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Complementary exploration of intersectional women's experiences of oppression in the workplace and beyond

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COMPLEMENTARY EXPLORATIONS OF INTERSECTIONAL WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF OPPRESSION IN THE WORKPLACE AND BEYOND

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Acknowledgment

"The pen is mightier than the sword."

Edward Bulwer-Lytton

To all Iranian women who fight, not with words on paper, but with courage in the streets; not wielding pens, but reclaiming every right that has been stolen from them across generations

To my advisors, who taught me to learn, this whole journey would not have been possible without them

To Emily, who believed in me when I didn't believe in myself. For all meme sharing moments, for creating a safe space to be weird, for laughing at my jokes, for supporting the desire of a six-pack comedian, for accepting my paradoxical HSP-carefree combo

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To Carmen, the one who every PhD student needs by their side

To Sonia, we never got the chance to meet again, and now, we never will; RIP, my darling.

We lost light with the closing of your eyes

And

To my parents, the world is too complicated for simple visits. But I've kept growing, slowly, and quietly

By the time we're together again, my hair will be waiting for your hands, Mom

And dad, you'd carry a whole piece of home for me, if I asked. Wrapped in a Persian rug, with love

Oh, I was about to forget

To a man in Jerusalem, who unintentionally made room for my dreams, simply by not speaking for a day. A plane took off, my legalized documents arrived; So, in a strange way, this degree belongs to you, too

Abstract

This dissertation examines how women navigate and respond to oppression and power dynamics across different contexts through a feminist lens, exploring the complex interplay between mechanisms of individual adaptation and collective resistance. Through three complementary studies employing collaborative autoethnography and in-depth interviews, this research reveals the multifaceted ways women simultaneously respond, adapt to, and challenge systems of oppression and power dynamics through embodied practices, workplace navigation strategies, and cultural resource mobilization across different cultural, professional, and geographical settings.

The research makes three key theoretical contributions to understanding women's workplace experiences and resistance strategies. First, it reconceptualizes haircutting as collective embodied feminist resistance, demonstrating how seemingly personal choices become sites of relational political action. Second, building on feminist resistance theory, it shows how immigrant women employ hybrid coping-resistance strategies that blur conventional distinctions between adaptation and transformation, operating across temporal and spatial dimensions spanning professional and personal domains. Third, it introduces a tripartite framework of home-making practices, showing how immigrant women mobilize cultural resources to navigate workplace power dynamics while creating spaces of belonging and resistance.

Collectively, these studies show how women's responses to oppression and power in the contexts examined operate across multiple dimensions, requiring diverse analytical approaches to capture their interconnected nature. These findings reveal the need for interdisciplinary approaches that bridge feminist, organizational, and immigration studies when exploring dynamics of gender and migration in work and organization studies. This dissertation reconceptualizes women's agency in relation to oppression and power dynamics, framing resistance as an ongoing and adaptive process through which women sustain identity, assert belonging, and cultivate transformative potential. Through the lens of embodiment, hybrid strategies, and cultural practice, the study illuminates how these actions actively contest and reconfigure dominant power structures.

Keywords: Women’s Responses, Feminist Resistance, Agency, Oppression, Power Dynamics

Resumen

Esta disertación examina cómo las mujeres navegan y responden a la opresión y las dinámicas de poder en diferentes contextos a través de una lente feminista, explorando la compleja interacción entre mecanismos de adaptación individual y resistencia colectiva. A través de tres estudios complementarios que emplean autoetnografía colaborativa y entrevistas en profundidad, esta investigación revela las formas multifacéticas en que las mujeres simultáneamente responden, se adaptan y desafían sistemas de opresión y dinámicas de poder mediante prácticas corporales, estrategias de navegación laboral y movilización de recursos culturales en diferentes entornos culturales, profesionales y geográficos.

La investigación hace tres contribuciones teóricas clave para entender las experiencias laborales de las mujeres y las estrategias de resistencia. Primero, reconceptualiza el corte de cabello como resistencia feminista corporal colectiva, demostrando cómo las decisiones aparentemente personales se convierten en sitios de acción política relacional. Segundo, basándose en la teoría de resistencia feminista, muestra cómo las mujeres inmigrantes emplean estrategias híbridas de afrontamiento-resistencia que difuminan las distinciones convencionales entre adaptación y transformación, operando a través de dimensiones temporales y espaciales que abarcan dominios profesionales y personales. Tercero, introduce un marco tripartito de prácticas de construcción de hogar, mostrando cómo las mujeres inmigrantes movilizan recursos culturales para navegar las dinámicas de poder en el lugar de trabajo mientras crean espacios de pertenencia y resistencia.

Colectivamente, estos estudios muestran cómo las respuestas de las mujeres a la opresión y al poder en los contextos examinados operan a través de múltiples dimensiones, requiriendo enfoques analíticos diversos para capturar su naturaleza interconectada. Estos hallazgos revelan la necesidad de enfoques interdisciplinarios que conecten los estudios feministas, organizacionales y de inmigración al explorar las dinámicas de género y migración en los estudios de trabajo y organización. Esta disertación reconceptualiza la agencia de las mujeres en relación con la opresión y las dinámicas de poder, enmarcando la resistencia como un proceso continuo y adaptativo a través del cual las mujeres sostienen la identidad, afirman pertenencia y cultivan potencial transformativo. A través de la lente de la corporalidad, estrategias híbridas y práctica cultural, el estudio ilumina cómo estas acciones activamente confrontan y reconfiguran las estructuras de poder dominantes.

Palabras clave: Respuestas de las Mujeres, Resistencia Feminista, Agencia, Opresión, Dinámicas de Poder

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Avant-Propos

Use of GenAI Statement

During the preparation of this dissertation, I used Grammarly Gen AI for copy-editing purposes and Claude AI for guidelines on drafting the introduction and translation of quotes from Persian to English. After using these tools, I reviewed and edited the content as needed, and I take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

Credit Taxonomy

Behnoosh Lahooti: Author**;** Conceptualization; Empirical material collection; Analysis; Investigation; Validation; Project leader (chapters 2 & 3), Writing & Reviewing

Emmanouela Mandalaki: First advisor: Project leader; Co-authoring; Sharing, collecting, and analysing empirical material (for chapter one)/ Revision; Writing; Editing; Conceptualization, Guidance (for all chapters)

Nishani Bourmault: Second advisor: Conceptualization; Supervision; Validation; Review & Editing (for all chapters)

Estela Maria Diaz Carmona: Third advisor: Co-authoring; Conceptualization; Supervision; Writing & Editing (all for chapter 3)

Elo Katherina Reiss: Co-authoring; sharing, collecting, and analysing empirical material; revision; writing; editing (all for chapter 1)

In the name of Women, Life, Freedom

Introduction

In organizations and societies worldwide, power dynamics frequently result in oppression, marginalization, otherness, and exclusion of vulnerable groups (Williams et al., 2003; Acker, 2006) based on gender, race, ethnicity, and other identifiers forming one's intersectional profile (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 2000; Holvino, 2010). While significant research has explored the presence and impacts of oppression and power dynamics[1], less attention has been given to the nuanced ways in which individuals, particularly women, understand, respond to and navigate experiences of oppression and power dynamics (Phillips et al., 2015; Vachhani and Pullen, 2019). This thesis traces the lived experiences of women as they encounter, contest, and reshape oppressive structures in organizational contexts and beyond.

My interest in these questions stems from my life story and personal experience. Coming from Iran, the doctoral program provided me with a critical platform to examine issues of oppression that have long shaped my worldview, as well as social and professional experiences as a woman in a patriarchal society. Having been born and raised in a society where gender inequality is deeply embedded in everyday life, I observed how oppressive practices often go unquestioned as people focus on meeting basic needs, while patriarchal norms normalize and obscure systems that create oppression. While these observations formed part of my lived reality from my early years, it was my doctoral studies that gave me a language and frame through which to explore and make sense of them.

Beyond filling an academic gap, understanding haircutting as resistance carries urgent societal relevance. As authoritarian movements worldwide increasingly target women's bodily autonomy, examining how women resist through embodied practices becomes crucial for understanding contemporary feminist movements.

Midway through my first year of doctoral studies, the Women, Life, Freedom movement emerged in Iran following Mahsa Amini's death, serving as a powerful catalyst for my research.

Revolution, these struggles have received minimal global attention until Mahsa's death suddenly illuminated the situated realities of gender oppression in Iran. This realization strengthened my commitment to documenting and analyzing Iranian women's responses to oppression.

Furthermore, when I began speaking with the Iranian women who would become participants in my research, they offered tremendous encouragement, expressing how meaningful it was to have their experiences acknowledged in academic discourse. The convergence of these factors, my personal background, the timing of a global movement, and the enthusiastic support of participants, created a compelling imperative to pursue this line of inquiry and bring these understudied perspectives into organizational scholarship.

This movement highlighted how Iranian women have been underrepresented as research subjects in academic scholarship, particularly within management and organization studies, and how Iran's political isolation has rendered women's ongoing resistance largely invisible to international audiences. Despite continuous waves of women's resistance since 1979, while these resistance movements illuminate women's struggles within Iran, Iranian women who immigrate to other countries face additional layers of complexity as they navigate unfamiliar organizational cultures. Starting from personal interest, this study crucially responds to calls within organization and management studies for more diverse cultural perspectives, particularly regarding how marginalized groups navigate and resist systemic inequalities in organizational contexts (Bell et al., 2019; Calás and Smircich, 2006).

[1] This dissertation uses both 'oppression' and 'power dynamics' throughout. The terminological evolution reflects the research process itself and is addressed in the 'Conceptual Clarification' section later

This work offers some insights into how these forms of resistance translate across contexts, examining the complex interplay between gender, migration, and organizational power dynamics that remain undertheorized despite their growing relevance in increasingly globalized workplaces.

Moreover, this research journey was nurtured organically by my own experiences as an immigrant woman from the Middle East living in a Western context. After relocating to France, I cut my hair short, an act that sparked a significant conversation with my first supervisor on the deeper meanings that might have underlined this decision. This interaction illuminated how embodied experiences (Gherardi, 2019; Mandalaki, 2021) can serve as valuable empirical material in understanding resistance against oppression, leading to the first study in this thesis. This research brought me into collaboration with two co-authors (my first advisor and another scholar sharing similar interests) from European countries where women face comparatively less patriarchal oppression (or at least in different, more subtle ways). Despite our diverse geographical and cultural origins, we discovered that our shared experiences around the seemingly simple act of cutting our hair enabled profound discussions about this largely understudied aspect of gender-based oppression. Our embodied experiences transcended our different backgrounds, allowing us to articulate and analyze systemic oppression against women through a contextually situated practice and related academic corporeal language that resonated across contexts.

Building on this theoretical foundation, while exploring literature for my first paper on haircutting as feminist resistance, I became aware of the multifaceted nature of resistance itself. Having been granted a platform to voice my own experiences and perspectives, I grew curious about what other women, particularly Iranian immigrants like myself, might express if given the same opportunity to speak. As I began conducting interviews with Iranian women about their workplace experiences, I noticed their responses did not align with existing literature. The

resistance literature emphasized clear acts of challenging oppression, while coping literature focused on adapting to systems. But these women were simultaneously doing both, adapting to oppressive systems while subtly challenging them. This disconnect made me question whether current frameworks adequately capture how immigrant women encounter workplace oppression. This line of inquiry ultimately guided me toward the second paper in this dissertation, which aimed to create such a space where Iranian immigrant women could articulate their own narratives of responses to workplace oppression and power dynamics and to theoretically examine this apparent hybrid nature of their strategies that existing literature seemed to miss.

During the re-analysis of these narratives, a recurring pattern was noticeable: many participants expressed notions of “home” or “belonging” when addressing workplace power dynamics, which manifested as marginalization, exclusion, and other forms of workplace challenges. Drawing on this emergent concept, we noted that although migration studies have engaged with home-making in domestic settings and organizational literature has focused on workplace resistance, the intersection between these spheres remains under-studied. In this study, women mobilized cultural resources and home-making practices as strategies of workplace resistance, within this largely unexamined intersection.

This observation led organically to the third study, which examined how Iranian immigrant women create spaces of being to address work-related experiences of power dynamics. These narratives revealed a complex dynamic where participants seemed to simultaneously resist certain aspects of their new organizational environment’s challenges while actively seeking to create a sense of inclusion within it. Most importantly, their accounts suggested an ongoing effort to (re)construct what 'home' meant in these new contexts - not simply maintaining connections to Iran, but actively creating spaces of familiarity within their new environment. Together, these three papers offer a multifaceted, complementary exploration of women's

responses to oppression and power dynamics. The specific theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches, and contributions of each paper will be elaborated later.

Conceptual Clarification: Oppression and Power Dynamics

The choice of "oppression" reflects feminist organizational scholarship's emphasis on examining how power operates through institutional structures rather than merely individual actions (Calás and Smircich, 2006; Martin, 2003). Following Young's (1990) influential framework, oppression refers to "systematic institutional processes which prevent some people from learning and using satisfying and expansive skills in socially recognized settings" (p. 38). This definition captures the structural nature of the power relations under study, encompassing exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence as interconnected faces of oppression.

In Papers 1 and 2, the term oppression is consistently used to capture systemic power relations. In contrast, Paper 3 adopts the term power dynamics (Foucault, 1982; Weber, 1978; Syed & Murray, 2009) to encompass a wider spectrum of power-related experiences, including oppression, workplace marginalization, and other structurally embedded manifestations (Acker, 2006; Rodriguez et al., 2016). This shift reflects both a conceptual development and an analytical challenge within the dissertation. Rather than imposing terminological uniformity, this evolution emerged organically from the research process itself, reflecting the complex and context-specific nature of how power relations materialize.

Theoretical Framework

This dissertation draws on multiple theoretical frameworks to explore women’s situated agency in the face of systemic constraints and institutionalized power relations in the workplace.

The first paper is anchored in feminist theorization of embodied resistance, particularly how gendered bodies encounter and disrupt patriarchal oppression through collective corporeal

practices. This theoretical foundation draws upon Butler's theories of performative resistance and relational vulnerability to examine how a personal act like haircutting can become a form of political expression that contests cisgender and heteronormative forms of marginalization (Johnson, 2016; Weitz, 2004). The study frames haircutting as a "performative act of resistance," interpreting it as an embodied political gesture rooted in the recognition of shared vulnerability as a fundamental social condition. This recognition fosters collective forms of support among diverse bodies and contributes to everyday acts of defiance. Reframing vulnerability as a generative ground for solidarity and embodied dissent, the analysis demonstrates how routine, infrapolitical practices can unsettle established power hierarchies (Vachhani & Pullen, 2019). As a result of this theoretical positioning**,** this approach questions the separation between public and private spheres by showing how apparently individual decisions regarding hair can transform into locations of communal resistance against oppressive institutional and social mandates targeting non-conforming bodies (specifically, bodies that do not conform to heteronormative masculine norms).

The second study combines scholarship on coping mechanisms with feminist resistance theory to investigate how highly educated immigrant women overcome workplace oppression. The study positions responses along a spectrum ranging from coping to resistance, thus questioning conventional theoretical approaches that categorize these as separate and discrete phenomena. Through connecting these theoretical domains, the research establishes five key strategies: (1) doubling efforts, (2) embracing anger, (3) exercising voice, (4) leveraging support through subversive coalitions, and (5) building critical consciousness. The framework reveals that immigrant women's approaches are characterized by three key dimensions: ambiguity (blending elements of both coping and resistance), temporality (evolving over time rather than as discrete acts), and spatiality (spanning professional and personal domains, home and host countries). This conceptualization contributes to organizational scholarship by revealing how seemingly

adaptive coping strategies can simultaneously serve as forms of resistance, revealing the ways immigrant women exercise agency while navigating structural constraints. The findings challenge assumptions that position immigrant women as either passive victims or active resistors, instead showing how they strategically deploy hybrid responses that serve both survival and transformative purposes.

The third paper draws on literature on home, belonging, and cultural identity to examine how Iranian immigrant women create spaces of attachment to respond to workplace power dynamics in host-country contexts, namely the U.S. Specifically, building on Ahmed's (1999) conceptualization of home as a complex web of memories and behaviors rather than a fixed geographical location, the paper explores how professional spaces become sites where home is actively reconstructed and deployed as a resource to overcome organizational structure. Crucially, the study reveals how workplace experiences of marginalization trigger home-making responses that transcend organizational boundaries, demonstrating how professional challenges catalyze identity work across multiple life domains - from private domestic spaces to community interactions to embodied practices that span workplace and personal spheres.

By bridging migration studies and organizational research on cultural identity and workplace resistance strategies (Essers and Benschop, 2009; Pio and Essers, 2014), the paper illuminates how cultural resources are strategically mobilized act of defiance against workplace hierarchical relations, while creating spaces of authentic connection. The paper's key contribution lies in introducing a tripartite framework of home-making practices: Affective Anchoring (creating emotional refuges through culturally grounded actions that preserve identity); Situated Offering (strategic cultural negotiation and sharing that facilitates inclusion without complete conformity); and Transformative Horizon (pursuing previously forbidden possibilities and developing new forms of agency). This framework reveals how immigrant women create spaces of empowerment and belonging through "dual-directional adaptation,"

simultaneously escaping oppression while pursuing new opportunities across multiple life domains, advancing organizational scholarship on how immigrant professionals transform challenging workplace environments into spaces of self-determination through mundane activities.

Theoretical Contributions

Through its complementary explorations, this dissertation broadly contributes to the growing body of critical feminist studies within management and organization scholarship (Acker, 1990, 2006; Fotaki and Harding, 2017; Vachhani and Pullen, 2019; Rodriguez et al., 2016; Essers and Benschop, 2009; Syed and Murray, 2009), revealing forms of resistance that have been overlooked in organizational literature that focuses primarily on formal and collective forms of resistance. All three papers address how women navigate or respond to oppression and power dynamics in a broad sense, showing how oppression manifests in varying forms and degrees across different contexts, and how women navigate these intersecting systems. Building on foundational feminist organizational scholarship that exposes the gendered nature of organizations (Acker, 1990), and examines how women experience intersectional disadvantages in workplace settings (Collins, 2015; Rodriguez et al., 2016; Essers and Benschop, 2009), this work advances the field by demonstrating how resistance operates through the body, cultural practices, and everyday interactions in ways that expand understanding of how resistance operates beyond formal organizational channels.

Through examining haircutting as feminist solidarity, hybrid coping-resistance strategies among immigrant professionals, and home-making practices as cultural resources, this research reveals how women create continuous resistance that sustains patterns of agency and transcend traditional boundaries between individual and collective action, personal and political expression, and adaptive and transformative practices.

Building on feminist scholarship that examines embodied resistance (Butler, 1990, 2015; Ahmed, 2016; Vachhani and Pullen, 2019), intersectional workplace experiences (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2015), and cultural identity navigation in professional contexts (Pio and Essers, 2014; hooks, 1990), this research challenges dominant organizational narratives that position women experiencing oppression and power dynamics within narrow categories, instead revealing how they exercise sophisticated forms of agency that operate simultaneously across embodied, professional, and cultural domains to create sustained patterns of resistance and belonging.

Methodological Approach

This dissertation employs qualitative approaches to examine women's responses to power dynamics and oppression from multiple angles. The first paper uses collaborative autoethnography (Chang et al., 2013), drawing on the three authors' personal experiences to explore haircutting as an embodied act of feminist resistance. This methodological approach acknowledges the value of lived experience as empirical material and the importance of the researchers' reflexivity in generating insights around how they are positioned vis-à-vis the studied topic (Ellis et al., 2011), here in the context of hair-related gendered oppression and resistance.

The second and third papers employ qualitative interview methods, analyzing empirical material from interviews with 45 Iranian immigrant women working in different organizational contexts in the United States. The interviews explored participants' experiences of workplace oppression and their responses to these experiences. The analysis involved three rounds of coding: initial open coding to identify response patterns, theoretical coding to compare findings with existing frameworks, and selective coding to develop final conceptual categories. The analysis used grounded theory techniques (Charmaz, 2006) to identify patterns in participants'

responses, moving iteratively between empirical material and theory, in an abductive manner (Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011), to develop conceptual frameworks that captured the complexity of these responses.

Papers 2 and 3 employ the same corpus of 45 interviews with Iranian immigrant women, yet they represent distinct analytical approaches rather than redundant use of data. This methodological choice reflects the richness of qualitative narratives, which often contain multiple layers of meaning that can be productively examined through different theoretical lenses. Paper 2 focused on coding participants' explicit descriptions of workplace challenges and their strategic responses, identifying patterns of coping and resistance through systematic analysis of response mechanisms such as "doubling efforts" and "exercising voice." In contrast, Paper 3 re-analyzed the same transcripts through a cultural identity lens, coding for references to home, belonging, and cultural practices that participants used to navigate professional environments. Where Paper 2 asked "How do women respond to workplace oppression?" Paper 3 asked "How do cultural resources function in professional adaptation?" This dual analysis is methodologically sound as it demonstrates how complex interview narratives can yield complementary insights when approached with different research questions and analytical frameworks, similar to how ethnographic studies often generate multiple publications by examining the same fieldwork data through various theoretical perspectives.

Through the qualitative methods employed, this dissertation offers both depth and breadth in its examination of women's responses to oppression and power dynamics. This approach aligns with feminist methodological traditions that value multiple ways of knowing, recognizing the importance of both personal testimonies and systematic analysis in understanding gendered experiences (Hesse-Biber, 2012).

The following table provides an overview of the three studies that comprise this dissertation, outlining their respective research questions, methodologies, theoretical frameworks, key

findings, and contributions to the literature.

Table 1: Summary of research

	Paper 1: Haircutting as Feminist Resistance	Paper 2: Coping and Resistance Continuum	Paper 3: Home-Making Practices
Research Question	How do women experience and understand decisions about hair in professional contexts?	How do immigrant women respond to experiences of workplace oppression?	How do immigrant women navigate workplace power dynamics through cultural practices?
Methodology	Collaborative autoethnography (3 authors)	Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 45 Iranian women living in the U.S., focusing on their professional and migratory experiences.	Semi-structured interviews with the same 45 Iranian women from Paper 2, further exploring identity, belonging, and resistance in the workplace and cultural contexts.
Theoretical Framework	Butler's performative resistance theory; feminist embodiment literature	Intersection of coping mechanisms; feminist resistance theory	Building Ahmed's theory of home: immigration studies
Key Findings	Three mechanisms: challenging gender norms, transforming vulnerability into solidarity, and creating political contestation sites	Five types of responses: three hybrids, one coping, and one resistance	Three strategic orientations: Affective Anchoring, Situated Offering, and Transformative Horizon
Main Contribution	Reconceptualizes resistance as a collective embodied practice transcending the individual/collective binary	Reveals hybrid coping-resistance strategies challenging traditional theoretical separation	Introduces the tripartite framework of home-making as cultural resource mobilization
Status	Accepted, Organization	Accepted, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	Under development for Human Relations

Implications for Practice

This dissertation has important implications for how we understand and practice organizational life. It contributes to reconceptualizing resistance by revealing its embodied, cultural, and everyday dimensions, offering a more integrated understanding of how resistance operates across different contexts. From a practical standpoint, the findings suggest that traditional diversity and inclusion initiatives often fail to account for the complex ways in which immigrant women navigate and transform workplace oppression and power dynamics. Organizations could benefit from moving beyond formal complaint mechanisms to recognize how cultural resources, transnational networks, and embodied practices function not only as survival strategies but also as catalysts for structural change. Rather than treating cultural practices as individual preferences, organizations should recognize them as belonging-making strategies that, when properly supported, can enhance inclusion and cohesion in the workplace.

In the same vein, organizations may need to reconsider their approach to supporting marginalized employees by recognizing that resistance and adaptation occur simultaneously across multiple dimensions of organizational life. This suggests creating environments where employees can express authentic identities through embodied practices, from personal appearance choices to cultural expressions, while building supportive networks that span across formal and informal organizational boundaries. Organizations could consider that seemingly personal appearance choices might function as forms of workplace resistance, potentially requiring policies that support these embodied expressions of identity. Rather than expecting employees to compartmentalize their cultural identities, professional strategies, and personal expressions, organizations might develop integrated support systems that honor how these dimensions work together to foster a sense of sustainable belonging. Organizations could recognize that employees are simultaneously seeking growth and transformation while

responding systemic barriers, requiring support systems that acknowledge this complex navigation rather than promoting and expecting linear assimilation processes.

This suggests moving from deficit-based approaches that seek to "fix" or "integrate" marginalized employees toward asset-based frameworks that recognize how employees' existing strategies for navigating work-place power dynamics can strengthen organizational culture. To shed light on blind spots, organizations could create inclusive spaces that support solidarity networks, acknowledge how workplace struggles extend beyond organizational boundaries, and develop leadership approaches that recognize how everyday acts of resistance and cultural preservation contribute to organizational resilience. Furthermore, this research reveals that traditional workplace-only interventions are insufficient given the interconnected nature of professional and personal experiences. Instead, organizations need comprehensive support systems that recognize how employees' workplace challenges are inseparable from broader life domains, structures of oppression, and power dynamics.

