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"Please, bring me some coffee": Illegitimate tasks as the explanation for the relationship between organisational sexism and occupational well-being

Zusammenfassung

„Bringen Sie mir bitte einen Kaffee": illegitime Aufgaben als Erklärungsansatz für den Zusammenhang von sexistischem Betriebsklima und Wohlbefinden am Arbeitsplatz

Während offensichtliche Formen des Sexismus in Organisationen zurückgehen, werden verdeckte Formen zur Regel. In diesem Artikel wird argumentiert, dass illegitime Aufgaben eine versteckte Form geschlechterspezifischer Diskriminierung und Belästigung darstellen. Zur Untermauerung dieses Arguments werden Belege für die Auswirkungen von Sexismus auf das berufliche Wohlergehen vorgelegt, die durch illegitime Aufgaben hervorgerufen werden. Insbesondere analysieren die Autorinnen den Zusammenhang zwischen sexistischem Betriebsklima und illegitimen Aufgaben sowie deren Auswirkungen auf die Arbeitszufriedenheit und die psychische Befindensbeeinträchtigung (Irritation). Die für die Analyse verwendeten empirischen Daten stammten aus einer Querschnittstudie mit einer Stichprobe deutscher Psycholog*innen. Auch nach Kontrolle des Effekts der Geschlechtszugehörigkeit belegen die Daten die negativen Auswirkungen von sexistischem Betriebsklima auf Irritation und Arbeitszufriedenheit, die durch die Übernahme illegitimer Aufgaben entstehen.

Schlüsselwörter
Sexistisches Betriebsklima, Illegitime Aufgaben, Irritation, Human Resources, Arbeitszufriedenheit, Wohlbefinden am Arbeitsplatz

Summary

While overt forms of sexism in organisations are on the decline, covert ones are becoming the norm. This article argues that illegitimate tasks are a disguised form of gender-based discrimination and harassment. To support this argument, evidence is provided about the effects of sexism on occupational well-being that are caused by undertaking illegitimate tasks. The authors focus on the relationship between sexist organisational climate and illegitimate tasks and the resulting effects on job satisfaction and irritation. The empirical data used in the analyses were obtained from a cross-sectional study of a sample of German psychologists. After controlling for the effects of gender, the results provided evidence of the negative effects that a sexist organisational climate has on irritation and job satisfaction, mediated by illegitimate tasks.

Keywords
sexist organisational climate, illegitimate tasks, irritation, human resources, job satisfaction, occupational well-being

1 Introduction

From the 1980s onwards, organisational scholars have tried to explain and counteract sexual harassment against women in the workplace. Pioneers like Till (1980) and Fitzgerald (Fitzgerald et al. 1988) demonstrated that harassment was a *problem* and that its negative consequences *existed*. Today, it is politically incorrect to question the negative effects of sexual harassment (although post-feminist backlash is increasing, see McRobbie 2011). In addition, there is greater acknowledgement of the negative consequences of sexual harassment against men who do not conform to stereotypical masculinity (Stockdale/Visio/Batra 1999) and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) employees (García Johnson/Otto 2019). The gain in rights and legal coverage related to gender discrimination and harassment invites to think about the improvements achieved in gender-equality matters. Nevertheless, sexism, rather than disappearing, has changed its expression and adopted subtler forms that can be as damaging as overt ones (Leskinen/Cortina 2013).

In this paper, the negative link between organisational sexism and occupational well-being is explained through the mediation effect of *illegitimate tasks*, a task-level stressor.

2 Theoretical background

In this section, the study model and hypotheses are defined, and their relationships are explained.

2.1 Organisational sexist climate and occupational well-being

In this paper, two constructs were chosen to account for occupational well-being. *Irritation* refers to subjectively perceived strain derived from uncertainty thoughts and feelings about the accomplishment of important goals in occupational contexts (Mohr/Rigotti/Müller 2005). In addition, irritation plays a key role as mediator of the relationship between social stressors at work and depressive symptomatology (Dormann/Zapf 2002). *Job satisfaction* describes how satisfied an individual is with different aspects of their own work, such as career opportunities and social climate (Neuberger/Allerbeck 1978). It has been found to predict performance (Judge/Bono 2001), and organisational commitment (Ćulibrk et al. 2018; Judge/Bono 2001).

