Exploring the Role of Organisational Culture in the Manifestation and Tolerance of Transgressive Workplace Behaviour

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Preface

You are currently reading my master thesis: *'Exploring the Role of Organisational Culture in the Manifestation and Tolerance of Transgressive Workplace Behaviour'.* This thesis was written as the final requirement for completing the master's program in Communication Science at the University of Twente. Between September 2024 and March 2025, I dedicated myself to researching and writing this thesis.

The inspiration for this topic stems from a personal interest in the subject. In recent years, transgressive behaviour has frequently been highlighted in the media, often sparking debates that dismissed the issue as exaggerated or overly sensitive. Personally, I believe this topic deserves more serious attention, as transgressive behaviour can have profound negative consequences for victims, perpetrators, and organisations alike. This belief formed the foundation for my research and writing process.

I could not have completed this master thesis without support, and I would like to take a moment to express my gratitude. First, I want to thank all the participants who contributed to this research. This thesis would not have been possible without your openness and courage in sharing your stories with me. Second, I would like to thank my second supervisor, Meike Belter, for her valuable feedback throughout this process. Finally, I would like to extend a special thanks to my first supervisor, Suzanne Janssen, who has provided me with valuable advice, insightful discussions, and encouragement to help me stay on track and successfully complete this thesis.

With this thesis, I hope to contribute to raising awareness about transgressive behaviour within organisational contexts. My aim is to encourage both employees and employers to reflect critically on their organisational cultures and foster healthier work environments.

I hope you enjoy reading it.

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Abstract

Background. Transgressive workplace behaviour, such as sexual harassment, bullying, aggression, inappropriate behaviour, and discrimination, significantly impacts employee well-being and organisational integrity. While previous research has mainly focused on individual factors within an organisation, such as the dominant gender, specific tolerance factors or management strategies, the broader influence of organisational culture as an overarching concept on both the manifestation and tolerance of transgressive behaviour has hardly been investigated. Drawing on structuration theory, this study examines how masculine and feminine organisational culture characteristics shape the occurrence and acceptance of transgressive behaviour.

Methods. This qualitative study involved thirteen semi-structured interviews with individuals who had experienced or witnessed transgressive behaviour.

Findings. Tolerance was divided into personal, relational, social, contextual, and organisational factors, all of which are influenced by both the structures of an organisation (e.g. rules, procedures, hierarchies) and the agency of an individual. Organisational cultures, characterised by hierarchy, competition, and dominance (masculine characteristics) are more likely to be associated with instances of discrimination. Conversely, cultures, emphasising collaboration and conflict avoidance (feminine characteristics), are associated with behaviours that were considered as inappropriate behaviour, such as violating work ethics or unprofessional work attitude.

Conclusion. The results demonstrate the complex interplay between structure and agency, showing that individuals can challenge a harmful work environment through their agency. However, structural changes are necessary to create a sustainable organisational culture that better prevents transgressive behaviour while simultaneously supporting both victims and bystanders. This research therefore contributes to the discussion on workplace safety and provides insights for organisations aiming to foster a more respectful and secure work environment.

Keywords: *workplace misconduct, structuration theory, organisational structures, agency, reporting mechanisms.*

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1 Introduction

Transgressive behaviour is a global societal issue in various contexts, including the workplace (CNV International, 2022). In recent years, this topic has received increasing attention, partly due to numerous media revelations about misconduct within organisations. Nevertheless, transgressive behaviour remains a persistent problem. Research by NAP indicates that in 2024, more than four in ten Dutch employees have personally experienced sexually transgressive behaviour, while over half have witnessed or heard about such incidents involving others (Basekin, 2024). These numbers highlight how deeply ingrained transgressive behaviour can be within organisational culture and how it often goes unpunished for long periods. In addition, sexual transgression is not the only form of transgressive behaviour; there are many other forms of behaviour that fall within this concept and can be harmful to an employee.

Transgressive behaviour, in this study, is defined as any form of conduct that exceeds social or professional boundaries and may have harmful consequences for individuals and organisations (Kuipers, 2024). Such behaviour can range from subtle forms of exclusion and intimidation to physical and verbal violence. The consequences can be severe: employees may feel unsafe, teams may function less effectively, and organisations may face reputational damage, legal action, and decreased productivity (Appelbaum et al., 2007; Cash et al., 2018). By examining the cultural factors that influence tolerance towards such behaviour, this study provides valuable insights for improving workplace interventions and fostering safer organisational environments. These insights can help organisations develop more effective policies and create a culture where employees feel safe to report issues.

Organisational culture plays a crucial role in both the manifestation and tolerance of transgressive behaviour, as it defines what is considered acceptable behaviour within an organisation and shapes how individuals perceive and react to such behaviour (Aleksić et al., 2019; Essen, 2022). A perspective that can be applied to organisational culture is Giddens' structuration theory (1984), which provides a theoretical framework for understanding how structures and individual agency are

continuously influenced by and shape each other. Structures, such as rules, procedures, hierarchies, and task divisions, provide a framework within which behaviour is regulated. These structures often reflect masculine or feminine organisational characteristics that influence both the way employees behave and how transgressive behaviour manifests. For example, the misconduct behind the scenes of the Dutch television programme *De Wereld Draait Door* (DWDD) exemplifies how an organisational culture dominated by a rigid hierarchy, high performance pressure, and competitive dynamics (masculine characteristics) can normalise and constrain toxic behaviour. An investigation by *De Volkskrant* revealed a culture of fear and systematic misconduct, where such behaviour became ingrained because it was seen as the price for success within this highly competitive, individualistic environment (Bormans et al., 2022). However, transgressive behaviour also occurs in organisational cultures with feminine characteristics, such as in healthcare, where collaboration, empathy, and relational dynamics are emphasised (Vugt & Pennarts, 2023). This raises the question of whether transgressive behaviour and its tolerance are influenced by the organisational culture (with masculine or feminine characteristics) and an individual's agency (the capacity to act independently).

