

Women in Masculinized Occupations, Men in Feminized Occupations: Experiences of Gender Occupational Minorities and Their Roles within the Occupational Group¹

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Abstract: Horizontal gender segregation divides the labor market into ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ occupations. However, some individuals choose occupational paths which are not consistent with the expectations for their gender, thereby becoming a minority in their occupational group. We propose the joint term ‘gender occupational minorities’ to describe their situation. We aim to supplement previous research with a combined analysis of the two gender groups, enabling a more general perspective on the meaning of gender in the labor market as well as a comparison of how similar mechanisms work in opposite gender contexts. Based on Pierre Bourdieu’s practical principles of gender occupational segregation, women working in IT/new technologies and men working in childcare/education were chosen as the project’s target groups. In this paper, we focus on the experience of being a gender occupational minority on the Polish labor market as well as on the role of gender occupational minorities within the occupational group.

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Gender division of work, dividing the labor market into 'feminine' and 'masculine' occupations, can be seen both as a statistical fact and as a sociological phenomenon with corresponding social implications (Gromkowska-Melosik, 2013). Still, some individuals choose career paths that are not 'expected' for their gender. The situation of men in feminized occupations and women in masculinized occupations is described in the literature as gender-atypical employment (Hussein, Christensen, 2017; McClintock, 2020; Moskos, 2020) or non-traditional employment (Potter, Hill, 2009; Whittock, 2018; Bonfert et al., 2021). We propose an alternative, more subject-centered term of 'occupational gender minorities'. We argue that occupational gender minorities can be treated as extreme cases in the analysis of gender's meaning on the labor market. Women in 'masculine' occupations are the extreme case of femininity being an 'exception' in a world that is generally tailored to men (Perez, 2021). On the other end of the spectrum, men in 'feminine' occupations present a unique case in which masculinity is not a default option.

Notably, the majority of existing studies on men in 'feminine' occupations and women in 'masculine' occupations is focused on one gender (with Williams, 1989 being one exception), frequently in the context of a single occupational group. Therefore, the research problem of our project was to analyze men in feminized occupations and women in masculinized occupations together. This approach aimed to bridge the gap in the existing research by finding similarities and differences between these two extreme cases of gender manifestations in the realm of work. This approach also makes it possible to look beyond occupational group cultures and identify more general mechanisms.

In this paper, we focus on the experience of being in a gender occupational minority. Members of the minority conceptualize role prescribed to them within the occupational group. Our two research questions are:

1. How do men in feminized occupations and women in masculinized occupations feel about their minority status?
2. What is their role within the occupational group?

We are aware that the gender binary system is arbitrary and has negative effects on people who do not fit into one of these categories (Richards et al., 2016; Nicholas, 2019). Nevertheless, stereotypes, as simplified beliefs about certain groups, tend to follow the binary between masculine and feminine, without much nuance. Consequently, in this paper, the terms 'feminine' and 'masculine' are used in quotation marks to indicate that they concern those stereotypical visions of femininity/masculinity.

Occupational segregation and gender stereotypes

Gender occupational segregation is defined as "a non-representative distribution of individuals from various demographic categories across different occupations" (He et al., 2019: 4). It can take the form of vertical or horizontal segregation. The former type of segregation means limited opportunities of career progression for a woman, as chances of achieving positions and jobs with the highest incomes and occupational prestige depend on the individual's gender. Horizontal gender segregation refers

to the division of the labor market into ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ occupations. This division is connected with the stereotypical traits and characteristics of the two genders (but also with gender roles prescribed by the given society’s norms and culture – cf. Krzyżanowska, 2012). Stereotypically feminine traits include being caring, facilitative, and supportive, while stereotypically masculine traits include being aggressive, competitive, and powerful. Moreover, in many societies, femininity is “a set of characteristics which hinder (due to, e.g., tradition and convictions of what women should do and how) participation in the labour market, obtaining the same income as men or access to career advancement on full and equal terms with men” (Krzyżanowska, 2012: 97). These gender stereotypes are persistent and shared in different national and occupational contexts (Ku, 2011; Huppatz, Goodwin, 2013; Litosseliti, Leadbeater, 2013; Didham, 2015; McEntee-Atalianis, Litosseliti, 2017; McDowell, 2019). Pierre Bourdieu lists three practical principles of gender occupational segregation, combining both horizontal and vertical aspects. The first principle is connected to the belief that feminine occupations are those that form a continuation of feminine roles in the family: care, education, and service. The second aspect results from the subordinate role of women in society, where masculine authority frequently leads to feminine occupations and job positions being seen as auxiliary in relation to masculine ones (cf. Acker, 2006). Finally, the third aspect is linked to men’s monopoly of technical knowledge and the ability to operate machines (Bourdieu, 2004). Therefore, the first aspect of segregation explains why feminized occupations are connected with care and children, and the third accounts for the masculinization of occupations dealing with new technologies and machines. As different sectors of the labor market can be analyzed as social fields (Bourdieu, 2004, cf. Grenfell, James, 2004), with their own logic and rules, expectations of the gender of occupation’s incumbents can be seen as one of the field’s rules of admission (cf. Kopciewicz, 2005 for an analysis of gender in the polytechnic IT education).² Moreover, Bourdieu’s aspects of segregation are consistent with the binary opposition between emotional femininity and rational masculinity (Kelan, 2007).

