To a Gender Equal Policy Plan and Beyond
Breaking the binary in gender policy making

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Acknowledgments

Abstract

The main aim of this pilot research is to write a set of recommendations aimed at guiding international organisations in making gender equality policy plans following a gender non-binary perspective. The definitions of gender equality used by most organisations and governments - in the past few decades - do not encompass a whole range of people, who take part in society, but are not represented nor protected by reforms and policies. From smaller scale gender policy plans aimed at international organisations, to larger scale governmental laws and reforms, I believe that equality could spillover faster and more concretely. While the gender binary has been constructing and leading the understanding of gender in society; by the end of this pilot research, with the help of non-binary people whose voices were gathered in a survey, the non-binary perspective of what gender equality policy plans should entail will be formulated. Through a thematic analysis of the survey four main aspects have been delineated: inclusivity, neutrality of discourse, breaking the binary and international organisations. From these themes the final results of the pilot research and subsequently the suggestions on how to make all-genders inclusive policy plans, have been drawn. I firmly believe that no matter how little space has been given so far to the non-binary umbrella terms categories, the importance of creating inclusive policies, reforms and in totum changes is the first step towards a true equality between the genders.

List of abbreviations

Food and Agriculture Organisation - FAO

Gender non-conforming - GNC

International Criminal Court - ICC

International Labour Organisation - ILO

International Organisations - IOs

International Relations - IR

International Women's Year - IWY

The Commission on the Status of Women - CSW

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation - UNESCO

United Nation - UN

United Nations Children's Fund - UNICEF
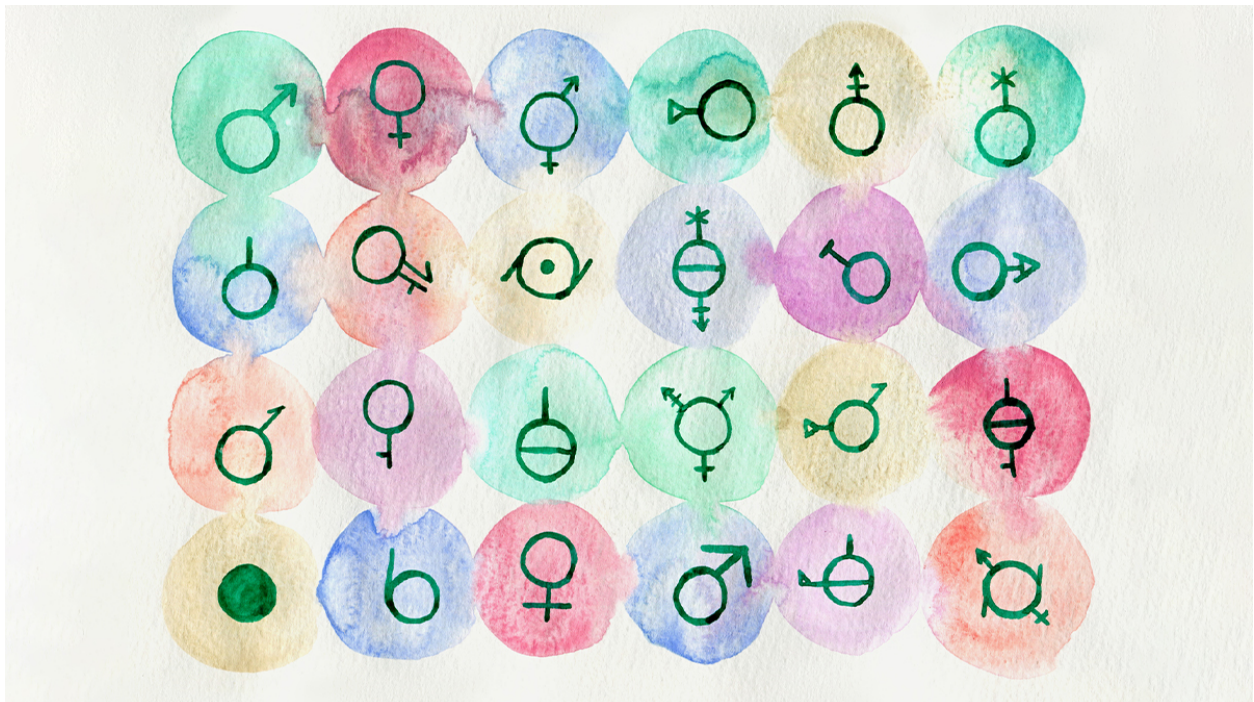
United Nations Population Fund - UNFPA

Figure 1: Transgender, Gender-Fluid, Nonbinary, and Gender-Nonconforming Employees Deserve Better Policies (Rodnikova/Stocksy).

Introduction

This thesis is a pilot study with the aim of writing a set of recommendations for gender equality inclusive policy making, aimed at international organisations[1] to consider in the process of making gender equality policy plans. To do so, a change in the discourse is a pivotal first step to create equality and inclusion, that is because so far most existing gender equality policy plans follow a binary understanding of the gender definition. Therefore, for the purpose of guiding the current approach towards gender equality to becoming a more inclusive one, the focus of the recommendations will fall into the non-binary gender category. Throughout the thesis, the term "non-binary gender" refers to people "identifying as either having a gender which is in-between or beyond the two categories 'man' and 'woman', as fluctuating between 'man' and 'woman', or as having no gender, either permanently or some of the time" (Valentine 2016, 6). Furthermore, it is wise to acknowledge that "the range of language and labels used within non-binary communities means that non-binary has become an inclusive umbrella term" (LGBT Foundation n.d.), in fact "some examples include genderqueer, gender fluid, agender, and bigender" (Webb et al. 2015).

The idea for this research came to me during my internship at the International Criminal Court (ICC), an international organisation of great influence that to this day is drafting a gender equality policy plan. The issue with this fact is that without an established policy plan, inequality is created on a daily basis and biased choices are made. The appointment of a gender focal point at the ICC, in March 2021, is a milestone that has been achieved far too late in the organisation's life considering that the ICC has been operational since 2002. With such a belated action, the progress resulting from the prospective policy plan will end up taking an unnecessary and impractical amount of time that could be avoided.

As for many big enterprises and organisations, bureaucracy takes a large amount of their time and resources; having a set of recommendations to follow could reduce costs and time required for all organisations that are working to establish a gender equality policy plan in their workplace and in their practices. Hence, if IOs have a reference point to follow for the drafting of the policy

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[1] Throughout the thesis the term 'international organisation' will be understood in light of bodies such as the UN and its branches, the ICC and similar others, which have an umbrella position for gender equality policy making in the world and within their offices.

plan, more change would be made and at a faster pace. That way the issue of pressuring one individual - who in the best case scenario is knowledgeable in this very specific field - that is solely liable for the policy is reduced this is because this person could be guided by these recommendations in all the drafting-steps of the plan that are more technical on gender knowledge, which are often overseen.

The knowledge that I acquired with Gendering Practices, on gender studies theories and gender equality policy analysis, has also guided my understanding of the relevance of gender and its social construction that determines many things in our societies. Thus, I regard the act of making gender equality policy plans easier to write extremely valuable because it allows gender experts to be a part of every stage. With all the above said, in order to tackle all these issues and to proceed towards all-gender inclusive policy making, my research will be guided by the following research questions:

1. What makes a gender equality policy plan inclusive to all individuals who are affected by it?
2. To what extent do non-binary individuals perceive (themselves) as being represented in policy plans?

An overview of the historical happenings concerning gender equality in international organisations contextualises my thesis in the topic's main milestones, while the importance of intersectionality, queer and trans theories is framed. Furthermore, the review of certain important concepts introduced by Butler provide me with the tools to inform a base understanding of the construction and deconstruction of the gender binary. This is to allow the readers to understand how gender is a term that shall not limit our comprehension of gender identities to the male-female binary. Finally, neutral discourse is highlighted for its potential contributions to breaking the gender binary and to the development of international organisations in general. The leading method of my research is a survey that I tailored for non-binary individuals to share their opinon on existing gender equality policies and current ways gender policy making is approached. Check and Schutt state that surveys are a tool "used in research as a means of collecting information from a sample of participants through the responses they provide to the questions asked" (Check & Schutt, cited in Swart 2019). The survey consisted of both closed and

open questions, which allowed the respondents to give more elaborate answers, if desired, in the form of comments. Considering that the survey is made of both types of questions, the data collected are considered mixed - qualitative and quantitative (Swart 2019). "While the closed questions offer impersonal and generic responses" (Frittitta & Cánovas Alonso 2019), the open questions give space for a more in-depth personal account, which can give me more insight on the subject's perspective and, in turn, on which aspects should be tackled and changed in the current making of gender equality policy making. To analyse the data gathered from the survey I made use of a thematic analysis of the qualitative data. Considering that the answers to the closed-ended questions were mostly 'yes and no' answers, and/or personal information irrelevant to the overall aim of the thesis, I then proceeded by applying this analytical tool only on open-ended questions.

Theoretical Framework

On the one hand, my theoretical framework is made of theories researching the background and the context of this pilot study, hence gender equality policy making in international organisations. In this section the theories of Altan-Olcay (2020) and Skard (2009) have been of utmost importance to chronologically and insightfully inform the reader on the gender equality achievements made so far. Furthermore, I shine light on the significance of intersectionality discussed by Yuval-Davis (2006) as well as, queer and trans theories by looking into an academic discussion on trans*theorizing contribution to ethical global politics (Sjoberg 2020). On the other, the theoretical framework is composed of the theories which, for the most part, frame and support the survey's analysis. Among the theories that I deemed pivotal in contextualising and guiding my research I selected Butler's "Gender Trouble" (1990) and "Undoing Gender" (2004), due to their focus on the construction and deconstruction of the gender binary (other than sex and sexuality binary). From here, I move on to a review on the value of neutral discourse and its possible controversies, to then conclude with examples of how breaking the gender binary, by starting from written documents, is a good start to ameliorate the current way of doing gender equality by making it more inclusive.

Previous Research and Context

Gender Equality in International Organisations

> *"An aspect all the organisations have in common is male dominance, both*
> *in decision making bodies and among professional staff"*
> (*Skard 2009, 158*)

The choice of writing recommendations for gender equality policy making aimed at international organisations, did not come easy because of the worries that projecting my idea of inclusivity into such complex international bodies and bureaucracies would lead to a lot of second guessing. I weighed out the realistic limitations that would be posed to achieving gender equal policies when including sexuality and gender queer theories in the suggestions for these bodies; I looked

at the historical developments that represent the evolution of gender equality within several international contexts and organizations; and I looked at what has been achieved and with which approaches. The aim of the following is to present a literature review that contextualises the progress of the organisations and their environments - to which I am aiming the gender equality recommendations.