Organisational culture thus provides structures (rules, norms, implicit expectations) that influences the behaviour of individuals. At the same time, employees and managers have agency to uphold, ignore, or change these norms (Giddens, 1984). The duality of structures has been demonstrated to constrain individual behaviour, whilst simultaneously constituting structures through the process of reification or challenge to the current status quo. Consequently, attempts to promote a safe and respectful work environment have been unsuccessful (Giddens, 1984). Previous research has shown that organisations with a predominantly male workforce are more likely to experience transgressive behaviour (Hurt et al., 1999; Malik, 2022). Additionally, various studies have explored reasons for tolerating transgressive behaviours, such as the severity and impact of the behaviour (e.g. Aumentado et al., 2024; Okimoto & Wenzel, 2014) and strategies for managing transgressive behaviour within organisational culture (Weitz & Vardi, 2008). However, what is missing in this literature is an in-depth understanding of how masculine and feminine cultural characteristics

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and individual agency influence the manifestation and tolerance of transgressive behaviour within an organisation.

The present study aims to address this research gap by analysing how organisational culture, characterised by masculine or feminine characteristics, affects the manifestation, tolerance, and response to transgressive behaviour. To deepen the understanding of these dynamics, this study adopts Gidden's structuration theory (1984) to analyse how organisational culture both shapes and is shaped by individual behaviour. Furthermore, the study examines the factors that influence the tolerance levels for transgressive behaviour. This insight is crucial, as it not only helps organisations develop more effective strategies for a safe and inclusive work environment but also encourages critical reflection on their own culture and any necessary changes to establish a sustainable and secure workplace. To achieve this, a qualitative study is conducted in the form of semi-structured interviews. To provide structure to this research, the following two research questions have been formulated:

Research Question 1: How do organisational norms, rules, and implicit expectations enable and constrain individuals to tolerate transgressive behaviour?

Research Question 2: How do different forms of transgressive behaviour manifest in organisational cultures with masculine and feminine characteristics?

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2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Transgressive Behaviour

The phenomenon of transgressive behaviour in the workplace is a growing concern, drawing attention from both academic and practitioner communities. Despite laws and regulations designed to protect employees, transgressive behaviour remains a common and often unreported problem (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2022). Transgressive behaviour, as defined by the Dutch Occupational Health and Safety Act (DOHS), is "a collective term for all forms of behaviour in which one person does not respect the boundaries of another" (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, 2017, Article 3, Paragraph 2). Research by LeBlanc & Barling (2004) has demonstrated that such behaviour has a direct negative consequence on both personal outcomes, such as emotional well-being and physical health, and organisational outcomes, such as work attitudes. Other research has shown that exposure to transgressive behaviour can lead to psychological stress (Fisher, 2000) and work withdrawal (Lim et al., 2008; Porath et al., 2010), including lateness, extended breaks, or unnecessary sick leave (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina et al., 2001).

Transgressive behaviour includes sexual harassment, bullying, aggression and discrimination. In essence, the personal boundary is the primary determinant of whether or not a given behaviour is perceived as transgressive (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, 2017). Alternatively, the behaviour may transgress the boundaries established within the organization, such as codes of conduct and house rules (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, 2017). It is also important to note that this behaviour may also cross legal boundaries, such as those pertaining to racism or assault. To give a more nuanced understanding of the different forms of transgressive behaviour, the most important forms are explained below.

Firstly, sexual harassment encompasses a multitude of forms of unwanted physical contact, including but not limited to hugging, kissing, and the making of uncomfortable or flirtatious comments (Kuipers, 2024). Non-physical forms of sexual harassment, such as sexual teasing, jokes, remarks, and comments, are most frequently reported by complainants. These include requests to

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see parts of their bodies, offensive language, verbale remarks about the size of women's breasts and buttocks, or comments of a degrading nature (Fitzgerald and Cortina, 2017). Also, Berdahl and Aquino (2009) have demonstrated that such behaviours are frequently perceived by their victims as dehumanising and humiliating.

Secondly, bullying is defined as the systematic mental and physical mistreatment of a subordinate, colleague, or superior, which, if continued, may cause severe social, psychological, and psychosomatic problems in the victim (Einarsen et al., 2003; Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2002; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). Exposure to such treatment has been claimed to be a more crippling and devastating problem for employees than all other kinds of work-related stress combined and is regarded by many researchers and targets alike as an extreme type of social stress at work (Zapf et al., 1996).

Third, aggression, like the other behaviours, can be interpreted in a broad manner, encompassing psychological acts (e.g., shouting) and physical assault (Dupré & Barling, 2003). In this research, the definitions proposed by Neuman (1998, p. 395) will be adopted, as he defines aggression as "efforts by individuals to harm others with whom they work, or have worked, or the organisations in which they are presently, or were previously, employed". This can manifest in various forms, including shouting, violence, or threats.