The negative effects of vertical segregation on women’s careers may be more obvious. Nevertheless, Marc Gärtner, Eli Scambor, and Erika Bernacchi (2020) argue that horizontal segregation is one of the most important factors contributing to the lack of gender equality, as it affects work status and income. As a result of horizontal segregation, women are underrepresented in occupations connected with technology (STEM), while there are less men in occupations connected with care (social, medical, and educational). Both of these phenomena are consistent with Bourdieu’s principles. Moreover, when care work and emotional labor are categorized in terms of their ‘innate female nature’ (and not skills to be learned), they are devalued (Donley, Barid, 2017). Notably, ‘naturally masculine’ characteristics such as physical strength and technical abilities are not treated in the same way. Consequently, in aggregate terms, feminized occupations offer lower salaries and lesser opportunities for promotion (Kalinowska-Nawrotek, 2005; Kopciewicz, 2005; Levanon, England, Allison, 2009; England, 2010; Janicka, 2020; Pelley, Carnes, 2020).

2 Given the traditional division of family roles, horizontal segregation also reflects what kinds of jobs are easier to connect with care duties – men are more frequently able to work jobs that require long and unpredictable hours (but also offer high income), while women are expected to be ‘on-call’ for their family role (Goldin, 2021, cf. also Cha, 2013 for the relationship between expected overwork and gender segregation on the labor market).

It is important to note that although the feminization and masculinization of occupations can be linked to an essentialist view of gender, connected with certain innate characteristics and skills, the proportions of men and women in occupational groups change with time and social context, which is why occupations can change their gender profile. This tendency is consistent with the fact that femininity and masculinity are social constructs created and maintained in historical contexts (Kopciewicz, 2005). For example, at the beginning of the 19th century, teaching was a 'masculinized occupation' that changed into a typical 'feminine occupation' (Gromkowska-Melosik, 2013). Similarly, while caring and healing were traditionally feminine roles, when medicine became a science and gained in prestige, it was transformed into predominantly male domain and remained so till the 20th century (Kulik, Dąbek, 2020, cf. also Lindsay, 2007; Simpson, 2009; Donley, Baird, 2017; Brown, Fleming, Silvestri, 2021 for different occupational groups and contexts).

Apart from the gender division of work based on labor market stereotypes, occupational groups tend to recreate this division on a smaller scale. Just as the labor market is divided into stereotypically 'masculine' and stereotypically 'feminine' occupational groups, within one occupational group certain specializations or tasks can be perceived as more feminine or more masculine (Woodfield, 2016; Pelley, Carnes, 2020; Campero, 2021; Czeranowska, 2021). Even the most feminized occupations can include some tasks and specializations that can be considered more masculine (and *vice versa*) – for example, teaching maths or physical education is the 'masculine' specialization within the 'feminine' occupation of primary school teaching. This phenomenon may reflect the fact that even people who themselves break gender norms by entering occupations atypical of their gender may hold quite traditional views on both themselves and their colleagues of the other gender (Fuszara, 2008; Jankowska, 2008).

Associations between gender and certain occupational roles include both an expectation regarding occupational choice and an assessment of choices already made, since social approval is connected with choosing a gender-typical occupation. This encouragement to choose gender-typical occupational paths is visible at the individual level from the perspective of both an employee and an employer, who is encouraged to hire candidates of the gender fitting the position (Moskos, 2020). Moreover, at the institutional level, these gender-type skills are reflected in education systems and human resource management (Hsiung, 2022). Nevertheless, there are some exceptions, where individuals make occupational choices that go against conventional gender expectations.

Occupational gender minorities

Some individuals choose occupational paths contrary to what would be stereotypically fitting for their gender, being the 'outliers in a gender-segregated workforce' (McClintock, 2020: 912). This phenomenon has been called gender-atypical employment (Hussein, Christensen, 2017; McClintock, 2020; Moskos, 2020) or non-traditional employment (Potter, Hill, 2009; Whittock, 2018; Bonfert et al., 2021).

The occupational gender minorities can also be linked with the theory of tokenism (Kanter, 1977 after Stichman, Hassell, Archbold, 2010), according to which underrepresented groups are more likely to have different negative experiences in the workplace as well as experience three ‘perceptual tendencies’: assimilation (perceiving all members of the token group similarly, according to the stereotypes), visibility (higher levels of scrutiny), and contrast (exaggerating differences between tokens and the dominant group). In Rosabeth Moss Kanter’s theory, the numerical proportions in which those consequences happen are 15% or less of the token group (Kanter, 1977 after Stichman, Hassell, Archbold, 2010). However, this focus on the numerical proportions was criticized (Yoder, 1991). Moreover, as Christine Williams’ (1992) study of men in feminized occupations shows, the tokenism theory seems to explain only the situation in which the minority group is also the one with lower status. In a more recent study, Charlotte Holgersson and Laurence Romani (2020) have shown that the experiences of token groups can also be affected by organizational culture and norms.

Personal motivations and circumstances for entering an occupation atypical of individuals’ gender vary from coincidence and choosing it as a temporal solution to conscious choice based on personal interests and values (Fuszara, 2008). Santiago Campero and Roberto Fernandez (2018) argue that, at least at the stage of recruitment, both men and women are disadvantaged if competing for jobs in gender-atypical workplaces, meaning that those who manage to enter the occupation are highly selected (Madsen, Brekke, Fekjær, 2023). However, once men enter the feminized occupation, they may expect certain privileges, as they are often quickly promoted to the highest, managerial positions in the feminized workplace. This phenomenon is conceptualized by Christine L. Williams (1992) as a ‘glass escalator’, elevating men into positions of authority. In contrast, women in masculinized occupations encounter various barriers that impede their integration into masculinized occupational groups (del Maira-Vidal, 2018). Sharla Alegria (2019) analyzes token processes in the context of the tech sector, showing that women do not experience the ‘glass escalator’ to help them achieve higher positions in masculinized workplaces. White women, however, tend to be moved from more technical positions to managerial ones, as these positions are connected with more ‘feminine’ social skills. Women of colour, however, do not experience even this ‘glass step stool’ process.