The work by Skard was very useful to engage with, especially at the initial stage of the thesis, because it provides an informed chronological overview of the gender-equality developments and achievements pre- and post- International Women's Year (1975-20th century) within the UN and some of its branches (Skard 2009). Reading about the historical evolution of aspects that nowadays have been - to a large extent - achieved in the context of these IOs, gives me more hope in projecting my work in a future reality. However, it also reminded me of a sore but true reality, that the evolution of our society was shaped by male-guided and male-centered decision-making. Skard underlines that even in a time when the UN was almost totally composed of men, there were articles, for example article 8 of the Charter, which were open to women participating at "any capacity" (Skard 2009, 158), that were however overlapping with other articles - such as article 10, which required an equilibrated geographical participation in the workforce - that worked in favour of a malecentered reality. As a matter of fact, overall, women were given less chance at receiving an education and/or at specialising in bureaucratic tasks; hence given less chance of being part of the UN competitive workforce. According to the above, it is possible to underline clearly how the structuralisation of an organisation has influenced, not only the chance of female individuals entering one career over another; but also the lack of inclusion of female individuals in the delineation of the foundation of each organisation and its policies. The decision that was made of excluding a category that makes up for at least half of the world population cannot lead to other ends than feed an inequality that now, after over four decades, still influences the equality between the two binary genders. It was the exclusion of women from the "decision-making, planning and implementation" (Skard 2009, 165) positions that led to their discrimination, due to the pre-exisitng sterotypes that divided the two sexes but also due to the lack of concern and understanding of females' needs by male individuals in power (ibid).

It is in the context of a demand for change of these inequalities that 'The Commission on the Status of Women' was created, whose body was mostly made of female individuals, with the aim of tackling and mapping women's position in society and their challenges to present their recommendations for the interested governmental bodies (Skard 2009, 159). However it is exactly in this context of development that many foreseen obstacles came around, and many proposed drafts were deemed "too radical" for the context of the institutions (Skard 2009; Altan-Olcay 2020). In the context of hostility that was commonplace among various IOs, the position taken by UNICEF and UNFPA, created a diverse pattern in gender-equality achievement due to the former focusing on women and children and the latter on family planning. The role of Women's Conferences became pivotal both for their focus on women's issues and in addition, because of the predominance of a female workforce; an initial example is that of the IWY World Conference in Mexico where women's discrimination was finally acknowledged and a 'Plan of action' put into place towards the full achivement of gender equality[2]. The biggest achievement that came to be with this Plan was the big increase in collection of data concerning women, furthermore it created an expectation for a certain level of inclusivity from all organisations and the totality of the UN system. This Plan led to other conferences and plans, like the Nairobi conference which established that all issues are women's issues and marked the turning point for women to be considered active actors in society. In the Conference it was established that "the equitable participation of women in all walks of life is not only women's legitimate right, but also a social and political necessity in making progress towards a more humane and sustainable future" (Skard 2009, 164). Another milestone was the Beijing Platform of Action, where the shift went from women to gender and therefore shining light on the necessity of a deconstruction; "only through such a fundamental restructuring of society could women take their rightful place as equal partners" (ibid). Each UN body responded to these Conferences and Plans at their own pace and with their own approach; some organisations like ILO decided to officialise gender equality and mainstreaming policy as a tool to demolish gender inequality in all the spheres of their organisation and within their staff. More generally, it was in the 1995 UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing that it was decided upon "gender mainstreaming as the global strategy for promoting gender equality" (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women 2020).

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[2] Gender equality is understood as the equality of the male-female binary in this particular source.

I believe that each Conference that took place and Plan of Action that was made influenced a change in the mentality, more than in the structure of the organisations. In fact, the top-down structure of UN bodies only allows for changes to happen slowly in time and only with the support of "top management and executive bodies" (Skard 2009, 167). An example of that is Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) where due to a majority of male natural scientists "whom felt uncomfortable with gender issues" (Skard 2009, 172), a gender mainstream approach was initially rejected by the organization. Later on, with a gender-equality supportive General Director taking charge, FAO made gender mainstreaming one of the programme's priorities, however failing to implement it within its own office and failing to make it a priority for the entirety of its staff (Skard 2009, 173).

Overall, until the late 90s it was gathered that many of the organisations were not sufficiently aware of how to promote gender equality which led to very little augmentation of female staff in those years. The issue concerning this aspect lies with the reasons that were made for inequality being reproduced within these IOs; like in UNESCO, where approximately 3% of the budget was assigned to "activities related to women" (Skard 2009, 175). Furthermore, within the same organisation it was reported how there was "no gender policy framework and that women's issues were not systematically addressed in the planning and programming process" (ibid). I cannot help but wonder why such concerns are not growing when looking at the percentage of gender non-conforming and queer individuals' issues and participation; and why is there not a budget being reserved to the preservation of their rights. Along these lines, is the use of a "neutral language in the Secretariat documents" (Skard 2009, 176) of UNESCO which Skard states having had success. I wonder, has this been followed up? Have the documents produced so far established a (gender) neutrality in their discourse?

Another author that made an extremely insightful contribution to this research, is Altan-Olcay who in "Politics of Engagement: Gender Expertise and International Governance" shares the role and experiences of (mostly) female gender experts, working at different levels in their respective job hierarchies, who engaged in the process of policy making in various IOs. The author makes use of instrumentalisation as a theory to analyze the *politics of engagement* used by the experts in this context, intended as "encompassing micropolitcal encounters involving different institutional positions, hegemonic narratives and non-feminist others" (Altan-Olcay

2020, 1274), as well as, making use of critical analysis of the same aspects. Furthermore, the author applies an ethnographic approach to study the overall experiences of the interviewees both within and outside the IOs whilst contextualizing the interviews in "literature on feminist actors and international governance" (ibid); this choice was deemed necessary to have an idea of the positionality of these experts. In her analysis, space is given to the various techniques used by the experts to simplify and fit feminist theories and knowledge to the prespective of non-feminist actors in these institutions (such as creating a shared terminology). The author gathered from various studies that one of the biggest challenges for gender specialists is to "simultaneously draw from, negotiate with and challenge hegemonic ideologies" (Altan-Olcay 2020, 1276). An important part of the reading concerns the definition of what is seen as the success of a policy, some would define success as when there is a visible change of terminology in the policy discourse; others would define success as the changes that take place in the world. In this 'debate' I believe that success can be seen to have both these aspects, and that since the former has to come before the latter takes place, together they can be seen as the *evolution of success.* An element common to both the above-discussed readings is the slow and static evolution of achievements in these bodies. Many of the experts shared with Altan-Olcay the complexity of their work in situations where they had to adjust the content of their arguments because of having to please the expectations of their headquarters. However, acknowledging to themselves that the adjusted work, in comparison to their original idea, gravely differed in terms of outcomes (Altan-Olcay 2020). If we see success as something that evolves with time, as it realistically happens, we can thrive for new success the more we persist. An example of this is my idea behind the recommendations, that is to inspire for a change in the discourse that gives visibility to non-binary people, a change that gives them a space in the bureaucracy that guides and represents them. The long term success that would come from this could be represented by, for example, the legalisation of non-binary individuals in all those countries where their identity puts them at risk of their own lives; or influencing the mindset of people who causally carry out violence and discrimination of queer and non-binary individuals. However, if we do not start to gain success by changing the dialogue of the institutions that lead us, we cannot expect a successful change of direction in the way our society is working and evolving.

The choice of theories and methodologies of this author is what has drawn most of my attention to this article, this is because it helped me further familiarise myself with certain

approaches like the critical analysis; as well as introducing me to new methodologies like that of instrumentalisation, which I find to be very useful for the overall purpose of my thesis of creating suitable recommendations for various international organisations.

An additional source that I decided to look into is "Stretching and bending gender equality: A discursive politics approach" (Lombardo et al. 2009) for its discussion on the various stages of evolution throughout which gender equality has globally changed the way it is understood and approached (Lombardo et al. 2009, 1). In this paper the authors study the reasons behind the changes in the understanding of gender equality, as well as the challenges in analysing such aspects. To carry out this analysis the scholars looked into various countries and international bodies in different time periods considering both "institutional and non-institutional levels" (Lombardo et al. 2009, 7). Finally, the authors also discuss the "multidimensional reality of equality" (Lombardo et al. 2009, 2), defining it as a very much contested concept, as is that of gender. They explain that "gender equality actually consists of two concepts – gender and equality – that have acquired meaning related to aspects of gender (for instance, division of labour, sexual difference, reproductive relations), but also related to aspects of equality (for example, class, race/ethnicity)" (ibid). The scholars further explain this concept in light of the approaches to gender equality that construct a discourse around the concept of "fixed achievements" (Lombardo et al. 2009, 7). Examples of "labels through which we fix gender equality" (ibid) are gender mainstreaming and "positive actions" (ibid). Lombardo et al. explain that, even though these approaches have brought about achievements in the gender equality process, we still need to contextualise that gender is a social element which constantly changes, as well as the opinion around the way it is entailed.

Intersectionality

The article "Intersectionality and Feminist Politics" by Yuval-Davis is useful to understand how intersectionality has been implemented and approached in IOs' processes of development of their gender equality agenda. The reading refers to various conferences and reports by global women's organisations that look at intersectionality as one of the tools to implement gender equality; the

Center for Women's Global Leadership stated in 2001 that "Intersectionality addresses the way the specific acts and policies operate together to create further empowerment" (Yuval-Davis 2006, 197). In Europe, the first traces of discourses on intersectionality and diversity were brought by specialists and consultants from United States; an aspect that was underlined by the author for its ambiguity if we contextualise that these topics had been discussed in Europe since the late 70s, however without any visible effects on policies (Yuval-Davis 2006, 194). The concept of social division becomes relevant in relation to intersectionality, as used also by other authors, to delineate the various layers through which society can be analysed. With social division we look at the macro consequences in society but also at the more personal ones, such as those of individuals, in fact these social phenomena "exist in the ways people experience subjectively their daily lives in terms of inclusion and exclusion, discrimination and disadvantage, specific aspirations and specific identities" (Yuval-Davis 2006, 199). The reason why intersectionality is an extremely important component of the background context of this thesis is because it underlines the different aspects of the construction that all gender identities are affected by. It is important to always contextualise people's positionality when challenging discourses on identity. That is also to "avoid attributing fixed identity groupings to the dynamic processes of positionality and location on the one hand and the contested and shifting political construction of categorical boundaries on the other." (Yuval-Davis 2006, 200). Even though the analysis provided by Yuval-Davis focuses on the intersection of race and binary gender, the core element of this theory can be very much relevant to the context of non-binary individuals and their gender intersection with their race. Especially in light of the author's take on gender, which they state should be understood "as a mode of discourse that relates to groups of subjects whose social roles are defined by their sexual/biological difference" (Yuval-Davis 2006, 201). Furthermore, Yuval-Davis' approach to intersectionality is relevant in light of her take on the use of intersectionality as a methodological tool for the gender mainstreaming approach, afore-discussed in light of the UN, which also relates more extensively to human rights discourses. The author underlines that the point of intersectional analysis is to look into "the differential ways in which different social divisions are concretely enmeshed and constructed by each other and how they relate to political and subjective constructions of identities" (Yuval-Davis 2006, 205), therefore without such a contextualised review this approach cannot be used for policy implementations and reviews. To conclude, Yuval-Davis underlines the

importance of placing policy makers side by side with "people on the ground" and "participants to the dialogue" (Yuval-Davis 2006, 205) so that the discourse is based on "common political emancipatory goals while the tactical and strategic priorities should be led by those whose needs are judged by the participants of the dialogue to be the most urgent." (Yuval-Davis 2006, 206).