Finally, discrimination is defined as "negative or ambivalent demeanour or treatment enacted toward social minorities on the basis of their minority status and membership that is not necessarily conscious and likely conveys ambiguous intent" (Jones et al., 2017, p. 1591). In the field, this often manifests as disparate treatment based on race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or disability (Hebl et al., 2002; Nunez-Smith et al., 2009; Stainback et al., 2011). It is important to note that while the manifestations of bullying and discrimination may appear similar, discrimination is more influenced by right-wing authoritarianism, whereas bullying is influenced by anxiety and a low capacity for perspective taking (Parkins et al., 2006).

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In addition, all of this behaviour can occur online in the form of messages or images. Transgressive behaviour can be both intentional and unintentional. For example, an apparently harmless joke can still be perceived as hurtful (Kuipers, 2024).

2.1.1 The Tolerance of Transgressive Behaviour

In the aftermath of scandals involving transgressive behaviour, questions often arise about who was initially aware of the misconduct and why it was not reported. However, the choice to report and, thus, terminate tolerance of such behaviour is a complex phenomenon shaped by many factors.

First, the severity and impact of the behaviour are primary determinants. Acts that pose a direct threat to individuals' safety or well-being are generally less tolerated than less severe forms of misconduct (Okimoto & Wenzel, 2014).

Second, research by Khan and Howe (2020) suggests that employees are less inclined to report transgressive behaviour when they perceive remorse from the perpetrator. This reluctance is further amplified when the transgressor is both a colleague and a personal friend (O'Sullivan & Ngau, 2014). In such cases, the observer must navigate the moral complexities arising from both the misconduct and the ethical obligations of friendship (Jones, 1991). In this context, victims often consider the potential repercussions for both the organisation and the transgressor (Khan & Howe, 2020).

Third, societal attitudes and legal frameworks also play a significant role in shaping the tolerance of transgressive behaviour (Hess et al., 2019). As awareness of issues such as sexual harassment and discrimination increases, there tends to be reduced tolerance for such actions, resulting in greater accountability for perpetrators (Barnett et al., 1996). Conversely, in environments where such behaviours are normalized or minimized, higher tolerance levels may persist (Hess et al., 2019).

Finally, the influence of power and status is notable. In competitive, assertive environments, aggressive behaviour may be more accepted, whereas in collaborative cultures, there may be stricter

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consequences for such actions (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005; Miceli et al., 2008; Hess et al., 2019).

Ultimately, the tolerance and approach to transgressive behaviour are determined by a complex interplay of individual, relational, societal, and organisational factors. Within this framework, organisational culture plays a key role, as norms and values dictate what behaviour is accepted and how it is addressed. This study examines how masculine and feminine organisational cultures influence the tolerance for transgressive behaviour. Gaining insight into this is essential for understanding why certain organisations are more vulnerable to such behaviour and how a safe, respectful, and inclusive work environment can be promoted.

2.3 Organisational Culture

Organisational culture is defined as a system of shared norms, values, beliefs, and behaviours within an organisation and serves as a sense-making device that shapes employee behaviour (Aleksić et al., 2019; Deal & Kennedy, 2000; Hartnell et al., 2011; Tang et al., 2022). It encompasses the collective understanding and interpretation of organisational goals, strategies, and operational methods by employees (Lee et al., 2021).

Organisational culture is formed by various factors, including leadership style, organisational structures, communication patterns, and employee interactions (Mutonyi et al., 2022). Leadership plays a crucial role in setting the tone and shaping the cultural norms and values within the organisation (Silverthorne, 2004). The organisational structures (e.g. rules, norms, implicit expectations) determines the distribution of power and authority, which can impact the level of collaboration and autonomy among employees (Setiawan & Hastuti, 2022). Effective communication fosters transparency and trust, facilitating the dissemination of cultural values and reinforcing desired behaviours (Lee et al., 2021).

Organisational culture significantly influences employee attitudes, behaviours, job satisfaction, and commitment levels (Mutonyi et al., 2022; Silverthorne, 2004). A positive organisational culture aligned with employee values enhances engagement, productivity, and

retention rates (Setiawan & Hastuti, 2022). Conversely, a toxic or dysfunctional culture can lead to disengagement, turnover, and negative psychological outcomes for employees (Hartnell et al., 2011).

Managing organisational culture is both a crucial and challenging endeavour in handling transgressive behaviour. From a functional perspective, organisational culture is often seen as something that can be shaped and controlled by management. This view suggests that culture is a strategic tool that can be deliberately adjusted to enhance performance, collaboration, or innovation (Schein, 2010). However, more critical and social constructivist perspectives emphasise that culture is deeply rooted in the shared meanings and interactions among employees (Smirchich, 1983). For example, research has shown that attempts to manage culture often result in superficial compliance rather than genuine transformation (Willmott, 1993; Ogbonna, 1992). For instance, changes to material manifestations, behaviours, and values within an organization may occur, but these changes are not always deeply rooted (Ackroyd & Crowdy, 1990). Employees might outwardly adhere to new cultural norms without fully internalizing them, leading to a phenomenon known as 'instrumental value compliance' (Ogbonna & Harris, 1998). This is also evident from the case study research by Ogbonna and Harris (1998), where tangible changes to organisational systems, structures, and strategies were achieved, but the modifications to behaviours and values varied. This perspective could explain why deeply ingrained transgressive behaviours are tolerated within the organisational culture, as employees may adapt out of necessity, while still being driven by hierarchical pressures and the desire to maintain their position. This indicates that while behavioural changes can be observed, they may not reflect authentic acceptance of new values.