PAPER 1

Hairy tales and gender troubles: Conceptualizing haircutting as an act of feminist resistance

Stage of the paper:

I co-authored this paper with Pr. Emmanouela Mandalaki, and Dr. Elo Katharina Reiss

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Abstract:

This paper discusses the significance of hair as a gendered symbol, particularly exploring the act of haircutting as a form of feminist resistance against the cisgender and heteronormative norms shaping much of social and organizational life. It does so by employing autoethnographic reflections of the three authors, revealing embodied and social implications of haircutting decisions for different bodies. By shedding light on hair, a highly understudied aspect of gendered embodiment, the paper contributes to discussions on gendered (dis)embodiment - namely hair-policing organizational norms and responses to these - and feminist resistance in organizations, conceptualizing haircutting as an act of resistance rooted in solidarity and relationality across differences. Doing so, the paper expands the understanding of feminist resistance beyond organized protest to everyday embodied practices. Methodologically, it surfaces collaborative writing as a feminist relational process, fostering solidarity across different intersectional bodies.

Keywords: haircutting, feminist resistance, gendered embodiment, masculine organizations, autoethnography

Introduction

Hair is a profoundly gendered symbol with social and cultural significance. Women's hair, in particular, has been historically regulated and policed in public, professional, and organizational spheres dominated by patriarchal, cis-heteronormative conventions (Donahoo, 2023; Kringen and Novich, 2018; Weitz, 2004). Such conventions most often objectify women, queer and *different other* bodies (i.e., bodies not abiding by cis-heteronormative standards) against the male gaze perspective (e.g., Clayson and Maughan, 1986; Rich and Cash, 1993), based on a binary gender division, whereby women's hair is traditionally expected to be long to look feminine, and different from men's (Synnott, 1987). In organizational contexts, this manifests through expectations for women to satisfy masculine norms of assertiveness, competence and embodied control (Acker, 1990), while maintaining feminine appearance markers like long hair, creating a double bind where deviations from long-hair norms are often read as unprofessional defiance or gender non-conformity (Mavin and Grandy, 2016). In this order, women and female-read bodies who refuse the prescriptive long-hair norm, are traditionally seen as resisting the status quo (Caldwell, 1991; Devineau and Laplace, 2018).

Despite its significance as a gendered symbol and site of/for political contestation, hair has received minimal attention in organization studies (for exceptions see Caldwell, 1991; Cruz-Gutiérrez, 2020; Darkwa, 2021), probably owing to a tendency within the discipline to overlook the gendered, embodied and affective dimensions of organizational life. In recent decades, feminist scholars have started to challenge the disembodied and supposedly gender-neutral stance of organizations and organizational research, highlighting how dominant masculine organizational conventions, operating under neoliberal ideologies, discipline and marginalize women and gender non-conforming bodies (e.g., Acker, 1990; Pullen, 2018; Fotaki and Harding, 2017; O'Shea, 2018). While such work has brought much needed attention to processes of (dis)embodiment in the workplace, only few exceptions stress hair-policing as a

form of control, highlighting how gendered bodies wear/use their hair to navigate oppressive organizational directives (Johnson, 2016; Weitz, 2001). There is little knowledge about how hair embodiment, namely through acts of haircutting, might shape embodied experiences at work, and the relevance of these processes for organizing feminist resistance.

We suggest that such exploration is timely, since the feminist potential of claiming haircutting as a political symbol of/for social transformation has gained attention, with women across the globe joining Iranian women in cutting and shaving their hair publicly, protesting against the violent killing of Mahsa Amini on September 17th 2022. Unveiling and cutting their hair, collectives of women and queers (supported by allies, such as like-minded men) stand in solidarity, share their grief, rage and indignance against the oppressive patriarchal systems disqualifying *otherness* and *difference* (hooks, 2014). The embodied practice of haircutting and the related crafting of alternative femininities and masculinities (Schilt and Connell, 2007) raise, thus, the question of how haircutting might be experienced, used, and owned as an act of feminist resistance that challenges cisgender, heteronormative marginalization in the neoliberal world (Johnson, 2016; Weitz, 2004). In this paper, we want to answer: How do women experience and understand decisions about hair in professional contexts?

Notwithstanding other hair-altering acts' potential to resist gendered marginalization, we here focus on haircutting, drawing on our -the authors'- contextually-situated autoethnographic reflections. Our first-person narratives (Butz and Besio, 2009; Furman, 2006) problematize the prescriptive long-hair norm associated to women, linking our stories to broader issues of social, organizational and political significance. We reflect on how our hairy tales might send gendered messages about who we are, who we want to become and how we can meaningfully transform our lives within our respective social and organizational contexts (Jacobs-Huey, 2006; Lewis, 2013; Weitz, 2001). While existing literature treats hair choices as primarily individual accommodation versus resistance strategies (Weitz, 2001, 2004), our analysis reveals more

complex relational dynamics where haircutting functions as collective embodied defiance that simultaneously challenges intersecting systems of oppression. Our reflections illustrate the intersectional affective interplays between our haircutting choices, situating their potential to nurture collective forms of feminist resistance with emancipatory social outcomes in patriarchal, neoliberal contexts.

Focusing on *haircutting* to critique mechanisms of gendered (dis)embodiment in organizations (Acker, 1990; Harding, Gilmore and Ford, 2022; Bell and Sinclair, 2014; Thanem and Knights, 2019), we extend literature discussing gendered hair-policing in organizations and feminist responses to these (Weitz, 2001, 2004; Okavi-Partush et al., 2018; Rabe-Hemp, 2009), conceptualizing *haircutting* as an act of resistance grounded in relationality across differences (Hemmings, 2012; Fotaki and Harding, 2017). We offer an expansive understanding of haircutting as every-day, infra-political resistance impacting patriarchal organizational norms (Vachhani and Pullen, 2019). This not only challenges gendered organizational control but also questions how neoliberal logics commodify and individualize resistance, potentially depoliticizing collective struggle. Our conception of haircutting hence recognizes the neoliberal underpinnings shaping organizational hierarchies, seeking to counter these. Doing so, we extend feminist accounts on resistance in organization studies, heeding calls for raising awareness and standing up collectively against instances of social and organizational injustice geared against *othered* bodies (Tyler, 2018; Fotaki and Daskalaki, 2021; Devgan, 2022; Draz, 2022; Wickstrom et al., 2021; Abdellatif, Boncori and Mandalaki, 2024; Fotaki and Pullen, 2024). Methodologically, we discuss how writing (resistance) together (Ahonen et al., 2020) becomes a feminist and activist relational process of building solidarity across differences (Suzanne and Reiss, 2023; Reedy and Haynes, 2023; Clavijo and Mandalaki, 2024).

In what follows, we first situate the paper theoretically, stressing hair-policing as a mechanism of gendered (dis)embodiment in social and organizational environments. We then draw on

conceptualizations of feminist resistance through Butler's theoretical foundation of resistance as a collective, performative and embodied process, grounding our theoretical development of haircutting as such an act against patriarchal cisgendered, heteronormative oppression. Methodologically, we situate this account as a collaborative autoethnographic piece (Ahonen et al., 2020; Kaasila-Pakanen et al., 2024) enabled by memory work (Haug, 1987), and discuss implications for organizations, including academia.

Hair and gendered (dis)embodiment in organizations

Gendered embodiment and hair symbolism

Over the past decades, discussions on embodiment are gaining momentum in organization studies, noting a paradigmatic shift in studying individuals' experiences at work (Fotaki and Pullen, 2019; Harding et al., 2022; Hassard et al., 2000; Thanem and Knights, 2019). Locating the body at the center of social and organizational life, such scholarly accounts problematize traditional understandings viewing decision-making, knowledge-creation and ethical interactions in organizations as mind-driven processes (Thanem and Knights, 2019). Such a shift has been heavily motivated by feminist voices exploring processes of women's, queers' and *different others*' (dis)embodiment at work (Acker, 1990; Fotaki and Harding, 2017; Mavin and Grandy, 2016; Fotaki and Pullen, 2023; Baker and Brewis, 2019). These critique how women and intersectional bodies have been historically subordinated by patriarchal standards of living, thinking, and writing (Ahmed, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989; Butler, 1999). They explain how dominant ideologies' labelling of non-male bodies and brains as inferior (Cixous, 1993; Weitz, 2001; Young, 1990) reinforces disciplinary practices aimed at creating a submissive, 'abject' (Kristeva, 1986), 'feminine' body (hooks, 2001).

In her foundational work, Acker (1990) discusses the ingrained gendered dimensions of organizations, explaining how purportedly gender-neutral organizational norms marginalize women's bodies (see also Baker and Brewis, 2020; Benschop et al., 2012; Fotaki and Harding,

2017). She criticizes organizational settings' adoption of implicit and/or explicit masculine norms for acceptable bodily conduct and physical appearance. Women in particular, are usually expected to conceal their bodies to lessen adverse workplace effects and/or exhibit them in conforming ways (Brewis, 2000; Haynes, 2008; Piller, 1996; Trethewey, 1999). These accounts suggest that we cannot comprehend gendered experiences in society and organizations, as well as how resistance manifests against them, without closely examining daily bodily disciplines and the different ways in which these are (dis)embodied, challenged, and enacted upon (Bell and Sinclair, 2014).

Here we focus on hair, a highly understudied yet highly visible and symbolic agent in the expression of gendered subjectivity in organizations (Synnott, 1987; Weitz, 2004), namely haircutting as a political symbol against patriarchal neoliberal ideologies. As shown in the recent political events, problematizing hair regulation unveils an important, yet highly understudied (in management and organization studies - MOS) dimension of gendered bodies' struggles - the capacity to have physical and social control over *y-our* bodies (Harcourt, 2009).

Hair, as a physical, personal and public body part (Dierk et al., 2018), is possibly among the most powerful embodied symbols of individual and group identity (Synnott, 1987). Hair allows us to create and recreate our identities (Lowe, 2016; Devgan, 2022; Draz, 2022) across different contexts (Manning, 2021; Obeyesekere, 1998), carrying messages that influence how others treat us and how we feel about ourselves (Thompson, 2008). Anthropologists have extensively researched hair symbolisms, particularly in initiation, marriage, mourning rituals, and magic (Firth, 2013; Frazer, 1935; Malinowski, 1922). Hair studies also discuss how hair is disciplined and regulated by law across political and cultural contexts, shaping hairstyles, social relations, and sociocultural esteem (Bartky, 2020; Thompson, 1999). Hair politics follow dominant notions of what is considered a proper hairstyle or "nature" of hair, as well as the need for work and education (Manfo, 2020), varying greatly across cultural and institutional settings. For

instance, in many societies, men's hair is traditionally short, even removed and/or controlled by the military (Yoshino, 2007). In some cultures and religions, women are required to cover their hair in public due to its associated erotic, sensual power (Bronner, 2011; Mageo, 1994, 1996). In Western cultures, abundant head hair and long hair on women function as a desired key indicator of femininity (Biddle-Perry, 2008), while short-haired women and female-read bodies appear to pose a challenge to the embedded polarity between the masculine and the feminine (Sherrow, 2023).

In the workplace, women are traditionally expected to adopt 'professional' hairstyles (Rosette and Dumas, 2007), combing, cutting, coloring, curling, straightening, plaiting, de/attaching, and/or decorating their hair to fit different occasions (Biddle-Perry and Cheang, 2008; Sherrow, 2023). Gendered hair politics also encompass sexuality and expressions of gender identity beyond the gender binary (Lowe, 2016). For instance, since the 1890s, the term "butch" is used to describe "mannish" looking lesbians - "someone who dressed and acted in ways previously thought to be reserved for men" (Gibson and Meem, 2002: 3). Short hair is often associated with lesbianism for its rather masculine association, and may thus be regarded as less attractive, irreverent or offensive to the cis-hetero male gaze.

Haircutting, thereby, allows different bodies to communicate their authentic (i.e., chosen, dynamic) identities, as a source of expression and protest against oppressive cultural, social and organizational norms (Weitz, 2004) fostered by patriarchal and neoliberal ideologies. With this inspiration, we focus on *haircutting's* political potential for resistance, drawing implications for feminist theory and organizational practice.

Haircutting as feminist embodied resistance

Feminist studies on resistance discuss organized actions and community arrangements motivated by a refusal to accept cis-heteronormative, patriarchal, and broader neoliberal

systems (Kambarami, 2006; Wickström et al., 2021). Feminist resistance spans across public, private, collective, individual, overt, covert and subtle endeavours, grounded on solidaristic, relational, affective and emancipatory connections (Wickström et al., 2021; Hemmings, 2012; Kandathil and Chennangodu, 2024; Mandalaki and Perezts, 2023). This can manifest via the circulation of discourses, state feminism, or in more direct ways (Gourlay, 2018), like me-too hashtags (Sanghani, 2015). In this way, feminist resistance unites women and minorities - across cultural traditions and social movements - towards a refusal to accept the pervasiveness of sexism and misogyny (Perezts and Mandalaki, 2023; Vachhani and Pullen, 2019).

Feminist literature discusses solidaristic resistance as a learning process of consciousness raising in the post-feminist terrain (Berglund et al., 2023); speaking back to patriarchal control (Alkhaled, 2021); writing, naming, storytelling (Reedy and Haynes, 2022; Suzanne and Reiss, 2023); and/or/as engaging with political action (Strzelecka, 2018; Fotaki and Daskalaki, 2021). While such actions are often associated with public protest and social movements, recent work has highlighted less visible, infra-political forms of resistance, known as "offstage practices" (Scott, 1990, p. 4). These manifest in "a wide variety of low-profile forms of resistance that dare not speak in their own name" (J. C. Scott, 1990, p. 19, Alkhaled, 2019). Vachhani and Pullen (2019) adopt this view, developing the potential of women's daily infra-political solidaristic practices to oppose sexist discrimination in neoliberal organizations.

Crucially, a burgeoning body of feminist literature draws on eclectic readings of Judith Butler[2]'s scholarship to conceptualize the collective and embodied aspects of feminist resistance. Butler's rich work touches aspects of gender, identity, queerness and affect, offering complementary perspectives through which to rethink feminist resistance for reclaiming embodied subjectivities under neoliberal directives. Butler develops resistance as embedded in how individuals negotiate, reject, or reinterpret societal norms in their daily lives (see Tyler, 2019;

[2] Reference to Butler's work adopts the singular *they*.

Harding, 2020). Their theory suggests that acts of defiance can often be subtle, manifesting through bodily expressions (Butler, 1993). They discuss resistance manifesting as public protest or in less visible, relational daily expressions of protest, stressing how performative embodied acts can destabilize and subvert gendered and neoliberal expectations (Butler, 1990, 1993, 2004). This involves remaining vigilant to ensure that individual acts of resistance do not become co-opted by neoliberal narratives that prioritize personal choice over structural transformation, emphasizing the collective and calling for systemic change**.**

In the theory of assembly, Butler specifically develops how collective embodied performances are motivated by a recognition of corporeal vulnerability as a common social condition (Butler, 2004, 2015), which leads different bodies to rely on each other for survival. They ground such reliance at the centre of feminist resistance and political solidarity, developing its ethical bearing for reframing the normative directives marginalizing different bodies. Butler thereby reconceptualizes vulnerability as an important source of resistance and solidarity, surfacing the social and political potentials of embodied affects to foster collective protest against patriarchal, neoliberal politics treating *different* lives as ungrievable (2015, 2009).

Feminist scholars engage with Butler's work to study how vulnerable relational bodies can organize communal forms of resistance against their ways of being socially marginalized in the neoliberal world (Tyler, 2018). Some studies highlight communal arrangements of vulnerable individuals in crisis-stricken contexts, situating the capacity of solidaristic and reciprocal collective actions to sustain precarious lives against discriminatory neoliberal orders (see Mandalaki and Fotaki, 2020, in the refugee context; Fotaki and Daskalaki, 2021, in anti-mining protests in Greece). Other studies develop Butler's conceptualization of vulnerability by exploring emergent modes of resistance as gendered responsibilities of giving and receiving care (Reiss, Kozhevnikov, and Muhr, 2021). Fotaki and Harding (2017) engage with the caring potentials of Butler's work - specifically the capacity of mutually recognized vulnerabilities

as/for resistance - offering a relational embodied ethics able to reframe organizational spaces and practices around inclusion of difference and otherness. Riach, Rumens and Tyler (2014) study intersectional embodied dynamics of gender, age and sexuality, drawing on Butler's performative ontology of gender to propose ways of nurturing more inclusive politics in organizations.

In relation to hair, we suggest that the performative, embodied, vulnerable and communal aspects of *haircutting* in response to patriarchal oppression might be meaningfully disentangled through Butler's work, complementing related feminist literature that has left hair embodiment understudied. Butler's understanding of resistance as both performative embodied acts and collective assembly allows for the conceptualization of haircutting as simultaneously individual defiance and relational solidarity, challenging oppressive norms through everyday embodied performances that destabilize gendered expectations. Considering that hair represents gendered, ethnic, and sexual identities as well as sociocultural standings (Darkwa, 2021), haircutting can perform frustration, indignance, and rebellion - a way to distinguish oneself from gendered systems of subordination and connect with like-minded others (Weitz, 2001).

Extant accounts discuss how feminist and other forms of resistance to hair disciplines (Fahs, 2011) can challenge and change the meanings of hair, hairstyles and body hair for different social groups (Lesnik-Oberstein, 2006). It has been shown that adopting a non-conforming hairstyle can foster feminist community and solidarity among people with similar values and commitments (Synnott, 1987; Hillman, 2013). By uniting through acts of hair rebellion, gendered bodies gain a sense of connection and common purpose (Devgan, 2022; Draz, 2022), as well as support and affirmation for challenging deeply ingrained oppressive norms (Cumberbatch, 2021; Donahoo, 2023). Examining women's hair choices in organizational contexts notably reveals how resistance can manifest both through rebellious acts challenging the status quo and through accommodating practices to dominant orders (Weitz, 2001, 2004).

Women and queers often deliberately embrace short hair styles - seen as unkempt under the cis-heteronormative male gaze - to emancipate and resist against traditional standards of attractiveness and professionalism (Weitz, 2001; Johnson, 2016).

The current example whereby Iranian women and those who joined them unveiled, cut and/or shaved their hair in public, responding to the violent death of Mahsa Amini, can be seen as such an act of resistance against patriarchal oppression, grounded in solidarity across differences. Women, queers and *different others* cutting their hair collectively resist gendered and organizational expectations policing their 'non-conforming' bodies. Haircutting thereby becomes a relational statement of autonomy and interdependence, reflecting broader contradictions within neoliberal systems that simultaneously celebrate individual freedom as self-discipline while maintaining hierarchical structures. Doing so, haircutting, as a collective performative act of resistance, breaks the public-private divides confining intersectional bodies, repositioning them as sites of feminist political struggle (Wickstrom et al., 2021; Tyler, 2021). Through performative acts, hair transforms into a site that contests normative expectations, reasserting control over one's embodied self, and offering the agency to reclaim embodied subjectivities (Benschop and Lewis, 2024; Ahmed, 2016).

Drawing on our experiences with haircutting, which we put in conversation with the afore-mentioned political happenings and Butler's perspectives, we suggest haircutting acts as "performative acts of resistance". As argued, these manifest publicly and through ordinary embodied performances, questioning normative gendered expectations in society and organizations.

Methodological reflections

The idea for this paper emerged from separate discussions between the authors, in/through personal meetings and encounters in academic conferences. There, haircutting emerged as a common experience of identity-making before dominant standards of femininity, within our

respective working and social contexts. While our inspiration to write about haircutting preceded the murder of Mahsa Amini in Iran and the fervent solidarity responses thereafter, these events fuelled our relational reflection on the potentials of collective haircutting performances to resist patriarchal oppression. Given that the first author is from Iran, Mahsa's killing created a sense of urgency and affective involvement in this research (Mandalaki, 2024), motivating empathic written and oral exchanges between the authors. This study, thus, emerged from emotive experiences of repression, grief, hope, and subordination (Clavijo, 2023), grounding the role of emotions, affect and intuition in knowledge development (Ashcraft, 2017), and how these can shape writing practices in different ways – here manifested in our diverse, yet interconnected, narratives styles (Abdellatif et al., 2024; Clavijo and Mandalaki, 2024). Thus, this text develops where theory meets embodied experience, with broader scholarly, social and political relevance (Ahmed, 2016; Pullen, 2018).

Our approach recognizes the significance of theory development in advancing intellectual understandings of the multifaceted struggles that intersectional marginalized bodies face in patriarchal, neoliberal organizations and the society. And it heeds the words of Prichard and Benschop (2018, p. 98) that "it is a long way to a better world through theory alone". We suggest that activist and reflexive feminist work needs to go beyond the obsession with the theoretical contribution (Prasad, 2024), starting from a "critical, reflective and engaged position" that recognizes "the challenges of our 'organizational selves' and the roles we play … [as] we become scholars, colleagues, authors, reviewers, editors, activists" (Zanoni, Barros and Alcadipani, 2023: 1181-1183). Drawing on feminist inspirations, we here engage with a "reflexive undoing of organizational subjectivities and the normative conditions upon which they depend" (Riach, Rumens and Tyler, 2016: 2069). The purpose is to develop work that meaningful engages with others on and beyond the (academic) page, to offer accessible knowledge, and hopefully translatable into activist actions.

Our collective discussions evolved in person and through an online shared document where we collected personal hair-related narratives and stories. Despite our common interest in the topic, we soon realized that our respective relations to our hair and haircutting differed in various ways. We all pursue academic careers in national/political/social Western contexts different from our countries of origin, where our experiences with otherness differ considering our intersectional profiles (Crenshaw, 1989). We present below our respective positionalities, mindful of not disclosing information that might over-expose our vulnerabilities when this text is published (Clavijo and Mandalaki, 2024). Our relational empathic reflection (Doucet, 2008) surfaced that while for author 2 and 3 speaking openly of our positionalities and hair experiences was a given, for author 1, this was not that straightforward. In one of our meetings, she noted: "I'd actually like to share even less". This concern enhanced our reflexivity on the challenge of openly disclosing intersectional positionalities, problematizing *who* can speak (and who not), from *which* position and *how*, in academic research and beyond (Zanoni and Barros, 2023). It highlighted how as organization studies scholars, we often take our privileges for granted. The collective 'we' in this article, is, thus, not intended to delete the individual 'Is' but make them louder against intersectional experiences of violence and discrimination (Ahmed, 2016; Perezts and Mandalaki, 2022).

Author 1 is 33, pursuing her PhD in a central European institution. She hails from Iran and has found a platform for self-expression through her PhD journey in a central European institution. Raised in a patriarchal society, she was fortunate to have a father who defied societal norms by respecting her freedom of choice. Her father never imposed on her restrictions related to clothing, career aspirations, or intellectual explorations, and encouraged her curiosity by allowing access to diverse books and ideas, which is more often than not restricted in Iran under the paternal figure. An avid reader himself, her father nurtured her intellectual growth, enabling her to critically examine the dissonance between the lives of women in Western literature and

those in her reality. However, her professional experiences in the male-dominated banking sector revealed the challenges of being overlooked and undervalued. Now, through her international academic journey, she can voice perspectives that were once difficult to express.

Author 2 is 39, Associate Professor in the same institution as author 1. Member of a middle-class, academically educated, leftist family with a long history of exile and engaged resistance against dictatorship in her home country (Greece), author 2 grew surrounded by books and hi/her-storytelling, which made her increasingly sensitized to various forms of structural inequalities and unequitable distributions of privileges and vulnerabilities among *different* bodies under patriarchal and neoliberal ideologies. Soon in her lifetime, she engaged with forms of activist resistance - also through art - internationally (i.e., volunteerism for houseless, displaced populations and public-school students from underprivileged backgrounds). Many of these experiences nurture her scholarly interrogations, whereby she draws on feminist perspectives to write, speak and act up against injustices in the institutional/academic/organizational spaces she operates. Experiencing academic writing as a vulnerable, embodied, activist practice, she increasingly recognizes her privileged positionality in Western contexts that took care of her education, offering her the space to speak/write freely, when/where this is not always a given.

Author 3 is 33 and works as a postdoctoral researcher in two central European universities, researching processes of collective resistance from queer perspectives. They grew up in an economically rather poor but academically rich household with leftist parents. During early childhood, there was little pressure to adhere to gender norms. Later at school, they started presenting more like a girly *she* to meet the environmental expectations. Due to the parents' unstable job situations, author 3 had to change schools repeatedly, which increased pressures to adapt quickly to whatever people seemed to like – particularly the feminine long hair. This started changing at university, when author 3 began reading feminist and queer literature and

understanding how patriarchal norms had heavily influenced personal feelings about sexual and gender identity. Author 3 started questioning the male gaze pressures, cut their hair shorter and shorter, dated women and queers, and found queer-feminist communities, to finally understand *themselves* as non-binary and trans. By now, they pretty much circled back to the genderless style of their childhood.

Given the personal underpinnings that motivated this paper, we here adopt a collective autoethnographic methodology (Kaasila-Pakanen et al., 2024), experienced as a necessary gateway for "unveiling" embodied truths which must be spoken for their potential to inform organizational life (Reedy and Haynes, 2022). Autoethnography offers vivid accounts of how topics often considered "taboo" or "unserious" can constitute matters of academic, social and political inquiry (Chang and Bilgen, 2020). Autoethnographic texts often draw on feminist inspirations, speaking of pain and suffering related to marginalized experiences (Mandalaki and Perezts, 2023; Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1984; Suzanne and Reiss, 2023; Pullen, 2018). They situate the methodological nexus of meaning-making within the critically reflexive researcher's body and being, disturbing normative and oppressive performativity (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Such work mainly relies on first-person narratives, as we do here, resisting the traditional objectification of the researcher's body in MOS (McCadden et al., 1999). Autoethnography views rather the researcher's body as the surface on which culture is inscribed, seeking to reconcile long-sustained binaries between mind and body and how such binaries shape the conduct and writing of academic research (Bell and Sinclair, 2014; Probyn, 1993). It stresses the researcher's subjectivity in knowledge development, unveiling embodied truths (traditionally rendered silenced and invisible by normative writing conventions, Clavijo, 2023), to enhance understanding of larger social and political problems (Learmonth and Humphreys, 2012).