Queer and Trans Theories

Lastly, to place my research among the works of scholars who are advocating for a non-binaristic approach to doing gender, as well as to frame the importance of queer and trans theories in understanding the relevance of non-binary inclusivity within international organisations' policy making processes, I decided to look into Laura Sjoberg's (2020) work on enhancing ethics through trans* theorizing in International Relations (IR). Alongside her contribution, authors like Cynthia Weber (2015) and Paul Shultz (2020) have accordingly participated in underlining the importance of trans and queer theories, respectively in the context of IR and in transitional justice discourses. Furthermore, reading the "What's wrong with rights?" chapter of Dean Spade book (2015) has been part of my process of always contextualising the aim and the approach that needs to be taken into account when creating documents that affect people's lives. Even though, the author looks at the limitations and issues concerning US anti-discriminatory laws and hate crimes laws on gender identity and expression, which differs from the context of my research, I found this reading to be a good reminder that no matter the intention and the ideas that one has on what is right or wrong, the context-specific experiences and opportunities of each person is a mandatory element to consider. However relevant each of the afore-mantioned readings have been to me, I decided to focus on Sjoberg's work for its insightfulness on trans* theorizing.

In her work Sjoberg shines light on the importance of queer and trans* inclusivity in the global politics context and more specifically in IR whilst informing the reader of some major theories in this field. Sjoberg's chapter of the book, "The Routledge Handbook to Rethinking Ethics in International Relations" (Schippers 2020), tackles the importance of trans* theorizing when it comes to the discussion of ethics in IR and global politics, and consequently tackles the

discussion on how to "disrupt not only dichotomous notions of conflict but also dichotomous notions of positionality and group membership [in light of] … how to negotiate, and decrease, violence in global politics" (Sjoberg 2020, 87). Trans* theorizing is "the academic field that claims as its purview transsexuality and crossdressing, some aspects of intersexuality and homosexuality, [and] cross-cultural and historical investigations of human gender identity'" (Stryker, cited in Sjoberg 2020, 81).

Sjoberg focuses on three main aspects that could help the process of making global politics more ethical and inclusive of all-individuals; firstly, she discusses how "trans* theorizing inspires [questions] with broad applicability to ethical thinking in global politics" (Sjoberg 2020, 85). In doing so she underlines that it is a mandatory part of the process to recognise and pinpoint "political space for diversity, for difference, for unrecognizability and for non-conformity" (Sjoberg 2020, 81). The author explains that the previous means that gender in the context of global politics should be seen "as a question of axes of subordination" (ibid), which can be understood in light of the, intended or not, unbalanced distribution of advantage and disadvantage on the basis of chosen traits (Sjoberg 2020, 82). In the case of gender this can be understood in light of the expectations that the constructed binary poses on people's identity, which in turn becomes a tool for "state and other actors in global politics" (Sjoberg 2020, 82) to create and maintain the subordination of queer and trans* people in the context of global politics. This discussion proceeds by connecting to what Lombardo et al. also called for, that is the need "to show disorder where it exists, and bring disorder to phenomena that appear ordered." (Sjoberg 2020, 83). Contextualising the call for more ethical and gender inclusive global politics has been mostly focused on cisgender women as opposed to trans* and queer people, which undoubtedly leads to outstanding achievements, but achievements that still maintain the exclusion of gender diversity. It is always important to underline that the introduction and consequent contribution of trans*, non-conforming and queer bodies to the ethics of IR shall not be seen as correcting the un-ethical exclusion done so far, but rather seen in light of gender diversity being part of global politics and representing a crucial aspect for it to evolve ethically by breaking the "the subject-object dichotomy in international ethics" (Sjoberg 2020, 83).

Secondly, the author focuses on the concept of visibility and invisibility and the danger that an extreme tilt towards visibility could create, for trans* and non-binary people, leading to hypervisibility. That is because "hypervisible things are things that are the object of gaze,

fascination and/or sensationalism and abjection" (Sjoberg 2020, 84). Therefore, while visibility can be a positive component, hypervisibility can have the opposite effect and turn into something hazardous; similarly, invisibility is a component which has been shown to result in discrimination and lead to violence. Furthermore, both invisibility and hypervisibility could lead to the danger of imposing "sameness" (ibid) and the expectations that come from it. Trans* theorizing helps shine light on the ethical responsibility that the discourses on visibility should entail, because it shows how the issue of visibility-invisibility cannot be treated as another dichotomy of discourse. This does not only have to do with the different extents of visibility and invisibility, but also with the fact that there are moral implications to the various visibilities that touch different people in global politics; "who benefits from and who is harmed by certain recognitions, and what implications about naturalness and truth are inherent in any given visibility and/or invisibility" (Sjoberg 2020, 85). Hence, privilege shall be a component of ethical analysis in global politics, especially if we consider: "what are the costs of visibility to marginalised voices in global politics" (ibid).

Thirdly, the author discusses disidentification, which can help the process of enhancing ethics in global politics with its multifaceted uses. In trans* theorizing this concept is usually understood in light of active disidentification and involuntary disidentification, where the former is also subdivided in: "counter-identification, a dialectic between identification and counter-identification, and a subversive re-articulation of the idea of identity itself" (Dean, cited in Sjoberg 2020). The author explains that disidentification, being both an "ontological state and a methodological process" (Sjoberg 2020, 86), contributes to "'a form of resistance to hegemonic norms that serve to marginalise and repress,' where it 'resists the binary of identification and counteridentifcation'" (Munoz, cited in in Sjoberg 2020). Furthermore, Sjoberg underlines how disidentification affects certain people "from their 'senses of self,' including borders, territories, peoples and claims to rights" (ibid) and that this type of disidentification is approached in scholars' discourses as being power- and interests- led. If such rhetoric would change the way we understand the cause-effect aspects of these events, it would shift the thinking on the origins of this systematic discrimination and on the reasons that reproduce them instead; also, this could guide the understanding of "harm and violence in conflict in global politics" (Sjoberg 2020, 87). From the disidentification analysis, the author theorises the concept of "crossing"; her reading of

McCloskey's (2000) experience of her in-betweenness motivated her idea of thinking of crossing as a tool to theorise ethics in global politics (Sjoberg 2020, 87).

Non-Binary and gender equality policy making

From doing 'Gender Trouble' to 'Undoing Gender'

When looking at the previous work done on gender equality policy plans, research shows that the common ground is always shaped by a binary perspective of gender equality. My thesis aims at pinpointing the whole issue that comes with gender equality policy plans, that does not necessarily lie within the way the existing plans are written, but rather in the way 'gender' is treated in those discourses. If we aim at gender equality plans to create a more just and equal world, this step should be taken by including the various 'variants' that are part of the equation that is our world. Considering that the aim of my thesis is to conduct a pilot study by formulating a guide on how to approach gender (non-binary) equality policy making, in the section that follows I will look into theories that surround the binary dilemma and inform on non-binary visibility.

Before jumping into the discussion on the relevance of non-binary inclusion in gender equality policy plans, I believe it is important to take a look at the academic works which can guide the understanding of what gender non-binary means, and more simply on how it came to be that we talk about gender as opposed to sex. Gender Trouble (1990) by Judith Butler serves as one of the bases of queer theories, as well as one of the most exhaustively researched and discussed academic papers on the deconstruction of the gender binary (alongside the binary views on sex and sexuality). However, the discussion on gender, from a Butlerian perspective, would not be complete without further looking at what Butler discussed in Undoing Gender (2004). Subsequently, I moved onto tracing a theoretical framework for one of the key themes of my research: discourse neutrality. To analyse this element I will look into the discussion on the use of the 'they' pronoun and discourse neutrality by Saguy and Williams (2022). To conclude, supported by this last theory I will shine light, firstly, on a recent policy aimed at neutral and non-binary (inclusive) discourse; and secondly, on a gender equality policy where a non-binary approach to the term gender has been successfully implemented.

The title of their work "Gender Trouble" (Butler 1990) represents what Butler is appealing all societies to do, that is doing gender trouble by breaking the views and expectation that have been constructed around what gender, sex and sexuality should look like and imply. As explained by Morgenroth and Ryan (2018) Butler "argued that gender, rather than being an essential quality following from biological sex, or an inherent identity, is an act which grows out of, reinforces, and is reinforced by, societal norms and creates the illusion of binary sex" (1). The work by Butler, is one that has been both heavily criticised while also becoming a new guide for 'social understanding'; or in other words, something for people to refer and to turn to, in order to see and understand society outside the constructions we all are born in. One of the most important aspects of Butler's work - in light of this thesis - is the idea that "it becomes impossible to separate out "gender" from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained." (Butler 1990, 6). However, this element needs to be framed with the awareness that cultural constructions differ depending on the contexts, and that is also to do with the fact that gender needs to be understood by contextualising its intersection with other spheres composing society: race, religion, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation and so on (ibid). Butler's discussion on gender focuses mostly on the binary that is created in social processes, in fact a reference to non-binary and intersex gender identities is made to underline that gender is a construct, and to pinpoint the consequences that such construction leads to. As a matter of fact, the established male-female binary juxtaposed to other gender identities, creates the distinction of what is accepted and what is not accepted in society. This not only feeds the hatred towards who does not fall into what is normal, what "humanizes individuals" (Butler 1990, 178), but also shows how the invisible accord which leads to societies establishing, maintaining and supporting such constructions is what "compels our belief in its necessity and naturalness" (ibid).

One of the reasons for this, as explained by the author, is because "gender is a construction that regularly conceals its genesis" (Butler 1990, 178). In other words, what makes up gender - for example the expectation of a female to be a woman, femminine, elegant and so on - is also what establishes gender in society, hence without the re-production of these attributes gender would cease to exist. Furthermore, for the exact reason that gender has been produced with and in time and affirmed by repeating a series of actions and expectation related to its binary understanding, "the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found precisely in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a failure to repeat, a deformity, or a

parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction" (Butler 1990, 179). That means that the way we have always understood gender is not only one way of seeing its composition, but it is also one that can shift and change with time. In this thesis the concept of non-binary is one that I doubted defining for the exact reason that in present time, more and more people discuss and therefore make this term and the categories that refers to its umbrella definition an existing and known one. In "Undoing Gender" (2004) Butler reinforces the concept that gender is produced and reproduces in its mere existence, and further hints to the possibility of gender being the grounds for the break of the binary construction that has characterised it; that is especially if we acknowledge that the way of defining and 'doing' gender, so far, has been lacking (Butler 2004, 42). "Whether one refers to "gender trouble" or "gender blending," "transgender" or "cross-gender," one is already suggesting that gender has a way of Undoing Gender moving beyond that naturalized binary" (Butler 2004, 43).