Additionally, organisational culture is not always experienced in the same way by all individuals. This raises the question of whether organisational culture is best understood from a unified or differentiated perspective. A unified perspective assumes that an organisation has an overarching, dominant culture all employees share (Martin, 1992). In contrast, a differentiated perspective suggests that organisational culture consists of multiple subcultures, which may vary by department, job function, or even within teams (Martin, 1992). When transgressive behaviour is

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more prevalent in certain parts of an organisation, this may be explained by the presence of these subcultures.

Despite the inherent difficulties, managing organisational culture is essential for fostering a safe and respectful workplace. Therefore, it is vital to conduct research on employees' transgressive behaviour across organisational cultures because these dynamics directly impact workplace ethics, employee well-being, and the overall work environment (LaGuardia & Oelke, 2021; Lee et al., 2021). A positive and respectful culture promotes constructive interactions and conflict resolution, reducing the likelihood of incivility among employees (Lee et al., 2021). Conversely, a culture that tolerates or encourages aggression, disrespect, or unethical conduct may foster incivility and transgressive behaviour, leading to negative outcomes such as increased turnover intentions and decreased job satisfaction (Maskor et al., 2022). Studying these interactions across cultural contexts can create a deeper insight into the ways in which organisational cultures influence these behaviours, facilitating the development of effective strategies to promote a respectful and safe work environment.

2.4 Organisational Structures

As explained in the previous section, organisational culture is shaped by both formal structures and social interactions. The structuration theory, proposed by Anthony Giddens (1984), provides insight into the dynamics between social structures and human agency within organisations. According to this theory, social structures such as rules, procedures, hierarchies and (implicit) expectations are not only shaped by individual behaviour, but are also continually reproduced or constrained by it (Giddens, 1984; Stones, 2017; Tracy, 2013). This reciprocal influence is referred to as the 'duality of structures' (Stones, 2017; Tracy, 2013).

Within organisations characterised by a specific culture, certain behaviours, such as transgressive conduct, may be perceived as normal or even desirable. These behaviours are reinforced by the existing structure of hierarchies and rules within the organisation. Employees who adhere to these behavioural norms contribute to the continuation of the organisational culture.

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Simultaneously, individuals within the organisation can, through their "agency" (the capacity to act independently) seek to alter the culture (Stones, 2017; Tracy, 2013). If employees choose to challenge transgressive behaviour, they can, with the support of others, help to change the norms and practices that make such behaviour possible.

Structuration theory provides insight into why certain organisations tolerate transgressive behaviour while others do not. This concept was also applied to understand bullying behaviour within organisations (Boucaut, 2001), as well as to enhance safety for healthcare patients (Groves et al., 2011). It demonstrates how organisational culture can evolve through the deliberate actions of individuals, and how existing structures can guide behaviour but also be transformed by that same behaviour.

2.4.1 Masculine vs. Feminine Characteristics

Organisational culture is shaped by both structural elements and shared behavioural norms, many of which align with Hofstede's (1980) masculinity-femininity dimension. Masculine cultures are characterised by competition, hierarchy, and performance pressure, while feminine cultures prioritise cooperation, empathy, and harmony (Hofstede, 2001; Maier, 1999). These structures are embedded in decision-making processes, leadership styles, communication norms, and reward systems, all of which influence how employees interact and respond to transgressive behaviour (Hofstede; 1998; Hofstede, 2001). An adopted overview of masculine and feminine characteristics, based on Hofstede's framework, is provided in Table 1.

In organisational cultures, structures such as rigid hierarchies and competitive environments (masculine characteristics) can discourage employees from reporting misconduct, as transgressive behaviour may be perceived as a demonstration of dominance or strength (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Plester, 2015). Conversely, in cultures that emphasis on harmonious relationships and conflict avoidance (feminine characteristics) may lead employees to ignore or downplay inappropriate behaviour to maintain group cohesion (Brewis et al., 1997; Sirin et al., 2004). This raises the question of whether employees in cultures with feminine characteristics really

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experience less transgressive behaviour, or whether it is simply tolerated in less overt forms, such as gossiping and exclusion (Brownlee, 2013).

Table 1.

Masculine and feminine characteristics adapted from Hofstede[1].