In this order, the present autoethnographic exploration does not focus on the self alone. It starts from the self, seeking to advance reflexive understandings of the broader cultural and social structures/struggles that one inhabits as part of a collective (Chang, 2013). We expose autoethnographic narratives conveying personal hair-related experiences and affects, offering a critical perspective on haircutting as a subject of academic inquiry. The reflexive analysis and reporting of larger societal and organizational phenomena through embodied narratives allowed us to perform the dual task of recollecting personal memories and experiences, whereby our lives are pulled into un/intentional interactions with different others (Hokkanen and Koskinen, 2016; Mandalaki, 2024). This includes those who have similar life experiences to ours, and/or those whose backgrounds, beliefs and/or experiences are unfamiliar, different or opposed to ours. We have also been mindful to not (over)expose the vulnerabilities of those involved in our stories.

To surface the collective learnings, we read the narratives thoroughly and highlighted key moments or events, paying attention to language, analysing the structure/style of the narratives, reflecting on emotions, and looking for connections between our experiences and broader sociocultural issues. We first read the narratives separately and kept notes of our reflections. We then held several online meetings, where we reflected collectively on our ideas and started to delineate the main propositions that this collective autoethnographic engagement surfaced. Feminist memory work (Haug et al., 1987; Onyx and Small, 2001) offered a valuable lens in this narrative analysis, allowing us to reflect on our personal memories as sites of both individual and collective meaning-making (Mandalaki and Daou, 2021). Feminist memory work emphasizes how personal experiences are shaped by larger (gendered and power-laden) social structures (Haug et al., 1987). In this context, we revisited feminist literature to establish a more profound understanding of haircutting as resistance, navigating the narrative analysis together via multiple abductive iterations across theory and empirical material (Fotaki and

Daskalaki, 2021). This process led us to different emergent themes, such as patriarchal norms, transitions, identity-making, courage, and affects like grief, joy, and solidarity. Drawing connections between our personal memories of embodied experiences within larger organizational and social spheres, allowed us to understand how our haircutting choices resisted or satisfied patriarchal expectations. We let this process develop organically and dialogically between us, trying to mitigate the risk of imposing theory on embodied experience (Thanem and Knights, 2019).

Below, we present our narratives and subsequently discuss the emergent learnings and conceptualization. In the narratives, author 1's story “What the fuck?!” employs direct address to readers, creating dialogue between personal experience and broader academic/activist audiences. Author 2’s narrative “H-air-ing the experience” presents a reflexive retrospective account and author 3’s narrative “Dear hair,” is a letter addressed to their own hair. Analysing our intersectional experiences, we develop our contributions to feminist discussions on resistance in organization studies and delineate implications for organizations.

Embodied narratives on experiences with our hair and haircutting

What the fuck?!

My sister was the first person I called after 10 years of having long hair to see my short hair. At first sight, she said, "what the fuck", laughing loudly. "I just did it," I said.

We used to live in one of Iran's southern, hottest and humid cities when I was a kid. Due to the mandatory hijab, my mother would not allow us to have long hair, as this was energy and time consuming. I remember begging my mother for longer hair, imagining the weight of thick braids cascading down my back. But my mother's firm voice echoed society's rules, dismissing my wish. The longing I felt was never just about hair; it was about freedom. I wanted to feel the strands between my fingers, braid them, and unbraid them as I pleased, but that small desire was stolen from me. As a FEMALE student at school, I could not have the hairstyle I desired, due to the country's regulations. After that, when I started university, I fulfilled my long-hair desire. However, soon after, I got a job as a bank clerk where workplace dress codes were very

strict, expecting women to cover hair "correctly". While hijab was mandatory across all these contexts, the enforcement varied - from my mother's practical concerns about hair maintenance under head coverings at school, and the relatively relaxed supervision at university, to the bank's strict regulations that demanded precise hijab placement. So, while I had my yearned long hair, I could rarely show it.

My father would describe me as an olive-skinned, tall girl with long black hair. I remember when he, who rarely considered birthday gifts, wanted to buy me a hair-braiding machine after seeing an ad during a movie. That thoughtful gesture, like many of my parents' views about my body and hair, has profoundly influenced me in ways I may not fully realize.

Currently living in France, I finally wear my long hair uncovered, feeling the wind weave through it, a small but radical act of defiance. But I ask you — was that really important? Did it matter so much to show my hair? For me, this was everything. It was a reclaiming of what was taken from me. My hair is no longer a symbol of oppression but of choice—my choice. Can you imagine what it feels like, after years of hiding, to finally let it all be seen? I had never felt the spring breeze in my hair before and did not dare to polish my nails in a formal workplace setting. I still remember the lady's words at the airport, who recognized that it was my first time traveling abroad. She said: "please remember the moment you will feel the breeze in your hair." And indeed, this first breeze gave me a sense of freedom. After six months in France, I looked in the mirror at my long hair—the hair I had longed and fought for. This symbol of defiance was now burdening me, tethering me to my past self. On April 16th, I decided to let it go. The scissors went through the strands, and fell to the floor - it felt as if years of silence and compliance fell with it. I was no longer the girl bound by expectations. Cutting my hair felt like defying gravity itself, a liberation from the expectations and constraints it symbolized, as though even natural laws paused in that moment, allowing me to gain power over beauty while losing some I once held, and finding joy in this. I was light as a feather. The very next day at work, I felt the weight of every gaze. Some eyes lingered with admiration, silently labeling my act as brave, as though I'd slain some unseen dragon. Others darted away, speaking of heartbreak and loss, projecting their own stories into my choice. And then there were the stares, unyielding, heavy, almost probing, as if my reflection in their eyes was louder than the words we exchanged. Each look pressed on me a silent conversation I hadn't consented to, but I carried it anyway, feeling exposed yet strangely empowered, as though I was learning to inhabit my new self under the scrutiny of the world.

When I posted my new haircut on Facebook, I received some comments saying that I am no longer the hero that looked like Pocahontas. Maybe, the time for being a hero has finished, and it is the time to be myself. Then Mahsa's story happened. This resonated so deeply with me. The courage and sacrifice tied to her name reminded me that hair is never just hair. It is a battleground for autonomy, identity, and resistance. When I think of her, I feel both sorrow and a renewed determination to live authentically, knowing that even small acts, like haircutting, can carry profound meaning and strength.

H-air-ing the experience

It has been some time that I am flirting with the idea of cutting my hair short. Currently, my hair is pretty long, what men have always found attractive, in the masculine social and organizational context/s I grew and socialized. Every time I disclose to someone my thought to cut my hair short (starting from my father!), they say: "Please don't cut it. Your hair is just so beautiful and feminine in this length". During my first professional experience, I remember having been asked by a female (!) colleague to comb my hair in a specific way to avoid being "too attractive", "unprofessional", "sexy" or "childish". I was 22 at the time and confused. I started realizing how my hair was giving strong symbols about who I am and how efforts to discipline it were often stronger than my power to take control over my body, especially when enacted by a superior at work (a woman comfortably practicing interiorized sexism and misogyny, in this case!). Today, as an academic, I try to wear my hair in ways that don't "provoke" my colleagues or students, to look "professional". This is often challenging, given my "undisciplined" relationship to my hair. I often touch them, attach or detach them, play with them when I talk, which might look disturbing or inappropriate. When I teach or present in a research seminar or zoom meetings, I usually maintain them attached and polished to avoid passing across as too young or unprofessional.

For very long, these ideas kept me going. Unsettling these standards would be seen as "irreverence" to masculine social and organizational codes and I was not ready to take this "rejection". The ability of my long hair to legitimize me in my personal and professional life reassured me that I was accepted, included, approved, liked and desired as a "woman"; but also serious, assertive and convincing as a professional, carrying multiple symbolic connotations. Others' eyes, desires and voices were prioritized over my own voice. I often wondered if this was the woman I wanted to be/come - cute, feminine and submissive. Even if I know that the answer is ***NO****, it has been really hard to escape this idea.*

Cutting my hair short would be an act of irreverence and a way to get rid of all of the memories of normalized oppression this long hair has absorbed. A way to un/re/learn myself, to say "No" to many things and gain agency over my body. I felt so reluctant. Would I "like" the image of myself that wouldn't satisfy these masculine standards anymore? I feel that this would make me stronger. Then, the question becomes one of strength versus submissiveness. Resistance versus accommodation. Could it be an accommodation protest?

Lately, I have met two inspiring colleagues (my co-authors!) who have both dared to cut their long hair short, for different reasons. Talking with them has been eye-opening. Despite our different baggage, motivations and backgrounds, haircutting seems transformational for all of us. This thought has been reinforced recently, after the terrible murder of Mahsa Amini in Iran. I am so angry and sad, realizing all the violence, oppression and injustice exercised on women's bodies internationally, including how we look and wear our hair - a symbol of sexualization and submission. Seeing women around the world manifesting in the streets, burning their hijabs and cutting their hair short in demonstration of solidarity and resistance gives me hope. I want to go out and scream with them. I was so close to cutting my hair in public too but didn't dare! I felt bad for chickening-out but joining my body with other bodies in public, marching against injustice was liberating. As an editor in a journal, I immediately proposed that we release a public support statement. Author 1 kindly offered to translate it in Persian. It seems that the ('simple'!) question of hair now becomes a question of air, survival and existence. A question of freedom, the ability to speak and act out one's body agenticallly. It is a subjectivity development mechanism of resisting to live in an objectified body of desire, making people connect, exchange courage, share solidarity and resist collectively. I feel that writing about this now, is also about using the means within our reach, as feminist writers of organizations, to resist forms of oppression that police different bodies socially, organizationally and epistemically - thinking here of our narratives that some might read as "irreverent". But, I guess not all things can be said in the same way. Theorizing resistance often requires enacting it in/through activist writing to reach those ready to listen and challenge vested habits. What are we here for if not striving to make our research accessible to everyone willing to act up together against injustices?

During this writing, I finally got a noticeable haircut. I felt stronger, inspired by my co-authors and other women's courageous acts of haircutting internationally. I donated my hair to an association making wigs for cancer patients - as another act of practicing solidarity across differences.

I look at the hair dropping
I air
I breathe
inhaling your exhale
sharing information
and energy
between us and with
the world
Will they bear to listen?

Dear hair,

Until I cut you, I didn't know how much you told everyone (including myself) about who I am and what I want.

For most of my life, I fulfilled traditional ideals of feminine beauty. I dressed like a girl, wore makeup, and carried you long and proud, flowing around my shoulders. People loved you and as I grew up, they often praised you as the most beautiful part of my body. I combed you every day, styled you with waves, braided you into plaits. I put a lot of thoughts into you everywhere I went and adopted your style aligning with all kinds of social occasions to always look appropriate. When I started flirting as a girl, I learned to use you in playful ways to send the 'right' signals.

The older I grew, however, some of the compliments felt more and more bitter. The looks of the people you attracted often made me feel uncomfortable. Those who especially liked you, were often disappointed that inside the blond, long-haired girl they liked on the outside, there was more stubbornness and assertiveness than they appreciated. For a long time, you remained my shield from the outside, allowed me to fulfil expectations, blend in with the spaces I entered, rewarded for fulfilling acceptable norms. The older I grew, however, the more estranged I felt in my own body. Contradicted. Expectations from the way I appeared to others did not match with how I felt on the inside. Once I had that clear, you helped me to get the message right.

The moment I dared to cut you short, you told everyone that I was different. You as a buzzcut seemed to shout: Stop sexualizing me! You helped me to resist what they wanted and took from me. Most cis-het men no longer liked you or bothered to get my attention. They rather eyed me with scepticism, perceiving me as disobedient. I didn't need to fight for a respectful distance anymore. What a relief!

Cutting you turned out to be a source of conflict and inspiration. I was the first among my friends and colleagues who dared to shave you so short, raising scepticism and discussions all

around me. Some colleagues asked if I was doing okay, one even told me out of the blue that I looked like a lawnmower had run over my head. Yet, I also encountered sweet and empowering reactions from family, friends, and colleagues. Many applauded me for my bold decision and told me how I motivated them to dare more themselves. Some more conservative colleagues at work surprisingly opened their minds to accept more expansive ways of gender expression. And some girlfriends even followed me in cutting their own hair shorter or shaving it. It was touching to see these reactions and how it created emotional bonds. One of the reactions I remember the most was from my dad, who instead of mocking me, as I expected, said: "Now you look on the outside like the strong person you've always been on the inside."

Cut short, you finally allowed me to feel comfortable as my authentic self, despite troubling, non-conforming, challenging. With this new appearance, you, my dear hair, showed me how I could be and how much I could even feel aligned with body and mind. By shaving you, again and again, every few weeks or months, I exercise my very personal power on this tiny little stage of my own head. It feels like a small win of freedom and liberation every time I look at myself in the mirror with my freshly shaved head. Afterall, it is not only a personal reminder but hopefully one that also encourages those who struggle by my side.

resistance daily plays out on my head
a tiny little shaved battlefield
so personal and so public
on my head, I win the fight

My joy for liberation gets an ephemeral aftertaste in light of other queer people living under severe oppression. While my way of resisting might risk othering me in social contexts or making me less employable, it threatens women's and queer people's lives in other parts of the world. Witnessing the braveness required to resist by multiply marginalized people like my Iranian co-author in Europe shows how my decision to buzzcut is in no way comparable. For now, I am out at work, looking more boy day by day, and in the worst case, I'll have to look for another employer to work for if things get too uncomfortable here, reminding me of the immense privileges I hold.

reminder of rigid orders
white skin, European passport, no borders
openly queer and buzzed with little fear
wearing the keffiyeh around my shoulders
I/we won't be free until we all are
we must together persevere

Conceptualizing haircutting as a form of feminist resistance

Our narrative analysis suggests that understanding gendered experiences in society and at work, as well as the ways in which *different* bodies resist heteronormative patriarchal oppression, requires a close examination of bodily disciplines, and how these are (dis)embodied, experienced, and enacted upon (Acker, 1990; Caldwell, 1991). Reflecting on our haircutting experiences led to a recognition of our situated vulnerabilities, considering sexualities, genders, religions, races, socio-economic and cultural origins. It allowed us to bond over our distinct feminist motivations to resist and recognize different ways in which we experience and suffer from patriarchy. Doing so, we conceptualize *hair-cutting* as a collective - contextually nuanced - form of resistance that operates through key mechanisms: it challenges binary gender norms, enhances identity-making and nurtures courage, and unites intersectional vulnerabilities in collective solidarity.

While existing hair literature focuses on hair-cutting as accommodation and resistance (Weitz, 2001, 2004), our narrative analysis reveals more complex dynamics, telling something about how hair-related norms lead us to manipulate our hair to fit in different gendered contexts, cultural traditions, and beauty standards (Biddle-Perry and Cheang, 2008; Sherrow, 2023), and also how haircutting opened different pathways for us to resist. Haircutting, in this way, functions as embodied defiance that challenges the patriarchal directives dictating binary beauty standards of long-haired femininity for women and short-haired masculinity for men (Synnott, 1987). While we all experience haircutting as an act of resistance, analysing our intersectional positionalities shows the different ways in which gendered subordination is contextually organized by dominant discourses labelling women's, queers' and *different others'* bodies as inferior (Kristeva, 1986; Weitz, 2001; Young, 1990; Kaasila-Pakanen and Mandalaki, 2023). It also surfaces how we each re-act (similarly but for different reasons and to different extents) to

challenge the embedded polarity between masculine and feminine hair norms in our respective contexts (Sherrow, 2023).

The context where haircutting takes place plays an important role for the meaning of resistance. In the West, patriarchal norms associate long hair with femininity and short hair with masculinity. In the Middle East, hair is regulated more directly through religious and legal mandates maintaining the gendered symbolic function of long hair. Cutting hair in both contexts, becomes an act of resistance against the respective norms, challenging different controlling patriarchal ideologies. For author 1, cutting her hair resisted religious and legal constraints, for authors 2 and 3 it resisted beauty, sexualization and gender-binary norms. For author 1, the expectation to veil in her country of origin (Bronner, 1993; Mageo, 1994, 1996) changed how she felt and related to her hair when she immigrated to Europe – "free" as she denoted. Conversely, uncovered hair has always been an unquestioned given for authors 2 and 3, as the narratives revealed. This shows the importance of solidaristic resistance as a learning process of consciousness raising (Berglund et al., 2023), highlighting how hair's social significance can vary considerably across cultural and institutional settings, and how the simple act of haircutting manifests an act of resistance across differences.

Further, for author 3, haircutting is part of recognizing and awakening their queer sexual and gender identity (Lowe, 2016). By shaving their head, they embrace a more 'masculine appearance' (Gibson and Meem, 2002). For author 2, cutting her hair meant troubling the objectifying sexualization she encounters as a woman in masculine social and working environments. Our narratives, thus, showcase how haircutting raises awareness of existing inequities and inequalities (O'Mahoney et al., 2018), carrying different messages in relation to how others treat us and how we feel about ourselves (Thompson, 2008) - i.e., causing discomfort that triggers comments around gendered societal expectations. Cutting our hair challenges inequities and norms; we are perceived (and feel) as troublemakers and prone to be

devalued (Ahmed, 2016). We each differently question contextual expectations towards a submissive “feminine”, “attractive” and “professional” body (hooks, 2001; Rosette and Dumas, 2007), assuming our choices on such a personal, yet also public aspect of our embodiment. The conflict between breaking masculine norms versus seeking approval and validation interestingly highlights the prominent role of the father, who emerges in all our stories as a prevalent patriarchal figure shaping the development of our subjectivities.

The narratives further surface how haircutting emerges as an identity-making mechanism (Lowe, 2016). While previous studies treat hair choices as individual identity work (Lowe, 2016), our analysis shows how personal decisions around haircutting change how we understand our bodies and reclaim them in our relations with others. Haircutting repositions us towards others (Synnott, 1987) whose expectations and opinions on our looks affect us. For instance, we describe hair appearance as “public responsibility”, speak of “desirable style”, and the expectation to “cover hair correctly” (narrative 1). We also write how our hair “satisfies standards” rather than reflecting our own preferences. We “avoid being too much” or “provoke”, using our hair to “legitimize” our standing (narrative 2). Our hair is there to be “praised” or “look appropriate”, and we need to “use it in playful ways to send the right signals” (narrative 3). By putting our own needs and desires in opposition to societal expectations and the wishes of others, haircutting often constructs us as feminist killjoys (i.e., troublemakers killing other people’s joy), leading to rejection and exclusion from certain (cis-hetero) normative spaces (Ahmed, 2016). In our conceptualization, haircutting, hence, resists the instrumentalization and sexualization of women’s and queers’ bodies in cis-heteronormative organizations (Mandalaki and Perezts, 2022). Instead of being the “happy object” (Ahmed, 2016) for the male gaze and desire (Reiss and Dahlman, 2024), we regain embodied power and control, seeking to transform how we perceive the world and how the world perceives us.

Our stories also surface the salience of courage and the power of liberation from societal and organizational expectations. It took time for each of us to enlist the courage necessary to cut our hair, since resisting masculine social and organizational codes comes with social rejection, standing in opposition to the social need for recognition (Butler, 2009). Our stories showcase that haircutting requires a significant amount of courage bound with vulnerability from those opposing embodied oppression (Butler, 2016), manifesting as an act of resistance that challenges the status quo (Weitz, 2001). At the same time, when courage, material and emotional resources are available, we can re-act; haircutting then gives us physical and social control over our bodies, reminding us of the agency and power we hold, despite our vulnerable positions (Harcourt, 2009). Developing the strength to cut our hair often results from following others' courageous examples, constantly confronting our vulnerable bodies, and daring to oppose norms on a daily level (Butler, 2016). Further, since hair grows back continuously (unless certain conditions apply), it requires sustained courage and repetitive efforts to keep it short, which inspires and "legitimizes" new orders of worth and power. Haircutting then becomes a form of daily circulating resistance (Lilja and Vinthagen, 2018), building on the possibility of a repetition that undermines the force of normalization, producing rather new truths and norms rooted in intersubjectivity and embodiment (Ahmed, 2016). Thereby, the resistance we discuss here does not remain at the individual level. It rather carries a relational potential with the possibility of spill-over effects through the creation of friction/s with norms, expectations, and affects, sparkling discourse and solidarity (Hemmings, 2012).

Read with Butler's insights on embodied resistance, our analysis illuminates how everyday performances of haircutting can ignite collective protest that challenge the patriarchal norms shaping much of social and organizational life (Butler, 2015). Butler's work emphasizes resistance emerging through overt public protest and through embodied performative acts that challenge normative boundaries in intimate and everyday ways (Riach et al., 2014). In line with

this, we develop haircutting as such a collective embodied and performative process of resistance, stressing the potential of collective solidaristic performances of relational vulnerabilities against masculine, neoliberal directives (Tyler, 2018; Mandalaki and Fotaki, 2020; Fotaki and Harding, 2017). Haircutting, here, emerges as a performative example of how resistance can be enabled by simple daily acts rooted in recognition of shared vulnerabilities (Butler, 2015) and the fostering of intersectional solidarity (Malseed, 2008). This suggests that while positionalities and the reasons for cutting one's hair might differ individually, the joint feminist fight against cis-heteronormative, patriarchal oppression and the process of inspiring others to disobey hair-policing, can bind intersectional bodies across differences (Hassel, 2022; Rivers, 2021). Haircutting develops as a form of infra-political (Vachhani and Pullen, 2019), everyday resistance (Lilja and Vinthagen, 2018), allowing to reclaim marginalized subjectivities against dehumanizing oppressive acts. This process also raises awareness of the advantages and rights available to us when able to cut our hair and openly resist without endangering our lives, suggesting the importance of standing as allies for those in less privileged positions.

Theorical and practical implications

Our analysis illustrates the potential of looking into embodied forms of resistance, considering the role of gendered embodied materialities (Daniels, 2009; 2021; Matich et al., 2020), namely hair (Weitzs, 2004) through haircutting, and the value of feminist solidarity for activist resistance (Hemmings, 2012). We argue that in addition to organized forms of resistance, such as social movements mainly addressed in feminist literature looking into processes of everyday infra-political resistance through haircutting is an important complementary conceptual consideration for feminist theory and practice (Lilja and Vinthagen, 2018; Vachhani and Pullen, 2019). Our conceptualization situates resistance to patriarchy within intersecting systems of oppression including capitalism, white supremacy, and neoliberalism, recognizing how

embodied resistance practices must navigate the tension between individual agency and collective transformation to avoid co-optation by individualistic neoliberal logics.

Drawing on Butler, we develop how haircutting, manifesting in/through shared embodied struggles, can motivate solidaristic and relational resistance beyond isolated acts (Tyler, 2018), against neoliberal narratives promoting individualized empowerment. Explicitly, we contribute to Fotaki and Daskalaki's (2020) analysis of embodied public protest by conceptualizing haircutting as an embodied act of feminist defiance that starts from individual acts to challenge dominant norms across public and private spheres. Further, we extend Butlerian conceptualizations of feminist resistance through relational expressions of vulnerability (Fotaki and Harding, 2017; Tyler, 2018; Mandalaki and Fotaki, 2020), by developing haircutting as a particular form of collective embodied politics emerging through expressions of intersectional vulnerabilities across different patriarchal contexts. The current conceptualization also adds to Butlerian conceptualizations of emancipatory politics against organizational marginalization (Riach et al., 2014), and of feminist solidarity as a vulnerable relational process (Reiss and Suzanna, 2013; Mandalaki, 2024), stressing the potentials of infra-political (Vachhani and Pullen, 2019) embodied and solidaristic actions against entrenched inequalities rising under neoliberalism (Hemmings, 2012; Wickström et al., 2021). Last but not least, surfacing haircutting as a relational and intersectional form of resistance and feminist agency against gendered organizational constraints on individual expression (Acker, 1990), our theorization extends studies conceptualizing hair embodiment dynamics and their effects within organizational contexts (Okavi-Partush et al., 2018; Rabe-Hemp, 2009; Weitz, 2001, 2004).

Further, methodological implications emerge from writing (about) resistance together (Ahonen et al., 2020) and from the embodied acts of everyday resistance through haircutting. Writing this text together has allowed us to make sense of the normalized mechanisms of patriarchal oppression internalized in our bodies - especially for a conspicuous body part that can make us

vulnerable. Some narrative reflections present haircutting as a farewell to the old self, involving grief and mourning or gender euphoria and joy. Writing our experiences with haircutting allows space for sense-making and recognition of our shared and differing vulnerabilities (Reedy and Haynes, 2022), leading us to mourn the loss of our socially and contextually-bound past or future selves. This offered the opportunity to reflect on the broader social and political contexts where *different others* are positioned and to recognize all bodies as grievable (Mandalaki, 2024). We experience such mourning as an emancipating process of feminist solidarity rooted in shared vulnerabilities across differences (Butler, 2009). We realize that albeit different, we are not alone but rather stronger when we dare to raise our voices collectively (Gourlay, 2018; Kaasila-Pakanen et al., 2024; Mandalaki and Perezts, 2022). This feeling intensified, given the temporality of this writing, which followed the haircutting resistance demonstrations against Mahsa's brutal killing in Iran.