The choice of Butler theories has been guided by my idea of how to approach a change in inclusivity in gender equality policy making; I would like for policy makers to look back at the policies that have been written by re-approaching them in a non-binaristic way. In order to do so a shift from doing 'Gender Trouble' to 'Undoing Gender' is what we (as a society) need to have in mind and the first tool that I believe can help this process is the discourse. Because it is by asserting a discourse, which confines gender solely to a binary, and that "performs a regulatory operation of power that naturalises the hegemonic instance" (Butler 2004, 43), that we have not been able to idealise its reformulation.

Relevance of non-binary discourse

This last element of analysis connects us to the next central theory which frames this research: discourse neutrality. For societies to work and to evolve the importance of language and discourse in shaping what is right or wrong, common or uncommon, accepted or unaccepted, has always been mandatory. Yet, nowadays few to none policy plans on gender equality are dealing with the discourse on equality while overcoming the binaristic male-female subjects. Whether we look at the mere importance of including everyone in the every-day-life language and

discourses, or whether we look at the language used in policy plans, laws and reforms, a point needs to be affirmed: a whole range of people who are an active part of society are being excluded. Which in turn, also contributes to their identities being seen as something abnormal and/or wrong. Therefore, I found it to be of utmost importance for this research but also to motivate a change in the extent of inclusivity of our societies, to focus part of my theories on the relevance of discourse and shine light on various ways this change could take place.

The article "A Little Word That Means A Lot" (Saguy & Williams 2022) shines light on the great importance, in the field of gender politics, of the use of singular *they* by discussing three possible uses of the pronoun. Firstly, as a nonbinary personal pronoun; secondly, as a universal gender-neutral pronoun; and lastly as an indefinite pronoun. With the help of various scholars as well as by drawing conclusion from an interview study based on "54 progressive gender activists" (Saguy & Williams 2022, 6) the authors provide a very insightful analysis of how the various ways of perceiving 'they' can help create more inclusion, as well as delineating the limitations that could come from a standardisation of the neutral discourse. By starting to look at the use of *they* as a non-binary personal pronoun, the authors claim that this approach to the pronoun can support the process of widening the "accountability to gender" (Saguy & Williams 2022, 6), and therefore also underline the point that I stated above of claiming the "social obligation to respect self-declared identities in linguistic interactions" (ibid). The authors offer a historical overview of how, from the late 18th century endeavour of English as a lingua franca, various discussions amongst grammarians surfaced on which third person pronoun shall be the standardised one, and in this context the singular *they* pronoun came to be analysed. From these debates, many grammarians established that *he* was the best "generic pronoun" (Saguy & Williams 2022, 7) as opposed to singular *they* which was stated as being grammatically incorrect, and *he/she* which would have been impractical. The authors also pinpoint how the grammatical perception of singular *they* is one that survives also in "non-sexist" (Saguy & Williams 2022, 7) contexts and discourses, that is due to "the assumption that this rule emanates in an apolitical interest in semantic clarity, rather than in a gender ideology of male supremacy" (ibid). This argument, however, could have been accepted in past rhetorics, but today it is in fact pointless to hide behind claims that protect grammatical rules over people's inclusivity. Endless developments have been made at a very fast pace when it comes to understanding *they/them* as

personal pronouns, however reforms and use of gender inclusive language is still facing great resistance (Clarke, cited in Saguy & Williams 2022). Furthermore, concerning the use of *they* as a pronoun personal to non-binary identities, the authors refer to Zimman´s work which looks into various trans-linguistic strategies, whilst positioning this use of *they* as a means "of resistance to biological gender essentialism and as an affirmation that gender is a self-determined identity" (Zimman, cited in Saguy & Williams 2022). In other words Zimmam underlines what has already been discussed in moving from Gender trouble to Undoing gender, however by shifting the analysis to the language aspects of how gender is determined by one-self and therefore how the use of neutral pronouns is contingent to this factor. This argument was also supported by another scholar who states that "declaring they/them pronouns refutes the assumption that gender can be assessed based on outward appearance and instead instates an alternate gender attribution regime based strictly on self-determination" (Nordmarken, cited in Saguy & Williams 2022). Following this extensive discussion on this use of singular *they,* Saguy & Williams underline how both these authors only make references to another possible use of *they*, "as an indefinite pronoun" (Nordmarken and Zimman, cited in Saguy & Williams 2022). Subsequently, Nordmarken sees "*they* as an universal gender-neutral pronoun for everyone" (Nordmarken, cited in Saguy & Williams 2022), with the aim of allowing everyone to be part of a neutral discourse. Following from this academic review the authors look into the conclusions drawn from the interviews with the overall outcome showing that these three different uses of *they*, could benefit a gender-progressive agenda but at the same time they could create other limitations. For example a positive outcome of the indefinite use of singular *they* is that it reaffirms the idea that gender is self-defined and allows the speakers to "resist the dominant gender attribution paradigm" (Saguy & Williams 2022, 25) - a paradigm which often leads to the association of gender to people's appearance. In the meanwhile, other outcomes show how for example the universal use of *they* could lead to depriving certain gender categories, like that of binary trans people and their chance to socially define their gender identity (Saguy & Williams 2022, 24). To conclude, the authors underline what many interviewees have emphasised, "that their goal is not to downplay or deny gender differences, but instead to create a more "gender-full" world—one in which people of all genders freely and fully express who they are" (Saguy & Williams 2022, 24).

Gender inclusive language in policies

Following up from this review of theories, the policy statement of the Journal of Human Lactation (JHL) provides a great example of how a change in the inclusivity of language is a mandatory next step to create equality among all people. The aim of this editorial group is to make sure that the literature published by them includes precise language. Therefore, for them to assure scientific and literary precision, acknowledgement, and development from the - so far used - cisnormative language, became a priority. Considering the content of their publication, the example given by them, to make this process more clear to all the authors they supervise, is the use of words like "women and mothers" to entail anyone who gives "birth and lactate[s]" (Bamberger et al. 2021, 227), underlining how incorrect and discriminatory that is to certain individuals. Furthermore, inviting the authors that they publish to include sources which can guide and inform their work on the various terminology resulting from "the changing nature of language and terms used by the transgender and gender non-conforming (TGNC) communities, and the wider LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans gender, queer, intersex, asexual, plus) communities, as well as regional and cultural differences" (Bamberger et al. 2021, 227). Bamberger et al. (2021) also underlines the importance of acknowledging people's self identification in relation to their appearance, for instance when "describing participants' characteristics" (ibid); as well as, the impossibility for authors to use binary/cisnormative language to generalise the discussion on a group of people. An example of a point in the policy is: "Do not use terms that imply or that rely on assumptions that sex and gender are exclusively binary structures (e.g., "he/she" and "opposite sex"American Psychological Association, 2020)" (Bamberger et al. 2021, 228). Lastly, the authors stress the importance of acknowledging the social and cultural differences that are part of the construction of gender and sex, and therefore part of the way these terms are used in global discourses. Due to JHL's international audience and content of their studies, the editorial team wanted to make sure that the works published are not only identity aware but also culturally conscious; an example of this is the choice of terminology when referring to North American TGNC individuals, one "should account for and recognize Two-Spirit people and may find the acronym 2SLGBTQIA+ more appropriate"

(Bamberger et al. 2021, 227) (see footnote for definition of Two-spirit person[3]). Moreover, while considering that gender and sex diversity is such everywhere in the world, JHL stresses their awareness for preventing exposure of "participants to self-identify as a marginalized group" (Bamberger et al. 2021, 228). In addition to emphasising that there are "some areas where inclusive research may not be safe or legal for the researcher" (ibid). In those cases the editorial company would make sure to consider exemption from their policy statement.

In addition concerning gender inclusive language policies, since the start of my pilot research, UN Women published a "Handbook on gender mainstreaming for gender equality results". The reason why this publication became relevant to my research is because for the first time I see an inclusion of non-binary individuals - or to use the terminology of the handbook "persons of diverse gender identities"/ "gender-diverse individuals" (Hannan 2022) in a UN gender equality document; alongside the recurrent gender binary. The introduction to this term, however, can easily be seen as controversial, especially since the addition of this gender 'category' to the text is only briefly explained in the introduction of the first chapter. Even though this inclusive linguistic improvement does not equate to a forward step like that of the JHL policy, it is still a change worth acknowledging. This inclusive approach of UN Women is even more relevant if we put it in relation to the UN's recently published resources under the name of "Gender-Inclusive Language" (United Nations n.d.), which are "part of a project entitled "Supporting gender equality in multilingual contexts", aimed at supporting the goal, under the United Nations System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity, of creating "a working environment that embraces equality, eradicates bias and is inclusive for all staff" (United Nations n.d.). That is because when looking into the 'guidelines' and 'toolbox' provided, all the examples given are binary-centred and only under a subsection of the 'guidelines' called "Do not make gender visible when it is not relevant for communication" the use of singular *they* is suggested, alongside gender-neutral vocabulary alternatives to binaristic terms commonly used.

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[3] "Two-spirit" refers to a person who identifies as having both a masculine and a feminine spirit, and is used by some Indigenous people to describe their sexual, gender and/or spiritual identity. As an umbrella term it may encompass same-sex attraction and a wide variety of gender variance" (Re:searching for LGBTQ2s+ Health n.d.).

Methods and research design

Gathering data with a survey

In order to have a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to shape the 'gender equality' recommendations, I have decided to use a qualitative approach. Therefore, I tailored a survey aimed at non-binary partecipants which will allow them to share their views and opinion on what would make them feel included and represented in society and more specifically in UN-like gender equality policy plans. As mentioned previously, the relevance of including the subject of a policy plan is shared by Yuval-Davis (2006). I had ambition to create a guide for international organisations and institutions, but due to the limit in time and resources, because of this thesis being part of a Master course, I instead worked to generate the base for a future research on how to write recommendations for IOs to make gender equality policies with a gender non-binary approach. The survey is composed of both open and closed questions, which I consider being the most effective way to collect knowledge among a defined group of people, which in my case is any gender identities that fall under the non-binary umbrella term. The survey is composed of twelve questions, five of which are multiple choice and seven of which are both short and long answers. Furthermore, the participation and the data collected from the survey will be anonymous, that is to take into account cases where the participants do not want their personal opinion and/or gender identity to be disclosed.

The process of sharing the survey and gathering participants was more challenging than foreseen, mostly due to the impossibility of carrying out the survey in person. Considering that the participants required for my survey were a niche group, I had to resort to various online platforms to reach as many people as possible. I also had to take into account that in general people have their lives to prioritise, and adding to that the recent events (Covid-19 and war in Ukraine), my biggest worry was that no one could take the time to participate, or that their participation would not lead to game-changing finding. Luckly, I was fortunate to have five participants taking part in the survey and sharing very insightful and detailed answers to the questions available. I never could have planned to end up with such a panel of very committed and informed participants in my survey. However, the answers to Question 8, about wanting a change in gender equal discourses, represents an example of the challenges I had to face while

working on this thesis due to the fact that my original plan was to approach the analysis of my data with a quantitative approach; a method that I had the chance to familiarise with in a previous academic context for the purpose of a field research analysis. The choice of having to apply a qualitative method is mostly related to the small number of participants that took part in the survey. Furthermore, a spread distrust towarrds international organisations and governamental bodies, among gender non-conforming (GNC) and queer communities has been a factor for a lesser extent of participation in the survey, that can be seen in light of the few exsiting discussion on trans and queer theories in the context of global politics and IR. As a matter of fact, the smaller the audience the less comparison and differences in opinion can be gathered to occur, this makes the collection of information slimmer when the participants share very concise answers.