In an organisation with a highly *sexist climate,* sexism permeates most of what is said, thought of, and done (Franke 1997). In such contexts, gender harassment against women and LGBTQ individuals is tolerated or promoted (Leskinen/Cortina 2013; Rabelo/Cortina 2014). In addition, men who appear as feminine or non-compliant to traditional masculinity are also susceptible to the negative effects of organisational sexism (Stockdale/Visio/Batra 1999). Hence, considering the available evidence, it is probable that a sexist climate negatively influences employees' well-being.

Hypothesis H1a: Employees in organisations high in sexist climate experience higher irritation.

Hypothesis H1b: Employees in organisations high in sexist climate experience lower job satisfaction.

2.2 Illegitimate tasks

Illegitimate tasks are task-level stressors in the workplace, which are offensive to the person who undertakes them, since they are perceived as a violation of the boundaries and expectations of the professional role (Semmer et al. 2010). Their negative effects can be interpreted within the "Stress as Offense to Self" (SOS) framework, because they are experienced as a sign of disrespect to the employees' professional identity (Kottwitz et al. 2019; Semmer et al. 2015). They are perceived as *unreasonable* and/or *unnecessary* in the context in which they are undertaken (Jacobshagen 2006). For example, organisational psychologists may find it unreasonable to coordinate the catering for all meetings held by their supervisors. In addition, they may find it unnecessary to manually type information from old files into a cloud storage that no one uses. However, a catering provider could see catering coordination as one of their core activities, and for a librarian, organising information in a digital database may be their main work task. A German study among teacher trainees found that attending seminars and substituting teachers were the most common illegitimate tasks for that group (Faupel et al. 2016). In contrast, attending seminars is a core activity for bachelor students, and replacing teachers (e.g., during sick leave) is legitimate for someone hired explicitly for this purpose.

Undertaking illegitimate tasks decreases self-esteem and can increase burnout, resentment, and irritation (Semmer et al. 2015). Moreover, it is possible to find similarities between the definition of illegitimate tasks and the operationalisation of workplace mistreatment. For example, in the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R, Einarsen/Hoel/Notelaers 2009) some items address the assignment of tasks that can be considered unreasonable and/or unnecessary, like "[b]eing ordered to do work below [the person's] level of competence" (Einarsen/Hoel/Notelaers 2009: 32). Hence, employees who undertake illegitimate tasks may feel the same way as the targets of workplace mistreatment do.

Finally, psychologists are especially vulnerable to the negative effects of illegitimate tasks, because they threaten their sense of being appreciated at work (Kottwitz et al. 2019). Since psychologists derive most of their work satisfaction from subjective indicators of success, perceiving a low social appreciation is particularly detrimental to their occupational well-being (Kottwitz et al. 2019; Sobiraj/Schladitz/Otto 2016). Hence, it is important to determine factors that increase the frequency of illegitimate tasks undertaken by this professional group.

2.3 Relationship between an organisational sexist climate and illegitimate tasks

A phenomenon is gendered if gender affects its occurrence, frequency, or if it serves the objective to establish or reinforce a gendered distribution of power (Acker 1990, 2006; Franke 1997). Although the extent to which illegitimate tasks are gendered has not been widely measured, there is some evidence available. Omansky, Eatough, and Fila (2016) found that illegitimate tasks relate to worse perceptions of effort-reward imbalance (ERI) for men than for women. In other words, although they found no gender differences in the *frequency* of illegitimate tasks, such tasks were more detrimental to men's than women's well-being. This phenomenon was interpreted as a consequence of illegitimate tasks being a threat to men's gender identity, since women's socialisation processes usually involve learning to see these tasks as part of one's job (Omansky/Eatough/Fila 2016). A Swedish study found that female managers performed more illegitimate tasks than male ones (Björk et al. 2013). Although it was not possible to rule out other factors affecting gender differences in the study (e.g., horizontal segregation of the labour market), it suggested that gender was relevant to understand illegitimate tasks (Björk et al. 2013). Finally, García Johnson and Otto (2019) proposed that illegitimate tasks may be unevenly assigned to female and LGBTQ employees to restrain their career development, acting as a disguised form of gender harassment.