Moreover, Małgorzata Fuszara (2008) describes the experience of men in feminized occupations as ‘being a raisin’ [in a cake], which is a Polish metaphor used to refer to one person who is different from the rest of the group. Most typically, this is used only for men in a group of women, but can also be used to describe other differences. Unfortunately, this metaphor cannot be translated into English, but there is a similar one in German (*der Hahn im Korb sein*). ‘Being a raisin’ implies being special, unique, different from others in the group, but also receiving special treatment – in Fuszara’s (2008) study, male interviewees not only felt accepted in their workplaces, but also admitted that they received additional support (or even care) from their female colleagues. ‘Being a raisin’ is, therefore, generally a positive experience, although in the case of a real cake, it is a question of personal preference – some people (especially children) may choose to pick the raisins out.

It is less common for men to enter traditionally feminine occupations than for women to enter occupations that are traditionally assigned to men (Moskos, 2020; McDowell, 2021). Ruth Simpson (2009)

notices that the fact that the inflow of men into feminized occupations is slower than the inflow of women into masculinized ones is “perhaps reflective of the sacrifices in both pay and status, as well as the possibility of encountering disapproval from family and peers, that can accompany these career decisions” (Simpson, 2009: 5). For example, in Fuszara’s study (2008), some interviewees encountered negative reactions to their occupational choice, especially regarding low incomes typical of feminized occupations, making them unfit for the breadwinner role (cf. McClintock, 2020 for romantic costs of working in feminized occupations for men).

Consequently, the research on men in feminized occupations is less abundant than studies on women in masculinized occupations. The major part of the existing research (Simpson, 2009; O’Keeffe, 2018; Galley, 2020) focuses on men in care work, as this is considered a stereotypically ‘feminine’ task, both in private and in occupational contexts. Simpson describes her book on men in feminized occupations as a book ‘about men who serve and care’ (Simpson, 2009: 3), which seems to be a good identifier of the majority of ‘feminine’ occupations. These are occupations that are traditionally held by women and which are notable for requiring ‘feminine’ skills and attributes (e.g., sensitivity, service, nurturance, and beauty) that society normally attributes to women. Anna Dudak (2021) researched men in feminized occupations in the specific Polish context (social workers, librarians, teachers, and other staff members from educational institutions). The majority of the interviewees see their position as a gender minority as advantageous, feeling that they receive better, special treatment (consistent with the phenomenon of ‘being a raisin’). Nevertheless, some of them feel alienated in their workplaces. They also admit that feminized occupations tend to be low-paid, which affects their financial position, which is consistent with earlier findings (Fuszara, 2008, cf. also Jankowska, 2008), showing the slow pace of changes in reducing gender differences in the Polish labor market.

Research on women in masculinized occupations is generally focused on occupations based on physical work, where the role of physicality is pivotal (Woodfield, 2016; Wright, 2016; Rydzik, Ellis-Vowels, 2019). However, other highly masculinized occupational fields are not reliant on body and physical strength. Technological progress was initially thought to offer gender neutrality on the labor market, but gendered stereotypes remained stable, even when the nature of work was changed by new technologies (Wajcman, 1991). The IT sector is characterized by a strong occupational culture based on masculinity (Hari, 2017). This occupational culture values traditionally masculine traits, such as certain physical look, technological skills, and geekiness (Kenny, Donnelly, 2020). There is also a perception that IT skills are one of the ‘innate’ abilities connected with gender, not something that everyone can learn with enough practice (Ensmenger, 2010). Engineering culture is also based on a strong technical/social dualism, where women are considered expressive and men – instrumental (Faulkner, 2000; 2007). Mastery in engineering is only considered possible for those who forgo the ‘social’ aspects and focus only on the ‘technical’ or ‘real’ aspects of engineering, and thus women are automatically excluded (Faulkner, 2007).

Importantly, both men in feminized occupations and women in masculinized occupations have mostly been researched in case studies of a particular gender, in the context of a specific occupational

group, and with a focus on occupational group cultures. This study aims at building a more general analysis of gender occupational minorities, concentrating on the consequences of their minority status. By comparing and contrasting the experiences of men in feminized occupations and women in masculinized occupations, we aim at using extreme case analysis to understand the general mechanisms within the meaning of gender and gender division of work on the labor market.

Data and methods

The data comes from the project “Occupational Gender Minorities. An Analysis of the Situation of Women in Masculinised Occupations and Men in Feminized Occupations”, co-financed by the Ministry of Education and Science subsidies for maintaining and developing the didactic and research potential of the SWPS University.

The project’s main aim was to analyze the experiences of men in feminized occupations and women in masculinized occupations, treating occupational gender minorities as extreme cases.

Individual in-depth interviewing methodology was used. The sample consisted of 27 interviews with members of occupational gender minorities, including 13 interviews with women and 14 interviews with men. Recruitment criteria were based on the gender stereotypes of ‘feminine’ work being centered around children and ‘masculine’ work being connected with new technologies, according to Pierre Bourdieu’s (2004) principles. In order to obtain comparable groups, we focused on highly skilled occupations. In the case of women, the interviewees were mostly graduates of engineering, currently working in positions connected with information technologies.³ Men were professionals working with children in education and care institutions (preschool and early school teachers, psychologists, etc.). Full information on the interviewees is presented in Table 1 in the Appendix.