To gather participants I turned to a series of social platforms like Tik Tok, Instagram and Facebook, as well as softwares like Telegram and Discord. On Tik Tok I looked up a series of non-binary influencers and activists who identify as non-binary and use the application to sensibilise people on different topics concerning the non-binary identity. From this app, I managed to obtain one participant. Telegram and Discord have been the most useful so far due to the fact that I managed to enter in contact with a bigger number of non-binary people all at once. More specifically Telegram, where I had the chance to enter an open chat where non-binary individuals from different parts of the world come together. After being granted permission by the administrator of the chat, I proceeded by inviting 100+ participants to join the survey with a concise text explaining the aim of the research; but only a couple of people from this application followed up on my invitation. Furthermore, I initially considered making use of Instagram and Facebook to widely share my survey, hoping that it will reach a non-binary audience, but after various consideration and considering that I already gathered five participants from the previous platforms, I decided to not proceed with this plan. The idea behind choosing these softwares and networks is due to the possibility of reaching a wide audience just by sharing your idea/ work. Furthermore, in this platform you have the chance of having your peers sharing your content with their platform, enanching even more your chances of collecting participants.

Positionality and research ethics

In terms of positionality I cannot position myself in the subject-category of this research due to the fact that I am a cisgender woman, which means that I identify with my birth sex. Stating my positionality "is beneficial for the researcher to explicitly share their own personal stance to comprehensively position the data, analysis, and findings, and provide context and understanding to the readers" (Swart, 2019, 4). Furthermore, it is important in relation to the ethics of the work. Firstly, my experience as an intern at an international organisation, is part of my position in this research, because other than sparking the idea for the study it has influenced my view and opinion on how gender equality is engaged in these contexts. Therefore, the way I perceived this aspect in my experience has most definitely affected my critical eye in my reading and in-depth analysis of the findings. Secondly, me being a feminist, could be read as bias in two ways; on the one hand, from the perspective of a non-feminist reader, which could see my feminist opinons as being bias in light of me believing in all-gender and sex equality. On the other hand, being a feminist is often associated with caring for male-female equality in society rather than for an all gender equality; hence this could be seen as clashing the intent of my thesis. Thirdly, my positionality is influenced by my provenance. I grew up in a medium-size city in Sicily, where the culture is widely influenced by the Catholic religion, and in a country which still lacks openess and awareness on gender and sexual diversity (as shown by the lack of reforms/laws to protect LGBTQI+ individuals). My upbringing in this context has influenced my knowledge and understanding of sexual and gender diversity, which I believe has also led me to where I am now, studying and specialising in these topics and working for a change in support of the LGBTQI+ community. Lastly, my sexual orientation and queer identity, are aspects to take into account in my positionality in the research. The feeling of being excluded and uncounted for, however to different extents and in different contexts than that of non-binary people, guides my understanding of the feeling of discrimination and sense of a minority. However, these different components have as common denominator the aspect that I do not identify as non-binary, therefore I cannot account for the experiences of people who identify as such. It is mostly for this reason that I looked into a way to include the opinion of those who experience gender discrimination and exclusion in the social dialogues. The survey aims to create a dialogue between me and the participants to inform higher institutions of the necessary changes and to pass on the shared opinions. Furthermore, in the context of a specific example in the survey, of

the Italian participant, I believe it is important to underline that I am writing from a position of power, considering that I am a cisgender white woman who is having the chance of researching on this topics from a Swedish University. The power relation is also to do with the lack of information I have on this participant other than their gender identity and Italian provenance; this last aspect shines light on the limiting context that I personally perceived and grew up in.

Qualitative analysis of the survey

For the analysis of the data gathered from the survey I decided to use thematic analysis, which "enables the researcher to organise and analyse responses and interpret them to determine common perspectives among participants" (Creswell, cited in Swart 2019). Considering that the survey is made of mixed-methods data, and that thematic analysis is a method for qualitative analysis, I will be analysing the open questions of the survey. While the close questions "generally have a stem question and a set of answer alternatives to provide participants with a fixed number of responses from which they need to choose their answer from" (Mrug, cited in Swart 2019); open questions, create ground to both share the participants views by making use of their own discourse and language, and allowing for "insight into their comprehension and thinking about critical thinking" (Swart, 2019, 2). Furthermore, this type of analysis spurs an awareness of the researcher's positionality, to encourage their awareness of and to recognise their opinions on the topic of research (Swart, 2019, 2). This was one form of data collection in the research, additional data collection methods and analysis included descriptive analysis of the closed-ended questions in the survey.

Analysis

The idea behind the survey I tailored for my research is to allow people who identify under the non-binary umbrella term to share their opinions on the current doing of gender equality policy plans, as well as to allow the participants to guide me with the future perspectives on how policies should be approached to be made extensively gender inclusive. The relevance of creating the survey is also to do with my positionality in the context of this research - especially my gender identity. Therefore, I deemed pivotal and necessary to gather views of non-binary individulas who are directly affected by the exclusionary gender equality policies. The experiences and opinions of the participants allow me to widen my perceptions and awareness of which and what changes would make a whole difference in the way gender equality is understood and approached.

The survey is composed of twelve questions (see appendix 1), the first question is meant to give the participants the chance to establish their pronouns, taking into account that 'non-binary' is an umbrella term for many gender identifications (Kandola 2021). The second and third questions have the role of categorising the participants by nationality and age group. Starting from the fourth question onward the content becomes more centred on the knowledge and opinions of the participants. I began by testing the ground and asking the participants about their interests in policy plans, which was meant to shine a bit of light on their knowledge on this topic. The fifth and sixth questions are similar to the fourth question, but more centred on the participants' views on international organisations, which I deemed important since part of my statement in this research is that IOs represent, to me, the best ground for changes to start taking place. These two questions are paired since one is an extension of the other. The seventh question starts moving towards a more detailed and aimed answer, that is because the question asks the participants to share their view on the extent of their representation. I believe this could be a tricky question for some of the participants because it could reinforce their feeling of diversity and exclusion in reforms and laws. The eighth question is one that could seem rhetorical in its composition, yet I found it very important to be asked. It is assumed that the participants care for change, but the change I wonder about - in this question - is strictly related to the discourse that is excluding and neglecting them. One of my main points and aims for these recommendations, relates precisely

to the changes in the 'gender equal' discourse. The ninth question is meant to study the opinion that the participants have on gender equality. Originally, the idea behind this question came to me after thinking of gender equality from the gender mainstreaming definition and discourses of IOs, therefore I expected negative responses from it. However, I was reminded by the participants that gender equality is a concept that overall represents non-binary as well as trans people, in its mere existence. Following the question on whether the participants felt included in the definition and process that is gender equality, I decided to let them define the concept with their own words; I thought that would give me more insights on what could be done differently if approaching this concept from a non-binary perspective. The thought behind the eleventh question was to allow the participants to comment on a definition of gender equality that I selected from the website of UNICEF, which is one of the most common definitions of gender equality that I encountered in my research, and one which highlights the binary of the gender equality discourse. The last question of the survey is focused on the participants' opinions of how things can be done differently in the policy making process, to avoid carrying out a gender binary discourse. Concerning the pattern of response to the questions, I have noticed that all participants have approached the survey critically and insightfully. The variety of age ranges and provenance makes the survey interesting in the different ways the participants have both perceived and answered the questions. However, what has made the survey intriguing is the common points shared in their responses; the overall opinions and aims on how gender equality policy making has been approached and needs to evolve are very congruent.

In the following sections I will analyse question by question the data gathered from the survey intersecting my findings with relevant gender theories, which will help guide my research and draw my conclusions on inclusive gender equality policy plans. As aforementioned, the approach for my analysis will be descriptive of the closed-ended questions, while I will apply a thematic analysis for all the open-ended questions, except for question 1 and 3 which are merely participants' personal information, unrelated to the aim of the survey.

Question 1.

The first question of the survey was originally meant to make sure that the conclusive data I collected would help me exclude possible participants who would fall within the gender binary categories. However, while analyzing the data collected - other than only coming across non-binary participants - I have had the chance of learning more about the various categories which fall under the non-binary umbrella term. I have learnt that non-binary individulas do not necessarily identify with the pronouns *they/them*, some prefer to not identify with any pronouns and others can identify with any pronouns. This brings more attention to the expectations of binarism that is applied to all individuals, even when their identity is not depending on any binary categorisation. As stated by Judith Butler in 'Undoing Gender' to assume the origin of gender from the "masculine and feminine is precisely to miss the critical point that the production of that coherent binary is contingent, that it comes at a cost, and that those permutations of gender which do not fit the binary are as much a part of gender as its most normative instance" (Butler, 2004, 42).

The data collected from the survey shows that two participants have answered with "None Only refer to me by name" and "any pronouns are fine", which I believe reinforce the same aspects entailed by the use of "singular *they* as an indefinite pronoun" (Saguy & Williams 2022, 6). As a matter of fact, this use of *they* "advances a progressive gender justice agenda by incorporating the principle of gender self-determination and by resisting gender attribution as a pervasive social practice" (Saguy & Williams 2022, 7). This approach to *they* could also create an opposite result to the neutralisation of gender that could rob binary trans individuals of their chance to state and affirm their pronouns (Saguy & Williams 2022, 24). On the other hand, two of the participants have stated their pronouns as they/them. The use of *they* as gender-neutral pronoun "broadens the lens of accountability to gender by drawing attention to a social obligation to respect self-declared identities in linguistic interactions" (Saguy & Williams 2022, 6). The importance of the discourse is not only shown by the need of changing the way gender is approached from a binary to a non-binary type of discourse, but it should also acknowledge the various identities and the variables of pronouns according to ones subjective identity. Another example from the survey is that of a participant who introduced a pronoun unknown to me: *Den.* Initially I was not sure whether to consider this answer a typographical error or whether it referred to a pronoun I was unaware of; it was only by connecting the third answer given by the

same person on their provenance that I learnt about the meaning of the Swedish pronoun *Den*, which is used alongside the 'it' meaning is also intended as the neutral pronoun 'them' (Gothenburg-400, 2018). I found this answer very interesting because it reminded me of my choice of stating my pronouns in one of my social media platforms by using the italian pronoun 'lei' (which translates in she), followed by the english pronoun her. I cannot explain the reason behind my choice of using the italian pronoun other than to further normalise the use of pronouns with my italian social media platform - which I deem lacking awareness on the relevance of stating ones gender identity.

Question 2.

