their training.

Benefits for the researcher
I felt strengthened by the feedback from colleagues and corporate clients about the unique contributions I am making to the diversity and inclusion discussions. This research helped
me to become a better trainer but also helped to develop my credibility as an expert in the field of inclusive training and development.

**Dimension 2. Relational ethical thinking: research should be conducted respectfully**

**Establish trust**

The key gatekeepers in my research were the global director of leadership programmes and her team, as well as the company president. Before the research was conducted, a detailed outline of the research was developed, that included the research background, rationale, questions and methodology, as well as the partnership guidelines. Subsequently, a meeting was conducted to discuss and answer any questions. During the research process, frequent email contact ensured clarity and alignment. The action steps that were discussed, were implemented as agreed. After the research was completed, the key stakeholders were provided with an executive summary document of the research and recommendations.

**Respecting anonymity**

Via the research information sheets, as well as the consent form, anonymity was promised to the research participants. This implied:

- The company did not know which trainees participated in my research, as the stakeholders sent the information sheet to the participants but did not know who decided to respond
- When using quotes, participants were only referred to by a self-chosen pseudonym
- In quotes or references to participants’ experiences, no reference was made to personal information to ensure no connection could be made to specific individuals
- Quotes were not related back to a specific programme as that could have meant an increased risk for internal anonymity
- Participants had the option to read the data analysis section to ensure they felt that the promised anonymity has been safeguarded.

**Collaboration and reciprocity**

The reason why the company supported and hosted my research is that they believed the outcomes would help them to increase gender diversity, especially by increasing representation of women in senior management levels. Hence it was important to draw out any issues with equity and inclusion, for women in training and development, which may
hamper progression into more senior roles. Although the focus was on women, also the challenges for non-hegemonic masculinities were highlighted.

**Confirmation of findings**
Participants were sent the transcript of the interview as well as the data analysis section, if they were interested, and had the opportunity to provide feedback.

**Respecting persons equally**
It was unlikely that participants wanted to be acknowledged in the research. It was however likely that the company wanted to be acknowledged in the research, especially as it may support their image of a company that values and invests in gender diversity. My recommendation to the company was that my thesis and any subsequent publications will not name the company, however that the company can reveal this information in internal presentations with the purpose of making their training and development programmes more inclusive and equitable. For this purpose, I have developed a presentation for the company about my research and the conclusions that they may use internally, at their convenience (with proper referencing).

**Copyright**
It was clearly established that the copyright of the research lies with me as the researcher. Based on my thesis I may want to publish aspects of my research. The company will not have access to the data/ transcripts/coding and analysis underlying the research.

**Dimension 3. Ecological dimension: research should be conducted responsibly**

**Cultural sensitivity**
Cultural sensitivity in my research especially involved understanding and incorporating the different backgrounds of the participants and reflecting on how this background may have impacted the gendered experiences in training programmes. As a result, the role of intersectionality became an important finding in my data.
**Awareness of all parts of the institution**

The institution supported my research, but my participants were dependent on the company for their career and income. Sensitivity may have arisen when participants had negative feedback about the training or the company. It was clearly agreed with the company beforehand that such criticism was welcome, and no harm would result for the participants. Anonymity was crucial in this regard.

The other key relationship that needed to be handled sensitively, was the relationship with the training provider who developed and facilitated the training programmes that were part of my research. The aim of the research was not to evaluate the training, and informing the training provider of my research would most likely have impacted the way the training was conducted. Hence it was agreed not to inform the training provider, either before or after the training, nor share the outcome of my research actively with the training provider, as it was not known externally which training was researched. To gain access to the training materials, which are typically owned by the host company, I signed a Non-Disclosure Agreement with the host company for these and other materials, meaning I cannot use them outside the purpose of my research. In addition, the host company did not share any training material they did not own the copyright for.

**Responsive communication**

To ensure the research information and consent forms were interpreted as intended, I shared them with the key gatekeepers for feedback.

**Responsibilities to the company**

As outlined before, the company expected the outcomes of my research to help them achieve greater gender diversity, especially representation of women at senior management position. I developed a presentation for the company about my research results that included, but not only focused on, a discussion of any barriers to the equity and inclusion of women that came out of my research. I also prepared an interim presentation for the company after my data analysis was finalised and reviewed by the participants.
Codes of practice
The OU HREC and Data Protection officer approved the research methodology, methods, materials and plan. The host company did not have any additional (ethical) research guidelines that needed to be incorporated.

Dimension 4. Deontological dimension: Research should we be done right

Avoidance of harm
The potential of harm was when negative feedback by the interviewees could be traced back to individuals and when the company was not open for criticism. Hence anonymity of the interviewees was key and one of the reasons why results, and especially quotes, were not reported by training programme. In addition, a clear understanding was developed with the company about their openness to criticism.