This text is thus addressed to colleagues in academia, to targets of oppression, and activists, who risk their lives by performing public protest through haircutting. We also wish to address those in privileged positions, such as cis-men, willing to listen and reconsider their potential for solidarity. We are conscious and lament that academic texts are limited to a few (differentially) privileged academics like us, in the current context of academic knowledge production and dissemination. Witnessing the surge of far-right, extreme neoliberal politics, we are working towards activist writing that permeates social and public spheres, seeking to generate reflection and dialogue around the difficult questions troubling intersectional lives in an increasingly unstable neoliberal world.

In terms of organizational implications, we offer that haircutting can quietly challenge the explicit/implicit rules of public and corporate appearance and professionalism. It can become a site of resistance and resonance (Weitz, 2004), whereby the act of non-conformity questions the rigid boundaries of gendered professionalism, asserting one's right to self-expression and

motivating others to do the same, towards more inclusive organizational structures. Further, we are pondering the implications of this work for the academic spaces we inhabit - our interactions with colleagues and students in the classrooms, academic conferences, and workshops. Presenting this paper in seminars opened conversations and space for sharing personal experiences around haircutting, questions of gender, feminism, queerness, white privilege, and inequalities. We shall envision promoting more relational reflection, inclusive interactions and problematization, with students and colleagues, around hair and other forms of (dis)embodiment under organizational directives.

Further, we recognize that the relationship between haircutting and resistance might vary from one context to another and that there might be alternative ways of resisting through hair. In some contexts, keeping short hair is considered the norm (see, for instance, the Nappy movement in African countries[3]) for girls, boys, women, and men alike. Growing long hair might be seen/experienced as resistance in these situations, as manifested in Afro hair styles[4] (Brown, 2018), often perceived as provocative in white Western environments. Resisting through hair can also manifest in hair-altering norms like colouring one's hair in bright/flashy colours, growing grey hair (Ward and Holland, 2011) or body hair for women (Fahs, 2022), growing long hair for men/male-read bodies (Caldwell, 1991), or women of colour refusing to straighten their hair (Donahoo, 2023). Future research could complement our conceptualization by exploring these diverse forms of hair-related resistances, across diverse sociocultural and organizational contexts. Additionally, alternative interpretations, like choosing to maintain long hair as a feminist stance within matriarchal or prefigurative organizations, present rich avenues for future inquiry. We broadly encourage future researchers to go deeper into empirical

[3] The natural hair movement originated in the 1960s and resurged in popularity in the 2000s. It was a response to Eurocentric beauty standards and encouraged self-love and self-acceptance. In the early 2010s, Black women created a new movement to celebrate and care for their natural hair.

4 Afro hair, in particular, has historically represented a powerful site of resistance for Black women, as it rejects Eurocentric beauty norms and asserts cultural pride and autonomy (Brown, 2018). Likewise, radical styles such as shaved heads, mohawks, and vibrant, non-traditional colors often resist and disrupt societal norms regarding professionalism and femininity.

investigations of hair policing norms and acts of embodied resistance across cultural and organizational contexts, including academia, as well as how such examples might fuel diverse collective mobilizations of feminist solidarity against cis-heteronormative conventions. While this study focuses on haircutting as resistance, future research could explore how aesthetic preferences, professional requirements, or physical comfort also influence hair decisions alongside political motivations.

Further, we recognize that the relations between oppression and resistance are not straightforward. In some cases, resistance might prompt reflection or even change, while in others, it may intensify efforts to maintain control, and (even inadvertently) reperform othering. The intersectional makeup of and power dynamics between participants can also significantly influence how haircutting is perceived and interpreted. For instance, a Black woman with a shaved head within a corporate environment may face racialized scrutiny distinct from that of a white woman with the same hairstyle in a similar context. A working-class woman who cuts her hair in defiance of sexist beauty norms might find solidarity among peers, yet experience backlash by those upholding more traditional values, like employers or family members.

Hence, not seeking to idealize, we advocate for haircutting resistances that do not occur in isolation but as dynamic relational performances involving diverse actors and discussions - individuals cutting their hair, communities of allies witnessing or participating in the act, and the societal structures or individuals representing the oppressive norms being resisted. As suggested here, feminist solidarity can unite intersectional bodies across cultural traditions, race, sexual, gender identities, and social movements against sexism, subordination, and misogyny, among other forms of marginalization (Hemmings, 2012; Bell et al., 2019; Vachhani and Pullen, 2019, Mandalaki and Perezts, 2023).

From our different positionalities, as feminist academics, we here employ the resources within

our reach to join a broader intersectional struggle against forms of patriarchal cis-heteronormative oppression (e.g., abortion laws, violence against women, violence against and marginalization of LGBTIQA+ people, racialized forms of sexism and transphobia under right-wing neoliberal politics). We particularly stand in solidarity with Iranian women and activists' public courageous acts of hair-unveiling and -cutting internationally. The happenings in Iran serve as a potent reminder of how individual acts of resistance can spark larger social movements rooted in relationality and solidarity. This underscores the importance of working through intersectional differences to stand together in the fight against all forms of oppression.

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PAPER 2

Between coping and resistance: exploring how Iranian immigrant women respond to experiences of workplace oppression

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Abstract

This paper explores how highly educated Iranian immigrant women in the U.S. respond to workplace oppression, challenging the traditional separation between coping and resistance. Drawing on in-depth interviews with 45 Iranian immigrant women across various professions, the study identifies five key response types that exist on a continuum from coping to resistance: doubling efforts, embracing anger, exercising voice, leveraging support through subversive coalitions, and building critical consciousness. By bridging coping mechanisms and feminist resistance frameworks, the research reveals that responses to oppression are characterized by ambiguity (blending elements of both coping and resistance), temporality (evolving over time), and spatiality (spanning professional and personal domains). The paper contributes to discussions on immigrant women's workplace experiences by reconceptualizing how coping strategies can simultaneously serve as forms of resistance, highlighting the complex interplay between individual adaptation and systemic change. Methodologically, it demonstrates the value of examining responses across multiple domains, emphasizing the importance of intersectionality in understanding how immigrant women navigate and challenge workplace oppression.

Keywords Workplace oppression, Immigrant women, Coping mechanisms, Feminist resistance

Introduction

Motivated by the desire for better opportunities and an enhanced quality of life, immigrant women embark on journeys that take them across different parts of the world (Pio et al., 2014). Their path is frequently affected by the glaring manifestation of oppression, which results from the intersection of their gender, racial, and immigration status, among others (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2015; Collins et al., 2021; Davis, 1983; Hooks, 2014). Recent data underscores the magnitude of these challenges: in the U.S., for example, immigrant women earn only 58.4 cents for every dollar earned by U.S. born men, and 29% of college-educated immigrant women work in low-skilled jobs despite their qualifications, a rate nearly three times higher than their host country counterparts (MPI, 2022). This complexity is particularly evident in the case of highly educated immigrant women, who must navigate the tension between their professional expertise and systemic devaluation of their credentials. Recent data shows that 64% of immigrant women with advanced degrees report experiencing "credential discounting," where their foreign qualifications are systematically devalued (MPI, 2023).

While existing research has examined either coping mechanisms or resistance strategies, the reality of how these women navigate workplace challenges defies this simple binary. Their responses often serve multiple purposes simultaneously, functioning as both survival strategies and catalysts for change. Experiences of oppression elicit varied responses, ranging from conformity and self-silencing to avoid further oppression to advocacy for rights and pushing for systemic change (Phillips et al., 2015). How marginalized groups respond to workplace oppression, often referred to as coping, has received significant attention in the organizational literature (Murray et al., 2017; Carver et al., 1989; Miller and Kaiser, 2001). Research has explored coping mechanisms generally conceptualized as problem-focused, emotion-focused, or community-focused (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Folkman and Moskowitz, 2004). While

these strategies can enhance awareness and inspire collective action, they often fail to address the power structures that limit individual agency (Phillips et al., 2015).

On the other hand, literature on feminist resistance (Hooks, 2015; Ahmed, 2002) has highlighted how women have historically employed diverse strategies to resist oppression and assert their agency (Butler, 2009; Hooks, 2015; Ahmed, 2002). The concept of intersectionality, developed by Crenshaw (1991) and Collins (2000), has further influenced how feminist resistance is understood and enacted, in particular by multiply marginalized individuals. These scholars emphasize resistance as both individual and collective action, ranging from overt challenges to subtle acts of subversion in everyday practices. Their work reveals how women's resistance often operates through informal networks, strategic uses of knowledge and expertise, and the creation of alternative spaces where dominant power structures can be questioned and reimagined.

Integrating insights from both coping and resistance literatures, this research investigates how professional Iranian immigrant women in the U.S. respond to workplace oppression beyond conventional understandings of coping. The case of Iranian women in the U.S. is particularly significant because it illuminates how geopolitical tensions and cultural dynamics intersect with workplace experiences, creating unique patterns of both vulnerability and resistance. Their strategies for navigating these challenges offer valuable insights for understanding how marginalized professionals can simultaneously adapt to and challenge oppressive systems.

Understanding how immigrant women simultaneously cope with and resist workplace oppression is crucial for several important reasons. It challenges the artificial separation between coping and resistance in existing literature, offering a more nuanced theoretical framework that better reflects the complexity of marginalized groups' experiences. It provides practical insights for organizations striving to support an increasingly diverse workforce,

revealing how conventional diversity initiatives may fail to address the sophisticated ways immigrant women navigate workplace challenges. It suggests potential pathways for organizational change by highlighting how individual responses to oppression could be recognized and leveraged as valuable inputs for developing more inclusive systemic approaches.

This study advances both theoretical understanding and suggesting practical organizational change efforts through several significant contributions. By reconceptualizing the relationship between coping and resistance, it reveals a continuum where responses simultaneously serve adaptive and transformative purposes, challenging prevailing assumptions about immigrant women as only passive victims of workplace oppression or active agents of resistance. The findings extend intersectionality theory by demonstrating how professional immigrant women's responses to oppression are shaped not only by their intersecting identities but also by temporal and spatial dimensions that span both home and host countries. By examining Iranian women's experiences, I illuminate how geopolitical tensions and cultural dynamics create unique patterns of workplace oppression and resistance, contributing to broader discussions about how global political contexts shape local organizational experiences. These theoretical advances offer valuable practical implications for organizations interested in moving beyond simple inclusion policies or formal complaint mechanisms. Organizations could benefit from recognizing and supporting how immigrant women exercise agency while navigating structural constraints. As workplaces become increasingly global and diverse, understanding these complex dynamics may be essential for creating truly equitable organizations that can harness the full potential of their immigrant professional workforce.

Literature

Immigrant women and workplace oppression

Research examining workplace oppression reveals how complex intersecting layers of oppression create distinct workplace barriers for immigrant women professionals (Blell et al., 2023). Workplace oppression, defined as systematic discrimination that specifically targets or disproportionately impacts certain groups beyond individual discrimination (Williams et al., 2003), manifests through both overt discrimination and subtle embedded systematic practices. Distinct challenges faced by immigrant women include discriminatory hiring practices, inequitable compensation practices, and lack of professional advancement (Liu, 2022; Blell et al., 2023). Wage data highlights stark disparities: immigrant women's earnings lag 41.6% behind U.S.-born men, more than double the 17% gap faced by native-born women with 46% reporting workplace discrimination during the pandemic compared to 32% of native-born women (IWPR, 2023). Among college-educated immigrant women, 29% work in low-skilled jobs despite their qualifications, highlighting how oppression systematically devalues their professional capabilities (MPI, 2022).

Professional immigrant women occupy a unique position–often privileged through education and skills yet marginalized through gender, ethnicity, and immigration status (Blell et al., 2023). This complexity manifests particularly clearly among Iranian women professionals, who deploy cultural and educational resources while confronting systematic devaluation of their capabilities (Rashidian et al., 2013). Their experiences illuminate how resistance operates through both overt challenges to oppressive systems and subtle deployment of professional expertise (Mahdi, 2014). For Iranian women specifically, navigating workplace oppression involves simultaneous negotiation of gender expectations, cultural adaptation, and professional identity (Mahdi, 2014; Rashidian et al., 2013). Ghorashi's (2003) comparative study of Iranian women exiles illuminates how these power dynamics operate differently across national contexts, shaping both experiences

of oppression and possibilities for resistance.

Traditional frameworks examining responses to oppression have often separated coping strategies from resistance. However, studies of Middle Eastern immigrant women reveal a more complex reality where survival strategies and resistance frequently intertwine (Gilanshah, 2011; McConatha et al., 2001). Liu's (2019) research on migrant wives demonstrates how seemingly individual coping actions can constitute forms of collective resistance, while her analysis of institutional frameworks reveals how immigrant women simultaneously navigate and challenge gendered systems (Liu, 2022).

Studies from South Africa to Qatar highlight the compounded difficulties immigrant women face, such as domestic violence, xenophobia, language barriers, unemployment, and the perception of foreignness intersecting with gender (Rodriguez and Scurry, 2019). This comprehensive body of research underscores the multifaceted challenges faced by immigrant women in global labor markets, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to dismantle barriers hindering their full integration. While studies document their experiences of workplace oppression, there is less focus on how they navigate or respond to it (De Castro et al., 2006). To address this gap, I next engage with extant research on coping with oppression.

Diverse coping mechanisms against oppression

Various coping mechanisms serve as protective behaviors against psychological harm caused by oppressive systems within organizational settings (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Miller and Kaiser, 2001). Coping is typically categorized into emotion-focused, problem-focused, or community-focused strategies (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Folkman and Moskowitz, 2004). Problem-focused coping involves taking direct action to resolve oppression-related issues, such as making compensatory efforts or seeking empowerment (Parsons, 2001). Emotion- focused strategies, like denial and disengagement, aim to manage emotional distress by mentally distancing oneself from oppressive realities (Crosby, 2017/1984). Social coping mechanisms,

such as seeking social support and collective identification, involve finding solace and strength through shared experiences (Au et al., 2013).

Research on immigrant women highlights diverse coping strategies tailored to navigate workplace oppression. While traditional approaches focus on individual psychological adaptation, recent studies of Iranian immigrant women reveal how coping strategies often serve multiple purposes (McConatha et al., 2001). As Ghorashi (2003) demonstrates, these women develop sophisticated responses that combine emotional management with professional strategy. Their coping mechanisms reflect both their professional status and cultural background, often drawing on educational resources and transnational experiences (Mahdi, 2014). Cohen (1991) explores how live-in domestic workers, particularly women of color in white households, adapt through community resources, workplace adjustments, and cognitive strategies. While coping mechanisms typically aim to alleviate immediate distress, there is a growing need to understand how women can resist workplace oppression more effectively, challenging oppressive systems rather than solely mitigating negative feelings.

While certainly important for understanding the full extent of how people experience oppression, a critique of the dominant research on coping is that it is limited to a focus on the alleviation of "symptoms", still maintaining the individual as the central figure, versus seeking to problematize the systems or structures that (re)produce oppression which might ultimately encourage adaptation to existing systems rather than questioning/challenging them (Philips et al., 2015). On the other hand, literature on feminist resistance centers the role of systems of oppression and resisting them, and I turn to this next.

Feminist resistance and organizational change

Literature on feminist resistance (Hooks, 2015; Ahmed, 2002) has highlighted how women have historically employed diverse strategies to resist oppression and assert their agency (Butler, 2009; Hooks, 2015; Ahmed, 2002). In the context of work and organizations, feminist

resistance explores how women navigate and subvert gendered power dynamics, intersecting with aspects of professional life (Lilja and Jahnsson, 2018; Lilja and Vinthagen, 2018).

Recent work on immigrant women's resistance highlights how professional credentials and cultural capital become tools for challenging workplace oppression (Liu, 2019). Studies of Iranian immigrant women demonstrate how they leverage their educational backgrounds and professional expertise to resist marginalization while maintaining professional identities (Rashidian et al., 2013). This resistance takes various forms, from subtle workplace negotiations to more overt challenges of discriminatory practices (Gilanshah, 2011). Blell et al. (2023) further illustrate how immigrant women in academia develop sophisticated resistance strategies that combine professional expertise with cultural knowledge.

The concept of intersectionality, developed by Crenshaw (1991), has further influenced how feminist resistance is understood and enacted, particularly by multiply marginalized individuals. For Iranian immigrant women specifically, resistance often involves navigating complex cultural expectations while challenging workplace hierarchies (Mahdi, 2014; Ghorashi, 2003). While the resistance literature illuminates various ways immigrant women may resist oppressive systems, a significant gap exists in understanding how coping and resistance interact, particularly their contextual conditions and relational dynamics. To bridge this gap, this study draws conceptually on both the coping and feminist resistance literatures to explore how professional Iranian immigrant women in the U.S. develop sophisticated strategies. that simultaneously help them navigate and challenge workplace oppression, revealing the complex interplay between individual adaptation and systemic change.

Methodology

Case selection justification

Iranian immigrant women in the U.S. represent a particularly compelling case for studying workplace oppression responses for several distinct reasons. First, they occupy a unique

intersectional position that differs from other immigrant groups previously studied. Unlike many immigrant populations who arrive with often low, relative to the U.S. generation Iranian immigrants to the U.S. are among the most highly educated with over 60% holding bachelor's degrees or higher compared to 28% of the general U.S. population (Migration Policy Institute, 2019). Even more striking, 31% of Iranian-Americans hold a master's degree or doctorate, three times the national average (Iranian Studies Group at MIT, 2022). This high educational attainment, combined with their status as women from a Muslim-majority country, creates a distinctive dynamic where they often face simultaneous privilege (through education and professional credentials) and marginalization (through gender, ethnicity, and religion).

Second, the geopolitical tensions between the U.S. and Iran create additional layers of complexity not present for most other immigrant groups. Iranian women face unique forms of discrimination stemming from post-9/11 Islamophobia despite Iran not being an Arab country, as well as specific prejudices related to U.S.-Iran political conflicts. According to recent studies, 76% of Iranian-Americans report experiencing discrimination or unfair treatment because of their ethnicity or country of origin (PAAIa, 2023). This context creates distinctive challenges in workplace integration and professional advancement that differ from those faced by immigrants from countries with less contentious relationships with the U.S. The ongoing sanctions against Iran also affect their ability to maintain professional credentials, transfer qualifications, and maintain connections with professional networks in their home country–challenges unique to this population.

Third, Iranian women's experiences of gender dynamics in their home country, where they face strict religious and cultural restrictions, followed by migration to the U.S. with its different gender norms, provides unique insights into how prior experiences of oppression shape responses to workplace discrimination in the host country. Unlike immigrants from countries with less oppressive gender regimes, Iranian women must navigate a dramatic shift in gender expectations

while simultaneously managing professional integration. Recent studies indicate that 82% of professional Iranian women report having to actively "unlearn" previous adaptive behaviors developed in Iran while developing new strategies for the U.S. workplace context (Mahdi, 2021). This transition from one system of gender relations to another offers important theoretical insights into how women develop and adapt their coping and resistance strategies. Finally, while extensive research exists on immigrant women's workplace experiences from Latin America, East Asia, and South Asia, Iranian women relatively understudied despite their growing presence in professional workplaces. The Iranian-American population has grown by 42% since 2000, with women making up 58% of this growth (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Their experiences illuminate important gaps in our understanding of how highly educated immigrant women from Middle Eastern backgrounds navigate workplace oppression in Western contexts. The timing of Iranian immigration waves–primarily post- 1979 Revolution–also provides insights into how different generations within the same immigrant group develop varying strategies for workplace navigation.

These distinctive characteristics make Iranian immigrant women an ideal case for examining how intersecting identities shape workplace experiences and responses to oppression. Their case helps advance theoretical understanding of how professional immigrant women develop sophisticated strategies that blend coping and resistance when navigating complex systems of power and privilege. Furthermore, studying this population contributes to broader discussions about how organizations can better support highly skilled immigrant professionals while addressing systemic barriers to their full workplace integration.

Sample

The sample group comprised a diverse cohort of first-generation Iranian women, reflecting a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, ages, occupations, positions within organizational hierarchies, and durations of residency in the U.S. The average age of the interviewees was 41

years old, with an average of 13 years spent living in the U.S. It's pertinent to note that the participants hailed from varying socioeconomic statuses, with some coming from privileged backgrounds while others faced socioeconomic challenges. Particularly in Iran, individuals belonging to minorities who represented different religious background, which corresponds with socioeconomic status have restricted access to official education and healthcare services (Farmand, 2021). Despite these challenges, upon immigrating to the U.S., these individuals pursued diverse professions, from childcare providers to scientists and university professors. However, most are highly educated (See Table A1 for participant demographics).

Empirical material collection

This research originated from my positionality as an Iranian immigrant woman living in the West, whose own observations prompted an investigation into the experiences of Iranian women immigrants in U.S. workplaces. Participant recruitment utilized a two-stage process: initial recruitment occurred through social media networks, specifically through a Facebook post seeking participants. A Facebook connection, whom I had never met in person, responded by providing access to her network of approximately 35 potential participants–all Iranian women immigrants in the U.S. I then contacted these individuals, who were previously unknown to me, to recruit initial participants. This was followed by snowball sampling where initial respondents facilitated connections to additional participants. The recruitment criteria targeted women who were born and raised in Iran, had migrated to the U.S, and were actively employed across various sectors. This methodological approach allowed access to a diverse pool of participants while maintaining appropriate distance from the researcher to ensure objectivity. None of the participants were family members or close personal acquaintances, which helped minimize potential selection bias.

Through this recruitment process, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 45 participants. Although all participants spoke English, interviews were conducted in Persian, their mother

tongue, to facilitate more comfortable and nuanced discussions about their experiences of oppression. All interviews were conducted virtually through various applications and video software, with each session lasting approximately 50 min and being recorded.

The semi-structured interview method allowed for a structured yet flexible dialogue, where I had prepared questions to ensure coverage of key themes while also permitting the exploration of new topics that emerged spontaneously during the discussions (Magaldi and Berler, 2020). While guided by prepared questions, I generally let the interviewees lead me to the topics that were significant to them, making it clear that I was interested in learning about their oppression experiences. This approach effectively captured the complexity of their life stories and how they navigate challenges.

Following data collection, transcription was done manually since rarely any software or application has Persian among all the languages, or if they did, the software accuracy for transcription was very low. On average, each interview took 6 h to be transcribed and translated.

Empirical material analysis

The analysis process consisted of three distinct coding rounds – open coding, theoretical coding, and selective coding. In the initial open coding round, I conducted a detailed line-by- line analysis of the first ten fully translated interviews. Each interview was carefully examined to identify any mention of how participants responded to experiences of oppression. I marked each unique response in the text and assigned it an initial descriptive code. This process yielded approximately 45 preliminary response codes, including codes such as “working extra hours”, “seeking support from spouse”, “documenting incidents”, “building professional networks”, “using humor as defense”, “learning workplace rights”, “maintaining cultural identity”, and “mentoring others”. These codes emerged directly from participants’ descriptions rather than from preexisting theoretical frameworks. To ensure consistency, I maintained a coding log where I recorded each

new code, its definition, and example quotes that illustrated it. When similar responses appeared, I compared them with existing codes to determine whether they represented truly new responses or variations of already-identified patterns.

In the second round, theoretical coding, I systematically compared these 45 initial codes with existing theoretical frameworks from both coping and resistance literature. This involved creating a matrix where I mapped each response code against key concepts from coping literature (e.g. emotion-focused coping, problem-focused coping) and resistance literature (e.g. individual resistance, collective action). Through this analysis, I began identifying patterns in how different responses related to theoretical concepts. For example, I found that responses like "working extra hours" and "improving language skills" aligned with traditional coping mechanisms, while responses like "mentoring others" and "building coalitions" showed clear elements of resistance. This process helped consolidate the initial 45 codes into broader theoretical categories.

In the final round, selective coding, I refined these theoretical categories into three distinct types: pure coping responses, pure resistance responses, and hybrid responses. This categorization emerged from the recognition that many responses did not fit neatly into either coping or resistance frameworks. I systematically re-analyzed all 45 interviews using this three-category framework, coding each response and noting how it fits within or challenged these categories. This process led to the identification of five key types of responses that exist on a continuum from coping to resistance: doubling the effort, embracing and leveraging anger, exercising voice, leveraging support and forging subversive coalitions, and building critical consciousness.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the coding process, I employed several strategies. First, I regularly consulted with one senior colleague experienced in qualitative research, who independently reviewed samples of my coding and provided feedback on my categorizations. Second, I conducted member checks with eight participants, sharing my interpretations and

categories with them to verify that they accurately reflected their experiences. Finally, I maintained detailed analytical memos throughout the coding process, documenting my decision-making rationale, emerging patterns, and theoretical insights.

This systematic three-round coding process enabled me to move from raw material to theoretical insights while maintaining analytical rigor and ensuring comprehensive coverage of the various ways participants responded to workplace oppression. The progression from 45 initial response codes to five key types of responses represents a careful consolidation of the data that preserves the complexity of participants' experiences while making theoretical contributions to our understanding of how immigrant women navigate workplace oppression.

