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USING DOING & UNDOING GENDER STRATEGIES IN RUSSIAN WOMEN'S CAREER DEVELOPMENT

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In Russia, the overall number of educated, qualified, healthy, working women is significantly higher than that of men. Nevertheless, women face unequal wage distribution and feel the income gap, rarely reach managerial positions, are not represented at high managerial levels, and are excluded from political life, which is a manifestation of gender inequality. The research was based on the concept of gender strategies of Doing & Undoing Gender Strategies.

The aim of the study was to identify and examine gender-specific career development strategies of Russian women as a way of narrowing the gender gap. The study involved 51 women aged 22 to 60 who were asked to complete a semi-structured interview.

The results were processed by content analysis and frequency analysis. The main results were to confirm the existence of gender strategies as a way of overcoming the gender gap in the organization and to identify and describe the specifics of Russian women's application of gender strategies in their career development. The Doing Undoing Gender Strategy was used more frequently than the Undoing Gender Strategy. However, the scope of Undoing Gender was significantly wider and more variable. Those women who used a combination of gender strategies rated themselves as "strong performers", emphasized high subjective satisfaction with their lives (having a family and children), and noted a successful career path, unlike those who used only one of the strategies. A combination of gender strategies can help to promote women's careers in the best possible way and bridge the gender gap in the organization.

Keywords: *gender inequality; highlighting gender differences; gender blurring; gender gap; career building; women's careers*

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ПРИМЕНЕНИЕ ГЕНДЕРНЫХ СТРАТЕГИЙ DOING & UNDOING РОССИЙСКИМИ ЖЕНЩИНАМИ ПРИ ПОСТРОЕНИИ КАРЬЕРЫ

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В России общее количество образованных, квалифицированных, здоровых, работающих женщин значительно выше, чем мужчин. Тем не менее, женщины сталкиваются с неравномерностью в распределении заработной платы и ощущают разрыв в доходах, редко достигают руководящих должностей, не представлены на высоком управленческом уровне, исключены из политической жизни, что является проявлением гендерного неравенства. Исследование опирается на концепцию гендерных стратегий “Подчеркивание гендерных различий” и “Стирание гендерных различий” (“Doing & Undoing Gender Strategies”).

Цель исследования состояла в выявлении и изучении особенностей гендерных стратегий построения карьеры российскими женщинами как способа сокращения гендерного разрыва. В исследовании приняла участие 51 женщина, каждой из которых было предложено пройти полуструктурированное интервью. Результаты обрабатывались методом контент-анализа и анализом частот.

Основные результаты: подтверждено существование гендерных стратегий как способа преодоления гендерного разрыва в организации; выявлены и описаны особенности применения российскими женщинами гендерных стратегий при построении своей карьеры. Стратегия “Подчеркивание гендерных различий” используется чаще, чем стратегия “Стирание гендерных различий”. Тем не менее, охват применения стратегии Undoing Gender был значительно шире и вариабельнее. Те женщины, что использовали сочетание гендерных стратегий (“Doing & Undoing Gender”), оценивали себя как “сильных игроков”, подчеркивали высокую субъективную удовлетворенность своей жизнью (наличие семьи и детей), а также отмечали успешное построение своего карьерного пути в отличии тех, кто использовал только одну из стратегий. Сочетание гендерных стратегий может способствовать наиболее оптимальному продвижению женщины по карьерной лестнице и преодолению гендерного разрыва в организации.

Ключевые слова: гендерное неравенство; гендерные стратегии; подчеркивание гендерных различий; стирание гендерных различий; гендерный разрыв; построение карьеры; карьера женщин

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Introduction

According to the World Economic Forum (WEF), the global gender gap situation has significantly worsened in 2021 as measured by the Global Gender Gap Index. For example, in 2018, Russia ranked 75th with a Gender Gap Index of 0.701; in 2021, Russia ranked 81st (out of 156 countries) with a Gender Gap Index of 0.708 [4]. Despite the fact that Russian society provides women with unlimited opportunities and access to education (including PhD degrees) and professional development, there is still a gap in income inequality, financial autonomy; women face psychological resistance to taking leadership positions both in politics and business [8; 18; 21].