Masculine characteristics	Feminine characteristics
Challenge and recognition in jobs are important;	Cooperation at work and a relationship with the boss are important;
Belief in individual decisions;	Belief in group decisions;
Men should be tough and take care of performance; women should be tender and take care of relationships;	Men should be tender and take care of both performance and relationships; women should be the same;
Sympathy for the strong;	Sympathy for the weak;
Live in order to work;	Work in order to live;
Fewer women in management positions;	More women in management positions;
Resolution of conflicts through denying them or fighting until the best 'man' wins;	Resolution of conflicts through problem-solving, compromise, and negotiation;
Less sickness absence;	More sickness absence;

While Hofstede's model has been widely used to explore cultural differences in organisational behaviour, it has also faced criticism. Scholars argue that organisational cultures rarely fit neatly into binary categories (Blodgett et al., 2008; Signorini et al., 2009). Instead, organisations exhibit a mix of both masculine and feminine characteristics, making it difficult to classify them as entirely one or the other (McSweeney, 2002). Nevertheless, Hofstede's framework remains a valuable tool for analysing cultural dynamics, particularly in cross-cultural research. Also, the dimensions of masculinity and femininity align with similar dimensions identified by scholars in organisational psychology, such as power-oriented cultures vs. people-oriented cultures (Williams et al., 1989), power achievement cultures vs. support and role cultures (Schein et al., 1996), and rational goal cultures vs. human relations cultures (Quinn, 1988). Seeking commonalities among existing cultural models may further advance cross-cultural organisational studies (Palazzo, 2019).

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[1] Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions and organisations across nations.* (pp. 298-318). Sage publications.

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By combining this theoretical approach with empirical data, this research not only provides insight into how organisational culture influences the manifestation and tolerance of transgressive behaviour but also into the underlying mechanisms that sustain or alter these processes. The application of structuration theory enables an analysis of how structural elements and individual actions mutually influence each other, with cultural norms being both reproduced and potentially challenged. To better understand this dynamic, this study employs semi-structured interviews. This method allows researchers to gain in-depth insight into employees' perceptions and experiences within different organisational cultures, which is essential for addressing the research questions (De Fina & Perrino, 2011). The following chapter outlines the methodological approach of this study in more detail.

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3 Method

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach to examine transgressive behaviour within organisational culture. Limited research has been conducted on this topic, with existing studies focusing on gender-specific transgressive behaviour (e.g., Hurt et al., 1999; Malik, 2022), reasons for tolerance (e.g., Aumentado et al., 2024; Hall et al., 2024), and management strategies for addressing such behaviour (e.g., Weitz & Vardi, 2008). And even less studies have explored transgressive behaviour within different organisational cultures. Qualitative research is therefore a suitable method, as it allows for an in-depth exploration of individuals' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations in a context where limited knowledge on the subject exists (De Fina & Perrino, 2011). In addition, the interaction between researchers and participants during interviews can provide qualitative insights into how these behaviours are perceived and addressed outside the research context (Jensen & Welzer, 2003). This approach not only examines employees' experiences and perceptions but also uncovers underlying dynamics within different organisational cultures (Fina & Perrino, 2011).

3.2 Context and Sample

In order to address the research question, purposeful sampling was employed, a method that is widely used in qualitative research. This technique is designed to identify cases that are particularly informative, thereby ensuring the optimal use of available resources (Patton, 2014). In order to gain insight into the phenomenon under study, the sample consisted of individuals who had either experienced or witnessed transgressive behaviour in their current or previous organisations. The participants were either personally approached or responded to a LinkedIn message, indicating their willingness to take part in the study and fulfilling to the requirements. The initial guideline was to conduct a minimum of twelve interviews, as this is often sufficient to achieve data saturation in purposeful sampling (Braun & Clarke, 2019). However, the final number of interviews was determined by data saturation, with the study concluding once additional interviews did not provide

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new insights (Guest et al., 2006). This approach enabled comprehensive and reliable conclusions to be drawn about the influence of organisational culture and agency on transgressive behaviour.

The final sample consisted of thirteen participants, including seven victims, three bystanders, and three participants' who identified as both victims and bystanders. The sample included seven women and six men, representing a diverse range of sectors, including law enforcement, education, finance, construction, government, retail, and manufacturing. Some of the participants held senior positions as managers, supervisors or directors, but a number of participants were just starting out in their careers. Organisational sizes varied significantly, from small businesses with fewer than ten employees to large institutions with tens of thousands of staff members. The participants' years of service within their respective organisations ranged from less than a year to over four decades. This diverse sample provided valuable insights into how transgressive behaviour manifests and is tolerated within different organisational cultures, considering both structural influences and individual agency. This diverse sample strengthens the study's ability to identify patterns and differences in organisational responses, making the findings more robust and relevant for a wide range of workplaces.

3.2.1 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was sought and obtained from the BMS Ethics Committee of the University of Twente to ensure participants' welfare and data confidentiality (See Appendix B). An informed consent process was conducted with participants, outlining the study's objectives, their rights, and the measures taken to protect their personal information (See Appendix C). The data was stored in a personal, secure network folder at the University of Twente.

In addition, deliberate steps were taken to make the participant feel as comfortable as possible. For example, the location of the interview was chosen by the participants so that they felt most comfortable and able to speak openly, and all their rights as participants were emphasised several times.

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3.3 Data Collection

To gather the data, semi-structured interviews were employed, a method chosen for its flexibility and ability to probe sensitive topics (Dempsey et al., 2016). Transgressive behaviour is a difficult subject to openly discuss, and semi-structured interviews provided participants with a secure and supportive setting to share their experiences without fear of judgment (Dempsey et al., 2016; Moser & Korstjens, 2017). This method promoted a conversational flow, allowing participants to narrate their experiences while ensuring that key topics were covered. Semi-structured interviews were also effective in eliciting diverse perspectives across different organisational cultures, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of transgressive behaviours. To conduct this research, an interview schedule was developed comprising 20 questions based on the principles of structuration theory, repertory grid and the Critical Incident Technique. A detailed outline can be found in Appendix D.