Main findings

The analysis identified five types of responses to experiences of oppression, which exist on a continuum from coping to resistance. Most responses exhibit characteristics of both coping and resistance; in other words, they include some form of adaptation to systems of oppression and some elements of challenging or resisting them. While some quotes may foreground either gender-based or immigrant-specific aspects of workplace oppression, it is important to recognize that these dimensions operate simultaneously and inseparably in participants' lived experiences. The analytical separation of these factors can sometimes obscure their fundamental interconnection. For Iranian women professionals in the U.S., gendered expectations are always experienced through their position as immigrants, and immigrant challenges are inevitably filtered through gendered power dynamics. The following quotes demonstrate various facets of this intersectional experience, even when one dimension may appear more prominent than others in particular narratives. I elaborate on these responses below.

1) Doubling the effort:

Participants described the necessity of doubling the effort to prove their value and demonstrate their worth, illustrating the complex dynamics of navigating workplace oppression. Doubling the effort often results from women feeling undermined, doubted, or subject to a double standard. For example, as another participant working as an infectious disease specialist described:

> *When my colleagues in the committee did not accept my reasons for medical consultation, sometimes I would go out of my way to read many articles to find the best and most valid one to convince others, although this was not the case for others. Their opinions were accepted without proof, which disappointed me. [42]*

Her ability to access and leverage scientific articles to validate her expertise underscores the privilege of her academic position, which affords her the resources to substantiate her arguments with academic evidence. However, while effective in her field, this strategy highlights the broader issue of women needing to provide excessive proof of their competence, a requirement not equally demanded by their male counterparts.

On the other hand, there have been women who exerted significant effort and fought hard for promotions, and when they finally achieved them, their accomplishments were not acknowledged and encouraged like those of other individuals in the organization, as more senior and experienced individuals within the organization were not pleased with the promotion of a non-white woman.

> *I doubled my effort to win more and more scholarships and awards, and the next time I asked them, they had to announce it publicly. I should not be ignored because others become sad about my success. [14]*

This demonstrates the impossibility of doubling the work as a strategy for actually achieving equality; even when these women put in more work and reach similar achievements, they are still subject to unequal treatment. This participant's determination to have her accomplishments

publicly acknowledged speaks to a larger struggle against an ingrained system of oppression that not only fails to recognize but actively undermines the achievements of marginalized individuals. Others put in more work in the hopes of being promoted to a different role associated with more respect from clients and the organization. For example, one woman working as a dental assistant, who was often asked to do office cleaning even though it was not in the job description, was putting in more effort to become a hygienist:

> *I do want to become a dental hygienist instead of a dental assistant. As a dental assistant, they sometimes ask me to clean the walls after the patients have left. It is absolutely not my task, but I do this extra work because I know they won't promote me if I decline. I am doubling my efforts; Studying these materials and preparing for the exams is not easy. [15]*

Her determination to pursue further studies and certification is driven by a desire for a higher position that commands more authority and respect, reflecting an effort to overcome occupational limitations and systemic undervaluation of her current role.

In the case of another participant, a postdoctoral researcher, she understood that having a publication as soon as possible was the only way that her advisor would be less abusive toward her:

> *I doubled my effort so I could finish the post-doctoral research. I was professional due to reading so much, so I published in the best journal. After that publication, she [supervisor] started behaving herself. [21]*

The pressure to publish not only aims at mitigating abusive treatment from her supervisor but is also strategic in securing a stable future in her host country, highlighting how the publication serves dual purposes: enhancing her professional profile and supporting her green card application. This approach reflects a broader trend where immigrants, especially in academia,

navigate additional hurdles, including the need to secure stable employment and residency status, often requiring exceptional professional achievements (Strauβ and Boncori, 2020).

The above examples demonstrate how migrant women often go above and beyond their job description, taking on additional tasks or doing work in their own time to try and prove themselves, fit in, or be recognized for their work like non-minoritized colleagues are. This type of response to oppression can generally be understood as coping, as it does not challenge existing systems of oppression as much as it helps participants adapt to and manage within these systems. In this way, participants experience a sort of double oppression.

2) Embracing and leveraging anger

Another way participants respond to experiences of oppression is by embracing and mobilizing anger. One participant explained:

> *When I entered one of the cancer labs in one of the labs in the US, an American lady looked into my eyes and said, "Look at this terrorist". I have heard a lot of these types of sentences. But I don't let them make me down. I don't feel bad when I hear this stuff. To be honest, I have never actively done anything to reduce the negative feelings associated with these types of behavior. I prefer to keep the anger inside me, and then I turn the anger into achievement. Each time they said something nasty to me, I tried and achieved something unbelievable. Now, I have my own lab at the second most famous pharmaceutical company in the United States. [33]*

Most literature on coping suggests that people who experience oppression act to reduce the negative feelings it brings on, but this suggests that rather than move to reduce anger, some participants welcome it and use it to resist. This type of oppression response underscores the transformative potential of anger (Perlow, 2018) when channeled into motivation and action, challenging the normative expectations of coping by not just enduring but thriving in the face of

adversity (Fitts, 2011; Friedrich, 2024). Anger can be a potent catalyst for the emancipation of women by motivating action and inspiring change. Such responses challenge the conventional wisdom on coping mechanisms, advocating for a recognition of the diverse and complex ways individuals resist oppression and transform their experiences into sources of empowerment. Not all these ways of reducing negative feelings are normative, like this interviewee: *"I insult her inside. [21]"*

This internal dialogue, though unseen, acts as a shield, preserving her dignity and self-esteem and asserting herself amidst external assaults on her identity.

Another participant describes how she channels her anger to fuel her work:

> *People are so aggressive, maybe because of the freezing climate here. People do not have control over their anger. When someone makes a mistake, they don't think maybe it was not on purpose. The first assumption is that it was done intentionally. They throw money into your face, but they do not have the same behavior as natives. They are angry, and they make you angry as well. Working under pressure with intense feelings is not an easy thing to do. I use my anger to give them the best birthday cakes they want with the best design. This is how I am handling it. [21]*

While anger can be a source of resistance for some, it also comes at a high cost, as illustrated by one participant who endured years of abuse before ultimately channeling her anger into a book about the experience:

> *After 13 years in the same job, I still never felt like I fit in. I expressed my frustration, emphasizing that even after 13, I still faced these situations as if I were expected to endure them as a woman. They couldn't fire the person who abused me because profit was more important to them. It's not reasonable at all. I could have filed a complaint against this company, but then I realized how much energy I would need, and sadly, I don't think these issues would be resolved quickly. I endured it, watched silently, and said nothing. The*

> *person who harassed me sent a false report against me, claiming that I had left my job earlier. I proposed they check the closed-circuit cameras to see who was correct, but in the end, they did not even apologize for their false claims. All these negative feelings left me with no choice but to write about these stories in my book, and I got my book published after quitting the company. [10]*

Embracing and leveraging anger in response to oppression is a complex interplay of personal resilience, available outlets for expression, and the broader societal and systemic contexts. While it can be a powerful source of resistance and motivation, it also carries risks that require careful navigation to ensure that anger serves as a catalyst for positive change rather than a source of further distress (Griffin, 2012).

3) Exercising voice

Exercising voice was another way that participants responded to experiences of oppression, which can be understood as a form of resistance. The dynamics of this response varied depending on the organizational structures and hierarchies as well as individual support. One interviewee, a post-doctoral researcher within an academic setting, narrated her experience:

> *I went to the Dean of research and started talking to him about the supervisors' behaviors. He was so supportive and told me to ask him for a recommendation letter if needed. He gave me the courage to talk. [13]*

Other participants found support and an avenue to exercise voice in their HR teams:

> *I like the way HR is so supportive here. When that colleague said something kidding and disrespectful, I told HR, and they supported me. [44]*

However, clearly, in some other cases, participants experienced challenges. Comparing the

culture with the host country's culture and being dubious about how they might judge you if you talk about other people's behavior is something at the back of their minds to consider while considering whether to speak up. As one of the interviewees shared her story:

> *As a woman, you can't protest much against the system in Iran. But being here, I've learned that I can voice my objections and get the answers I want. Although sometimes it may not work, I can still speak up. It is not like Iran at all. If a woman objects, people label her with some disgusting features. Here, at least, they listen and try not to be judgmental in your face. [23]*

In another case, the precarious immigration status tempered a participant's ability to speak up:

> *Regarding the sexual harassment, I asked HR and filed a complaint. I was afraid of becoming jobless and receiving a rejection for my green card. [30]*

Sometimes, despite efforts to exercise voice, participants experienced obstacles due to unclear HR policies or expectations:

> *Once, one of my colleagues said something that he was not supposed to say. I went to HR and told them what had happened. As it was my first experience, I did not know that when I reported something like this, I had to be aware of what specifically I wanted (apologies, relocation of that person's office, etc.), but now, I am well aware. In this regard, I suggest HR provide codes of conduct and hold training courses for all staff. I am happy I was effective. [18]*

Similar to other forms of resistance, exercising voice sometimes comes with a cost:

> *Once I spoke up, I faced his [my boss] harsh and bitter behavior, and I told him they did not deserve good employees. The boss was shocked, and he did not expect this behavior. Showing them that I was aware of my rights after three years of working there. My*

> *brother-in-law is a famous lawyer in the U.S. He helped me become aware of my rights. Several times, he accompanied me to the labor union. But I didn't continue because I found another job. [6]*

While most instances of exercising voice happened within the workplace, one participant shared a story of less conventional expression through the creation of origami inspired by her experiences, which she sold at the local market:

> *The figures I created as origami is of a girl in various poses. Customers often wonder why they are all girls, and I explain the events that have happened to me and the inspiration behind my origami creations. [6]*

This act of selling allowed her to showcase her work and resist her experiences of oppression and opened the door to discussions about these experiences with many other people.

4) Leveraging support and forging subversive coalitions

Another response to experiences of oppression that took the form of resistance was forming subversive coalitions. One interviewee shared her experience of taking legal action against the CEO. She found strength and support through a colleague in the human resources department, which significantly eased the process and emboldened her to pursue this course of action. This act of challenging the CEO was subversive because it directly confronted the established power dynamics within the organization:

> *Having Daniel as a professional colleague from HR by my side helped me a lot to overcome all those fears. I found the power to file a complaint and sued the CEO in court. [4]*

Subversive behavior can also manifest in less formal and more creative ways, as illustrated by one interviewee sharing experiences of dealing with an impolite manager's behavior:

She was so rude, and when she passed by our office; she covered her nose; implying that we [Iranian colleagues] smelled. We were three in one office. We decided to buy three different air fresheners and use them when she passes our office. We also asked her for a public apology as compensation. [8]

In certain instances, demonstrating to those upholding an oppressive system that the onus is on them to depart or face exclusion, rather than the victims of oppression, was also adopted as a strategy to curtail such behaviors:

My employer was extremely cruel, not only to me but to everyone. One day, the employees agreed to give him a decent lesson. I made a luxury Persian breakfast for the group, but we didn't extend an invitation to him. He became aware of it something while eating, the aroma of the delectable dish. He was taken aback that we hadn't invited him. We said, "Let's go Dutch; this breakfast costs fifty dollars for each of us." Although the price surprised him, we assured him he could join and pay the remaining 50. He paid, and we divided that among us. It was not a huge amount, but after that, he tried to be nicer. [31]

Leveraging support and forging subversive coalitions to resist systems of oppression was not restricted to coalitions within the workplace. In multiple cases, participants described friendships or partnerships outside of work as subversive coalitions. Several participants discussed their marriage to American men as a resource in challenging systems of oppression:

I married an American guy; I asked him about the details of my work rights and American workplace regulations. [15].

or who said: *"Marriage to an American person/I can ask about the regulations and laws; he is so supportive." [1]*

This support and help from a native husband were advantageous in various ways. For one of the interviewees whose English was not perfect and who experienced oppression due to language, practicing with her husband as a native speaker was a way of going through the experience:

> *I am working on my language. I think the progress is slow, but I know it will work a day. I married here to an American man. He is so supportive and helps me a lot, specifically practicing English. [39]*

Another case for other interviewees is that she is a professor at an American state university who is married to an American husband, and her daughter is now studying at the very same university:

> *I married an American white man. Now, my daughter resembles me. She is just much brighter than me. I have the feeling she is less non-American than me. I taught her to follow her dreams and not let her gender limit her. [44]*

Also, having an Arabic Muslim family name made an interviewee think of taking the husband's family name:

> *I married a Mexican man who was born and raised in the States. During that time, I really considered changing my last name and taking my husband's last name instead. [18]*

Of course, relying on men and marriage as a source of resistance is complicated by the fact that women may remain in a position of disadvantage or dependence. However, the experiences of these participants demonstrate how coalitions outside of work may be a source of support and resistance against racist oppression, even if they also reflect patriarchal power arrangements.

5) Building critical consciousness

Finally, participants also discussed resisting their oppression through educating and informing others. For instance, one person facing challenges with their advisor tried to caution potential students, aiming to protect them from potential mistreatment in the future:

> *I definitely told the others who came to this prof about what it's like here, and they freed themselves from this person sooner than I did. [14]*

Newcomers are more likely to encounter these challenges, especially when there isn't a clear protocol to guide them. In such situations, newcomers might feel lost and uncertain about what steps to take if they experience oppression: *"Also, I myself try to tell newcomers what to do and what not to do in case something happens. [18]"*

Experiencing oppression or similar situations does not always lead to a straightforward path of going to court and filing a complaint. It's not just time-consuming and draining in terms of energy, but the process of proving oppression and its psychological impact can be immense. Often, it's more feasible to resolve these issues within the organization itself. One of the interviewees encountered this and chose to educate a colleague, aiming to prevent similar events from happening again based on her own experiences:

> *The approach is essential because oppression always exists, and it's not always possible to file a complaint. I don't want another person to have this experience. I know that this person will do the same thing to someone else, so I will prevent it from happening. For example, I advise my Indian colleague to assert themselves and say no when their rights are violated, such as taking credit for their work. [7]*

Raising awareness about these issues does not always occur solely within organizations; it extends beyond their boundaries. For example, some interviewees engage in giving talks at schools and various events outside their workplace to raise awareness and encourage change and inclusivity:

I am invited to different schools to talk about Engineering. I try to encourage young girls to believe that women can be engineers. I talk about the positive and negative sides of being an Engineer. I tell them this is us who should reduce the negative impacts by becoming the majority instead of the minority. [18]

Similarly, another participant shared: *"I made many speeches for different conferences and seminars to show them that women are capable of doing this job and women can have high positions. I do not know how effective I was, but I did my best [42]".* As a result of these efforts, the state government has recently extended invitations to scholars and women in high-ranking positions. They are asked to share their challenges, aiming to create a systematic approach against marginalization (McDonald and Coleman, 1999). This is not just a series of random individual actions; it is a deliberate effort by the government to address and counteract marginalization by involving both students and managers in these discussions: *"*

I give lectures in different universities and schools. It is a scheme from the States for the young female generation to explain that they can choose any field they want. I was invited many times. But, after a while, I actively search for communities to tell them to follow their dreams. Gender should not be a barrier. [44]

Participants also leveraged social media to raise awareness about their experiences:

It's been 20 years or more that I have been using different platforms for writing about work/life experiences challenges and experiences of oppression, from having a weblog to having an Instagram account and other forums. [36]

Furthermore, leveraging these platforms to seek advice and share sensitive organizational details, such as salary ranges, proves to be highly beneficial:

I have tried to write posts on social media to raise awareness about salary negotiations. Also, I wrote one post on my LinkedIn about the previous institute I used to work for because they were so rude to me. [27]

Discussion

Drawing on the experiences of Iranian women in the U.S., this study bridged the literature on coping and resistance to explore how immigrant women respond to workplace oppression. The analysis identified five types of responses to oppression, most of which draw on elements of both coping and resistance and, in doing so, generate new insights into the dynamics of navigating and responding to workplace oppression.

Previous work on understanding responses to experiences of oppression has been approached in terms of psychological coping, focused primarily on short-term, individual acts to reduce negative feelings associated with oppression (Phillips et al., 2015) or mainly in terms of resistance-focused specifically on how oppressed groups resist and challenge systems of oppression (Smith, 2020), through actions ranging from public protest to subtler workplace or private organizing and speaking up to mimicry and subversion (Galvan-Alvarez et al., 2020). Both of these streams of literature have been instrumental in shedding light on how marginalized groups deal with oppression. Yet this study suggests that responses to oppression often exist on a continuum between exclusively coping or resisting, often including elements of both. In this way, I have attempted to bring these two literatures together, allowing for a more nuanced perspective on the ways marginalized groups respond to oppression. More specifically, this research generates new insights into the ambiguity, temporality, and spatiality of responses to oppression that may be missed when viewing it from the perspectives of coping or resistance alone.

First, there is ambiguity in distinguishing between responses that are "coping" or "adapting" and responses that may be understood as "resistance". Many responses have elements of both. Some responses are uniquely aimed at reducing negative feelings while experiencing

oppression and do not address the fundamental resolution of the issue, such as doubling the effort to prove one's worth, for example, the existence of a double standard for scientific proof or challenges for getting promoted. On the other hand, some of the responses try to deal with the root of the cause of oppression and try to challenge the oppressive system, for example, by educating others and trying to prevent the same experiences from happening to others. Most responses, however, may be understood as a hybrid of coping and resistance. In these cases, women try to challenge the oppressive systems while reducing the negative feelings and experiencing having access to many services that were forbidden in their homeland. These responses could happen completely individually or collectively, seeking a same-minded community (Sonn and Fisher, 1998; Wickstrom et al., 2021).

Second, the findings highlight the temporality of responses to oppression in that they exist over time, are often ongoing, and cannot necessarily be understood simply as discrete acts following one-off instances of oppression. For example, participants discuss *years* of experiencing oppression, with ongoing attempts to cope or resist it. The finding of forging subversive coalitions through marriage also highlights how responding to oppression can be a lifetime commitment. Some participants who have experienced oppression are continually striving to educate other members of vulnerable groups to prevent the recurrence of similar bitter experiences. These efforts are aimed at broader community awareness and profoundly influence how they raise their children. By sharing their own experiences of oppression, they ensure that the next generation and young students are better informed and prepared to navigate and resist such challenges. This educational initiative serves as both a protective measure and a means of empowerment (Valencia, 2023), fostering resilience and a deeper understanding of systemic oppression (Crann and Barata, 2021). Moreover, contending with oppressive conditions does not always manifest itself in forms like marriage or education, which can have a more positive appearance. At times, the struggle against ongoing oppression can be much harsher. Continued

exposure to oppression can be life-threatening, sometimes leading to extreme responses such as suicide. This highlights a lethal aspect of ongoing oppression, illustrating how it can escalate to life-threatening levels and contribute to burnout and resource erosion (Gorski and Chen, 2015). These dynamics are well documented in the literature (Gorski and Erakat, 2019; Gorski and Chen, 2015), with scholars emphasizing how ongoing oppression depletes individual resources, potentially leading to severe psychological outcomes like burnout. So, this highlights the importance of viewing responses to oppression as part of a broader, interconnected social process that requires communal and institutional support to challenge systems of oppression and sustain individuals over time. This perspective might ensure that those engaged in these efforts are supported holistically (Moon and Sandage, 2019).

Finally, departing from studies that tend to focus solely on the workplace in examining responses to oppression (Sonn and Fisher, 2023; Philips et al., 2015), the findings show how responses span across the professional and personal/private as well as home and host country. Even if the oppression itself is experienced in the workplace, its effects and the way women respond to it expand well beyond into home lives and personal lives. In addition, Iranian women rely on American spouses in order to navigate the legal system, among other forms of support. Their responses to oppression further inform how they raise their children. This resonates with some of the literature on resistance, which identifies the home as a site of feminist resistance (e.g. Alkhaled, 2021). In addition, the findings show how experiences of and responses to oppression in the host workplace cannot be separated from experiences of oppression in the home country; indeed, the former is shaped by and entangled with the latter. Together, these reveal a spatiality of coping and resistance that is not often addressed in studies of workplace oppression.

Overall, integrating perspectives on coping and resistance offers a more holistic view of how individuals respond to systemic oppression at work. Further, the lens of intersectionality helps

shed light on the way intersecting markers of difference (gender, immigrant status, race/ ethnicity) inform experiences of and responses to oppression. The intersectional framework reveals the nuanced and varied ways in which Iranian women experience workplace oppression in the U.S., emphasizing that these experiences are not monolithic but are instead shaped by multiple, intersecting aspects of their identities like other oppressed, marginalized groups. An Iranian woman's experience and response to workplace oppression can be profoundly influenced by her socioeconomic status (and other aspects like religious background, length of residence in the U.S., and her specific community ties). For example, having a fragile position as an immigrant and not knowing your rights. While this study identifies temporality and spatiality as key dimensions distinguishing hybrid responses from traditional coping or resistance frameworks, future research should provide more explicit empirical analysis of how these temporal and spatial patterns manifest in participants' narratives, perhaps through longitudinal or ethnographic methods that can better capture these dynamics in practice.

Conclusion and contribution

The theoretical and practical contributions of this research advance our understanding of how professional immigrant women navigate workplace oppression and what might be done about to support this. This study reconceptualizes how we understand professional immigrant women's responses to workplace oppression by demonstrating that these responses transcend traditional boundaries between coping and resistance. Rather than treating these as distinct categories, the findings reveal a complex continuum where most responses incorporate elements of both coping and resistance. This hybrid nature of responses challenges existing theoretical frameworks that tend to categorize actions as either adaptive (coping) or transformative (resistance). The study's identification of ambiguity, temporality, and spatiality as key dimensions of these responses provides a more nuanced theoretical framework for understanding how marginalized individuals navigate oppressive systems while simultaneously working to transform them.

At the practical level, the research reveals critical insights about the limitations of current

organizational approaches to workplace oppression. Traditional support systems and diversity initiatives often fail to address the complex needs of immigrant women professionals, particularly when formal voice mechanisms prove inadequate for creating meaningful change. The findings highlight how organizational policies and practices frequently privilege assimilation over authentic inclusion, suggesting the need for fundamental reforms in how organizations approach diversity and inclusion work.

Beyond organizational boundaries, the research demonstrates the crucial importance of informal support networks that blend professional and personal resources. Iranian immigrant women develop sophisticated support systems through colleague relationships and community connections that prove more valuable than formal organizational initiatives. These networks serve multiple functions–providing immediate emotional support, facilitating knowledge sharing about navigating workplace challenges, and enabling collective resistance efforts. The findings emphasize how these informal networks help immigrant women maintain their professional identities while dealing with multiple forms of oppression.

Organizations could create dedicated spaces that recognize immigrant women's workplace navigation strategies as legitimate forms of organizational knowledge rather than individual adaptation challenges. Such interventions might include formalizing the mentoring and knowledge-sharing behaviors observed in this study, where experienced immigrant women guide newcomers through workplace dynamics, transforming this currently invisible emotional labor into recognized organizational activities. Additionally, organizations could establish cross-cultural professional networks that acknowledge the coalition-building and support mechanisms identified in the findings as valuable workplace resources rather than informal coping strategies. Training managers to recognize when behaviors like "doubling efforts" signal systemic barriers rather than individual performance issues would enable organizations to address structural inequities at their source. These approaches would legitimize immigrant women's sophisticated navigation strategies as organizational assets while simultaneously

addressing the power dynamics that necessitate such hybrid responses.

The research also contributes to understanding how broader sociopolitical contexts shape workplace experiences and response strategies. Immigration policies and international tensions create specific vulnerabilities that manifest in daily workplace interactions, suggesting the need for policy-level interventions beyond organizational solutions. For Iranian immigrant women in the U.S., this means developing strategies that address both immediate professional challenges and deeper structural barriers arising from their unique sociopolitical position. These findings highlight the importance of creating dedicated spaces for knowledge sharing and mutual support while working toward systemic change at the organizational, community, and policy levels.

Finally, this work advances methodological approaches to studying workplace oppression by demonstrating the value of examining responses across multiple domains, professional and personal, public and private, home and host country. This holistic analytical approach reveals how responses to workplace oppression extend far beyond organizational boundaries, informing aspects of women's lives from family relationships to child-rearing practices. This methodological contribution suggests the need for more comprehensive research approaches that can capture the full complexity of how marginalized professionals navigate and resist workplace oppression.

Overall, this study has revealed that the responses of Iranian women to workplace oppression in the U.S. are complex and multifaceted, often blending elements of both coping and resistance into what can be described as hybrid strategies. These responses are deeply influenced by their intersecting identities, including gender, immigration status, minoritized racial/ethnic position, socioeconomic status, religious background, and length of residence in the U.S. This research emphasizes that while Iranian women may face significant challenges, they also display remarkable resilience and adaptability. Moreover, the study highlights that how women navigate and respond to oppression is not solely dependent on individual characteristics but is also influenced by the social context and availability of broader support systems or solidarity networks. Additionally, the findings underscore the importance of considering oppression's

temporal and spatial dimensions. Responses to oppression are not static or isolated events but are part of an ongoing process that evolves over time and can vary significantly depending on the individual's environment and stage of life. By integrating insights on coping and resistance, this study offers a more comprehensive framework for understanding responses to workplace oppression. It encourages a reevaluation of how oppression, resistance, and coping are understood and studied, thereby contributing to ongoing work on immigrant women's experiences of workplace oppression.

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PAPER 3

Between two homes: Home-making practices of Iranian women in the U.S. workplace

I am co-authoring this paper with Dr. Estela María Díaz Carmona.