Women face some barriers to realizing their creative potential in their career paths [7], which can be addressed through the use of gender strategies known in the academic literature as Doing & Undoing Gender Strategies [9]. The concept of “Doing Gender” is interpreted as focusing and emphasizing one’s gender identity, which includes performing “a set of socially oriented perceptual, interactive and micropolitical activities that put special aspirations as an expression of male and female ‘natures’” [9, p. 126]. This interpretation of the concept is based on Erving Goffman’s concept of gender activity as an active achievement entailing gender manifestations in the relevant context [6]. This concept was developed and supplemented by sociologists C. West and D. Zimmerman [22], as well as anthropologist D. Kondo [10]. In the works of such authors as P. Martin, M. Silvestri, E. Kelan, M. Morash and S. Murray, one can find various descriptions of gender strategies that fit the concept of “Doing Gender”:

- Reacting in a “feminine way”: a woman in a business meeting encourages compliments about her appearance from men, reinforcing the perception of her as a woman rather than a professional [9; 20];
- Friendliness and cooperation orientation. In the organizational culture of companies, where a culture of competition and individual achievement is more prevalent, women demonstrate more friendliness and teamwork in their behavior [14; 16; 19];
- Fulfill requests of men from a supportive role. The attitude “women are supportive and accompanying men” stipulates certain rules of the game between men and women both at work and at home [13, p. 346-347].

The notion of Undoing Gender refers to the ways in which gendered actors reproduce gendered behavior and challenge gender in their everyday lives [2; 3].

Research studies on gender emphasizing and/or erasing practices have pointed out the difficulty of isolating this phenomenon [1; 11], perhaps attempting to create a scale methodology for observing gendered behavior in an organization is challenging and challenging at the moment. Researchers of the concept “Undoing gender” reveal it by describing certain gender strategies:

- “Break the stereotype”: mark one’s role in a business meeting [9];
- “Consolidate your position”: to emphasize your power by having a leadership position and using the rules of a hierarchical management system [16];
- “To prove the opposite”: to work in non-traditional areas for women (power structures, construction) [15; 17];
- “To be a super manager”: choosing a job role that allows combining work and family matters [2; 16];
- “Women’s community”: create a community of women and mentor young women in their profession [16, p. 14-16].

At the moment there is a lack of research on how Russian women use gender strategies in shaping their career path [5]. This article will focus on the description of methods for studying gender strategies, description of the specifics of the context of their use by women in Russia in the workplace, discussion of the findings, limitations and prospects of gender strategies research.

Aim

Aim of the study: to identify and examine gender-specific career development strategies of Russian women as a way of narrowing the gender gap. To achieve this goal, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- 1) There are gender strategies used by women in career building;
- 2) The use of gender strategies is associated with satisfaction with their careers.

Materials and Methods

Fifty-one women, ranging from 22 to 60 y.o. (MD=33.3, SD=9.10) participated in the exploratory study. All respondents lived in different regions of the Russian Federation and had higher education.

The qualitative research was organized using a semi-structured interview method. Respondents answered questions such as:

- “Have you ever been successful in your job because you are a woman?”
- “Have you ever felt that your gender limited or hindered your success at work?”
- “On a 7-point scale, how satisfied are you with your career?”

The first two questions were aimed at identifying the gender strategies used by women, while the third question aimed at assessing career satisfaction in

order to further compare groups of less and more satisfied women by the gender strategies they used.

The data obtained from the women's responses to the semi-structured interview questions were analyzed and summarized.