On average, an interview was about 48 minutes and 52 seconds. The total duration was 10 hours, 35 minutes and 52 seconds. The range of the interviews is 42 minutes and 23 seconds.

3.3.1 Interview Protocol

The interviews were structured in a specific way to collect the data systematically, which is shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Components of the interview protocol

| **Part 1** General Introduction | **Part 2** Organisational Culture | **Part 3** Transgressive Behaviour and Tolerance | **Part 4** Conclusion |

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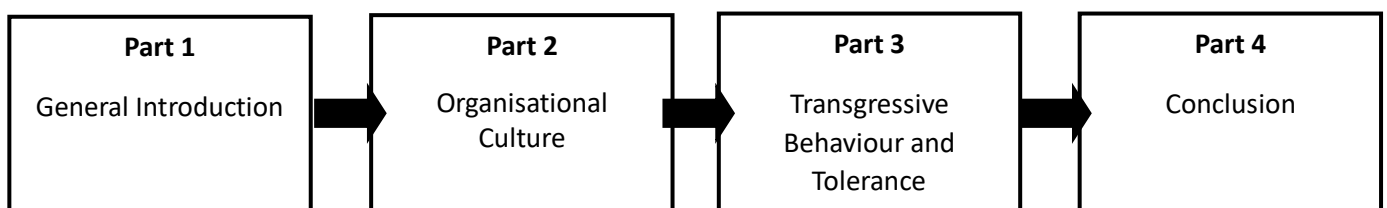
The structure of the interview was carefully designed to ensure that it provided a comprehensive yet flexible approach to exploring the sensitive topic of transgressive behaviour within organisational contexts. The interview was divided into several sections, each serving a specific purpose to elicit rich, relevant data while making participants feel comfortable sharing their experiences.

In Part 1 on the interview, the participants were asked general questions about their work responsibilities and their organisation. Questions such as, *"Can you tell me what kind of work you do?"* and *"How would you describe the organisational culture?"* were used to build rapport and understand the context in which the participant operated. This helped create a comfortable atmosphere and provided an initial insight into the organisational environment, which is crucial for analysing the influence of organisational culture on behaviour (Patton, 2014).

In Part 2, the Repertory Grid was used for the assessment and analysis of organisational culture, as it provides a structured way of exploring individuals' perceptions of their work environment (Cassell & Symon, 2004). Originating from Personal Construct Psychology (PCP), this technique has been widely used in psychological research on organisational culture (Gammack & Stephens, 1994; Kelly, 1955). Traditionally applied as a quantitative tool, the repertory grid evaluates an organisation based on personal constructs. However, Cassell and Symon (2004) later integrated it into qualitative research, allowing for a deeper understanding of how individuals interpret and experience organisational culture.

In this study, the repertory grid was designed to position feminine organisational characteristics on the right and masculine organisational characteristics on the left, using a 7-point scale. A score of "1" indicated a highly masculine characteristic, while "7" signified a strongly feminine characteristic, with "4" representing neutrality. Participants were asked to explain their choices, providing insights into their perceptions and reasoning. Rather than solely measuring elements within the grid, the primary focus was on understanding the underlying motivations behind participants' responses. This qualitative approach allowed for an in-depth analysis of how and why

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individuals experience specific organisational cultures in particular ways. Figure 5 provides an example of the organisational culture grid utilised in this study.

Figure 5

Used Repertory Grid

Masculine	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Feminine
Formal								Informal
Controlled								Uncontrolled
Top-down								Bottom-up
Individual performance								Collaboration
Hierarchy								Flat/ equal organization
Goal-oriented								Process-oriented
Career development								Work-life balance

O = Organisation

Additionally, open-ended questions such as *"What values are important in your organisation?"* and *"How do you communicate internally?"* were used to explore both formal and informal cultural norms. This approach was particularly effective in capturing implicit cultural patterns, which shape behaviour and tolerance within the workplace. The visual representation of organisational culture through the grid further facilitated the identification of patterns in participants' perceptions, highlighting how masculine and feminine characteristics influence performance evaluation, communication, and workplace dynamics.

The core section of the interviews (Part 3) focused on participants' experiences with transgressive behaviour and their perceptions of organisational responses. The interviews began with an open-ended question, such as: *"Can you describe a situation where you or someone else experienced transgressive behaviour?"* This approach allowed participants to narrate their experiences in their own words, ensuring a detailed, personal account (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). To

encourage further reflection, follow-up questions such as *"What made you perceive this behaviour as transgressive?"* and *"How did you and/or others respond?"* were included.

This in-depth exploration aligned with the Critical Incident Technique, which is particularly useful for capturing significant moments that show deeper organisational issues (Flanagan, 1954). The Critical Incident Technique is a qualitative research method that enables participants to reflect on their own or others' experiences, helping to determine whether such incidents were isolated occurrences or part of a broader organisational pattern (Flanagan, 1954; Viergever, 2019). A key strength of the Critical Incident Technique is its focus on specific, real-life incidents, which improves the validity of findings by reducing hypothetical bias (Butterfield et al., 2005). Additionally, it enables the identification of both typical and atypical behaviours, providing deeper insights into the conditions under which transgressive behaviours emerge (Flanagan, 1954; Viergever, 2019).