The second question of the survey is: What is your age range? Of the five participants two were in the age between 25-34 years old. Two others in the age range of 35-44 years old and one between 18-24 years old. The age component is very important in those individual who are not gender conforming because in most cases, as also supported by researches, each individual endures some sort of discrimination, in which case a younger or older age can contribute to it. Other than that, people pertaining to elderly age ranges are more likely to have grown with less information in guidance and support of their identities. This last aspect could also have an influence in their opinion on policies and reforms, which could be more critical considering how much work still needs to be achieved, or it could be more supportive if we consider that changes are in the making. Out of the researches I have carried on the influence of age in the context of one's gender identity, I found a lot of researches where age was associated to the health of nonbinary and trans people. I would have assumed that the elder a participant, the more experiences would have cross their path, however an article I came across to has stated "that experiences of lifetime discrimination and victimization related to one's sexual and/or gender identity…varied across age groups, with the oldest-old experiencing the fewest number of lifetime events, yet showing a stronger negative effect of these experiences on health" (Kattari and Hasche 2016, 287). Consequently, I reasoned following this concept which made me reflect on today's society which allows for more spaces and grounds for diversity to exist than any past years, decades or centuries have; this makes the concept of the younger-age component of experiencing more with - possibly - fewer negative experiences, a more comprehensible one.

Question 3.

The idea behind question 2, as well as question 3: Where are you from?, was originally meant to underline the diversity among the participants. However one of the biggest limitations to my research, being the impossibility of having in-person encounters due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the answered of the survey being strictly anonymous, did not help me tracking the diversity factor outside the age and provenance component. Furthermore, relying on a virtually conducted survey made the search for participants harder than I foresaw, leading to gathering fewer people than planned. Consequently, the data that I ended up collecting was less diverse than I hoped for, if we consider that all the people who participated come from Western countries, most participants come from Sweden, one of them is from the United States, one is Italian and one is Swedish/Polish. A pattern discussed by Saguy & Williams, which concerns most academic researches on neutral pronouns - including mine -, is that the "research on gender neutral pronoun use has measured differences in attitudes by gender, age, and political affiliation, but not across different racial and ethnic groups" (GLAAD; Parker et al., cited in Saguy & Williams 2022).

Considering the anonymity of my survey I am not aware of the ethnicity nor race of any of my participants, but the westernised provenance does not allow for insight on this under-researched topic. While reading about the different use of *they*, I also came across an argument on the current common use of stating pronouns - for examples when signing or when introducing one self - that could be seen as regarding gender identity as more important than other parts of ones identity; or as denying the interconnectedness of race and gender identities" (Saguy & Williams, 2022, 24).

Question 4.

Moving on to question number 4, the content of the survey starts taking shape. The query to the participants goes as follows: "Are you interested in governmental documents, i.e. policy plans, laws, reforms?". The idea behind this question is to gradually welcome the participants into the open conversation - that I consider my survey to represent - on matters that people might deem interesting to very different extents. I thought that it would be very insightful to read about the degree of interest of the participants, however without knowing the idea behind their response. Whilst I wanted to smooth away the process of approaching the more intriguing questions to

follow, I also wanted to open the participants' minds with the hope of inviting them to ask themselves the question: why are they interested or disinterested in these kinds of documents. Is it to do with how much they know about it? Perhaps, it has to do with their involvement? Or their interest, that could also be a consequence of the lack of their involvement?

Overall, three of the participants responded to this question with 'maybe' and the remaining two with 'yes'. Looking at the responses I came to wonder if any of the previously gathered data could have presented commonalities in the responses and I noticed how the Swedish participants covered the higher percentage of the response, while the Italian and North American participants have stated a clear interest in these types of documents.. Perhaps, it is safe to say that the provenance has a weight on the degree of interest in such policies, and the experience held by each participants, because certain countries have shown less progress or interest in non-binary rights, or on the contrary could have shown more developments which make the subjects of the policies more interested to them. In the previous positionality section, I have discussed my experience as a Sicilian woman who grew up in a context of taboos and unmentioned discourses, which made my awareness on such topics less expanded however it allowed for my curiosity and trust for knowledge to grow, until it lead me to make my passion for gender and LGBTQI+ rights a career I would like to undergo. Similarly the interest and opinions of the various participants is - to different extents, in this particular case - influencing their answers to the survey.

Question 5.

Question number 5 "Do you consider International Organizations (i.e. UN) to have an influential weight on social representation and inclusion?" looks more into the perceptions and views of the participants on IOs, and more specifically their opinion on the influence that these bodies have in society. The question was tailored due to my recommendations being mainly aimed at IOs and therefore to contextualise the survey's inquiries for the participants, other than to gather information that are relevant to IOs. The answers to this question did not provide me with an established final result because the participants were equally divided between Yes and No answers; two of the participants agreed that IOs have influential weight on social representation and inclusion, another two disagreed and one of them answered both agreeing and disagreeing. Considering that this question was designed as a multiple choice one, I proceeded with a follow up question asking the participants the reason behind their answer (question 6).

Question 7. and Question 8.

The seventh question of the survey enquiries: "Do you feel represented in policy plans?". None of the participants responded with "yes" nor "not at all", the answers ranged from "to a certain extent" to "not really". The idea behind this question is strictly correlated to one of my research questions: "To what extent do non-binary individuals consider being represented in policy plans?", as a matter of fact the answer is given directly by the participants alongside the critical analysis I concluded in the previous chapter. Among the answers two of the swedish participants answered with "not really"; the american participant responded with "sorta but not really" and the italian participant with "to a certain extent" and lastly another swedish participant stated "very rarely, partially because of intersecting queer identities and partally because mentioning non-binary people does not mean they necessarily address our issues".

This last response connects back to one of the main aspects, afore discussed, of discourse inclusivity and consequent enhancement of visibility in gender policies, which most times does not follow up in its practice. The importance of visibility in the discourse is obviously a very pivotal step in the making of inclusive policy plans, however it should not be the final step nor should it be secured for too long as the sole element in the 'inclusivity process'. Academic sources concerning non-binary inclusivity and policy making aimed at protecting non-binary individuals are not many. Much research has been done on topics concerning health policies and reforms made to protect and provide anti-discriminatory tools for non-binary people (see, e.g., Scandurra et al. 2019; Vincent 2019). Furthermore, often "existing policies that ban discrimination on the basis of gender identity and expression are usually worded as well as they should be, but they're rarely enforced in a way that's actually protective" (Zheng 2020).

Overall, the answers received on this question underlined the need for policies and for action to be taken. "Gender inclusion also calls us to exercise care in understanding the ongoing oppression of sex and gender minorities around the world and ensure that our research and published work are part of the solution and not part of the problem" (Smith & Bamberger 2021, 442). Even though further steps have been seen between 2020 and 2022 as shown for example by the "recomendations and resources which were developed for the project "Supporting gender equality in multilingual contexts" (United Nations n.d.), discrimination of non-binary individuals is still a big factor in many working space. Alongside this issue, many places which tackle

gender based discrimination often summarise all gender non-conforming identities under the transgender category (Zheng 2020).

Finally, there were no opposing opinions when it came to question 8: "Do you care for a change in the gender equal discourses of higher institutions?", in fact all the participants answered with "yes, I find it important".

Thematic analysis of open-ended survey questions

Four features to overcome binarism in policy documents

To properly approach a thematic analysis six main steps need to be followed: gaining familiarity with your data; generating initial codes or labels; searching for themes or main ideas; reviewing themes or main ideas; defining and naming themes or main ideas; and producing the report (Braun and Clarke 2006, 87). Between the coding phase and the theme phase of analysis I made sure that all the data was coded and collected together. I did so by manually coding - by writing notes alongside each data. After having concluded the coding step of analysis I started highlighting the various themes with different colours by looking for similar or sub-concept in the answers; in this step I began to study the "codes and consider how different codes may combine to form an overarching theme" (Braun and Clarke 2006, 89). The four themes I gathered following coding the data collected from the survey are: inclusivity; discourse neutrality; breaking the binary and international organisations.

Inclusivity

The theme of '**inclusivity'** is one of the most recurrent ones throughout the answers to the different questions. Inclusivity is intended in this analysis as phrased by Smith & Bamberger (2021) "it calls us to examine how individuals experience and represent gender, explore the gendered constraints and realities in their culture and personal lives, and to exercise caution in making assumptions about gender roles, expectations, and norms across cultures". My informants brought up different concepts of inclusivity depending on what has been discussed in the questions. But also depending on the various topics that the participants were bringing up. In question 9 on inclusivity, one of the participants has stressed the low extent of inclusivity that they perceive when binarism is part of the policy discourse. Another participant discusses inclusivity concerning the process of how things are done *would hope that "gender equality" encompasses everyone but I do not trust that it does to most people"*. This quote can be mirrored

back to the background discussion of Skard's and Altan-Olcay's (2009; 2020), where the focus is, on the one hand, only on the binary subjects in the arch of the past four-five decades. On the other, in most definitions of gender equality used both by IOs and governments an example of which is the definition provided on the UN Women Training Centre's Glossary and used in official UN documents (UN Women Training Centre eLearning Campus n.d.). Also in question 10 about their take on 'gender equality', we can read about the expectation of inclusivity of one of the participants, however this time inclusivity is approached from a wider perspective. The responder is arguing for a more intersectional perspective on inclusion when it comes to UN-like bodies' definition of gender equality;

> "*I find the term has potential but needs to be combined with other efforts to have actual impact. It does not address poverty unless it is about inequality between genders. Nor does it address racism and ableism, or any other systemic oppressions and inequalities unless it is directly pertinent to gender (in)equality. Achieving gender equality for all genders (or lack thereof) and gender expressions would alleviate some of my struggles but hardly all of them*".

The statement above made me think further about the loss of value that the concept of 'gender equality' has undergone in the past years of binary-gender equality policy making. We can read in this response a clear separation that the participant made between attaining gender equality and tackling the other struggles of their life. Similarly, if we look at one of Philomena Essed takes on intersectionality we read that "racisms and genderisms are rooted in specific histories designating separate as well as mutually interwoven formations of race, ethnicity and gender" (Essed cited in Yuval-Davis 2006, 197). Intersectionality underlines the importance of reconsidering all constructions and to refocus the necessity of awareness and inclusivity in basic human rights discourses like that of gender equality.

Furthermore, question 11 - "What are your thoughts when you read definitions of gender equality as the following: "The concept that women and men, girls and boys have equal conditions, treatment and opportunities to realise their full potential.." (UNICEF 2017)?" - also has a reference to inclusivity with the use of its contrary (vocabulary). The respondent reflects on how excluded the non-binary categories are in the discourse "*that that only applies to the binary and*

excludes most of the trans umbrella". Furthermore, alongside this very direct answer, other answers to this question also refer to the exclusionary discourse represented by the definition enclosed in relation to the - chosen - definition of gender equality.

Lastly, another sub-theme of inclusivity can be seen in the question on the tips that the participant would give to gender equality policy makers, where one of the participant suggests including non-binary people in the policy making process, creating more inclusivity in the making of these policies: *"Leave it to the queers or ask to be invited and listen carefully. Act upon the information you receive"*. Similarly this answer shows how this theme is spread across the various answers in the essence of the respondent's opinions and in their wording like *"automatically excludes"*.