Results

A description of the types and specifics of the use of Doing Gender Strategies is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Women's Doing Gender Strategies in Russia

Title	Description
Use outward attractiveness	Specific manner of dress, brightness of make-up and accessories are used by women to emphasize beauty, femininity, external attractiveness, and to attract the attention of men, on whom the decision depends
Use flirtation	Expressed in specific verbal and non-verbal behavior aimed at attracting and holding the attention of the opposite sex, to establish informal contact with men in order to achieve the desired goal
Pretend not to understand	Expressed by deliberately not understanding an issue or way of dealing with a situation in order to get help from others, for example, in situations involving the use of technical devices
Conform to stereotypical expectations	Manifested in a woman's willingness to demonstrate the role model that is expected of her by others as a woman in a situation (e.g. avoiding confrontation in situations of emotional intensity in a team)
Use emotional reasoning	Manifested in women's communication with male supervisors or colleagues and is characterized by the desire to use emotional reasoning when conveying information or proving one's point of view
Be benevolent with men	Aimed at building benevolent relations with colleagues and male clients in order to establish a relationship of trust and get the desired result without the active resistance of the interlocutor

Source: Compiled by the authors.

The commonality of Doing Gender strategies is that they are predominantly used in "horizontal" communications – with male colleagues, male clients, male partners and, in rarer cases, in "vertical" communications with management or a teacher. The use of this type of strategy is aimed at gaining tactical advantage over other employees or people, i.e. gaining a benefit or help in a particular situation, and is also used to create a trusting atmosphere and "defuse" a con-

flict situation. To achieve a quick tactical advantage, behavioral patterns such as flirting, showing off an attractive appearance, artificial “misunderstanding” and emphasized politeness and tactfulness are used.

A description of the types and specifics of the use of Undoing Gender Strategies is presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

Women’s Undoing Gender Strategies in Russia

Title	Description
Not reacting to flirting as a woman	Used in response to men’s flirtatious behavior (attention, words, behavior, gifts) in an inappropriate situation for flirting: work negotiations with clients or colleagues
Cut off contact with sexual connotations	Used in response to physical contact with sexual connotations by men with whom the woman is not in a romantic relationship
Act more confident and assertive than a man	Desire to behave more aggressively, assertively and confidently than men in order to achieve the desired result
Speak on equal terms with men	Expresses itself in engaging in business dialogue with men, in demonstrating its expertise within the professional field
Demonstrate expertise	Willingness to present their point of view using logical, structured argumentation; demonstrate their competence in their work tasks or in negotiations
Self-development in “male” professions	Desire to work in non-traditional professional fields for women (IT, industry, police), where there is no competition with other women
Position oneself in a gender-neutral way	Strive to position oneself in the workplace primarily as a professional and not as a woman; pay particular attention to one’s appearance to avoid the possibility of being perceived as a woman
Turn to legal rules	In a controversial situation (a task that significantly diverges from professional duties), refer to legal and regulatory documents to assert your identity and reputation as a professional
Enlist the support of other women	Appeal to the experience and knowledge of other women in their professional field, to a «women’s community» that acts as a counterbalance to the «old boy club»
Demonstrate high self-management skills	In the absence of a spouse’s support, the woman has to become a «super manager» and deal with work and family matters
Manage risks	Willingness to delay or forego pregnancy in order to advance in her career
Negotiate equality	Willingness to share childcare and household tasks with their husbands, taking into account each other’s work obligations

Source: Compiled by the authors; S. Cloninger.

Undoing Gender Strategies are used equally often in both “horizontal” communications (with male colleagues, male customers, male partners) and “vertical” communications with company management. The use of this type of strategies is aimed at gaining a strategic advantage over other employees: faster career advancement and professional growth, and at reducing the level of stress and the risk of being fired. Behavioral patterns such as demonstrating expertise, high self-organization, toughness and persistence in achieving their goals or asserting their opinions, and gender-neutral positioning are used to achieve these results.

The findings show that Doing Gender strategies are used more frequently by the research participants (about 65% of respondents) than Undoing Gender (about 30% of respondents). At the same time, among Doing Gender we find less variability (6 types of strategies) and predominant use in “vertical” communications: communication with the direct supervisor, less often with colleagues, partners and friends. Undoing Gender is characterized by greater diversity (12 types of strategies), as well as a wide scope of application in both “horizontal” and “vertical” communications. Each type of gender strategy is used by women in certain contexts and conditions to gain some kind of advantage.