The project was positively reviewed by the Empirical Research Ethics Committee of the Institute of Social Sciences (USWPS). The participants’ informed consent was obtained before the interviews. Because of the epidemiological situation, as well as the geographical dispersion of the project participants, interviews were conducted via a video conferencing tool (Google Meet). All the interviews were conducted in Polish, recorded (audio only), and transcribed to enable analysis. Interviews were conducted by women – the project’s PI and other female interviewers. All personal information in the transcriptions was anonymized.

Qualitative analysis was conducted with the help of the Atlas.ti QDAS software. The analysis methodology was based on systematic text condensation (Malterud, 2012). Systematic text condensation

3 Because of the high numbers of women entering the IT sector later in life, we also included some participants who had completed non-engineering tertiary education and gained qualifications needed for their current job positions through academic and non-academic courses and informal education.

is a descriptive and exploratory method for thematic analysis, which focuses on the meaning of presented experiences for the individuals. It is based on Amadeo Giorgi's (2003) psychological phenomenological analysis, putting interviewee perspective in the center of attention. The first step in the analysis consisted of identifying the initial themes in the data and translating them into codes. Two main initial codes used in the presented analysis included: *Working with people of the opposite gender* (subcodes: *Positives* and *Challenges*) and *Occupational gender minority roles and duties* (subcodes: *Feminine role in masculine occupations* and *Masculine roles in feminine occupations*). After the coding, fragments of the data which were assigned the same code were analyzed together in order for the researchers to find shared elements of meaning in various interviewees' experiences. Finally, synthetic descriptions were prepared and quotes were found to illustrate them (Malterud, 2012).

All the participants were currently living and working in Poland (although some were working remotely for international companies). It is, therefore, essential to take into account the context of the Polish labor market, which is shaped by economic, cultural, and societal factors, including traditional, patriarchal gender norms persisting in the society as well as the role of right-wing conservatism in country's political landscape (cf. Gwiazda, 2021). Many forms of gender discrimination on the labor market are still present as well as the traditional gender division of work both in the occupational and family sphere (Kotowska, Sztanderska, Wóycicka, 2009). Maternity and the country's policies regarding working mothers are also an important context of women's chances in the labor market (Michoń, 2008). Moreover, as Barbara Kalinowska-Nawrotek (2005) notices, the situation of women in the Polish labor market after 1989 was influenced by insufficient access to institutionalized childcare (a tendency which is still present in the 21st century; cf. Bargu, Morgandi, 2018; Suwada, 2021). The processes happening in the contemporary labor market can also be linked to the Eastern European history of women's emancipation and relations between genders – in the Polish context, public and private spheres are perceived as opposing, and women's 'natural' realm of responsibility is placed in the private sphere (Kopciewicz, 2005; Kalinowska-Nawrotek, 2005).

The level of economic activity among women is generally lower than for men, and this also applies to the level of employment (Statistics Poland, 2022). Moreover, the average monthly income is lower for women in all occupational groups (compared to men in the same groups). Women are also more frequently employed in the public sector (schools, administration, healthcare), while the most masculinized sectors in the national economy are construction, mining, and quarrying (Statistics Poland, 2018). Due to data availability, we do not have exact numbers on most occupations' feminization/masculinization. Statistics Poland presents data on gender proportions only at the level of great occupational groups. The most feminised groups are: Professionals and services as well as Sales workers, while the most masculinized are: Craft and related trades workers as well as Plant and machine operators and assemblers (Statistics Poland, 2022). Krystyna Janicka's (2020) analysis of the POLPAN 2018 dataset paints a similar picture, with women being most overrepresented in occupational groups: Administrative and clerical staff, Non-technical specialists, and Trade and service workers.

Experiences of being an occupational gender minority

In most cases, this status of being a statistical minority persisted throughout the interviewees' work life. However, the proportions of men and women in the workplace or team strongly varied (both in the IT and childcare/education groups), depending on the organizational environment. Men, in contrast to women, had a very strong sense of being an exception, or a very rare case (which is visible in Kaspian's quote below). Some of the male interviewees even doubted if the realization of our project sample (which was initially set at 10 interviewees from each group) was feasible due to the extremely low numbers of men in childcare/education. On the contrary, women did not put such a strong emphasis on being a minority in their workplace or occupational group.

[...] my internship supervisor, she told me that once, there was a male teacher in a preschool where she was working. So there are some men [in preschool education], but they are very rare, a [rare] phenomenon. (Kaspian, M, 26, preschool teacher)

As mentioned earlier, an important metaphor used traditionally in Polish to describe men in a feminine environment (not only occupational) is 'being a raisin' (Fuszara, 2008). As it is quite common in Polish every-day language, it was spontaneously used by the interviewees to describe their situation. The male interviews felt that their status of an occupational gender minority is connected with certain advantages, especially in terms of better treatment which they receive from their co-workers (Fuszara, 2008; Dudak, 2021). The interpersonal relations between minority and majority groups were, therefore, portrayed as very positive.

Sometimes I feel more profits from it [being a men in a feminized occupation], because these female colleagues, yes, whether younger or older, whether they are ladies from the administration, school office, I have the impression that they are sometimes even nicer to me, because I am what is popularly called a 'raisin' (Stefan, M, 32, primary education teacher)

Although the raisin metaphor is traditionally used when men are in the minority (the only boy in the class, the only male teacher in the school), some of our female interviewees also used it to describe the positive aspects of their experience. For example, Maria, who is a business intelligence developer, felt that being the only woman in many work contexts is generally a positive situation (despite a few situations in which she was treated in a condescending way). She felt that her 'raisin' status gives her a leverage in that she is recognizable and, because of that, more likely to receive extra support or career advice. In such cases, aspects of the token status (visibility and contrast) described by Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977 after Stichman, Hassell, Archbold, 2010) take a positive turn, resulting in more opportunities and additional support.