Neutrality of discourse

Another theme that has been very recurrent in the data analysis is that of '**neutrality of discourse**' as intended in the theory afore-discussed in "A little word that means a lot" (Saguy & Williams 2022). When we approach the creation of a plan, the first step should be that of losing the gendered language that goes from the use of feminine and masculine references to the use of words such as girls and boys, women and men. Losing this language allows the use of a 'more general' which in reality is simply a 'neutral' discourse that allows all members of the society to be subjects of the discourse. That certainly does not take away attention, importance or focus on women and girls nor to the male counterparts, instead it creates ground for a discourse where non-binary gender are also spoken for - where everyone is included. The importance of discourse is discussed in multiple questions, however independently to the questions the use of a neutral discourse has been underlined and deemed pivotal by the participants in many answers. Looking at question 11 - about the participants' thoughts on binary definitions of gender equality - the respondents have affirmed in different ways, starting from one respondent who explained how much difference would represent to them being included - in words - in a policy plan;

> *"Wording is important, and the fact that I do not exist in this sentence means that*
> *even if I would want to call upon this document to have my rights respected or seen*

my issues addressed I cannot…Or even better, if it explicitly mentioned non-binary
people, or any of the specific labels I use to describe myself I could call upon it if
need be and the chances of it having actual impact on improving my quality of life
would increase substantially."

According to Bamberger et al. (2021, 229) The relevance of "wording" has also been approached by editorial companies, where new policies have become mandatory to make the content gender and identity inclusive, even in cases where the gender identity of the subject has not been specified. Like these authors, the participant share a common view on the importance of explicitly acknowledging non-binary identity in the wording, or the importance of creating a neutral dialogue to avoid a binary discourse, which in turn would lead to assumptions on identities or worse to the exclusions of any identity outside the binary (ibid).

Following this answer on including wording, another response concerning the importance of a neutral discourse was *"I feel like it's a rigid definition that could be improved simply by substituting gendered words with 'everyone', 'all humans', 'nobody regardless of gender', etc."*.
This quote can be read in light of the theory of 'sameness' proposed by Trinh who calls for the need of breaking the binary, creating a parallelism with the difference-sameness dichotomy. The author explains that breaking the social binary, would entail that 'difference' can no longer be placed in opposition to sameness, rather one is a component of the other (Trinh cited in Barad 2014, 170). The theory of sameness also translates into the practice of sameness which Barad suggests when discussing diffraction as the art of making a difference in the world. The neutral discourse is therefore practising the 'sameness', once we establish names and categories we create the base for diversity, which leads to the acceptance of 'difference'.
This is an answer that also shines light on the simple changes in discourse that could be made, which not only would not counter any gender categories but also that would create less division and discrimination among genders. One more respondent suggested that a change in discourse - from a binary one to a neutral one - is needed because that way all people are acknowledged and the current way of doing discourse is counterproductive to the concept of gender equality in itself; *"That it exclude a huge gruop of people and also that quotes like that is counterproductive when it comes to equality"*.

On the same theme, question 12, on what tips to give a policy maker, presents two relatable responses. In fact two of the suggestions that the participants would share with policy makers deal with the neutrality of the discourse. An example of the two is:

> "*Start by changing it to "all genders" instead of just "men and women/girls and boys" because not everyone is a girl or boy or a man or a woman… So maybe start by updating your antiquated language when making policy plan. Because when its just men and women that automatically excludes myself and all other people who dont fall in the binary.*"

In this quote we can identify some key concepts which underline the views of the participants. For example "all genders" implies the existence of diversity among genders, which relates back to the concept of sameness and difference by Barad (2014). "Antiqueted discourse" represents a critique to cis-normative and binary discourses, which connects the constructions around 'gender'.

Similarly to this quote, a respondent stated the importance of acting upon the concepts established by policy plans and similar documents, as opposed to just adding the term non-binary to the 'gender equality' equation. Overall, few answers underline the importance of neutral wording in relation to writing policy documents which minimises the use of gendered words, aspects that connect us to the next theme of analysis: "breaking the binary".

Breaking the binary

The third theme identified among various responses is '**breaking the binary'**. The approach to this concept varies with depending on the different questions, for example this theme can be encountered in one of the answers of question 9, about their identity being included, where the respondent explained that it is due to the use of binary discourses and the assertion of a binary that they feel distant and excluded in the processes and discourses of policy plans. This aspect

also becomes relevant when looking at the process of gathering participants, in fact a lack of mass participation to the survey could have been cause by the scepticism that many trans and non-binary indivduals percive towards institutions and international bodies. The influence and weight that binary discourses and constructions have on non-binary individuals in their perception of visibility and in the way their rights are regarded, is not only an addressable issue but it is also very much part of a developing process that today's society demands.

Alongside exclusionary wording that require a break in the binarism of policy plans, another aspect relates to the expectation that the binarism sets on people in relation to their gender. When asking about their take on gender equality (in question 10) a participant answered describing a reality where no gender would exist and therefore no binary would be balancing the scale, and all the terms that have been used as stereotypes in relation to assigned genders would just become words detached from the expectations around them;

> *"It gets closest to no gender at all - on the sense that no gender stereotypes would be hendered anymore, è.g. femininity would become just the individual characteristics that make it up, such as delicate, elegant, etc., there would be no gender roles anymore whatsoever, and the only, mild, distinctions left would be the biological ones".*

These terms associated with femininity make me also think of the concept of social division in relation to intersectionality that is discussed by Yuval-Davis (2006). The author underlines how social division is present in all the forms of "representation" (Yuval-Davis 2006, 198) in society, from "images and symbols, texts and ideologies, including those to do with legislation" (ibid), to media and radio content (Frittitta, 2020). Furthermore, in the same literature, the author explains how the attribution related to every category becomes the tool to create constructions that lead to excluding or including people, which in turn underline the differences with one-self and others (Yuval-Davis 2006, 199). Hence, "determining what is 'normal' and what is not, who is entitled to certain resources and who is not" (ibid).

Furthermore, the answer of the respondent counters one of the aspects discussed in "A little word that means a lot" (Saguy & Williams 2022), where the authors share the activists concern of

"abandoning linguistic practices that confer gender recognition on people—especially those who have been misgendered and denied gender recognition in the past" (Saguy & Williams 2022, 24) and that a complete detachment "from using gender-specific pronouns would deprive binary trans people of the social affirmation that comes from being properly "pronouned" (Saguy & Williams 2022, 24). These contrasting opinions just remind us of how complicated and delicate the process of 'breaking the binary' can be, yet clearly deemed a necessary one for many people to finally feel like they have a place in society. Lastly, in question 12 concerning the tips that they would give to policy makers, most answers lead to the expectation of the break of the binary and all the constructions that have been shaping the society to this day as a consequence of the existing binarism. One participants answered with a short and concise "*Don't be binary*" tip for the policy makers; another has suggested the reduction of gendered words, other than suggesting *"to not think of men and women as two polarized, separate universes on the basis of the few differences between them, but as humans first based on the very broad similarities between them"*. Both these answers can be contextualised in the process of going from doing "Gender trouble" to "undoing gender", because the expectation advanced both by the respondents and by me as the researcher, is first and foremost, that of deconstructing the understanding of gender in order to 'do gender' in a way that does not allow for an exclusion based on different identities. Lastly to answer this question, a respondent has re-positioned the discourse on gender binary and the need to adjust the discourse to *"all genders"* by stating that nature itself has shown that not everyone is defined by a binary when it comes to their sex (other than gender): *"..because not everyone is a girl or boy or a man or a woman. Even in basic human genetics people can be born with both sex organs"*.

International Organisations

To conclude the thematic analysis, a theme I gathered from the collection of the various codes is '**International organisations'.** Few arguments made by the participants have been about the way gender equality policy making is approached and how accountability in the discourse should also be given to the subject of the discourse, in this case non binary people. Question 6 "Why?", represented the main ground for this theme due to the fact that it gives space to elaborate on

question 5 on international organisations' weight on social representation and inclusion. While a decisive answer could not be gathered from this question, one of the participants countered the influence of IOs in social representation and inclusion, by stating the influential power of social movements. This concept can also be read in the words of mistrust that is shared by other participants in relation to IOs. A respondent who answered by affirming IOs' influence, explains that their influence exists but not when it comes to non-binary individuals:

> "*I don't even trust them enough to assume i exist in their documents and work unless it is an organization explicitly stating that they work with non-binary people and our issues, social inclusion and representation.*"

In this quote "I don't even trust them" refers to the international organisations. I find this statement to be very strong in its essence and I believe that opinions as such are proof that inequality is in the making, to the point that people do not feel visible in the eyes of IOs because of their gender identity. Also the part of the statement concerning organizations being known for their work with the non-binary community is one that works in favour of the feeling of diversity, aspect which should not be encouraged by international organizations that promote the equality of genders. Overall, from these answers, a feeling of untrustworthiness seems to be the common denominator in relation to the role of IOs. This shared feeling among the respondents came as a surprise to me and could be interesting to further investigate it in the future. Along these lines, another argument which relates to 'International Organisation' can be found in question 10, where a respondent stated

> "*I feel like gender equality is a buzzword that organisations and institutions like to slap onto things but that it has very little operational capabilities without being actively combined with other perspectives.*"

The importance of including the opinions of the subjects that are part of the concept of 'gender', not by strictly looking at the opinions of men and women, is a step that needs to be taken into account in the way gender equality policy making needs to be approached. Similarly to what has been discussed by Yuval-Davis in her theory on the use of intersectionality as a methodology for

human rights' discourses of gender mainstreaming (Yuval-Davis 2006, 206). It is only by taking into account and including non-binary and/or GNC people in policy making proceeses that we can reach gender equality, because only with everyone's participation, as said by one of the respondents, *"focus and awareness of norms and hierarchys and a active goal to reconstruct those"* can be achieved.

Summary of the findings

The analysis of the answers of the twelve-question survey I carried out, have been very insightful and a great compass for the collection of findings to meet the aim of my research. The participation of five respondents, with mostly different backgrounds, has allowed for a very insightful exchange of information and has worked as groundwork for the deepening of my knowledge on non-binary perspectives, as a gender researcher but also as an individual. The closed-ended questions have created the chance for me to learn about the different backgrounds of the various participants, as well as to acquire a more concrete understanding of the respondents' opinions and knowledge on policy making and international organisations. Among the most useful findings of the closed-ended questions was the age-range that delimited my survey which showed a participation of individuals between 18 and 45 years old. Furthermore, the nationality of the respondents helped me contextualise some of the findings, as well as to focus the ethical aspects of my research, especially when it came to the Italian participant whose participation helped me further introspect on my positionality as italian. The introduction of the pronouns taught me about the difference in the use, and the importance of the various pronouns. It also taught me new ones, like the Swedish pronoun *Den*. Something that made the collection of the closed-ended answers less insightful than I hoped, which also made me reconsider the choice of a mix-method survey, was that a couple of questions did not allow for a clear answer. Substantially, considering that my original aim was to gather more participants, not only was I left with unusable statistics (considering the small amount of participants), but I also did not achieve concrete answers, as shown by the answers of question 5, "Do you consider international organisations to have an influential weight on social representation and inclusion?". As a matter of fact, in a future survey I would choose one of the two methods and I would do so depending on the budget and time I would have to gather the participants for my study. Lastly, a positive outcome that came from the closed-ended questions - example of which is question 8 - is the complete agreement among the five participants and therefore the demarcation of the aspects that all respondents deemed important and which delineated their congruent opinions.