The main assumption of this paper is that illegitimate tasks are a disguised form of gender-based harassment. *Disguised* because illegitimate tasks may lack overt sexual or sexist content. *Sexist* because their assignment is affected by the targets' gender, serving to reinforce gender roles and gendered dynamics in organisations. Hence, a higher frequency of illegitimate tasks is expected in organisations with a highly sexist climate.

Hypothesis H2: Professionals working in organisations with a highly sexist climate undertake more illegitimate tasks at work than professionals working in a non-sexist organisation.

Female professionals in a sexist organisation may be expected to undertake more illegitimate tasks that are believed to be "feminine", such as decorating the workplace and organising meetings. In the same context, male professionals may be expected to do "men's work", such as carrying heavy objects and installing programs in their colleagues' computers. There is evidence that women are punished when displaying agency if it is not "balanced" by displayed communality (Heilman/Okimoto 2007), so they face a greater pressure than men to appear communal. Also, women more often volunteer to undertake tasks that disadvantage them but help the group, are more often asked to do so, and receive harsher backlash when they refuse to (Babcock et al. 2017; Babcock/Recalde/Vesterlund 2017). Finally, research shows that gender stereotypes are not only descriptive, but also prescriptive, so that men and women feel the pressure to act according to traditional gender roles at work (Heilman 2001). Illegitimate tasks might hence constitute a form of gender harassment, working as a *technology of sexism*, according to Franke's (1997) definition of a technology as a *means* for something. Namely, illegiti-

mate tasks may contribute to reinforce traditional gender roles and the power imbalances that accompany them, becoming more frequent in highly sexist organisations.

2.4 Illegitimate tasks and occupational well-being

Illegitimate tasks are task-level stressors that negatively influence individuals' well-being at work (Semmer et al. 2015). Evidence signals that they induce low self-esteem, feelings of resentment towards the organisation, burnout, and irritation (Semmer et al. 2015), as well as lower job satisfaction and intrinsic motivation (Omansky/Eatough/Fila 2016).

Hypothesis H3a: Professionals undertaking more illegitimate tasks experience higher irritation.

Hypothesis H3b: Professionals undertaking more illegitimate tasks experience lower job satisfaction.

2.5 Illegitimate tasks as the explaining link between organisational sexist climate and occupational well-being

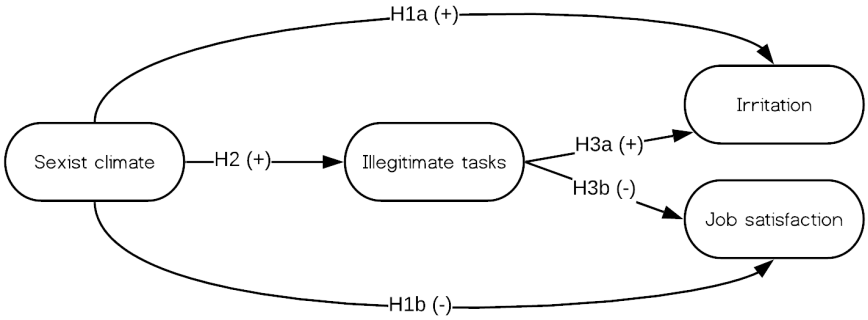
The influence of sexist climate on well-being and illegitimate tasks was explained, and the effects of illegitimate tasks on irritation and job satisfaction were described. Here, it is proposed that the link between a sexist climate (an organisational-level variable) and occupational well-being (an individual-level outcome) is the undertaking of illegitimate tasks (a task-level stressor).