I am getting great support and also a lot of advice, so these are the advantages, and it seems to me too that, due to the fact that I am a woman who is present online, somewhere in the IT environment, this is why older colleagues, who already have many years of experience in the

industry pay more attention to me [than to her male colleagues], because I am a 'raisin'. (Maria, F, 28, business intelligence developer)

In terms of being seen and remembered, because of the minority status, men focused especially on the physical difference between them and their female colleagues, which makes them stand out in the workplace. Such direct reference to the role of gendered bodies was not evident in the women's narratives. In Jacek's quote below, he presents himself as contrasting with his female colleagues, which is the reverse of the tendency to see the members of the token group as similar (Kanter, 1977 after Stichman, Hassell, Archbold, 2010).

When I was the only man who was always in the school area, it was easier to remember me than my female colleagues [...] It's easier to recognize Jacek than Ania, who has blonde hair. There are three female colleagues named Ania and all of them have blonde hair. (Jacek, M, 31, teacher in an integrational school/common room teacher⁴)

Another common thread was the connection between being a gender occupational minority and being 'spared' some less pleasant aspects of the job. In the case of Łucja, who is a programmer and data scientist, this meant that unpleasant or entitled clients are more likely to argue with her colleagues than with her. Due to being a women, she does not have to deal with as much conflicts or verbal aggression as her male colleagues. According to Łucja, it is clients themselves who try to be more civil with her, presumably seeing her gender before her professional status.

I think that gender makes it easier for me, that if the client is upset, he will have a fight with some guy from my team. But they [clients] try to be nice to me. [...] if it happens that the client is actually extremely ill-mannered in his way of communicating, I'm usually the one least affected by it. (Łucja, F, 32, programmer/data scientist)

On the contrary, Kaspian, who is a preschool teacher described the situation when, starting a new job, was encouraged to ask for additional support if he encountered challenges in the 'caring' aspect of his work. The preschool's headmaster (female) told him that the cleaning lady would be ready to help him with the children and he should not be ashamed to ask for her help. As the cleaning lady is not (in all probability) a qualified teacher, the preschool's headmaster must have assumed that she possesses those caring skills naturally, as a woman.

Because when I started work, I got an assurance that if I could not cope with something, in the sense of, let's say, 'maintenance'... That you need to take care of the child, so to say, tidy them up, that is, dress them, change their clothes, and so on. The headmaster informed me that she

4 A common room teacher is a person who cares for children in a common room – a place in school where children can spend time outside their lesson hours (especially younger children, for whom it would not be safe to return home alone). There are some activities organized in the common room (arts and crafts, games, etc.), but children can also play or do their homework independently.

talked to the cleaning lady, who would help me if I needed, so that I would not be ashamed to ask for help (Kaspian, M, 26, preschool teacher)

In both Łucja's and Kaspian's cases, being spared the less pleasant elements of the job (but only along the lines of gender stereotypes) is consistent with the positive aspects of 'being a raisin' (Fuszara, 2008). Still, those situations also show that, despite positive interpersonal relations and friendly atmosphere in the workplace mentioned before, members of occupational gender minorities are seen by their work environment via the lens of gender stereotypes. Consequently, they may be perceived as incapable of dealing with some aspects of the job; their status, therefore, is simultaneously 'privileged' and weakened by the lack of trust in their competencies.

Occupational gender minority roles

Apart from influencing an individual's work experience, the occupational gender minorities are also important from the occupational group perspective. Specific roles and duties are given to and/or spontaneously taken on by occupational gender minorities. These roles and duties appear to be strongly connected with gender stereotypes, creating a secondary gender division of work within the occupational group (Bourdieu, 2004). One important role connected with being an occupational gender minority, both in the case of men and women, seems to be of social character. Both male and female interviewees said that their presence was good for the atmosphere in the workplace, although this positive effect had a different character for each gender. Men talked more about conflicts in their workplaces – mostly not overt disagreements, but gossip and passive aggression. They saw this kind of negative social interaction in the workplace as a problem resulting from its feminization, and felt that the presence of more men could help solve it.

There should be more men in schools because women's environments are specific. Women gossip a little sometimes. They have their own groups, they fight mini-wars quite often. (Jacek, M, 31, teacher in integration school, common room teacher)

In the IT environment, women felt (and were frequently told) that their social function is more straightforward. Similarly to the case of men in feminized workplaces, what is important is their status as a woman – rather than individual characteristics – that can affect their environment in a positive, soothing way. This is especially visible in Danuta's story: when she joined the new team, her colleagues automatically tried to censor themselves and not use swear words, even apologizing to her when they forgot and used those words among themselves. Danuta felt that this was a kind of 'positive impediment', as she also uses swear words when the occasion calls for it, and would prefer to have the possibility to do so in the workplace.

But when I came, from the very first day it was the case that when someone, not even addressing me, but some other person, used a swear word, there was silence and they said to me – "I'm sorry,

I won't do it again". Or some other type – "Oh, sorry, I forgot, I'm biting my tongue already", etc. On the one hand, it was nice, on the other hand, it limited me, because I felt that I should not use those swear words myself, since they did not use them in front of me. (Danuta, F, 23, robotics engineer)

It is important to note that similar sets of stereotypes result in opposite outcomes in Jacek's and Danuta's stories. In the case of Jacek, he presents himself as a rational and outcome-oriented person able to avoid conflicts in the workplace (unlike his emotional female colleagues, cf. Kelan, 2007). On the other hand, in Danuta's case, it is her, assumed (according to gender stereotypes) higher female sensibility that has a calming effect on her team (Kelan, 2007, cf. Holgersson, Romani, 2020). The tendency of some men in feminized occupations to maintain traditional, gender-essentialist views of themselves and their female colleagues was described also by Małgorzata Fuszara (2008) and Karina Jankowska (2008).