Following the close-ended questions, with the use of a thematic analysis I collected the most important findings of my work, that not only directly and naturally connected to my theoretical

framework, but that also confirmed the sense of gender inequality which originally guided my choice of research. The four themes that resulted from the coding of the data were: inclusivity; discourse neutrality; breaking the binary and international organisations. These themes were extensively present in answers to different questions and from the perspectives of each of the various participants. The themes, together with the theoretical framework, have made up for the main aspects delineating the recommendations for inclusive and non-binary gender equality policy plans.

Here I will discuss each one in turn. Firstly, *inclusivity* is a term which has been often repeated in the course of this research because it lacks presence in the discourses, actions and views of bodies and organisations discussing gender equality. Not only have the participants extensively used this word and underlined the importance of including everyone and not just the binary genders. But also just by looking at the background research section of the thesis, one cannot help but noticing how the only people discussed belong to the male-female categories. This makes me wonder 'where is the inclusivity that represents equality?'.

Secondly, moving on to *neutrality of discourse*, this is a more complicated theme because the concept of discourse neutrality is one that can entail a lot of things and that can attract contrasting opinions. Just by looking at one of the views shared by a participant and the study on neutral discourse by Saguy & Williams (2022), we can notice a discrepancy in their arguments. In fact, while the former responded to question 10 "What does gender equality mean to you?" by saying that they wish for a world without gender categorisations, the latter reminds us of the importance of categorising gender for many people, for example this could be the case for some transgender people whose transition establishes their identity within one of the binary gender identities. While referring to question 10, I find it very important to look into another aspect which, in hindsight, I would change in a future research. As a matter of fact, this question did not help the process of my analysis due to the fact that I phrased it in a way that was too open to interpretation because, as is visible in the totality of the answers, the participants read and responded to the question with varying approaches. An example of this is, *"I find the term has potential but needs to be combined with other efforts to have actual impact"*. The respondent mainly discussed the potential of "gender equality" as a concept and the actions that, combined to this term, create change. Furthermore, from this question the respondents provided their definition of the term. In other words, question 10 of the survey can be read in multiple ways, it

can be understood as asking participants to analyse the concept of gender equality or as asking them what the concept entails.

Thirdly, *breaking the binary*, is probably the most recurrent answer that has been given throughout the survey. Many participants have stated, explained and demanded the end of the binary, some have also shown their frustration with this concept by using terms like "antiquated language", which stress the cisnormative take on policy making. The division that comes from this social construction of gender is the same one that has been feeding the inequality between men and women, besides the discrimination towards every other gender category. It has created inequality and it still creates exclusionary behaviour in society and, even worse, in the policies that should protect and represent everyone's human rights. Even the most recently updated document on gender equality published by UN Women, shows stubbornness in their use of a binary language, while disclaiming what gender equality should really entail: "Gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women, men, girls and boys… Gender equality is not a women's issue but should concern and fully engage all genders while recognizing that neither all men nor all women are a homogenous group" (Hannan 2022, 10).

Lastly, the theme of International Organisations resulted from the analysis, that is because some guiding questions in the survey focused on IOs - this aspect was pivotal for me in order to understand the perceptions that non-binary people have on these bodies, and the influence that they believe these organisations have on society. Overall, I was surprised to notice that not much importance was given by the participants to IOs, other than by requesting these bodies who produce gender equality policy plans to include non-binary and GNC people and their opinion in the policy making processes. Indeed, a common feeling of frustration among the participants was shared concerning IOs prevailing gender-exclusionary practices and discourses. More than anything, studying IOs as part of my analysis shone light on the feeling of invisibility that non-binary people share in these organisations' eyes.

To conclude, I would like to mention an aspect which I did not expect would result from the overall analysis, that is the lack of reference to and discourses on intersectionality. Intersectionality is a term that I deemed mandatory to discuss in my theoretical framework, and I expected it to be one of the themes of my analysis. When approaching the data for the first time I assumed I would be reading more than one participant's answer on this concept or at least to hear

more critiques on the very frequent white feminist dominating perspective on gender equality discourses. I believe this is a pivotal concept when dealing with gender equality policy making because without intersectional lenses, inequality reproduces and exclusionary policies are made, while 'cis-sameness' is perpetuated.

Conclusion

This thesis researches the tools needed to approach gender equality policy making by re-enforcing the importance of a non-binary approach to gender. Throughout this thesis I studied the approach shared by various international organisations and branches, especially within the context of the UN, to gender equality policies in the course of the past decades. Furthermore, I looked into some key concepts - i.e. non-binarism and intersectionality - that I believe are missing or not extensively discussed in most gender equality policy plans and strategies published to this day. To guide the analysis of my findings and to answer to the overall aim of my thesis, I established the following research questions.

"What makes a gender equality policy plan inclusive to all individuals who are affected by it?"
"To what extent do non-binary individuals consider being represented in gender equality policy plans?"

To answer the first research question, following an overview of how the concept of gender equality came to be discussed in IOs, whilst looking at the approach to the theory of intersectionality by Yuval-Davis (2006) and framing my work in the context of trans and queer theories; I have carried out an analysis on the importance of breaking the gender binary in the discourse, as well as in those policies that affect human rights and people's freedoms in society. Furthermore, the participation of five individuals, who identify as non-binary or under the non-binary umbrella term of identities, have focused the main aspects to look at when drafting all-gender inclusive equality policy plans. This process became even more insightful, thanks to the great awareness of such debates that all the participants showed to possess.

The four themes that came out of the analysis of the data and their intersection with the theories are: 1. Inclusivity, 2. neutrality of discourse, 3. breaking the binary and 4. international organisations. When discussing the concept of *gender inclusion* I took into account this statement: "Gender inclusion also calls us to exercise care in understanding the ongoing oppression of sex and gender minorities around the world and ensure that our research and

published work are part of the solution and not part of the problem" (Smith & Bamberger 2021). The *neutrality of discourse* theme is one that, since the moment I decided to approach this pilot research, I knew was going to be a leading aspect to start changing the way gender equality is discussed and acted upon. When at the end of the analysis process this theme came up as one of the main aspects underlined by the participant, I felt more confident with the overall influence that I think this research could create. The respondent advanced suggestions to write with more neutral wording, like "everyone", "all humans" and "nobody regardless of gender". Furthermore, just by looking into the analysis of the theme *breaking the binary* we can underline three main suggestions for policy makers: do not be binary in practice or in theory; reduce the use of gendered words; and substantially include words like "all genders" - instead of using a men-women dichotomy - in the consultations when writing policies. The interconnection with all these themes is also an aspect which I believe gives strength to the research but also that 'simplifies' the steps that policy makers or policy drafters need to look into to make gender inclusive policies. Lastly, the theme of *international organisations* helped with contextualising and informing these bodies of the consequences that the gender policies written so far have on people who identify outside the binary; which in turn influences their trust and views on these bodies as a whole.

An aspect of the research that I also found of utmost importance to discuss, regards the ethics of the recommendations in relation to my positionality. The consideration of my positionality as a cisgender white woman have also encouraged my choice of creating a space for non-binary individuals to share and discuss their opinions. Furthermore, I made sure that the survey would be anonymous so no one can trace back its sources, in order to preserve the participants' privacy and protection.

The inclusion of non-binary participants and the overall congruent responses shared among them, was a very important aspect of my research, especially when it came to answering the second research question: "To what extent do non-binary individuals consider being represented in gender equality policy plans?". As a matter of fact, the survey, alongside the arguments provided by trans and queer theorists, as well as scholars discussing intersectionality, contextualised, and informed on, the systematic exclusion and discrimination that affects gender non-conforming and queergender people. The opinions shared by the scholars and the participants to this survey further informed the small and uncertain perception of inclusivity and

visibilty that non-binary people, as being part of a gender identity outside the cisnormative one, perceive is constructed and reproduced by IOs in their policies.

Contribution to the gender studies field

I believe that this research could be of great contribution to the Gender Studies field specifically in the political and human rights branch of the field. I believe that often changes are not made because excuses are made on top of them, either to slow down processes or to avoid these processes from ever taking place. In the case of gender equality policy making, these changes entail a de-structuralisation of aspects that have influenced society for decades. This is because the issue is not only to do with the approaches used in gender equality policy making, for example gender mainstreaming, which various scholars have discussed, oversimplifies the concept of gender and the elements that intersect with it; but it also has to do with a change in the - once and for all - inclusion and consideration of everyone's needs and chances equally.

For a decade, discourses on gender equality importance for the well-functioning of society, and how it is something that should become a priority for all international organisations and states, but I have not witnessed changes that benefit all identities and therefore the whole extent of what society is made of. My exploratory research is something that I hope will create a concrete ground for changes, something that could help the process of drafting gender equality policies plans within IOs that are aiming at making gender equality a priority for their staff and in their work, and a certainty in their reality.

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APPENDIX 1 - Survey questions

(Breaking the binary in gender policy making)

Question 1.

Breaking the binary in gender policy making

Hello, my name is Chiara and I am writing my Master's thesis in Gendering Practices at the University of Gothenburg, in Sweden.

Most of the gender equality plans of International Organizations are aimed at "women and men, girls and boys", in my research I am working for writing a handbook to guide International Organizations to conduct gender equality for all genders. To do so your voice will be a compass without which I would be lost. Your voice, your opinions are the ones which can help me make these exclusionary policies become history. The following survey will take up to 30 minutes to answer. In addition there is space for open questions which will allow you to express your own thoughts extensively.

Thank you for taking the time to participate!

What are your pronouns?

Short answer text

Question 2 and 3

What is your age range?

○ 18-24

○ 25-34

○ 35-44

○ 45-54

○ 55-64

○ 65+

Where are you from?

Short answer text

Question 4 and 5

Are you interested in governmental documents, i.e. policy plans, laws, reforms?

- ○ Yes
- ○ Maybe
- ○ Not really
- ○ Not at all

Do you consider international organizations (i.e. UN) to have an influential weight on social representation and inclusion?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ I don't know
- ○ Other...

Question 6 and 7

Why? - feel free to write as much as you want on your thoughts on the topic -

Long answer text

Do you feel represented in policy plans? (that can be small scale policies and/or large scales ones)

- ○ Yes
- ○ To a certain extent
- ○ Not really
- ○ Not at all
- ○ Other...

Question 8 and 9

Do you care for a change in the "gender equal" discourses of higher institutions?

○ Yes, I find it important

○ No, I don't think it has any weight on a larger scale change

○ I don't have an opinion on the matter

○ Other...

Do you perceive your identity and that of people who identify outside the gender binary, to be included in the discourses/ process of achieving gender equality?

Long answer text

Question 10, 11 and 12

What does gender equality mean to you?

Long answer text

What are your thoughts when you read definitions of gender equality as the following: "The concept that women and men, girls and boys have equal conditions, treatment and opportunities to realize their full potential.." (UNICEF 2017)?

Long answer text

What tips would you give to a policy maker who is in the making of a gender inclusive policy plan?

Long answer text