Hypothesis H4a: Illegitimate tasks mediate the relationship between organisational sexist climate and irritation of the individuals undertaking those tasks.

Hypothesis H4b: Illegitimate tasks mediate the relationship between organisational sexist climate and job satisfaction of the individuals undertaking those tasks.

Hence, we believe that an increase in organisational sexism leads to a higher frequency of illegitimate tasks undertaken at work, which undermines job satisfaction and irritation levels. Illegitimate tasks thus serve as a disguised form of gender harassment which increasingly occurs when sexism is high. It may take the form of *gender policing*, so that illegitimate tasks are assigned to reinforce stereotypical gender roles and behaviour (Leskinen/Cortina 2013; Leskinen/Cortina/Kabat 2011). In other words, when female professionals are assigned tasks such as organising a birthday party, and male professionals are assigned tasks such as changing the position of heavy office furniture, they are undergoing gender policing at the task level. Based on previous evidence that both men and women report illegitimate tasks (Omansky/Eatough/Fila 2016) it is expected that both groups will undertake them more often when sexism is high. Figure 1 displays the relationships between the main constructs considered in this research.

Figure 1: Study model



Notes: Direct-effect hypotheses are represented by arrows. Mediation hypotheses H4a and H4b can be inferred from the paths H2→H3a and H2→H3b, respectively.
Source: own figure.

3 Method

In the following lines there is a description of the methodology utilised to test the hypotheses mentioned in the previous section.

3.1 Procedure

The participants of this study were psychology graduates who finished their studies between 2001 and 2006. They were recruited utilising the university's alumni database through an e-mail inviting them to complete an online questionnaire. In total, 133 psychologists answered the survey. Twelve percent could not be considered in the study because employment data was failing (one case) or because they were unemployed (15 individuals). Three subjects (2.3 %) were excluded because they did not inform their gender, so the final sample of 114 respondents had 96 females (84.2 %) and 18 males (15.8 %), age $M = 31.21$ ($SD = 4.88$). Most (89.5 %) participants had a contract with a public or private organisation, and 12 of them (10.5 %) were independent or freelancers. They had an average of 2.49 years of work experience ($SD = 2.47$, $N = 101$), a tenure of 2.51 years ($SD = 2.51$, $N = 99$) in their current organisation, and worked an average of 37.43 hours a week ($SD = 10.47$, $N = 111$). Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of all measures of the study are provided in Table 1.

3.2 Measures

This section describes the instruments applied to measure the variables conforming the research model of this paper.

3.2.1 Sexist climate

We used an adaptation of a ten-item sex-role conflict scale that was developed within a project about gender atypical professions (Mohr/Rigotti/Müller 2005). Because the original measure was designed to be administered to a male-only sample, it was modified to suit both men and women for this study. Answers were ranked on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "never" to "always". An example item is "In my work life, my gender is more important than my capabilities when explaining the way I am treated [by others]" (translation from German). For the analyses, one item was removed to improve the scale's reliability "I receive negative feedback because of the profession I chose". The Cronbach's alpha was .84 (M = 13.99; SD = 4.91).

3.2.2 Illegitimate tasks

This construct was measured with the Bern Illegitimate Tasks Scale (BITS; Semmer et al. 2010). The measure has eight items, four for unnecessary tasks and four for unreasonable tasks. Respondents had to indicate how often they think about the tasks they undertake at work as unreasonable or irrelevant. They do this by grading their thoughts about these tasks in a five-point Likert scale ranging from never/almost never to almost always. An example item is "Are there tasks in your everyday work, in which you ask yourself if they should be done at all?" The scale presented a Cronbach's alpha of .85 (M = 16.97; SD = 5.19).