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Abstract

This study examines how Iranian immigrant women navigate workplace power dynamics through home-making practices that operate both within and across organizational boundaries. Based on interviews with 45 highly educated immigrant first-generation Iranian working in professional occupations, we identified three strategic orientations: (1) *Affective Anchoring* involves creating emotional refuges through culturally grounded practices that preserve identity and provide comfort; (2) *Situated Offering* refers to cultural negotiation through strategic sharing and adaptation, facilitating belonging without full conformity; and (3), *Transformative Horizon* captures the pursuit of previously inaccessible or forbidden possibilities and the development of new forms of agency. These practices illustrate a form of "dual-directional adaptation", simultaneously challenging oppression while opening up new opportunities. Our findings reveal how highly educated professional migrant women (HEPMW) experience power dynamics and transform hostile environments into spaces of agency through everyday practices spanning workplace, community, and personal spheres. The research advances organizational scholarship on cultural identity and workplace resistance strategies, showing how immigrant women strategically mobilize cultural resources for identity preservation and professional adaptation within organizational contexts**,** contributing new frameworks for understanding workplace belonging and resistance.

Keywords: immigrant women, home-making practices, workplace power dynamics, Iranian diaspora, cultural identity

Introduction

Research on immigrant women's workplace experiences has provided important insights into the systemic challenges they encounter (Syed and Murray, 2009; Raghuram, 2008; Al Ariss et al., 2012; Essers and Benschop, 2009). These include racialized and gendered stereotyping, exclusion from informal networks critical to career advancement, devaluation of credentials, and language-related barriers that constrain participation and voice within organizational settings. Immigrant women often engage in complex negotiations to balance cultural authenticity with professional expectations, while navigating intersecting power dynamics across both professional and personal domains (Essers and Benschop, 2009; Pio and Essers, 2014; Carrim and Nkomo, 2016).

Building on this body of work, it is important to consider how these challenges are embedded within broader power dynamics. Power dynamics refer to the ways in which power is distributed, exercised, and contested within social relationships and institutional structures, shaping who has access to resources, decision-making authority, and voice (Foucault, 1982; Weber, 1978). Such dynamics and distribution can systematically disadvantage immigrant women through processes of exclusion and marginalization, sustaining inequitable relations that undermine their professional experiences and sense of belonging (Acker, 2006; Essers and Benschop, 2009; Pio and Essers, 2014).

Against this backdrop, the concept of belonging becomes central to understanding how power operates in everyday organizational life. Belonging refers to the fundamental human need to feel accepted, valued, and connected within social spaces (Yuval-Davis, 2011). It is intrinsically linked to power, as those who hold institutional authority often control access to spaces of acceptance and recognition (Anthias, 2006; Yuval-Davis, 2011). This creates conditions where immigrant women must actively contest exclusionary practices to establish meaningful connections and recognition in professional settings (Pio and Essers, 2014). Indeed, workplace

power structures that deny immigrant women full inclusion generate a displacement that extends beyond the physical act of migration to encompass social and professional displacement within their new contexts (Ahmed, 2000; Brah, 1996).

In response to this power-induced displacement, immigrant women engage in *home-making practices*, deliberate efforts to create spaces of authenticity and connection when institutional structures fail to provide them (hooks, 1990; Yuval-Davis, 2011). The notion of *home* has shifted in migration studies from a fixed geographical location to a dynamic process of meaning-making (Ahmed, 1999; Brah, 1996; Ahmed et al., 2003). Building on this evolving understanding, recent scholarship has introduced concepts like "homing" (Boccagni, 2022; Märtsin, 2023) and "spatial belongings" (Probyn, 2003) to capture how immigrants actively construct supportive environments through everyday practices that resist and reconfigure existing power structures.

However, while existing scholarship has extensively examined home-making practices within domestic and community spheres (Walsh, 2006; Burrell, 2008a; Nowicka, 2007; Boccagni, 2017; Lauster & Zhao, 2017), less attention has been paid to how highly educated women draw on understandings of home and home-making as strategic resources within professional environments. This gap is particularly relevant in migration contexts, where women often craft practices of belonging that blur and transcend conventional boundaries between personal and organizational life in response to complex power relations.

Building on this gap, this study explores the following research question: *How do immigrant women navigate workplace power dynamics through cultural practices?* To address this question, we conducted in-depth interviews with 45 first-generation Iranian women living and working in the United States, focusing on their experiences across professional and personal spheres.

Our findings suggest that Iranian women's responses to workplace power dynamics often extend beyond formal organizational boundaries. We identify three home-making orientations through which these women negotiate identity and cultivate belonging: (1) *Affective Anchoring* involves creating emotional refuges through culturally grounded practices that preserve identity and provide comfort; (2) *Situated Offering* refers to cultural negotiation through strategic sharing and adaptation, facilitating belonging without full conformity; and
(3) *Transformative Horizon* captures the pursuit of previously inaccessible or forbidden possibilities and the development of new forms of agency.

Further, our analysis points to the presence of what we term *home-making logics*—processes that, while not always aligning with Ahmed's strict definition of home-making, nonetheless evoke similar practices of meaning-making, rootedness, and authenticity. These logics appear to operate in a dual direction: while experiences within professional settings inform how women engage in home-making, these practices simultaneously shape how they navigate and contest workplace power relations.

Drawing on Ahmed's conceptualization of home as a dynamic and affective process, this study contributes to organizational scholarship on cultural identity and workplace resistance (Essers & Benschop, 2009; Pio & Essers, 2014), illustrating how immigrant women mobilize cultural resources to resist exclusion and cultivate spaces of situated belonging across both personal and professional terrains.

Literature

Immigrant Women's Experiences of Workplace Power Dynamics

Immigrant women navigate persistent power dynamics across multiple workplace domains, experiencing various forms of disadvantage (Berry and Bell, 2012; Essers and Benschop, 2009). Whether manifesting as marginalization, discrimination, exclusion from decision-making, or

subtle daily interaction challenges, these experiences share a common thread: they reflect systemic inequalities embedded in organizational life. These power dynamics are not random nor incidental but targeted and structured, disproportionately affecting individuals with intersecting marginalized identities. They are reproduced through institutional norms and practices that normalize differential treatment and obscure their political and historical roots (hooks, 1984; Acker, 2006). An intersectional lens reveals how various social categories, such as gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality, converge to create complex systems of disadvantage, particularly for those who deviate from white, masculine, heteronormative, and able-bodied norms and standards (Collins and Bilge, 2020).

To navigate these layered exclusions, immigrant women engage in multifaceted strategies that reflect both resistance to dominant norms and adaptation to organizational expectations. Research suggests that women from non-Western countries face distinct forms of cultural scrutiny and racialization not typically experienced by Western immigrants (Berry and Bell, 2012; Ghumman and Ryan, 2013). In response, they mobilize cultural resources as tools for constructing agency within often constraining structures, weaving everyday acts of negotiation into their professional lives (Christou and Michail, 2015; Fozdar and Hartley, 2014; Madziva, 2018).

Rather than relying on overt resistance, many of these women enact more subtle and situated forms of agency. For instance, Zanoni and Janssens's (2007) analysis of "micro-emancipation" describes how immigrant employees tactically use organizational routines and relationships to resist complete cultural assimilation without jeopardizing their position. Those everyday workplace practices allow marginalized workers to challenge organizational control while maintaining professional viability. Similarly, Tastsoglou and Dobrowolsky (2006) show resistance extends beyond the workplace, as immigrant women actively build solidarities and enact cultural agency across multiple life domains. These strategies illustrate how resistance

and adaptation are not mutually exclusive but intertwined, unfolding through complex negotiations across institutional and personal spheres.

While these studies illuminate important resistance strategies, there remains untapped potential to explore how cultural negotiations might involve the active construction of spaces of belonging, practices that provide emotional grounding and identity preservation within professional environments (Essers and Benschop, 2007; Khoshnevis, 2020). While existing studies shed light on immigrant women's resistance strategies, less attention has been paid to how such strategies intersect with emotional grounding and identity work in professional contexts (Essers & Benschop, 2007; Khoshnevis, 2020). Recent scholarship has begun to explore how cultural practices contribute to these processes, offering concepts such as *home-making* to capture how displaced individuals navigate and reshape their environments (Ahmed, 1999; Brah, 1996; Boccagni, 2022). Building on this evolving perspective, the following section turns to the literature on home and belonging in migration studies to develop the theoretical framework for our analysis.

The Concepts of Home and Belonging in Immigration Studies

Among the various cultural resources available to immigrants, the concept of home represents a particularly salient theoretical notion for navigating workplace challenges. While once understood as a fixed geographical site, *home* is now widely understood as a dynamic, affective process through which migrants negotiate identity, meaning, and belonging in unfamiliar contexts (Ahmed et al., 2003; Brah, 1996). Recent scholarship conceptualized home-making as both a response to rupture and a site of reconstruction,where cultural continuity and adaptation converge to foster agency in new environments (Boccagni, 2022). This evolving understanding highlights how immigrants actively engage in practices that preserve connections to cultural heritage while reconfiguring their sense of self and community.

Under this perspective, *home* emerges through complex webs of memories, practices, and relationships that shape how immigrants navigate unfamiliar spaces (Ahmed, 1999). Following Ahmed's (1999, 2004) conceptualization, home is not a fixed physical place but a dynamic process of creating spaces, where one can exist authentically without external judgment, control, or power dynamics. Ahmed emphasizes that home is fundamentally "implicated in" identity (1999, p. 330) and operates through embodied "sensory homes" (2004, p. 89) that allow immigrants to maintain cultural connections and familiarity through their everyday experience.

Building on this, the notion of home becomes inseparable from belonging a condition that immigrant women must actively construct rather than passively receive or access. Research on immigrant women's belonging highlights that it is produced through ongoing practices, cultural rituals, and strategic negotiations with dominant norms and structures (May, 2013; Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004). Rather than being granted belonging, immigrant women forge it through situated actions that reflect both attachment and autonomy. As they navigate transnational lives, they cultivate multiple belongings, creating complex affiliations that resist simple integration narratives (Anthias, 2002). These multiple belongings may include maintaining emotional and cultural ties to homeland communities while simultaneously developing professional identities and social connections in host countries. Rather than choosing between competing loyalties, immigrant women often create hybrid forms of belonging that allow them to move between cultural worlds, weaving together diverse commitments and expectations without collapsing them into a singular national or cultural identity (Fortier, 2000).

This theoretical lens of home, as a dynamic process of constructing belonging through everyday practices, invites us to consider the workplace as a key site where such processes unfold. These theoretical insights materialize through the concrete ways immigrants actively remake "home" through daily practices and rituals that bridge cultural contexts or worlds (Blunt and Dowling,

2006), creating continuity between past and present experiences (Hoffman, 1999). As immigrant women navigate these professional landscapes, it is plausible that they would develop specific strategies for mobilizing home as a resource that both maintains and nurture cultural continuity and enables career advancement; yet, these strategies remain undertheorized in existing literature (Tran and Ghorashi, 2023; Raithelhuber and Sharma, 2023). Without this understanding, organizations may overlook valuable cultural resources that immigrant professionals bring, while potentially missing opportunities to foster more inclusive spaces that support diverse ways of engaging in professional life.

Home-Making in Professional Contexts: An Underexplored Intersection

As noted earlier, while existing research has explored home-making in domestic and community settings, its role within professional environments remains less developed. A notable exception is Essers and Benschop's (2007) pioneering study of Muslim businesswomen, which revealed how cultural and religious practices from the private sphere can be strategic mobilized in professional settings. Their findings illustrate that Islamic values, rather than hindering participation, were creatively employed as sources of entrepreneurial agency—reframing home-based cultural knowledge as an asset (instead of a barrier) in navigating and reshaping workplace expectations.

Furthermore, those home-making practices can also function as subtle forms of resistance. Khoshnevis (2020), for instance, makes a significant contribution to this discourse through his examination of how diasporic communities turn domestic spaces into sites of cultural preservation and defiance. His ethnographic study of Iranian immigrants reveals how "seemingly mundane domestic decisions constitute deliberate acts of cultural resistance" (p. 195) enacted through material culture, spatial arrangements, and ritualized practices. While Khoshnevis's work offers valuable insights into how home becomes a site of resistance in

domestic contexts, there remains limited understanding of how similar processes might operate in professional landscapes, where immigrants must navigate distinct power dynamics and institutional constraints. Examining home-making in workplace settings shows how professional environments function as contradictory spaces where immigrants face power dynamics while needing to secure economic survival and career progression. Drawing on these theoretical foundations, workplace power dynamics, Ahmed's conceptualization of home as a site resist, this study conceptualizes home-making as a resource for navigating and contesting power dynamics in professional settings.

The following methodology section explores how these ideas take shape in practice, examining participants' lived experiences of home-making across both professional and personal domains.

Methodology

Sample

The study draws on interviews with 45 first-generation Iranian women who immigrated to the U.S. All participants were highly educated women employed in skilled positions across a range of sectors, including academia, healthcare, technology, and entrepreneurship. Length of residence in the U.S. ranged from 2 to 25 years, with an average of 13 years for 25 women, offering varied perspectives on how home-making practices evolve over time. Participants' narratives revealed varied migration pathways, including graduate studies, professional opportunities, and family connections. Regardless of initial motivations, political circumstances have made a return increasingly difficult or impossible.

Educational profile reflects highly educated Iranian immigration, with all participants holding at least a bachelor's degree and 31 having advanced degrees (master's or doctorate degrees). This educational attainment shaped their professional opportunities and cultural navigation strategies. Participants were engaged through professional networks and social media. All

interviews were conducted by the first author in Persian, the participants' and the first author's mother tongue, allowing for nuanced discussions about cultural identity, belonging, and professional experiences. This choice of language proved particularly important for grasping subtle cultural meanings and emotions around home-making practices.

Context: Iranian Women in the U.S.

Iran-US relations have undergone dramatic transformations that directly shape Iranian immigrants' experiences. During the Pahlavi era (1925-1979), Iran maintained close diplomatic ties with the US, with Iranian passport ranking among privileged travel documents globally. Iranian nationals enjoyed easy visa access, and students and professionals were actively recruited by American universities and corporations (Hakimzadeh, 2006; Mobasher, 2012).

The 1979 Islamic Revolution altered this relationship, severing diplomatic ties and creating ongoing geopolitical tensions (Kinzer, 2003). Since 1979, the U.S. maintains no embassy in Iran, forcing Iranian nationals to travel to third countries (Turkey, Armenia, UAE) for U.S. consular services, adding significant logistical and financial barriers (Batalova and Lai, 2023). This creates ongoing separation from Iran that is involuntary due to political circumstances, regardless of participants' original migration, making return practically impossible under current diplomatic conditions. Despite, the U.S. remains the primary destination for Iranian immigrants due to historical educational ties and perceptions of greater professional freedoms (World Bank, 2023).

Iranian women face state-imposed gender apartheid under the Islamic Republic, experiencing systematic oppression through violent mechanisms and discriminatory legal frameworks that require male guardian permission for occupations, restrict participation in numerous fields, and create workplace harassment with limited legal recourse - resulting in women occupying less than 6% of managerial positions despite comprising over 60% of university graduates

(Moghadam, 2020; Statistical Center of Iran, 2022; Rezaei-Tajabadi, 2021). This systematic deprivation of basic rights, including educational opportunities, healthcare access, and employment rights, creates barriers to professional development explaining why Iranian women continue to migrate to the U.S. following 1979, despite facing racism in the host country (Hakimzadeh, 2017; Batalova and Lai, 2023). For these highly educated professional women, the U.S. represents an environment where professional advancement, while challenging, remains achievable in ways that were, while challenging, systematically foreclosed in Iran, which explains why making their home-making practices function as sophisticated strategies for creating professional possibilities rather than mere coping mechanisms (Bayor, 2011; Mostofi, 2003). Organizational contexts ranged from multinational corporations to businesses, universities, and healthcare institutions, providing insight into how different professional environments shape home-making practices.

Professional Iranian women often occupy unique positions as highly-qualified knowledge workers minoritized. This positioning creates distinctive dynamics in how they construct cultural identity while pursuing career advancement. Their experiences illuminate how professional spaces become sites for negotiating notions of home in the diaspora.

Researcher Positionality

While the theoretical framework of home-making practices emerged from academic collaboration, our experiences of cultural navigation and displacement provided interpretive resources for understanding participants' narratives.

The first author, an Iranian doctoral candidate in France, experiences precarity of annual visa renewals and impossibility of return to Iran due to political circumstances. This "non-return" shapes home-making practices, decorating office spaces with selective cultural elements while rejecting nationalist attachments, creating belonging through deliberate curation. Living under

immigration uncertainty while building an academic life in France provides an intimate understanding of how home-making operates as survival strategy and identity work.

The second author, a Spanish professor who has lived extensively in the U.S., navigates cultural in-betweenness, feeling ‘more Spanish’ in America but ‘not fully Spanish’ in Spain. Her office, decorated with cat statues, family memories, and plants, reflects home-making as a form of intentional self-presentation. She has returned to Spain, yet the possibility of return was always present, shaping her home-making abroad in ways that differ from the first author’s more constrained mobility. Moreover, her personal experience is intertwined with that of her Korean-American partner, a first-generation immigrant who has lived the tensions of migration both in the U.S. and, more recently, in Spain, offering her an embodied, relational awareness of immigrant complexities beyond her own.

Our different positionalities influenced aspects of research. The first author's shared Iranian background facilitated resonance with participants' narratives, while the theoretical framing as "home-making practices" emerged through academic collaboration. The second author's cultural in-betweenness proved influential during analysis, as her recognition of similar patterns prompted deeper examination of the strategic and temporal dimensions.

Our different relationships to homeland return, constrained versus voluntary, sensitized us to how migration circumstances influence the temporal orientations of home-making practices. This reflexive examination acknowledges how researchers' social locations shape knowledge production (Jamjoom and Mills, 2023), recognizing that our insider-outsider positions and personal migration experiences inform our interpretive frameworks.

Analysis

The analysis process emerged organically. While initially examining responses to workplace power dynamics, the first researcher noticed recurring patterns in how participants referenced concepts of *"home"* to navigate professional challenges. This led to a re-analysis of home-making practices. We approached participants' accounts as valid lived experiences, acknowledging that while subjective, they constitute the reality through which women navigate their professional lives. We honour these self-reported experiences as authentic situated representations, not to generalize them as absolute knowledge.

Analysis proceeded through three coding phases. First, we conducted open coding, identifying references to home, cultural practices, identity negotiations, and spatial/temporal dimensions of belonging. This yielded approximately 50 preliminary codes, including "recreating cultural spaces," "maintaining traditions," "building new communities," and "transforming professional environments."

Second, we engaged in theoretical coding, comparing initial codes with existing frameworks from migration studies, particularly Ahmed's (1999) home and Boccagni's (2022) homing. This consolidate the preliminary codes into broader theoretical categories. We created analytical memos to track emerging patterns.

To refine our theoretical insights, we conducted a final phase of selective coding, focusing on recurring patterns in how participants mobilized home-making practices to navigate workplace power dynamics. This process led to the identification of three core analytic categories, *Affective Anchoring*, *Situated Offering,* and *Transformative Horizon*, which guided the final round of coding and framed the findings presented in the next section. We reanalysed all interviews through this lens to examine how participants' home-making practices operated across spatial and temporal dimensions, from daily workplace interactions to cultural

celebrations. We also examined how these practices served both protective and transformative functions, helping participants navigate professional challenges while creating new forms of belonging.

Analytical framework for development

Building on Ahmed's framework, we develop the concept of *home-making logics* to describe how cultural resources are mobilized to create spaces of belonging, authenticity, and agency. While inspired by home-making in contexts of displacement, these logics extend beyond spatial relocation to encompass the transformation of everyday environments, particularly professional ones, into domains where sovereignty and selfhood can be reasserted. They allow individuals to resist organizational dynamics that might diminish their identity, reconfiguring spaces where competence is affirmed, cultural memory preserved, and new forms of self can emerge.

Our iterative analysis revealed four interrelated dimensions through which these logics operate. First, *spatial home* refers to the configuration of physical environments, such as workspaces or domestic settings, that allow for the expression of identity and comfort. Second, *sensory home* captures the embodied experiences through which cultural memory is activated, including smells, sounds, textures, and visual elements that evoke continuity and affective rootedness. Third, *relational home* involves the cultivation of emotional and cultural bonds, both local and transnational, that provide a sense of kinship, solidarity, and recognition. Finally, *temporal home* points to the ways in which individuals draw on memory and heritage to create a sense of continuity between past and present, enabling the integration of cultural histories into professional and personal trajectories.

This four-dimensional framework serves as the organizing structure for understanding how workplace power dynamics trigger diverse home-making responses across multiple life

domains, allowing for a systematic examination of how participants create spaces of authentic belonging while navigating professional challenges.

Findings

The analysis of participants' narratives reveals three recurring strategic orientations through the use of what we term *home-making logics*. These logics operate through processes like Ahmed's home-making, creating spaces of authentic being, belonging, and agency, while extending across broader domains of workplace navigation and cultural adaptation. We refer to these as *Affective Anchoring, Situated Offering, and Transformative Horizon*, each representing situated functions of home-making**:** ways of preserving, negotiating, or reimagining home, understood not only as physical space, but as emotional grounding, cultural continuity, and existential belonging. See Table *Three-Dimensional Integration Strategies* for a comprehensive overview of these strategies and their key characteristics across temporal, agential, and cultural dimensions.

Affective Anchoring involves creating emotional refuges through culturally grounded routines and meaningful objects that offer comfort and preserve identity. These strategies seek continuity with inherited identities and attachments, often providing safety in environments marked by marginalization.

Situated Offering reflects a strategic mode of positioning, in which women selectively share cultural elements and adapt expressions of identity to negotiate recognition without full assimilation. These acts of translation and relational attunement aim to establish legitimacy while navigating dominant norms.

Lastly, *Transformative Horizon* signals a forward-looking stance through which participants articulated new aspirations and reconfigured self-understandings and personal growth, pursuing possibilities previously foreclosed due to gendered, racialized, or national constraints

Each orientation is shaped by a specific temporal focus (past, present, or future), core existential need (safety, recognition, or freedom), and a characteristic mode of agency (emotional, strategic, or transformative). These represent cognitive, emotional, and conative strategies to sustain selfhood and belonging across fragmented life spaces. Importantly, all three orientations, *Affective Anchoring, Situated Offering, and Transformative Horizon*, manifest across both professional and personal domains. In what follows, we explore each orientation through two interconnected settings: inside the workplace (professional setting) and outside the workplace (personal and community life). This structure allows us to illustrate how immigrant women mobilize home-making logics across multiple dimensions of their lived experience.

1) Affective Anchoring

Affective anchoring emerges as the first function through which home-making, wherein Iranian immigrant women use home-making logics to create spaces of emotional shelter and care. This protective function employs processes similar to Ahmed's home-making, restoring emotional integrity, soothing pain, and preserving connections to Iranian heritage in the face of workplace power dynamics. These practices are often quiet, intimate, and located in familiar sensory or relational experiences that provide comfort, a sense of safety, and cultural continuity. They sustain emotional well-being and provide stability in environments where participants may otherwise feel dislocated or unseen.

For immigrant women, especially in challenging professional environments, these practices draw on home-making logics, strategic modes of creating safety, continuity, and self-affirmation. They draw on the symbolic and affective dimensions of home as a site of recovery, a place to feel safe, reconnect with oneself, and process pain (Viruell-Fuentes and Schulz, 2009). Such refuge-creating practices involve intimate gestures that reaffirm one's humanity in private

spaces, using similar processes to spatial home-making but operating across professional and personal domains, allowing women to maintain emotional resilience despite professional challenges.

Inside the Workplace Setting

Within workplace environments, participants created subtle forms of emotional refuge, a temporary state of reduced emotional labor, through private, culturally significant practices that remained largely invisible to colleagues yet offered crucial moments of comfort amid professional challenges. These personal practices, while seemingly mundane, served as affective anchors that helped maintain integrity during experiences of workplace power dynamics.

One participant responded to colleagues pretending not to understand her accent by turning to a familiar cultural practice:

> *It was sometimes challenging when they tried to pretend they didn't understand my accent. Although winter was so harsh in that state, I made lemon juice for myself with much ice when I was harassed by them being pretentious. [43]*

This traditional Iranian refreshment, usually made with rose water and served in summer, represents both as an emotional refuge, and a form of cultural affirmation during moments of workplace challenge. The sensory experience of drinking lemon with ice provides a familiar embodied practice that likely requires no translation or justification to others, and simultaneously marks her resistance to conformity pressures. This practice may create what Sara Ahmed (2004) calls "sticky affect", a possible momentary suspension of work, making her culturally intelligible to hostile colleagues, potentially allowing her to exist without explanation or defense.

Subtle spatial cues in the workplace can also silently reaffirm dynamics of marginalization, prompting emotional strategies to cope with everyday exclusion. One participant recounts an

experience that reveals how belonging can be spatially mediated:

> *Half of our office rooms have sea views, while the other half face an industrial area that's dark and shadowy. Despite holding a senior position for many years, my office was never one of the rooms with sea views. I've never seen a non-American employee assigned to those seafront offices. There's even a noticeable difference in how thoroughly the janitors clean the sea-facing rooms compared to the others. I'm not the only one who has observed this pattern. [24]*

In response to this racialized discrimination, she transformed her assigned office into a personal refuge:

> *I decorated my office by myself. I bought the Iranian pattern [Termeh] wallpaper and renewed the whole office. [24]*

Her choice of Iranian-patterned Termeh, a traditional Persian pattern characterized by ornate paisley and floral motifs, wallpaper may demonstrate affective anchoring, attempting to create a space that might preserve cultural identity while providing emotional shelter from workplace exclusion. This illustrates Ahmed's (2004) "spaces of inhabitance" for authentic identity expression. The Iranian patterns on her walls serve as an attempt to create daily visual that may be intended to counter the daily experience of proving her legitimacy in a space marked by racial discrimination.