We also analyzed how many respondents mentioned in their interviews the use of both Doing & Undoing Gender strategies depending on the situation. A total of 35.3% of women said that they had used both Doing and Undoing Gender strategies. We compared their data with other parameters such as income level, career satisfaction, family satisfaction and other aspects of life. The results of the comparative analysis showed that those women who used the Doing & Undoing Gender strategies were generally more satisfied with their careers.

Discussion

The results of the study confirmed the existence of gender strategies, as well as identifying and describing the specifics of Russian women’s career development. According to the frequency analysis, the Doing Gender strategy was used more frequently (it was mentioned by about 65% of respondents). This strategy was used in the context of communication with direct superiors, managers (i.e. “vertically”) as well as with colleagues, partners and friends (“horizontally”). Only 30% of respondents mentioned the use of the Undoing Gender strategy. However, the scope of this strategy was much broader and more variable. In addition, the context of communication situations included both “horizontal” and “vertical” communication. It is important to note that just over a third (35.3%) of the respondents noted the use of both Doing Gender and Undoing Gender strategies depending on the situation. They were the ones who reported the

highest subjective satisfaction with their career paths relative to those women who used only one of the strategies.

The results of this study lead to several assumptions:

- 1) The use of only the Doing-strategy by women contributes to obtaining the necessary help and some local “advantages”. However, this strategy is not associated with the achievement of strategic career advancement.
- 2) The use of exclusively Undoing strategies by women contributes to the achievement of strategic career advancement. However, there can be an increased likelihood of encountering negative stereotypes about “unassailable woman”, “careerist”, etc., which can also affect career building by women.
- 3) Using a combination of Doing & Undoing Gender contributes to the best possible career progression and higher levels of subjective success.
- 4) A managerial solution for the organization, aimed at maintaining a balance between the two behavioral strategies: Doing Gender and Undoing Gender, can be the observance of a strict dress code during working hours, with careful attention to detail, not violating the natural image of a working woman, but emphasizing the status of a working woman (not to transform into a male image and not to contrast with it).
- 5) The management of the organization, knowing and understanding the importance of maintaining a balance between the two behavioral strategies, can regulate and adjust them. For example, if the dominance of the Doing Gender strategy is observed, this may be an indicator that the working woman subconsciously feels and experiences gender inequality, demanding increased attention, manifested in excessive demonstration of femininity, attractiveness, sexuality, etc. (with the exception of beauty-companies that specialize in the sale of care and beauty items). The dominance of the Undoing Gender strategy may be an indicator that the female employee subconsciously does not feel that she is the “weaker sex”, trying not to be inferior in professional knowledge and experience to her male colleague by entering into a competitive relationship with him.

One of the limitations of this research is this study of gender strategies as a way of overcoming the gender gap only in the sample of women, due to the topic of the research grant under which it was conducted. The results and conclusions obtained in the framework of the research need to be clarified on an expanded sample of women; it is also necessary to conduct research with a male sample of respondents.

Nevertheless, the findings are consistent with our other research findings that working women incorporate gender into the attributes important for career advancement and use individual social strategies to offset gender inequalities [12].

Conclusion

Modern society, including Russian society, is represented by a large number of educated women willing and able to fulfil their personal potential. However, faced with various manifestations of social and gender inequality in their lives, women strive to compensate for the existing gender gap through a variety of gender strategies, both emphasizing gender identity and levelling gender stereotypes. This research confirmed the hypothesis that Russian women use Doing & Undoing Gender Strategies to gain tactical and strategic advantages in building their careers. Our exploratory research into the identification and study of women's gender strategies in Russia is only the first stage of further gender research. Further research is envisaged in the following areas. expansion of the sample by both women and men, development and validation of methodological tools, and adjustment of methods.

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