3.2.3 Irritation

Irritation was measured using a seven-item scale from Mohr, Rigotti, and Müller (2005). The questionnaire subscales (cognitive and emotional irritation) were clustered together, since they presented satisfactory reliability. The questionnaire asks to rate the asseverations using a seven-point Likert scale from "Doesn't apply to me at all" to "Totally describes my situation". One example item is "It is difficult for me to disconnect after work". The scale had a Cronbach's alpha of .91 (M = 23.52; SD = 9.36).

3.2.4 Job satisfaction

This construct was measured using the instrument from Neuberger and Allerbeck (1978) with seven questions about the satisfaction with different aspects of one's job. An example item is "In general, I am satisfied with my colleagues at work". Answer options were located in a seven-point Likert-scale ranging from "Doesn't apply to me at all" to "Totally describes my situation". The Cronbach's alpha after excluding one of the items ("In general, I am satisfied with my income") was .79 (M = 28.05; SD = 4.81), so the six-item version was utilised in the analyses.

Table 1: Intercorrelations, means, standard deviations, and sample sizes of study variables

	Variable	*M*	*SD*	*N*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	Sexist climate	1.55	0.54	108	-									
2	Illegitimate tasks	2.12	0.65	114	.29**	-								
3	Irritation	2.95	1.17	114	.20*	.47**	-							
4	Job satisfaction	4.67	0.81	111	-.30**	-.60**	-.20*	-						
5	Weekly hours	37.43	10.47	111	.25**	.32**	.27**	-.09	-					
6	Work experience	2.60	2.40	113	.17	.07	-.05	-.11	.16	-				
7	Tenure	2.59	2.34	112	.18	.07	.06	-.15	.15	.65**	-			
8	Age	31.21	4.88	114	.05	-.21*	-.09	.14	-.18	.26**	.42**	-		
9	Gender	-	-	114	.15	-.02	-.03	-.08	.23*	.20*	.18	.19*	-	
10	Work type	-	-	114	-.17	-.21*	-.08	.12	-.21*	.04	.03	.13	-.07	-

Notes: Gender: 0 = female, 1 = male. Work type: 1 = permanent contract, 2 = freelance. p*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level, p**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
Source: own figure.

3.3 Analyses

Gender was included as control variable in the analysis of all hypotheses considering the recommendations of Becker et al. (2016), to choose conceptually meaningful control variables and avoid the use of proxies such as age and tenure. However, gender exerted no significant effect on the dependent variables of this study. For this reason, all analyses were undertaken twice: first controlling for gender, and then leaving it out. Hierarchical regression analyses were initially undertaken to test the hypotheses H1a, H1b, H2, H3a, and H3b, controlling for gender in step 1, and the dependent variables in step 2. To test our mediation hypotheses (H4a and H4b), we conducted simple mediation analyses (model 4) including gender as covariate utilising IBM© SPSS© Statistics software in combination with the PROCESS© macro (Hayes 2013). In the "second round" of analyses, hierarchical regressions were replaced by simple regressions, and gender was eliminated as covariate from the mediation analyses. The results reported in the next session refer to this second round.

4 Results

This section presents the results of the analyses undertaken and contrasts them with the research hypotheses.

4.1 Consequences of organisational sexist climate

The direct effects of organisational sexist climate were contained in hypotheses H1a, H1b, and H2. Hypothesis H1a was supported, although the ability of sexist climate to explain irritation was small (R^2 = .03, β = .20, F[1, 106] = 4.53, p = <.05). H1b was also supported (R^2 = .08, β = -.30, F[1, 106] = 10.28, p = <.05) so that an increase in one unit of sexist climate translated into a .30 unit decrease in the levels of job satisfaction. Support for H2 was found, with sexist climate significantly explaining variance in the levels of illegitimate tasks (R^2 = .08, β = *.29*, F[1, 106] = 9.72, p = <.05), so that for each unit that sexist climate increased, illegitimate tasks incremented in about one-third of a unit.