It was helpful that the company, in some of their emails that accompanied the research information sheet, reiterated their desire for honest feedback from participants, the notion of anonymity and that participation or non-participation would not impact in anyway on the relationship between employee and employer.

Showing fairness
All training participants of the programmes researched were invited to participate in the research. Dependent on the availability and possibilities of the interviewee, the interview could take place face to face (if in the Netherlands), or by phone or skype call, to ensure all interested trainees could participate at their convenience. All interviews were in English or Dutch. This could have meant a disadvantage if this was not the first language of the participant. I was not able to provide a translation to all participants however all interviewees had a chance to review the transcripts of their interviews to correct any misunderstandings on the researcher’s part, check for translation (if unsure, maybe run a sentence past google translate to check meaning in local language) or to clarify their answers.

Telling the truth
In the research information, it was made clear that the company welcomed participation as well as critical feedback and that participation was anonymous.
It was important to manage expectations with the company’s key gate keepers that negative feedback and unpopular findings may be part of the outcome of my research. In addition, I provided the company with a comprehensive summary and presentation of my research that could be used internally and that correctly represents the research findings.

**Keeping promises**
First it was important to clarify what the promises were towards the company to ensure I could keep them. This was the key rationale for the extensive research outline and ethical guidelines document that was agreed with the host company. The individual’s rights to privacy and confidentiality were outlined in the consent form.

**Avoidance of wrong through honesty and candour**
To ensure honesty and candour, it was important to have a clear understanding with the company beforehand about my research. This was the key rationale for the guidelines that I discussed and agreed with the host company. In addition, the consent form stated that participants could withdraw from participation at any time and in the information sheet the contact details of my supervisors were provided in case of questions or concerns.
Appendix 9. Gender Equity in Training Programme Roadmap

WEEK 1
Introduction

1st Virtual Meeting

WEEK 2
1. Defining Gender (Approx. 3 hours)

Reading
Discussion

WEEK 3
2. Gender and the Training System (Approx. 3 hours)

Reading
Reflection

WEEK 4

WEEK 5

WEEK 6

WEEK 7
3. How can we be Gender Equity Trainers? (Approx. 2.5 hours)

Your Action Plan

WEEK 8

4th Virtual Meeting

Reading
Discussion

Case study

Gender Equity trainer
Appendix 10. Recommendations for sex/gender equity in training

Below is a selection of the recommendations developed for trainers and training organisers, to enhance the sex/gender equity of their training programmes. These recommendations are part of the Gender Equity in Training Programme (Appendix 9).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training System Elements</th>
<th>How to bring sex/gender equity into your training</th>
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</table>
| Trainee Characteristics   | • Recognise and be sensitive to the gendered norms and expectations in the culture and society you are training in. And how that can influence the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of your training participants  
• Understand (through research, interviewing participants or speaking to colleagues) the perspectives and experiences of “minorities” or marginalised learners. How is ‘it’ (whatever you are training) different for them: conceptually and in practice  
• Recognise and be sensitive to the fact that (multi-day) training can interrupt care responsibilities. Discuss with client what the best design is. Suggest interviewing women and men regarding design preferences |
| Work Environment          | • Build equity of learning opportunities into the line manager coaching sessions. Ask line managers to consider their positionality, or position in relation to others, in terms of their race, class, gender, sexuality, ability status, and privilege relative to their team members  
• Understand the importance of representation of women and men in the training. Discuss with client. Help clients understand biases in access to training and promote equity in access |
| Training Design and facilitation | • Ensure the training design and especially evening time in between training days do not become excluding events. Discuss with clients how to organise for all  
• Ensure all training material has a credible representation of women, men, and non-binary employees, as well as feminine and masculine |
| Training Outcome | Analyse training evaluation by women, men, and non-binary individuals  
|                  | Specifically ask for a score on the equity, diversity, and inclusion of the training programme as part of the evaluation |

- Understand and be sensitive to the fact that competencies have a gendered connotation and that “leadership” and “management” have an (unconscious) link to masculinity.
- Reflect on your own biases and behaviours and how they may unconsciously favour women or men and/or feminine or masculine behaviours. Ask for feedback from participants/peers on your style of facilitating.
- Be sensitive that women tend to underrate themselves when using self-reported questionnaires as measure of accomplishment.
- Do not accept any form of sexist comments, jokes, or other excluding behaviours.
- Be careful with promoting one model or theory as the only way to do things. Be open for co-construction of knowledge based on different lived experiences.