These workplace anchoring practices may reveal an important dimension of home-making: the potential ability to create micro-sovereignty (Puwar, 2004) of care within hostile institutional spaces. Unlike the transformative practices that push boundaries or the situated offerings that negotiate belonging, these anchoring acts prioritize emotional survival and cultural

preservation. They suggest how marginalized professionals use material culture and sensory experiences to attempt to maintain psychological integrity when direct confrontation or visibility would be too costly.

Outside the Workplace Setting

Beyond workplace environments, participants created more explicit spaces of emotional refuge through practices that provided comfort and connection to their cultural identity. These "affective anchoring" practices offered crucial emotional shelter and cultural protection against the effects of workplace power dynamics, allowing women to restore their sense of self.

For some participants, physical withdrawal into a private space seemed to serve as a critical home-making practice. One woman recounted how her manager exploited her visa-dependent immigration status, treating her with deliberate harshness while showing leniency toward other employees. Her vulnerable and unequal position was not abstract but deeply embodied in her everyday professional life. She described her experience in the following terms:

> *I have an Iranian passport, and she's well aware of this. She knows how difficult it is to find employment in the U.S. with an Iranian passport and no green card. Because of this vulnerability, she treats me significantly more harshly than my colleagues. She doesn't pressure the others nearly as much because she knows they have the freedom to leave for other jobs, while I'm essentially trapped in this position. [11]*

Faced with this acute sense of precarity, her bedroom functioned as an emotional refuge, a space where she could momentarily reclaim a sense of safety and sovereignty, even if only symbolically: "I just sleep. I like to go to my room, close the door, and sleep; even if I do not fall asleep, I prefer to be in my bed. It's like a comfort where I can stay safe". *[11]*

By physically withdrawing behind a closed door, she attempted to create a bounded space where

exploitative power dynamics cannot penetrate, exemplifying Ahmed's (1999) conception of home as a space. The bed becomes what Ahmed calls a "space of inhabitance" where she can reconnect with her sense of agency and control. For someone whose immigration status limits workplace mobility, this physical retreat could function as home-making by creating alternative spaces of refuge when formal protections remain inaccessible. This withdrawal represents a form of embodied resistance that requires no linguistic competence or cultural translation, simply the fundamental human act of claiming physical boundaries when psychological ones have been violated. The symbolic weight of the closed door creates what might be understood as temporary sovereignty over her immediate environment, allowing her to suspend the precarity and hypervigilance required in her workplace interactions. Through this practice, she transforms the most private domestic space into a site of recuperation from the specific vulnerabilities that her Iranian passport creates in U.S. professional contexts.

This practice may illustrate how embodied home-making might operate through claiming personal territories when professional spaces become hostile. Her retreat appears to represent an active reclamation of control over her immediate environment, suggesting how immigrant women might construct protective spaces when workplace power dynamics leverage their immigration status against them. The bed becomes not just a place of rest or escape, but a spacembolic repair and self-reconstitution, allowing her to temporarily suspend the external demands she experiences professionally.

Another interviewee shared how she coped with subtle yet persistent forms of workplace marginalization, particularly linguistic shaming related to her accent and perceived fluency. She described moments when her colleagues mocked her pronunciation or corrected her dismissively, turning her daily use of English into a source of exhaustion and vulnerability: " During the day, I reached my maximum for English, specifically when they bullied me because of my English, and watching Iranian movies made me less distressed." [27]

This reflects how cultural practices tied to the home country, such as watching Iranian movies,

become deliberate acts of personal restoration. By immersing herself within familiar language, narratives, and aesthetics, she reconnects with a space where her fluency and competence are unquestioned, momentarily suspending the pressure to perform linguistic assimilation. These acts serve as affective anchors that offer emotional relief and reaffirm cultural identity in the face of daily (symbolic) violence.

The search for community connection also serves as affective anchoring when workplace marginalization creates isolation. One participant, a graphic designer, described how structural barriers related to her Iranian nationality restricted her access to international career development. Despite working in a globally connected field, she found herself excluded from the opportunities available to her peers:

> *A common issue here is that the UK is a major hub in my field, with many renowned graphic design companies and institutes. However, my company won't support opportunities for me to go there because, as an Iranian passport holder, I would needto apply for a visa and face lengthy waiting periods. This creates another barrier to my professional development that my colleagues don't experience. [45]*

Cut off from routes of upward mobility and feeling increasingly sidelined, she redirected her efforts toward building emotional support in her local environment. She explains:

> *I first tried to find some Iranians here. I found some of them in the Telegram group. But it was not as effective as I expected. Then I found an Iranian lady who is in a confectionery here. She was like a patient stone for me. Each time I face those types of challenges, I would go there, talk, and cry. [45]*

This creation of emotional support networks with cultural insiders provides a safe space for processing workplace frustrations. The specific choice of another Iranian woman as confidante reflects the importance of shared cultural understanding in creating effective emotional refuge.

These affective anchoring practices suggest how immigrant women might create spaces of emotional shelter outside the work setting to maintain identity integrity when confronting marginalization. Unlike the other two strategies explored in the following sections, which involve more outward-facing forms of negotiation or transformation, Affective Anchoring primarily serves a protective function, potentially helping women preserve their emotional well-being and cultural connections in the face of professional challenges. By creating these affective sanctuaries, participants may establish what Ahmed (1999) describes as spaces of "inhabitance" where they can temporarily suspend the demands of cultural navigation and experience moments of authentic self-connection, enabling them to return to challenging professional environments with renewed resilience.

1) Situated Offering

This second strategy reflects how Iranian women employ home-making logics for cultural negotiation, relational adaptation, and the search for belonging without relinquishing their identities. These practices use processes similar to Ahmed's cultural translation to maintain cultural roots while simultaneously adapting to new elements of their new American lives. Through this mode of engagement, women create meaningful spaces for themselves within the host-country context, reshaping social interactions through selective cultural sharing.

Rather than confronting or assimilating, participants created subtle bridges between cultures by offering fragments of their background, language, rituals, or narratives, as a way to foster relational recognition. These gestures enabled them co-create “third spaces” of belonging, both inside and outside the workplace.

Inside the Workplace Setting

Workplace relationships often present some challenges for immigrant women navigating cultural differences, and many participants developed creative strategies to bridge these divides.

The strategic use of culturally significant food emerges as a home-making practice that facilitates belonging in workplace settings. One participant described a particularly difficult dynamic of subtle power inversion within her team, where hierarchical roles did not translate into professional respect. Despite being in a managerial position, she found herself consistently questioned and dismissed by a subordinate:

> *One of my colleagues, who reported to me and worked under my supervision, consistently treated me poorly and constantly undermined my work. My supervisor finally asked me why I hadn't addressed this subordinate's disruptive behavior and its impact on my work. [9]*

Rather than escalating the situation through formal complaints or other types of harsh confrontation, she deliberately used food sharing, a significant cultural practice in the Iranian heritage, as a means to dissolve tension and create meaningful communication. As she explained: " I usually take my meal at work. Several times, I invited her to an Iranian dish that I myself prepared." [9]

By personally preparing and sharing traditional Iranian food, she seeks to transform the workplace interaction from one of hierarchy and tension to one of cultural exchange and potential understanding. This gesture could also be interpreted as what Ahmed calls a 'space of inhabitance' where her Iranian hospitality traditions reshape professional relationships.

Similarly, another participant described feeling that the burden of cultural integration fell entirely on her shoulders. Despite having seemingly friendly colleagues, she noted that she always had to initiate conversations, raising concerns that her naturally extroverted personality might be masking forms of exclusion that more introverted immigrants would experience more acutely. She describes her experience:

> *My colleagues and classmates are warm and friendly, but I've noticed that I'm always the one who initiates conversations. I'm naturally energetic and extroverted, which*

> *helps me connect with others. But sometimes I wonder what my experience would be like if I weren't so outgoing, I think I would face much more discrimination and isolation. [38]*

In response to these dynamics, she developed a deliberate strategy to adapt her personal interests and conversation topics to align with local cultural preferences. Rather than abandoning her own identity, she selectively engaged with aspects of local culture as a way to facilitate everyday belonging. This form of situated offering illustrates how cultural learning becomes a relational tool, enabling her to manage visibility and navigate informal social work in the workplace. By adopting shared interests, such as soccer, despite not enjoying it, she opened a communicative bridge that reduced her sense of estrangement and allowed her to form interpersonal bonds:

> *I have learned that one way to feel less strange here is to find common points with them and talk about their culture and hobbies. They love soccer. I am not a fan of it. But I have to say it's one of the most effective ways to have a community around. [38]*

This account reveals the emotional labor involved in cultural negotiation, as she strategically engages with cultural practices that do not personally interest her in order to establish social connections. Rather than simple conformity, this practice creates what Ahmed calls 'spaces of inhabitance', using soccer knowledge to construct relational bridges that transform her from a cultural outsider to a community member. What makes this practice significant is her clear-eyed assessment of its instrumental value, recognizing soccer discussions as an effective way to build community despite her personal disinterest. This represents a form of "situated offering" where she offers engagement with host country practices as a way to facilitate belonging.

Outside the Workplace Setting

The strategic engagement with American cultural practices extends beyond workplace

boundaries into participants' personal spaces, where Iranian women actively cultivate cultural knowledge as a form of belonging and negotiation. These practices represent deliberate efforts to create connections with the host culture as part of their identity expansion process.

One example involves deliberately engaging with American music genres despite personal disinterest. A participant explained how she intentionally expanded her musical preferences to build stronger workplace relationships and reduce her sense of cultural isolation:

> *It was just yesterday that I installed Spotify on my cellphone to listen to country music, to have something to discuss with my colleagues. [29]*

This deliberate cultural exploration creates conversational entry points that bridge professional divides while maintaining personal autonomy. By engaging with country music in her private time, she develops cultural knowledge that serves as social currency in professional settings.

Food exploration similarly functions as a form of situated offering that extends beyond mere consumption preferences, operating instead as a culturally embedded and emotionally charged strategy for navigating professional exclusion. For some participants, food was not simply a matter of nutrition or taste, but a site where cultural unfamiliarity became a source of marginalization and subtle ridicule. One participant, a food scientist working in a research and development team, described how her unfamiliarity with certain Western ingredients and flavours exposed her to workplace microaggressions. Despite holding a higher academic qualification than her peers, she experienced exclusion rooted in everyday professional interactions:

> *Part of my job requires familiarity with different food flavors and tastes. In Iran, we only had halal products, even the gelatin in jellies and candies was halal[5], certified. Now, I can see that my junior colleagues can easily identify and describe flavor notes (the scientific term for taste characteristics), but I struggle with this. During our*

> *professional discussions about food science, they mock me for my lack of familiarity with these flavors. I don't take offense because I know that, scientifically, I'm far more qualified than any of them. I have the expert power here; I'm the only one with a PhD, but their behavior still makes me feel excluded from the group. [29]*

Rather than retreat, she responded by engaging in cultural learning as a form of strategic adaptation. Willing to invest her own resources, she described how she began experimenting with unfamiliar products to reduce this experiential gap: "I spent money on buying candies and chocolates, and also some fruit juice which was not common in my country [to become] familiar with [flavor] tastes." [29]

This culinary exploration addresses both professional development needs and cultural integration goals. Religious restrictions in Iran prohibited certain ingredients common in American candies (such as pork-derived gelatin), while economic sanctions prevented access to American food products regardless of financial means. By familiarizing herself with these previously inaccessible flavors in her personal time, she simultaneously builds professional expertise and cultural competence.

These are practices that allow immigrant women to move between cultures without dissolving into either. In other words, they represent meaningful ways of inhabiting the in-between, maintaining personal integrity while adapting to new contexts. Rather than erasing their Iranian identity, women strategically incorporate American cultural elements to expand it. They engage in a more nuanced "cultural bridging work" that establishes third spaces of negotiation.

[5] halal products are foods prepared according to Islamic dietary laws that restrict certain ingredients

Inside workplaces, these offerings transform potentially contentious relationships through cultural exchange; outside of work, they develop competencies and capacities that strengthen long-term professional integration. These practices might create the relational/emotional connection that defines home, transforming workplace spaces from sites of cultural distance into spaces of mutual understanding, recognition, and care. Through familiar acts of hospitality and cultural exploration, these practices might create belonging that Ahmed describes as essential to home- making.

What emerges from this process is not assimilation, but a dynamic and resilient identity, one that stretches or expands to accommodate new possibilities while remaining anchored in cultural roots. These acts are profoundly home-making: they forge authentic sites of belonging where Iranian women can exist meaningfully across cultural frontiers, resisting both invisibility and cultural isolation (Ahmed, 1999, 2004).

2) Transformative Horizon

This orientation captures how Iranian women employ home-making logics to reimagine themselves and engage in new possibilities that were previously inaccessible, socially, professionally, or culturally. These practices use processes similar to Ahmed's transformative home-making as tactical autonomy that transforms both self and surroundings across workplace and personal settings.

Inside the Work Setting

The transformative horizon for many participants often involves learning and adopting new forms of professional voice, presence, and advocacy that may have been uncommon, unavailable, or discouraged in their country of origin. This transformation process frequently intersects with how their cultural identities are perceived and responded in professional contexts.

Visible markers of cultural identity, particularly those associated with religious expression, can significantly impact their professional experiences in cross-cultural settings. One participant, a

healthcare professional, reflected on how wearing the headscarf shaped others' assumptions about her language skills and competence. Though personally comfortable with this form of religious expression, she became increasingly aware of its unintended social consequences. As she navigated a context of symbolic exclusion and subtle degradation, she made the strategicdecision to remove her headscarf at work. The change was met with a noticeable shift in how others interacted with her:

> *I used to wear a headscarf for some time, and people around me assumed I could not speak English. I also had a boss who treated us badly, constantly degrading us. After a while, I took my headscarf off, and one of the nurses came to me and started talking; she said she thought I could not speak English when I wore it. [9]*

What she encountered was not overt hostility, but a more insidious form of symbolic exclusion, subtle behaviors that revealed how her appearance mediated others' perceptions. She recounted:

> *I removed my headscarf. Then, I could see how others behave differently (mainly better) than before. Once, when I removed my headscarf, one of the colleagues we didn't meet often asked me, 'Oh, you can speak English, I didn't know.'[9]*

This example illustrates how self-transformation is not always about internal change alone; it may involve reshaping visible identity markers in order to navigate and subtly resist the exclusions embedded in professional environments. For some participants, the gesture of removing the headscarf becomes more than a simple conformity, as the passive adoption of dominant cultural norms. Rather than simply abandoning her identity, she may be strategically navigating professional barriers to create space where her competence can be recognized. This could represent a form of home-making through selective self-presentation, potentially constructing professional belonging. She was not passively giving up her culture but actively seeking to navigate workplace barriers. This deliberate modification of self-presentation reflects agency: the power to shape one's circumstances through strategic choices that enable

authentic professional engagement rather than cultural erasure. While this strategic modification of religious expression enabled professional recognition, it simultaneously required her to navigate the painful tension between authentic self-presentation and workplace acceptance, illustrating how even acts of agency can carry the violence of forced cultural compromise.

Similarly, another participant, a dental hygienist, reflected on how migration opened up a horizon of professional self-assertion that had previously felt inaccessible. In her case, the transformative potential of the host country resided not just in material opportunities, but in the emergence of a cultural environment where voicing dissatisfaction or advocating for oneself was not immediately delegitimized. Drawing a sharp contrast with the constraints she faced in Iran, she described how working in the U.S. allowed her to develop a sense of entitlement to fair treatment and recognition. After being denied a raise despite years of service, she shared:

> *They refused when I asked for a raise after five years of working in this specific clinic. I think if I were American, he would have been less harsh. [23]*

Nevertheless, although her request was rejected, she framed her response as part of a broader transformation in how she engaged with systems of power:

> *As a woman, you can't protest much against the system in Iran. But being here, I've learned that I can voice my objections and get the answers I want. If a woman objects, people label her with some disgusting features. Here, at least, they listen, and they try not to be judgmental in your face. [23]*

This reflection reveals a profound shift in agency, from enforced silence to a growing confidence in her right to speak and be heard. While acknowledging that the workplace settings are not free from judgment, she creates what Ahmed calls a 'space of inhabitance' where her professional voice can exist authentically, recognizing a transformative difference: the ability to speak up without facing the severe social penalties that would have been imposed in Iran.

Outside the Work Setting

Beyond the professional realm, Iranian immigrant women develop transformative practices that reclaim and create new possibilities in their everyday lives. These home-making practices extend beyond mere cultural preservation or adaptation to function as strategic acts of agency and transformation. Through embodied practices, Iranian women reclaim space, body, and self, new forms of spatial and professional belonging previously impossible within the constraints of either their home country or marginalized positions in American workplaces.

In contexts where their authority is routinely questioned, these women must often renegotiate visibility, credibility, and voice in real time. One participant, who worked in an airport check-in environment, described how the presence of a diverse workforce insulated her from internal discrimination. However, interactions with the public still revealed persistent biases related to accent, race, and perceived foreignness. She explained:

> *The check-in environment at the airport has been non-discriminatory from colleagues, managers, and supervisors due to the presence of many foreigners in the work environment. However, passengers don't trust me when I remind them of weight limitations or unaccompanied minor regulations. They pretend they cannot understand my accent and ask to speak to my supervisor, who then tells them exactly what I had already explained. [1]*

When asked how she responds to these daily experiences of having her professional authority undermined and her voice effectively silenced through this othering, she described finding empowerment through her daily commuting choice:

> *I challenge myself by riding a bike, although this city is huge. The biking lane is not that safe. Still, I prefer to ride a bike. It gives me the feeling of being able to handle my life on my own. [1]*

This account illustrates how biking becomes an embodied home-making practice that creates what Ahmed (2004) calls "sensory homes", embodied experiences of authentic selfhood. When workplace interactions systematically undermine her authority by questioning her competence and voice, *cycling might create* a domain where her capabilities are unquestionable: "It gives me the feeling of being able to handle my life on my own." In this space, she deliberately chooses challenge, creating corporeal experiences of mastery and self-determination. For Iranian women, cycling may carry additional significance as an embodied freedom previously restricted in Iran, though participants did not explicitly connect these experiences. The physical act of navigation and control restores her authentic sense of competence and autonomy that workplace dynamics attempt to diminish, creating space where she can exist as the capable, self-determined person she knows herself to be.

Another interviewee described facing workplace invalidation and racial marginalization as a teacher, where other colleagues would interfere with her teaching methods without showing appreciation for her contributions. She described her experience:

> *Some white teachers would interfere with my teaching methods and never show appreciation for my work. In contrast, non-white teachers were respectful and gave me positive evaluations. The white principal, however, treated me harshly and criticized my teaching, claiming that I didn't explain the materials clearly enough for students. [8]*

In response to this professional undermining, she found meaningful engagement elsewhere:

> *Currently, I am living close to a farm. I help farmers breed their animals. [8]*

This farm work represents more than simple stress relief; it represents an active creation of a new domain where her contributions are tangibly valued. Through physical and relational engagement with animals and agricultural processes, she embodies what Ahmed's (1999)

theoretical framework describes as "space of inhabitance", not a space of return but of becoming. The farm provides immediate, concrete feedback and visible results, creating a space where her competence is unquestionable and her contributions are directly valued. Unlike her teaching environment, where her expertise was dismissed and undermined, the farm becomes a site where she can experience authentic professional efficacy and recognition.

These practices represent gestures toward freedom and rootedness defined not by the past but by new possibilities. Rather than simply adapting to existing structures, they actively transform various spaces, from urban streets to rural farms, into sites of personal empowerment (hooks, 2008), establishing physical relationships with their surroundings that reflect their evolving identities. Through strategic visibility management, they redefine 'home' as a horizon of becoming rather than a fixed location. While these practices often emerge from experiences of marginalization and impose additional demands on these women, they reveal the power of everyday tactics in creating possibilities for recognition and self-determination, allowing them to move through the world on their own terms despite constraints from both homeland gender restrictions and host country exploitation.

Discussion

Immigrant women around the world often relocate in search of safety, freedom, and opportunity, yet their journeys are rarely free from constraint. As they settle into new countries, their everyday lives and professional experiences are shaped by intersecting forces of gender, race, and migration status. This is particularly true for Iranian women who migrate to the United States, often driven by aspirations for greater autonomy and professional fulfillment. While the U.S. may offer expanded possibilities, it also presents its own forms of marginalization. In this study, we ask: *How do immigrant women navigate workplace power dynamics through cultural practices?* To explore this question**,** we conducted in-depth interviews with 45 highly educated Iranian professional women living and working in the United States across a variety of sectors,

including healthcare, science, engineering, and education. What emerges from these narratives is a rich repertoire of everyday practices as resources for both adaptation and resistance. Home emerges as a dynamic process of creating spaces, whether physical, relational, embodied, or temporal, where Iranian immigrant women can experience authentic selfhood and meaningful belonging in the face of professional challenges. The home- making response to marginalization reveals a profound dimension beyond mere adaptation; it represents a deliberate choice of constructive and tender resistance, quiet yet intentional acts grounded in care, learning, and a deep commitment to coexistence. Hence, rather than responding to exclusion, devaluation, and othering with confrontation or defensiveness, these women engage in everyday acts that assert their presence and reshape their realities for growth, expression, and connection. In line with Ahmed's (1999) notion of home as a site of dynamic meaning-making, immigrant women develop their sense of self through embodied practices that bridge cultural contexts. These practices, quiet yet powerful, enable them to reclaim agency, affirm identity, and generate belonging in spaces where they are often made to feel out of place. They speak to what we might call *constructive presence*.

This approach reflects an existential need not only for recognition of who they are, but also for the freedom to become, anchored in a desire to *be present* and to establish themselves as legitimate members of professional communities as well as broader social spheres, neighborhoods, and cultural spaces. Home-making, in this sense, becomes not merely a strategy but an extension of their fundamental sense of self and existential continuity, a way of affirming their presence through cultural contribution rather than confrontation. The women's home-making practices thus represent navigation of professional, social, and community spaces that acknowledge the transformative potential of challenging experiences, converting marginalization into an opportunity for personal growth and cultural exchange across multiple domains of their lives. These dynamics reveal how marginalization, while inherently negative, can paradoxically catalyze constructive responses that enrich both individual identity and

organizational culture, community dynamics, and intercultural understanding through peaceful means of asserting presence.

Still, one might wonder: Are these choices fully conscious expressions of agency, or do they risk being misinterpreted as passive forms of accommodation? While it is impossible to disentangle all motivations, some undoubtedly shaped by emotional needs as much as strategic reasoning, some practices may well operate on multiple levels at once, soothing, protecting, and negotiating belonging. The women's narratives suggest deliberateness. Their stories convey thoughtful, situated decision-making, such as bringing American food to foster inclusion, and tuning into country music to bridge cultural divides. These do not seem simply reflexive or powerless adjustments, but relational acts aimed at preserving coherence and connection. Furthermore, rather than signs of passivity, these practices reflect an embodied cultural intelligence, a form of 'quiet resistance' that safeguards personal integrity within institutional constraints, enacted with care, discernment, and dignity.

Strategic Agency in Home-Making

The first group of findings demonstrates how Affective Anchoring practices extend organizational cultural identity research (Essers and Benschop, 2009; Khoshnevis, 2020) by revealing how immigrant women create emotional refuges within workplace hierarchies, advancing understanding of identity preservation strategies in professional contexts. Building on Ahmed's concept of "sensory homes" our findings show how immigrant women create micro-refuges of cultural and emotional protection. Drinking Iranian lemonade after linguistic harassment, decorating offices with Persian patterns, retreating to bed for safety, watching Iranian movies after accent bullying, and seeking Iranian confidantes all represent acts of emotional self-preservation. Meanwhile, some home-making practices might function as withdrawal or escapism rather than active resistance, recognizing that these motivations can coexist with the identity-construction processes you've identified

These affective anchoring practices extend understanding of workplace identity preservation by demonstrating how home-making operates as resistance through emotional territoriality within professional constraints. The concept of affective anchoring thus illuminates how immigrant professionals use material culture and sensory experiences to maintain psychological integrity, creating what Ahmed (2004) terms "sticky affect" where emotions attach to objects that carry the weight of cultural identity and resilience.

The second group of findings reveals how Situated Offering practices extend workplace resistance literature (Pio and Essers, 2014; Zanoni and Janssens, 2007; Essers and Benschop, 2009) by demonstrating home-making as a cultural negotiation strategy that transcends simple binaries of adaptation versus resistance within professional contexts**.** Building on Ahmed's conceptualization of home as involving complex webs of memories and practices, our findings show how immigrant women actively create "third spaces" of belonging through strategic cultural bridging. Sharing Iranian food with difficult colleagues, learning about soccer despite a lack of interest, exploring country music, and investing in American food products all represent deliberate acts of cultural expansion rather than mere adaptation.