4.2 Consequences of illegitimate tasks

The direct effects of illegitimate tasks were described in hypotheses H3a and H3b. Regarding H3a, illegitimate tasks explained a 22 percent of the variance from irritation (R^2 = .22, β = *.47*, F[1, 112] = 34.07, p = <.001), thus supporting this hypothesis. In relation to H3b, illegitimate tasks significantly contributed to explain the variance of job satisfaction (R^2 = .35, β = -.60, F[1, 109] = 59.96, p = <.001). In other words, for each one-point increase in illegitimate tasks, irritation increased in .47, and job satisfaction decreased in .60 points.

4.3 Mediating effects of illegitimate tasks

For the mediation analyses (hypotheses H4a and H4b) we utilised model four from the PROCESS © macro (Hayes 2013). Hypothesis H4a was supported (indirect effect = .28, *SE* = .12, 95 % CI [.07, .53]), indicating that for a one-unit increase in sexist climate, irritation incremented in .28 units because of illegitimate tasks induced by sexist climate. Hypothesis H4b was supported as well, since job satisfaction decreased .24 points for each one-point increase in sexist climate, as a consequence of illegitimate tasks caused by sexist climate (indirect effect = -.24, *SE* = .10, 95 % CI [-.45, -.05]).

5 Discussion

This study explored the role of illegitimate tasks as the explanatory link in the relationship between sexist climate and occupational well-being. Specifically, we assumed that illegitimate tasks are one manifestation of sexism at work. This assumption was founded on previous research on disguised forms of gender-based discrimination and harassment, namely, behaviours and conditions that appear to be gender neutral, but serve to oppress women and LGBTQ individuals (García Johnson/Otto 2019).

Our results underscore the detrimental effects of sexist climate on irritation and job satisfaction as a promoter of disguised gender harassment through illegitimate tasks at work. The data present a strong effect of illegitimate tasks on irritation, and a stronger one on job satisfaction. One way of interpreting this difference is that illegitimate tasks are usually–but not always–unpleasant. For example, organising a birthday party may be fun (for some, in the short term), while staying late at work to prepare a meeting might be less enjoyable. While these tasks may vary regarding the irritation they elicit, both steal resources from other activities relevant for career development, undermining job satisfaction in the long term.

5.1 Sexism, gender and illegitimate tasks

Gender was controlled for in the first stage of all analyses, without exerting any significant effects on the tested relationships. This raises the question of whether there are no gender differences in the frequency with which employees undertake illegitimate tasks, or if the methodology used was not sensitive enough to capture those differences. Available evidence suggests that men experience worse ERI than women when undertaking illegitimate tasks, because they threaten both their professional and their gender identity, while women are socialised to be communal and take on such tasks from early on (Omansky/Eatough/Fila 2016). Also, gender roles are both descriptive and prescriptive, so that women are expected to be communal, and face backlash when failing to do so (Heilman 2001; Heilman et al. 2004). In addition, women are penalised when succeeding at "male tasks" (i.e., agentic, related to career success) if they do not show clear signs that they are also high on communality (Heilman/Okimoto 2007). Moreover, evidence shows that women are more likely to volunteer to undertake tasks that are detrimental to them but favourable for their work group, are more often asked to do so, and experience more backlash when they refuse to (Babcock/Recalde/Vesterlund 2017). For these reasons, women may consciously or unconsciously overlook the illegitimacy of the tasks they undertake, since it complies with gender roles and helps them avoid backlash. Furthermore, women may apply a different standard (a higher "illegitimacy threshold") before they label illegitimate tasks as such, so that they *perceive* the illegitimacy but it has to reach higher levels to produce resistance or be salient in an illegitimate-tasks report.

A highly sexist climate might lead women to internalise their work role in a gendered way, influencing their perceptions of tasks illegitimacy. In other words, for women, detecting illegitimate tasks in highly sexist organisations may be especially difficult because it becomes normalised that they undertake them. Paradoxically, this implies that in egalitarian organisations women could perceive more illegitimate tasks than in sexist ones, because it would become salient that these tasks do not belong to their professional identity. In contrast, in workplaces where gender equality is lower, women might be prevented from perceiving these tasks as illegitimate, giving HR researchers and practitioners the impression that they undertake them less frequently.