Apart from their social role, occupational gender minorities also have other gender-typical tasks, specializations, and functions within their gender-atypical occupations, which again can be linked to Bourdieu's (2004) gender division of work. Within early-school/preschool teaching, men generally visit the institution for time-restricted classes and do not stay with the group the whole time. However, this division between the more instrumental roles of male teachers and more caring roles of female teachers is (slowly) becoming more blurred.

So a male teacher comes, plays the piano, the kids learn to sing, dance and so on. A male teacher comes and does corrective exercises with these children or teaches them English. As for the care itself, the upbringing, yes, this is done by a female teacher. And generally it was like that in the past. (Kaspian, M, 26, preschool teacher)

Some of our male interviewees saw their role as providing children with a specific 'masculine' kind of care, contrasting with the care and education provided by female teachers. In a rather essentialist and stereotypical view of gender-specific, innate skills, they considered their female colleagues as warmer and more emotional, and themselves as more rational and able to discipline the group (cf. Fuszara, 2008; Jankowska, 2008). In several narratives, the interviewees saw their physical, male characteristics (beards, lower voice) as crucial for gaining children's respect and maintaining discipline. Konstanty, who is a nursery teacher, even noticed the change in his ability to maintain discipline after he had grown a beard over the summer holidays.

This [having a beard] is probably the factor that gives me plus 1 to power. I really had a situation where I came to the group I was teaching after the summer holidays and it was much easier for me to discipline them because I'd grown a beard. (Konstanty, M, 26, nursery teacher)

The interviewees also saw their role as men in education and care as providing children with masculine role-models (which they saw as especially important for boys). As many children have more or less absent fathers (due to divorce or long hours of work), they grow up surrounded only by women

– mother, grandmothers, female teachers. This may leave children’s worldview incomplete. Some of the interviewees even said that parents themselves see the lack of men in care settings as a problem and are keen to have a male teacher in charge of their children.

The argument on children needing ‘the masculine role-model’ may in itself seem gender-essentialist. However, it is important to take the context in which this model is presented into consideration. As Dariusz, who is a teacher in a democratic school⁵, argues, children seeing a male teacher get a masculine role-model that differs from the traditional, hegemonic masculine role-model they may get from pop-culture. Having a male teacher shows children that man can be caring, sensitive, and patient (even if he has the respect-commanding beard).

Or that many children do not know men in such roles, oh, and they find it so surprising and interesting that a man can be, I don’t know, sensitive, non-aggressive. (Dariusz, M, 37, teacher)

Defining the ‘feminine’ role in IT may be more complex than in the case of the ‘masculine’ role in childcare/education. The crucial difference is that the IT/new technologies sector is changing with high speed: new specializations and occupations are emerging with fast-paced technological changes, and the existing occupations are changing their character and ranking in the prestige hierarchy. A few years ago, women were most likely to be working in graphic-design-related jobs, while currently the ‘feminine’ jobs are mostly connected with testing (especially manual testing) and User Experience. One general trend that the interviewees have observed over the years is the feminization of front-end jobs (the client side of programming), while the back end (the server side) remains more ‘masculine’. This is again consistent with the stereotypical view of women’s role as social and men’s role as technical or instrumental (Faulkner, 2000; 2007).

[...] it was believed that front end and graphics, UA, UX and so on are feminine things. Due to the fact that here we have a kind of direct contact with the client and this is something that the client sees, it is something we care about, the client and so on, yes, image, functionality and so on. And the back end is more masculine really, because the only one you communicate with is a machine, which of course, as I say, is just a stereotype, because the truth is that this [back-end] functionality is also discussed with customers and soft skills are also very much needed [in back-end jobs]. (Aleksandra, F, 32, .NET programmer)

One important issue here is that the ‘feminine’ testing jobs are currently also those with the lowest entry requirements, as testers do not necessarily require a tertiary technical education. Ewelina, who is a telecommunications engineer, as well as a tester and lecturer, notices that (female) testers are frequently graduates of humanistic studies, who enter the IT sector without much technical knowledge. Moreover, testing and similar jobs are seen as very convenient for parents, as one can work from home and have a relatively flexible schedule. Women working in these jobs (or wanting to gain qualifications and enter the IT sector) can obtain practical and social support via various online communities (e.g., Facebook groups).

5 A model of school where pupils are given agency in shaping their learning experience and the school’s governance.

Certainly, the most feminine in IT are tester jobs. Testers have relatively the lowest entry threshold, the easiest way to get to work [in IT sector] is as a tester. (Ewelina, F, 44, telecommunication engineer / tester / information technology lecturer)

Both in terms of the 'masculine way of caring' and regarding front-end jobs in the IT sector, we can argue that the secondary gender division of work within the occupational group (Woodfield, 2016; Pelley, Carnes, 2020; Campero, 2021; Czeranowska, 2021) may be even more difficult to overcome than horizontal gender occupational segregation on the labor market. However, it is important to note that our female interviewees did not see any specializations or tasks as being connected directly with their gender (in the way in which the male interviewees talked about being a masculine role model or providing children with different kinds of care than their female colleagues). Moreover, they put much less emphasis on their gender in general (apart from describing situations in which it was important for their co-workers or clients). In their narratives, women placed more emphasis on being an IT professional than on being a woman, and contrary to men, they did not generally mention physical difference as being important for their gender occupational minority status.