To further explore tolerance levels, interview questions were designed to show the relationship between organisational structures and individual agency. Participants were asked*: "How did you and/or others respond to this behaviour when it occurred?"* and *"In hindsight, would you have acted differently in this situation?"* These questions helped uncover employees' perceptions of agency within their workplace. Additionally, participants were asked whether a formal policy on transgressive behaviour existed and how it was visibly implemented within the organisation. This dual focus on structure and agency was crucial in understanding how formal structures (e.g., rules, procedures) interacted with individual agency. It helped identify whether employees felt empowered to act against transgressive behaviour and to what extent organisational culture influenced tolerance levels.

The final part (Part 4) closed the interview by encouraging participants to reflect on possible solutions and preventive measures for transgressive behaviour. Questions like, *"What interventions or solutions do you think would help prevent transgressive behaviour in the future?"* not only allowed participants to express their thoughts on organisational improvements but also helped gather valuable data on what might constitute effective interventions.

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The structure of this interview was chosen to gradually build trust and enable participants to open up about sensitive issues, starting with general, relationship-building questions and moving on to more personal and reflective questions. This layered approach ensures that the interviews are both thorough and considerate of participants' emotional well-being while providing rich data for analysis.

3.4 Data analysis

Thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2012) guidelines, was employed to analyse transgressive behaviour and tolerance within different organisational cultures. Qualitative data analysis software ATLAS.ti assisted in transcribing and coding interviews to identify key themes relevant to the research questions. This involved familiarising with the data, creating initial codes, and organising them into potential themes. These themes underwent iterative review, refinement, and precise definition to reflect the dataset accurately.

The data analysis consisted of six stages, as illustrated in Figure 6. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, resulting in 126 pages of transcripts. However, details about previous work experience, tasks or responsibilities, and additional small talk were regarded as irrelevant and were therefore eliminated from the analysed pages, reducing the total to 122 pages of transcript. To ensure confidentiality, organisations and individuals mentioned in the interviews were anonymised. The data analysis followed the coding method of Boeije (2010), which involves three coding phases. These phases are specifically tailored to the context of this study and will be explained in detail.

Figure 6

Overview of the data analysis stages

Interview transcription General Introduction	→	Text exclusion Eliminate irrelevant information	→	Open coding Raw data is grouped into categories
Final codebook Final codes used in analysing the data	←	Selective coding How theoretical framework explains theme relation	←	Axial coding Connection between categories & analyse dominant elements
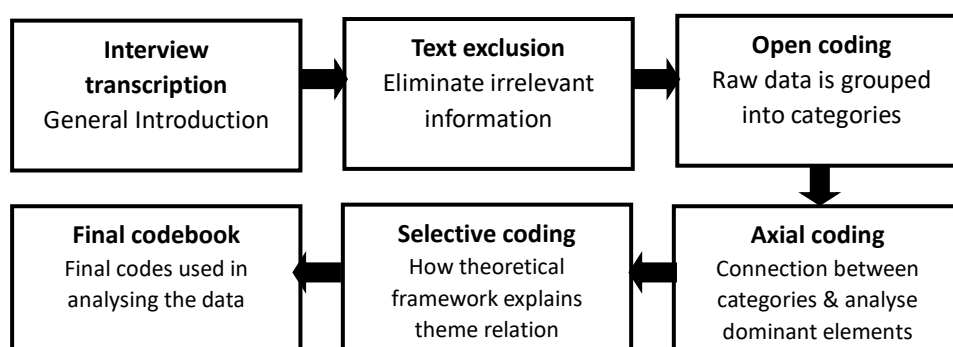
The first phase, open coding, involves a thorough and detailed examination of the data. This step focuses on identifying and labelling distinct concepts, themes, or categories that emerge from the data (Boeije, 2010). Therefore, the interviews were first carefully read, after which each passage was precisely assessed. Relevant segments were selected and assigned a code that captured their core meaning. This exploratory phase aimed to break the data down into smaller, meaningful units without any predetermined assumptions.

Next, axial coding builds upon the open coding phase by examining the relationships and connections between the identified codes (Boeije, 2010). In this phase, links between the codes were analysed and organised, grouping initial codes into broader categories and subcategories. Patterns, relationships, and hierarchies were identified to clarify how different elements of the data interact and influence one another. These hierarchies were then visualised in networks (transgressive behaviour, organisational culture & tolerance factors) to make their structure and interconnections more apparent (see Appendix E).

Transgressive behaviour was, in this phase, categorised into behaviours such as bullying, aggression, sexual misconduct, and discrimination. Additionally, an extra category, 'inappropriate behaviour', was introduced. This category included behaviours that did not fit into the previously mentioned categories but were nonetheless perceived as transgressive, such as stalking or breaches of workplace ethics. Through frequent discussions with the researcher's supervisor, the categories were repeatedly reviewed, sometimes renamed or reorganised, to ensure the most accurate classification.

Also, all interviews were coded based on the characteristics of masculine and feminine organisational cultures as defined by Hofstede (2001). The interviews showed that organisations did not fit entirely within either a masculine or feminine organisational culture but often exhibited a combination of characteristics, with one side being more dominant. As a result, five masculine organisational cultures and seven feminine organisational cultures were identified, along with one

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organisation that displayed an equal number of masculine and feminine characteristics. Subsequently, these characteristics were analysed separately in relation to transgressive behaviour and, based on these dominant cultural characteristics, the study examined which forms of transgressive behaviour were observed and how they developed within the organisation.