If men and women perceive illegitimacy and detect illegitimate tasks differently, it would make sense to test these differences in experimental settings. An experiment to detect perceptions of illegitimacy could present participants with vignettes where

fictitious employees undertake certain tasks (legitimate and illegitimate) and then ask them how illegitimate they perceive them to be. If men show a higher sensitivity to illegitimacy than women, they may also label their work experiences more often as illegitimate. An experiment to test the detection "threshold" of illegitimate tasks could present participants a vignette portraying a list of tasks undertaken by a fictional character in a particular industry. Afterwards, participants would have to choose which of the presented tasks are illegitimate. If men label more tasks as illegitimate than women do, they may also perceive more of the tasks in their workplace as illegitimate. Both experiments can be useful to find differences in the way women and men *perceive illegitimacy* and *label illegitimate tasks*. If differences are found, they would help to interpret the results of previous and future studies.

A drawback to our study is that the sample was predominantly female (84.2 %). Nevertheless, in the year the data for this study was raised, 76 percent of psychology bachelor students in Germany were female (Statistisches Bundesamt 2011), so that the gender distribution in our sample almost reflected that from the population. Nevertheless, future studies should oversample men to test for gender differences.

There are good reasons to consider the effects of gender in future studies regarding organisational sexist climate, illegitimate tasks and occupational well-being. There is evidence signalling a higher prevalence of generalised workplace harassment (Rospenda/Richman/Shannon 2009), gender harassment (Basford/Offermann/Behrend 2014), and illegitimate tasks (Björk et al. 2013) among women than men. Also, evidence that men respond more negatively to illegitimate tasks, suggests that they might be more reluctant than women to undertake them at work, so that they are unevenly assigned to female employees (Omansky/Eatough/Fila 2016).

Our study was carried out in Germany, a country that has a Gender Equality Index (GEI) score of 66.9 points out of 100, according to data from the European Institute for Gender Equality (2019). That score situates Germany 0.5 points below EU average, but still at 12th place in the European ranking (European Institute for Gender Equality 2019). According to another indicator, the Global Gender Gap Report (GGGR), Germany is situated among the top 10 worldwide (World Economic Forum 2020). However, when looking at the "Economic Participation and Opportunity" sub-score of the report, Germany is 48th in a list of 153 countries. This still locates the country in the upper-third globally, but is a reminder of its pending tasks: the gender wage gap has been closed in a 67.1 percent only and roughly a third (29.3 %) of German managers are women (World Economic Forum 2020). While the GEI and gender-gap scores from Germany are positive for the women living there, it creates the misleading impression that the country has overcome gender inequality. This leads again to the question of gender differences in illegitimate tasks. There might be less differences in illegitimate tasks between women and men as a consequence of a society that is in general more equalitarian. However, it is possible that female employees are not perceiving inequalities as such, and are hence not reporting them. In the organisational context, there is a concept that well describes the phenomenon of inequalities being concealed in apparently egalitarian contexts: the *gender subtext* (Benschop/Doorewaard 1998). It refers to the consequences of holding a speech of equality (e.g., managers claiming that everyone has equal opportunities) that keeps women from acknowledging injustice. The problem is that inequality is hege-

monic and hence, invisible for most, which is why it is so important to raise data that make visible the obstacles faced by gender minorities in society.

5.2 Psychologists sample

This study focused on psychologists, which has the disadvantage that our findings cannot be generalised to other professional groups. However, psychologists share similarities with other professionals from the social (e.g., sociologists, occupational therapists) as well as the economic (e.g., HR practitioners, managers) sciences. One reason for studying this group is that their work satisfaction highly relies on subjective indicators of success, such as social appreciation, which is negatively undermined by illegitimate tasks (Kottwitz et al. 2019). This makes psychologists, as well as individuals from other professions with similar characteristics, a group of interest due to their susceptibility to the negative effects of illegitimate tasks. Nevertheless, further research could target a broader sample of employees, to be able to generalise results to a broader population.