Discussion and conclusion

The study's aim was to analyze experiences of women in masculinized occupations alongside those of men in feminized occupations, focusing on their minority status. We propose a more subject-centered approach that focuses on the occupations' incumbents by calling them 'occupational gender minorities'. Treating occupational gender minorities as extreme cases opens a new theoretical perspective in analyzing the meaning of gender and gender division of work in the labor market.

The interviewees confirmed their status as members of a statistical minority in their workplaces, but the exact proportions of genders vary between institutions and organizations. Men had a much greater sense of being an exception in their occupational group as a whole. Although there is no large-scale statistical data to confirm this perception, this seems to be consistent with Ruth Simpson's (2009) and Joanne McDowell's (2021) intuitions that the inflow of women into masculinized occupations is greater than that of men into feminized occupations, which might be due to status, wages, and work conditions that are usually better in the case of masculinized occupations.

Both men in feminized occupations and women in masculinized occupations related to the concept of 'being a raisin' in the workplace (Fuszara, 2008) – that is being special and different from co-workers. They felt that the status of being in an occupational gender minority gives them positive visibility and distinguishability (cf. Simpson, 2009), which helps in networking. The concept of 'being a raisin' can be seen as partly opposing the situation of being a token (Kanter, 1977 after Stichman, Hassell, Archbold, 2010) as in 'raisin's status' being in the minority has primarily positive connotations: visibility and contrast with the majority group results in more opportunities and being spared some less pleasant aspect of the work (although 'raisin' may be expected to perform

some other, gender-specific duties). Moreover, while in the token theory, members of the token group are not seen as individuals but, rather, as a uniform group shaped by the stereotype, 'being a raisin' means being unique and special.

In terms of contrast and visibility, it is also important to note that, while neither of the researched occupations is strictly based on physical work, in our male interviewees' perception, this visibility was connected with physical difference (beard, male voice). No such connection was found in the women's narratives.

'Being a raisin', although positive, does not equate with access to a 'glass escalator' (Williams, 1992) in the case of men, but these two phenomena can coexist. Still, none of our male interviewees mentioned that being in a gender occupational minority could increase the chance of promotion or a better position in their organizations. Instead, they focused on smaller, everyday advantages in the workplace, mostly of a social character. This may reflect the fact that schools and preschools are usually workplaces with a flat organizational hierarchy, and in the Polish education system, teachers' salaries and career advancement are very formalized and connected with job seniority.

Both men in feminized occupations and women in masculinized occupations felt that they were sometimes spared some less pleasant parts of their jobs or supported in certain tasks. In the case of men, this applied to the caring/maintenance aspect of working with small children and in the case of women, this was dealing with aggressive or rude clients. Therefore, in both cases, the interviewees were relieved from the aspects of their jobs that were most in conflict with their gender stereotype. However, it is important to note that those situations can also be interpreted as the dominant group (gender in the majority) not treating members of the gender occupational minority as fully capable of doing their job and, therefore, needing support.

At the same time, both men in feminized occupations and women in masculinized occupations had some tasks or functions specifically prescribed to them (or spontaneously taken up by them) because of their gender. Both groups felt that they had a special role to play in their workplace's social life – in the case of men it was alleviating their female colleagues' conflicts (mostly in the form of gossip and passive aggression) and in the case of women – more generally improving the atmosphere and manners in their teams, including the language used in the workplace. In both cases, occupational gender minorities' social roles are connected with the binary opposition between emotional femininity and rational masculinity (Kelan, 2007).

Apart from this social role, the experiences of both occupational gender minorities confirmed the tendency to divide roles and tasks into 'feminine' and 'masculine' based on the stereotypes of each gender. This gender division of work, which is repeated at the occupational group level, had been described in earlier studies (Woodfield, 2016; Pelley, Carnes, 2020; Campero, 2021; Czeranowska, 2021). The 'masculine' role in childcare/education generally focuses on teaching concrete skills and knowledge – this is why male teachers work mostly with children older than primary school pupils. Even in preschools and primary education, men tend to teach children measurable skills in limited time periods (e.g., English, music) than to spend a whole day with them. Another task which the male interviewees saw as specific to them

was providing a male role model, which they considered important in times when many children are growing up with absent fathers. Some of the interviewees also mentioned their stricter approach and the ability to establish rules and discipline in the classroom (cf. Simpson, 2009). Meanwhile, the other 'feminine' role in the IT/new technologies sector (apart from improving the atmosphere and culture within the team) was associated more with social skills and contact with clients (front-end, design, UX) and less with the technical aspects of the work. A more recent trend is the feminization of IT testing jobs (especially manual testing, requiring less technical skill), which is seen as a means of entry into the IT sector for people without tertiary technical education. This division can be linked to the technical/social dualism described by Wendy Faulkner (2000; 2007).

Both in the case of women in masculinized occupations and men in feminized occupations, those specializations/tasks are, therefore, connected with gender division of work and gender stereotypes that cast women as being caring and focused on social contacts, and men as being strong and focused on measurable outcomes and tasks (Ku, 2011; Huppatz, Goodwin, 2013; Litosseliti, Leadbeater, 2013; Didham, 2015; McEntee-Atalianis, Litosseliti, 2017; McDowell, 2019). At the same time, both men in feminized occupations and women in masculinized occupations were conscious that these roles and specializations are changing with time so that specializations perceived as 'masculine' or 'feminine' ten years ago may no longer be seen as such. This is consistent with the literature on the changing perceptions and stereotypes of 'feminine' and 'masculine' occupations (Simpson, 2009). Changes concerning 'feminine' tasks in 'masculine' occupations and *vice versa* seem to be happening faster than in the case of 'feminine' and 'masculine' occupations in general (Gromkowska-Melosik, 2013; Donley, Baird, 2017; Brown, Fleming, Silverstri, 2021). Nevertheless, we argue that this 'secondary' gender division of work within the occupational groups is an important factor sustaining horizontal segregation in the labor market, as they proliferate gender stereotypes.