These situated offerings advance understanding of workplace cultural negotiation by revealing how participants strategically deploy cultural fragments to reshape workplace interactions and social dynamics. This extends workplace resistance research beyond Pio and Essers' (2014) framework by showing how home-making in professional contexts involves calculated offerings that create bridges between cultures, allowing participants to exist meaningfully in in-between spaces without disappearing into either the dominant workplace culture or remaining isolated within cultural enclaves. The concept of situated offering thus illuminates workplace home-making as an active process of cultural negotiation that creates new possibilities for professional belonging through selective sharing and strategic engagement.

In the third group of findings, participants' efforts to pursue a Transformative Horizon reveal how home-making becomes a vehicle for radical reinvention and agency. This pattern extends immigrant workplace experience research (Syed and Murray, 2009; Raghuram, 2008; Al Ariss et al., 2012; Özbilgin and Tatli, 2008) by showing how immigrant women actively create new professional possibilities that were previously forbidden or unavailable in their home country contexts. Building on Ahmed's (1999) conceptualization of home as "becoming" rather than "being," where immigrant women actively create new possibilities that were previously forbidden or unavailable. The removal of the headscarf, learning to voice objections after Iranian silence, cycling through unsafe lanes, and finding value through farm work all represent transformative acts that go beyond strategic adaptation; they embody deliberate reclamation of agency and visibility.

Through transformative practices, participants demonstrate how bodies themselves become sites of home-making, where physical engagement with new environments creates what Ahmed (2004) calls "spaces of inhabitance" that allow for simultaneous departure from past constraints and arrival into new forms of being. This extends Syed and Murray's (2009) focus on workplace challenges by revealing how adaptation involves embodied transformation across multiple life domains. The transformative horizon thus reveals home-making not as a nostalgic return but as a forward movement toward previously unimaginable possibilities of selfhood and belonging.

Specifically, they enact home-making through three interrelated strategies that complement and reinforce one another: *Affective Anchoring,* which involves creating sensory and relational refuges that preserve Iranian identity; *Situated Offerings*, through which women strategically share aspects of their culture while adapting to American norms; and *Transformative Practices* of becoming, where they pursue freedoms and possibilities that were once out of reach. Each of these strategies reflects a distinct orientation toward time, identity, and cultural positioning.

Importantly, they extend beyond the organizational context, operating across workplaces, community spaces, and the intimate sphere. This multidimensional orientation enables women to counter work-related marginalization by cultivating alternative ways of being and relating with others in exclusionary contexts in the host country. Yet these practices do not emerge in a vacuum. While the U.S. remains a destination of choice, it also presents its own forms of constraint. These women's home-making practices emerge at the intersection of aspiration and adversity, shaped not only by the marginalization they encounter in the host country but also by the shadow of restrictions they may have faced in their country of origin.

While participants rarely explicitly referenced homeland restrictions, their biographical backgrounds as Iranian women may inform how certain practices function as meaningful acts of agency. For some participants, activities like professional advocacy or physical mobility in American contexts may carry particular significance, though these connections emerged more implicitly than explicitly in their narratives. Where participants did reference Iranian constraints, such as limitations on women's voices in professional settings, these contrasts appeared to inform their appreciation of new possibilities available in U.S. workplace contexts. Still, the primary driver of home-making practices appears to be navigating present workplace power dynamics rather than a direct response to past homeland restrictions. It is through this present-oriented lens that we examine the emotional, cultural, and professional strategies they enact.

This tension between past and present conditions of possibility led us to notice a recurring pattern in how Iranian professional women respond to workplace marginalization through home-making practices. Across their narratives, a subtle but powerful dual movement emerges, which we conceptualize as a dynamic between *running from* and *running toward*. This pattern

reflects the experience of living *in-between*, navigating the push of exclusion and the pull of possibility.

The *running from* dimension reflects women's desire to escape the structural constraints and gendered oppressions that shaped their lives in Iran. These include restrictions on women's autonomy, limitations on free expression, professional ceilings, and the constant negotiation of their presence in public and private spaces. For many participants, these conditions rendered emigration not only aspirational but necessary, a means of seeking personal freedom, professional fulfillment, and the possibility of self-determination.

Yet *running from* does not imply a complete rejection of the past. Rather, it reflects a selective distancing, a movement away from oppression without severing emotional or cultural ties. What surfaces is not erasure, but continuity on new terms. Through rituals, memories, and sensory practices, women maintain affective connections to Iran while establishing a sense of grounding in the host society. Drinking Iranian lemonade after work, watching familiar TV shows, or preparing traditional meals become ways of reclaiming coherence and comfort amid displacement, acts of affective anchoring that soften the pain of rupture while affirming belonging.

On the other hand, the *running toward* dimension captures women's active movement toward new forms of selfhood and belonging made possible in the United States. While the host country presents its own exclusions, it also offers expanded opportunities for expression, autonomy, and recognition, particularly in professional settings. Participants described moments of discovery: realizing they could voice objections without being silenced, feeling seen and valued in their work, or engaging in previously inaccessible forms of mobility, leisure, or self- presentation.

These experiences are not merely about adapting to American norms, but about cultivating agency and shaping one's own life trajectory. *Running toward* reflects an orientation to possibility, an embrace of spaces where women feel they can grow, be heard, and connect with others on new terms. Whether exploring unfamiliar cultural practices, forging relationships across difference, or redefining their professional identities, participants engaged in home-making as a forward-looking project, one that affirms not only where they come from, but where they are becoming.

This state of in-betweenness, marked by the simultaneous pull of past attachments and future possibilities, demands continuous personal and collective negotiations. In navigating this complexity, women engage in what we conceptualize as *dual-directional adaptation*. This liminal condition animates the three home-making strategies identified in our analysis: *Affective Anchoring*, *Situated Offerings*, and *Transformative Horizon.* Together, these strategies do not resolve the tension of living in-between but offer creative ways to inhabit it, holding on, letting go, and reaching forward in complex, sometimes contradictory, rhythms of belonging.

Contribution and Conclusion

While workplace resistance research has examined how immigrant women negotiate between cultural maintenance and professional integration (Essers and Benschop, 2009; Pio and Essers, 2014; Zanoni and Janssens, 2007), our framework reveals specific mechanisms through which these negotiations construct belonging within professional environments. Rather than viewing cultural practices as primarily defensive or adaptive responses, our tripartite framework demonstrates how home-making functions as active belonging-construction through three distinct orientations. This advanced understanding goes beyond negotiation as a balancing act to show how immigrant women strategically deploy cultural resources to transform workplace environments themselves into spaces of authentic professional engagement.

Second, we introduce the concept of "dual-directional adaptation" that adds complexity to models of immigrant workplace adjustment. While much research has emphasized immigrants' movement toward host country norms (Al Ariss et al., 2012; Syed and Murray, 2009), our findings shows simultaneous movement away from workplace power dynamics and toward new possibilities, revealing adaptation as involving both protective responses and proactive identity construction through selective engagement and strategic positioning.

Third, we found how home-making practices transcend traditional organizational boundaries, operating across workplace, community, and personal spheres as integrated belonging strategies. This contributes to organizational scholarship by showing how cultural practices create coherent identity strategies that span multiple life domains, extending understanding of how workplace experiences interconnect with broader identity work beyond professional contexts.

Together, these contributions offer insights into how immigrant workplace experiences involve active home-construction processes alongside adaptation challenges, providing theoretical understanding of how immigrant professionals transform challenging workplace environments into spaces of agency and belonging through everyday cultural practices.

Future Research

Future research could explore additional dimensions of home-making practices that emerged peripherally in our study but merit deeper investigation, particularly embodied presentation practices (clothing, hairstyles, makeup) as sophisticated forms of home-making that negotiate visibility and cultural belonging, and digital technologies' role in creating transnational home-making practices through virtual cultural connections and professional networking.

While grounded in the experiences of Iranian women in the U.S., our findings may offer broader insight into how other displaced women, particularly highly educated immigrants, navigate the simultaneous pull of escape and aspiration. Like our participants, many face the challenge of building lives in contexts where their skills, cultural identities, and aspirations are both undervalued and reshaped. The home-making practices we trace thus speak to a wider struggle: the search for coherence, dignity, and belonging amid the tensions of uprooting and flourishing. Our findings may be most applicable to immigrant women from culturally distant, non-Western contexts facing similar challenges related to visible cultural markers and geopolitical tensions, while Western immigrants who face fewer cultural barriers warrant separate investigation.

Future research could explicitly examine how homeland biographical contexts inform home-making practices, as participants in this study rarely made explicit connections between Iranian restrictions and their current workplace strategies. Such investigations could illuminate whether and how previous restrictions intensify the transformative significance of workplace belonging practices.

Additionally, future research can benefit from examining how marital status and household dynamics intersect with home-making practices, as the domestic sphere presents complex power dynamics where cultural identity negotiation occurs through intimate relationships, household compositions, and family acceptance of cultural practices, creating multi-layered experiences that interconnect with workplace home-making strategies.

Finally, this study focused primarily on home-making as belonging construction; "home" may carry complex emotional valences for women who have experienced limitations in their homeland contexts, as participants in this study rarely made explicit connections between Iranian restrictions and their current workplace strategies.

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Dissertation Conclusion

Understanding how women respond to unequal systems requires attention to the ways in which agency, resistance, and adaptation are lived and embodied in specific contexts. Rather than viewing oppression as a fixed structure and resistance as its binary opposite, this research embraces a more nuanced approach that considers how women negotiate tensions, constraints, and openings within their everyday lives and professional environments.

This dissertation originally aimed at investigating how women navigate and respond to hierarchical dynamics across different contexts, examining the complex interplay between individual adaptation and collective resistance (Lilja and Vinthagen, 2018; Scott, 1990; Vachhani and Pullen, 2019). Specifically, it intended to explore how these responses operate across multiple domains, from embodied practices to workplace interactions to cultural negotiations, revealing the subtle and complex ways in which women simultaneously conform to, accommodate, and challenge dominant systems.

The three empirical chapters of this dissertation each address a distinct yet interconnected research question. Beginning with an autoethnographic exploration of embodied resistance through hair practices (Chapter 1), the dissertation examines how haircutting can be understood as a form of embodied feminist resistance that connects intersectional bodies across cultural contexts, drawing on feminist and decolonial theories of the body and affect. Continuing with an analysis of hybrid coping and resistance strategies among Iranian immigrant women in professional settings (Chapter 2), it investigates how highly educated Iranian immigrant women negotiate and respond to workplace marginalization and discrimination, with a particular focus on the coping mechanisms they develop to navigate exclusion and complex power structures. Concluding with a study of how imaginaries of "home" are mobilized to negotiate agency and belonging in the workplace (Chapter 3), it explores how Iranian immigrant women reconfigure

power relations through cultural imaginaries and emotional geographies. These practices resist both full assimilation and confrontation, giving rise to a tender mode of acculturation that maintains connection to the present self, the past, and the environment, opening transformative spaces for other ways of being Iranian in diaspora.

The theoretical contribution of the first paper lies in enriching feminist resistance theory by framing haircutting as collective embodied resistance that transcends traditional binaries between individual accommodation and organized social movements (Scott, 1990). This study mobilizes Butler's (1990, 1993, 2015) performative resistance theory, showing how haircutting manifestations go beyond formal assembly to encompass everyday infra-political acts (Scott, 1990; Vachhani and Pullen, 2019), revealing how seemingly personal embodied choices function as relational political statements that simultaneously challenge patriarchal norms to create feminist solidarity across differences (Hemmings, 2012; Wickström et al., 2021). By theorizing vulnerability as a source of collective strength rather than individual weakness (Butler, 2015, 2016), the research reveals how haircutting operates through three key mechanisms: challenging binary gender norms (Butler, 1990), transforming personal vulnerabilities into shared solidarity (Hemmings, 2012), and creating everyday sites of political contestation (Vachhani and Pullen, 2019). This framework reimagines resistance as fundamentally relational rather than individual (Hemmings, 2012), showing how embodied practices in organizational and social contexts become sites where personal agency and collective feminist action intersect (Acker, 1990; Fotaki and Harding, 2017), moving beyond accommodation-versus-resistance frameworks (Scott, 1985) to reveal the complex dynamics through which everyday embodied acts generate transformative feminist community while challenging multiple systems of patriarchal oppression simultaneously (Crenshaw, 1989).

The contribution of the second study lies in developing feminist resistance scholarship by retheorizing the relationship between coping and resistance as a continuum rather than distinct categories (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Phillips et al., 2015). This study challenges the traditional separation between coping mechanisms and feminist resistance by revealing how highly educated Iranian immigrant women employ complex, hybrid strategies that blend adaptation and transformation simultaneously (Ahmed, 2002; Butler, 2009; Hooks, 2015). By documenting that responses to workplace oppression exhibit ambiguity, temporality, and spatiality, spanning professional and personal domains (Alkhaled, 2021), the research extends intersectionality theory (Collins, 2015; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991) to encompass temporal and spatial dimensions that shape how marginalized women professionals navigate oppressive systems. This framework moves beyond conventional understandings of coping as merely adaptive and individualistic (Folkman and Moskowitz, 2004; Miller and Kaiser, 2001), exposing how coping can function as resistance while resistance strategies simultaneously yield psychological coping benefits (Lilja and Vinthagen, 2018). The contribution lies in developing a more comprehensive theoretical understanding that captures the complexity of how immigrant women exercise agency while navigating structural constraints (Ghorashi, 2003; Liu, 2019, 2022), offering a nuanced perspective that better reflects the multifaceted experiences of marginalized groups responses to systemic workplace oppression (Sonn and Fisher, 2023; Wickström et al., 2021).

The third paper's contribution lies in expanding organizational research on cultural identity and workplace resistance by theorizing how immigrant women mobilize home-making practices to navigate workplace power dynamics. This study introduces a tripartite framework of home-making functions, affective anchoring, situated offering, and transformative horizon, extending current understanding of how professional spaces become sites where cultural resources serve as tools for identity preservation, resistance, and transformation (Essers and Benschop, 2009;

Pio and Essers, 2014). By conceptualizing "dual-directional adaptation," the research challenges linear perceptions of immigrant adjustment (Syed and Murray, 2009), revealing how marginalized professionals simultaneously escape oppression while pursuing new possibilities through everyday practices spanning workplace, community, and personal domains (Ahmed, 1999; Boccagni, 2022). This framework demonstrates how immigrant women transform hostile professional environments into spaces of agency through home-making practices, contributing new insights into how cultural resources are strategically mobilized for workplace belonging and resistance (Ryan et al., 2015; hooks, 1990).

By integrating feminist, organizational literatures, the three chapters illuminate the nuanced ways in which women navigate complex terrains of identity, belonging, and transformation, whether through the body, the workplace, or the affective geographies of home. Across these diverse contexts, the research reveals how agency is enacted not as a singular act of resistance but as a set of situated practices that simultaneously adapt to and challenge oppressive structures, often transcending conventional boundaries between individual coping and collective resistance (Butler, 2009; Philips et al., 2015).

Practical and Societal Contributions

This dissertation reveals that women's responses to oppression operate through interconnected embodied, cultural, and everyday practices that transcend conventional boundaries between individual and collective action, personal and political expression, and adaptive and transformative practices. These findings have some important implications for how organizations, policymakers, and communities approach workplace inclusion and cultural integration.

For diversity and inclusion professionals, this research suggests moving beyond complaint-based systems toward recognition-based frameworks that validate the sophisticated navigation

strategies marginalized women already employ. Rather than treating cultural practices as personal preferences, organizations could design collaborative spaces where diverse approaches to problem-solving, communication, and professional self-presentation are valued as organizational assets. This means creating mentorship networks that help employees navigate visibility politics while supporting embodied forms of professional identity that may appear "unprofessional" but actually represent sophisticated resilience strategies.

Policymakers could develop integration frameworks that support both protective and transformative functions simultaneously, recognizing that successful adaptation involves escaping oppression while pursuing new opportunities. This requires culturally responsive workplace rights education that acknowledges how marginalized women build coalitions and leverage emotional responses like anger as motivation, while facilitating rather than constraining transnational professional networks that serve as crucial resources rather than divided loyalties.

For feminist organizations, this research demonstrates the legitimacy of "tender resistance" grounded in care and constructive presence rather than confrontation, particularly important for women whose status makes overt resistance costly. Organizing strategies could help women recognize how their individual navigation practices contribute to collective feminist goals while developing long-term support systems that sustain women through different phases of professional and personal development. As organizations become increasingly diverse, understanding these sophisticated informal strategies becomes essential for creating inclusive environments that can leverage the full potential of their workforce rather than continuing with traditional approaches that fail to address the complex realities of globalized workplaces.

Limitation

This dissertation's findings emerge from specific methodological, theoretical, and contextual boundaries that shape both the scope and interpretation of the research. Rather than undermining the work's contributions, these limitations illuminate important areas for future inquiry and highlight the situated nature of all knowledge production.

The autoethnographic method in Paper 1, while offering valuable embodied knowledge and reflexive insights into haircutting as resistance, represents the experiences of only three researchers from specific cultural and professional backgrounds. Of course, this might resonate with a broader audience; however, this approach, while methodologically sound for exploring subjective experiences, cannot capture the full spectrum of how haircutting might function across diverse cultural, economic, or geographical contexts. The interview-based methodology in Papers 2 and 3, while enabling in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, relies on self-reported narratives that may be influenced by social desirability bias, memory limitations. Additionally, the cross-sectional design captures experiences at a single moment in time, potentially missing the dynamic and evolving nature of women's responses to workplace power dynamics over time.

The study's focus on highly educated Iranian professional women, while illuminating an understudied population, might limit applicability beyond this specific demographic. By concentrating on women with advanced degrees in professional occupations, the research excludes working-class immigrants, undocumented women, and those in precarious employment, whose navigation strategies may differ substantially. Additionally, the unique Iran-U.S. geopolitical context raises questions about transferability to other Middle Eastern, Muslim, or immigrant populations, as the specific historical and political dynamics may not apply to other migration contexts.

The cross-sectional design fails to capture the evolution of women's experiences and strategies over time. With residence duration ranging from 2 to 25 years, participants likely interpret and respond to workplace power dynamics differently. Recent arrivals may view challenges as temporary adjustment issues, while long-term residents may perceive them as systemic discrimination. This temporal gap is particularly significant as home-making practices, coping mechanisms, and resistance strategies likely transform as women develop familiarity with host systems, build networks, and experience status changes. The study cannot account for how life events, career progression, or broader socio-political shifts influence responses to workplace dynamics.

The theoretical grounding in feminist, immigration, and organization frameworks, while robust, may obscure other dimensions of women's experiences. The focus on gender and immigration-based marginalization provides limited attention to other forms of discrimination participants might simultaneously face, such as ageism, classism, or religious bias. Additionally, the emphasis on Ahmed's home-making conceptualization may have oriented analysis toward specific response types while overlooking other forms of agency that do not align with home-making frameworks. The focus on resistance and coping may have also missed positive experiences such as workplace support, cultural exchange, or successful integration strategies.

The research is embedded within specific historical, political, and geographical contexts that limit broader applicability. Findings emerge from particular U.S.-Iran relations, American immigration policies, and workplace cultures that may not translate to other national contexts or historical periods. The focus on U.S. professional workplaces may not capture dynamics in different employment sectors or countries with varying multicultural approaches.

My positionality as an Iranian immigrant woman and doctoral researcher inevitably shaped the research process. While this insider status facilitated rapport and cultural understanding, it may have created blind spots or uncritical assumptions about shared experiences. Conducting

interviews in Persian, though enabling nuanced cultural expression, may have privileged participants with stronger Iranian cultural connections while excluding those who have distanced themselves from their heritage. Additionally, my position as a privileged doctoral student may have influenced participants to emphasize successful adaptation strategies while downplaying more challenging experiences.

Future Research Directions

This dissertation opens several avenues for future research that could address the identified limitations while advancing understanding of power dynamics, resistance, and workplace navigation strategies.

Longitudinal studies following immigrant women over extended periods could illuminate how responses to workplace power dynamics evolve over time and identify factors that influence strategic adaptation. Understanding which approaches lead to sustainable well-being and systemic change could inform both individual decision-making and institutional support programs. Such research could capture the dynamic nature of strategy development and reveal how major life events, career progression, or shifts in broader social and political contexts influence women's responses to workplace dynamics.

Comparative studies across different immigrant groups, educational backgrounds, and national contexts could reveal which findings are transferable and which are specific to Iranian women's experiences. Research examining different underrepresented groups could determine whether the patterns identified here apply more broadly or whether distinct experiences of otherness and discrimination generate alternative response strategies. Such comparative work could contribute to developing more comprehensive theories of how marginalized groups navigate and transform oppressive systems across diverse contexts.

Future research might employ mixed-methods approaches that combine qualitative insights with quantitative measures of workplace experiences, potentially enabling broader generalizability while maintaining the depth of understanding that qualitative methods provide. Studies that explicitly examine the intersections of gender, immigration, and other forms of marginalization (such as ageism, classism, or religious discrimination) could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how multiple identities simultaneously shape workplace experiences. The concept of "hybrid responses" that simultaneously serve adaptation and resistance functions deserves further theoretical and empirical development, examining how different contexts enable or constrain these strategies and how they might be leveraged for broader social change efforts.

Research examining the perspectives of employers, colleagues, and organizational leaders could provide valuable insights into how immigrant women's strategies are perceived and received, potentially informing more effective interventions and policy changes. Such research could illuminate how institutional cultures either support or hinder these navigation approaches and inform organizational development efforts designed to address various forms of power dynamics.

Finally, an important area for future research involves systematically examining how previous experiences of oppression shape response capabilities in new contexts. While this research documents Iranian women's workplace navigation strategies, it does not explicitly connect past and present experiences of oppression. Understanding how prior experiences of systematic gender restrictions influence women's resistance strategies in new contexts could provide deeper insights into the development and adaptation of coping and resistance mechanisms across different political and cultural systems.

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Appendix

TABLE 1: Participant Demographic Profile

Participant No.	**age**	**Years in U.S.**	**Occupation**	**Education**	**Marital Status**
1	34	5	Airport Ticket Agent	Bach. English Literature	Married
2	36	5	Dentist	Dentist	Married
3	36	9	Kindergarten Teacher	Bach. English Literature Bach. Early Childhood Education	Married
4	51	19	VP, Senior Researcher	PhD Animal Genetics (Breeding) scientist	Divorced
5	50	30	International Sales Manager	Bach. Business Bach. Criminology	Married
6	40	12	MBA Program Coordinator	Master: Business	Single
7	48	7	Accountant	Master: Accountant	Single
8	35	9	Archaeology Teacher at the Museum	PhD candidate: Archaeology Bach: Anthropology/Archaeology	Single
9	47	21	Nurse	Master: Botany (Plant Anatomy) Bach: Nursing	Married
10	51	17	Security Guard/ Yoga trainer/ piano instructor/Author	Master: Business	Single
11	41	12	Sales Assistant	Bach: Sociology	Divorced
12	37	11	Ethnography Researcher	Master: Sociology	Divorced
13	41	7	Postdoctoral Researcher	PhD Microbiology	Single
14	39	14	History Teacher/ Researcher	PhD Middle Eastern Studies	Single
15	47	7	Dental Assistant	Master: English literature Dental Hygienist Program	Married
16	32	10	Electrical Engineer	Master: Electrical Engineer	Married
17	49	14	English teacher	Master: English Literature	Married
18	42	14	Product Manager	Master: Electrical Engineer PhD: Business	Married
19	42	9	Product Manager	Industrial Engineering	Married

20	37	11	Postdoctoral Researcher	Computer Engineering	Single
21	37	10	Postdoctoral Researcher	Pharmaceutical Science	Married
22	45	14	Music and painting Instructor/Baker/ Lab scientist	Scientist	Married
23	47	22	Dental Hygienists	Master: Botanical degree (Plant Anatomy)	Married
24	55	12	Chemical Engineer	Bach: Chemical Engineering	Divorced
25	40	13	Lawyer Assistant/ Coffee Shop Owner	PhD Law/ Education Management Master: Education Management and Law	Single
26	48	20	Professor	Pharm D. PhD Biomedical Science	Married
27	53	25	Phlebotomist	Bach. Midwifery	Married
28	58	18	High School Principal	Bach. Business/ Master: Art/Art craft	Widow
29	46	15	Scientist	PhD Food Science	Married
30	38	10	Assistant Prof	PhD Applied Mathematics	Married
31	42	15	Assistant Prof	PhD Computer Science	Married
32	42	9	Career Development Practitioner	Bach. English Literature	Single
33	45	20	Joint Faculty of Harvard/ Lab head/principal Scientist	PhD/ Pharm D Immuno-oncologist/ Cancer Specialist	Married
34	52	12	Accountant	Dentist/ MHA	Married
35	50	24	Associate Prof	PhD IT	Single
36	45	22	Head of Cyber Security/ Cyber Security Insurance	PhD It and Cyber Security/ Risk Management	Married
37	37	7	Assistant Prof	PhD Management Science	Single
38	25	3	Dominos Pizza	Master's in Linguistics studies	Single
39	31	6	Biomechanics Start-up	PhD Biomechanics	Married
40	38	5	Assistant Prof	PhD Management Science	Single
41	45	43	Head of Infectious Studies and Education Medical Dr	MD Infectious Disease Specialist	Married
42	31	6	Assistant Prof	PhD in Operations Management	Single
43	35	6	Software Trainer	PhD Mechanics Engineer	Married
44	50	36	Professor	PhD Philosophy	Married

45	34	17 Month	Graphist	Bach: Graphic	Single

Source: Data collected by the author. All participants provided informed consent.