5.3 Intersectional research and illegitimate tasks

Intersectionality is a critical theory that underscores the threats faced by individuals in the intersection of multiple minority statuses (Cho/Crenshaw/McCall 2013). It emphasises the impossibility to explain discrimination based on simple demographic characteristics, such as gender or race, but claims the importance to consider their interplay and the inequalities that they expose (Cho/Crenshaw/McCall 2013). Previous research has pointed to discrimination and harassment against women of colour, women with disabilities, transgender and non-binary individuals, LGBTQ of colour, and so on (Barclay/Scott 2006; Calafell 2014; Moodley/Graham 2015; Nadal/Skolnik/Wong 2012). Future research on illegitimate tasks should adopt an intersectional approach that integrates race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. Especially urgent are studies dealing with gender identity, since transgender and gender non-conforming individuals are often harassed and hence forced to change or abandon their jobs, careers, or even the formal labour market. Now that the gender identity debate is peaking, it is important to make visible the problems faced by this group. This will provide policy-makers, as well as HR researchers and practitioners, with information to support the inclusion of gender-identity minorities, so that they can stay and thrive in the labour market.

5.4 Practical considerations

It is crucial to determine the influence of leaders in the development of sexist climates that increase illegitimate tasks, and to create measures to raise awareness of the effects of (hetero-cis) sexism at work. It is also necessary to define the effect of the leaders' gender on illegitimate tasks, since female professionals perceive less support and more gender harassment from male than female supervisors (Konrad/Cannings/Goldberg 2010). Hence, female employees may receive more illegitimate tasks when supervised by men than women. Research should also focus on the effects of CEOs' and executives'

advocacy of women development, since they serve as examples for the rest of the organisation. In other words, when leaders show equal appreciation for the work of women and men, they send a message that illegitimate tasks are not a women's duty. It is also positive to increase the number of female leaders who act as role models and promoters of other women in organisations (Arvate/Galilea/Todescat 2018). Finally, research on gender-inclusive leadership may help to promote workplaces where individuals of all genders develop to their full potential.

It is also relevant to study the impact of sexist climate on innovation, performance, turnover, and evaluate the return on investment of programmes supporting change initiatives to improve gender inclusion. However, this should consider the socio-cultural and ethical backgrounds of these initiatives to ensure engagement from all members in the organisation (Unzueta/Knowles 2014).

5.5 Study limitations

This study relied on a cross-sectional design, so conclusions regarding causality must be taken carefully. Although there is a robust body of evidence supporting the link between illegitimate tasks and well-being outcomes, the relationship between sexist climate and illegitimate tasks may be of circular causality. Namely, it is both likely that in sexist organisations employees undertake more illegitimate tasks, and that employees who undertake more of these tasks perceive the organisational climate to be more sexist. Also, this study relied on self-reports, which can increase common method variance and hence artificially inflate the statistical relationship between the variables tested (Siemsen/Roth/Oliveira 2009). Future research should address the relationship between sexism, illegitimate tasks, gender, and well-being with longitudinal designs or combine experimental studies with cross-sectional information. This study focused on psychologists and women were overrepresented, which limits the generalisation of the obtained results. Future research addressing these issues will contribute to better understand how organisational sexism and illegitimate tasks influence the well-being of employees.

6 Conclusion

This paper addressed the relationship between sexist climate and well-being, mediated by illegitimate tasks in the workplace. The results point out the negative effects exerted by sexism at work, through the undertaking of illegitimate tasks, increasing employees' irritation and undermining their job satisfaction. In order to achieve fair, inclusive, and respectful organisations, human resources practitioners and managers must work together to counteract sexism in the workplace and its different manifestations. Only counteracting sexism, it is possible to create organisations that allow individuals of all gender characteristics to enjoy good health and unleash their full potential at work. It is far from being the only necessary step, but it is surely a big one towards a fairer and more inclusive society.

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