The presented study is not without limitations. Due to its exploratory nature and the small scale of the project, we were able to reach only a limited number of interviewees. Bourdieu's (2004) practical principles of gender occupational segregation were used so that we could choose two groups that could be compared and analyzed together. The chosen occupations – IT/new technologies and childcare/education sectors – although both requiring high qualifications, are very different in nature as well as in terms of working conditions, income, and occupational prestige. This difference in part reflects the disparity in how 'masculine' and 'feminine' traits and talents are valued, as 'feminine' occupations universally are connected with lower incomes and inferior working conditions (Levanon, England, Allison, 2009; England, 2010; Pelley, Carnes, 2020). Nevertheless, the difference between the sectors affects the possibility to compare them. In future research, it would be interesting to study a higher number of gender occupational minority members, preferably representing other occupational groups, including low-skilled occupations. Moreover, we may assume a positive selection bias, as recruiting people currently working in an occupation atypical of their gender, we did not have access to those who could not enter or stay in the occupational field.

The project applied qualitative methodologies, which was the most suitable option for hard-to-research populations, characterized by small numbers. The qualitative approach was also consistent with the focus on individuals' experiences and feelings. However, using quantitative or mixed method

approaches in further studies may be useful for supplementing the obtained findings with quantitative data. These approaches would also make it possible to include more occupational groups in the study as well as to compare the perspectives of gender occupational minorities with those of their co-workers and the wider environment.

Despite these limitations, this paper supplements the existing research with a joint analysis of men in feminized occupations and women in masculinized occupations. The main theoretical contribution of the study is using the concept of gender occupational minority to describe the experiences of men in feminized occupations and women in masculinized occupations jointly, with a focus on their minority status. This study also advances theoretical and empirical knowledge on the role of gender on the labor market, and specifically gender division of work, by analyzing how similar mechanisms and processes within the workplace and an occupational group occur within two opposite gender contexts.

Appendix

Table 1. Characteristics of the Interviewees

	Pseudonim	Gender	Age	Occupation/position
1	Natalia	F	46	Account manager
2	Danuta	F	23	Robotics engineer
3	Halina	F	37	Programmer
4	Róża	F	30	IT project manager/programmer
5	Paulina	F	30	Production engineer
6	Maria	F	28	Business intelligence developer
7	Lidia	F	Refusal	Software tester
8	Ewelina	F	44	Telecommunication engineer/tester/information technology lecturer
9	Aleksandra	F	32	.NET programmer
10	Łucja	F	32	Programmer, data scientist
11	Gabriela	F	33	UX developer
12	Karolina	F	34	Business analytic IT – Robotic process automation
13	Konstancja	F	37	Programmer
14	Kacper	M	30	Primary education teacher
15	Przemek	M	44	Preschool teacher

16	Jakub	M	40	Primary education teacher
17	Gabriel	M	26	Psychologist/preschool teacher
18	Jan	M	24	Animator/sociotherapist
19	Dariusz	M	37	Teacher
20	Kaspian	M	26	Preschool teacher
21	Jacek	M	31	Teacher in integration school, common room teacher
22	Stefan	M	32	Primary education teacher
23	Konstanty	M	26	Nursery teacher
24	Michał	M	45	Psychologist
25	Karol	M	40	Psychologist
26	Konrad	M	43	Psychologist/teacher
27	Paweł	M	37	Teacher's assistant in special school

Source: Project „Occupational gender minorities. An analysis of the situation of women in masculinized occupations and men in feminized occupations”.

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Cytowanie

Olga Czeranowska (2024), *Women in Masculinized Occupations, Men in Feminized Occupations: Experiences of Gender Occupational Minorities and Their Roles within the Occupational Group*, „Przegląd Socjologii Jakościowej”, t. XX, nr 2, s. 174–195, <https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8069.20.2.08>

Kobiety w zawodach zmaskulinizowanych, mężczyźni w zawodach sfeminizowanych – doświadczenia płciowych mniejszości zawodowych i ich role w grupie zawodowej

Abstrakt: Horyzontalna segregacja płciowa oznacza istnienie na rynku pracy zawodów stereotypowo „kobięcych” i „męskich”. Niektóre osoby wybierają jednak ścieżkę zawodową niezgodnie z oczekiwaniami dla ich płci, stając się tym samym mniejszością płciową w swojej grupie zawodowej. Autorka proponuje wspólny termin „zawodowe mniejszości płciowe”, aby opisać ich sytuację. Celem przedstawionego projektu było uzupełnienie wcześniejszych badań o łączną analizę sytuacji kobiet w zawodach zmaskulinizowanych oraz mężczyzn w zawodach sfeminizowanych i umożliwienie globalnego spojrzenia na znaczenie płci na rynku pracy, a także porównanie, w jaki sposób podobne mechanizmy działają w odwrotnych pod względem dominującej płci kontekstach grup zawodowych.

Opierając się na praktycznych zasadach segregacji zawodowej według Pierre’a Bourdieu, do udziału w badaniu zostały zaproszone kobiety pracujące w IT/nowych technologiach i mężczyźni pracujący w opiece nad dziećmi/edukacji. W niniejszym artykule skupiono się na doświadczeniu bycia płciową mniejszością zawodową na polskim rynku pracy oraz na rolach i zadaniach tych osób w ich w grupie zawodowej.

Słowa kluczowe: płeć kulturowa, płciowe mniejszości zawodowe, segregacja pozioma