The final phase, selective coding, involves refining and integrating the developed categories to construct a coherent narrative or theory (Boeije, 2010). During this phase, all central themes that best represented the research question were identified, and data was selectively coded to support or illustrate these themes. All coded categories were then thoroughly compared and reviewed to identify initial patterns, ultimately leading to a clear and concise interpretation of the data. These interpretations, in turn, provided definitive answers to the key research questions.

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4 Results

The results chapter presents a detailed thematic analysis of the findings, providing insights into the

research questions. The first section examines the transgressive behaviours that have manifested

within organisations. The second section explores the factors that influence tolerance in addition to

organisational factors, distinguishing between personal, relational, social and contextual factors.

Subsequently, the focus shifts to organisational norms, rules, and implicit expectations within an

organisational culture, examining which organisational characteristics are linked to transgressive

behaviour and how these features shape both structural frameworks and individual actions. To gain a

deeper understanding of these dynamics, structuration theory is applied. This theory helps to

identify interconnections and analyse the complex interplay between individual actions and broader

organisational processes (see Figure 7).

Figure 7

Set-up of the result section of this research

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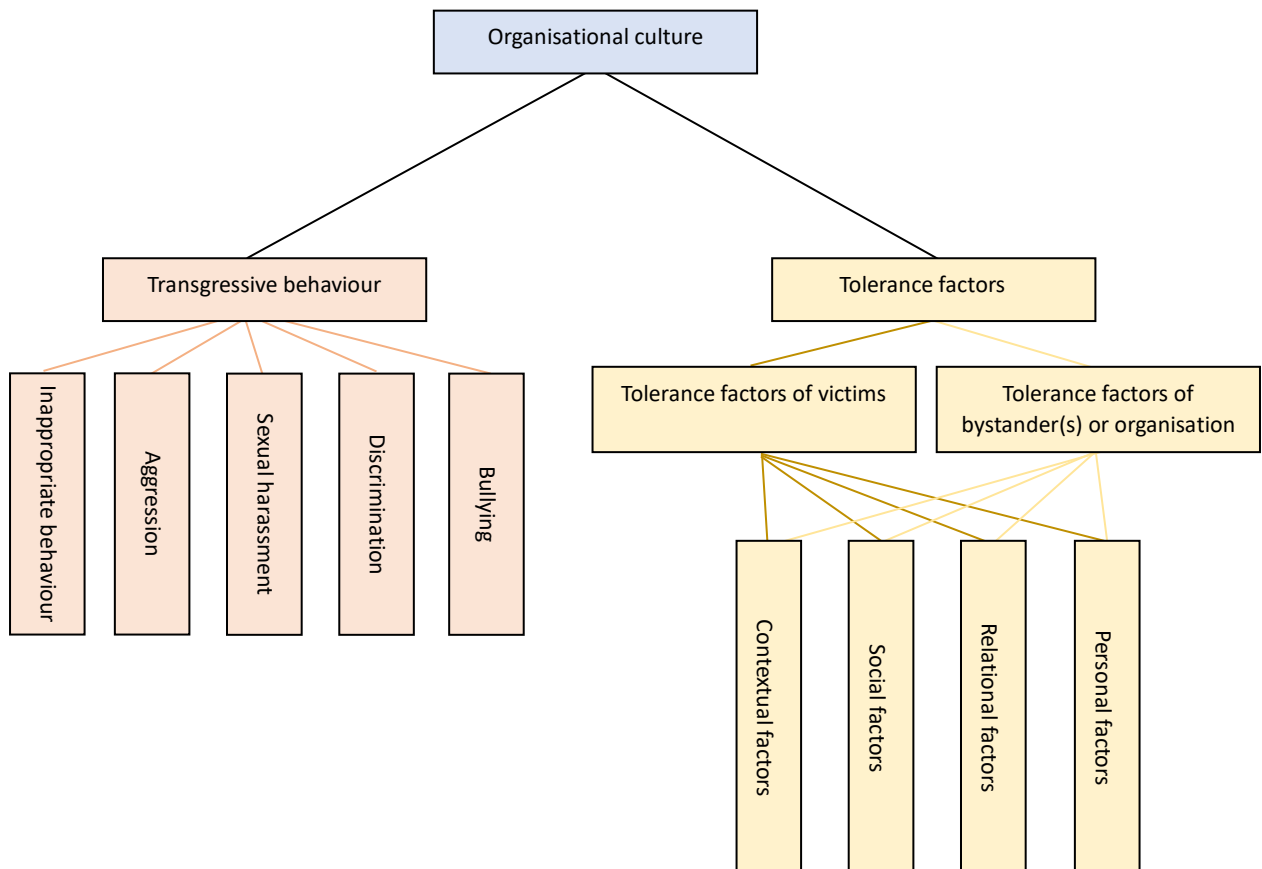
4.1 Manifested Transgressive Behaviours

In order to answer research question 2, which poses the question of what transgressive behaviour manifests in organisational cultures with masculine and feminine characteristics, it is first necessary to gain an insight into the different forms of transgressive behaviour discussed during the interviews conducted. An overview of all identified behaviours can be found in Table 2.

The experiences recounted by the participants during the interviews indicated various forms of transgressive behaviour. Bullying was the most prevalent form of this, mentioned in ten of the thirteen interviews. This behaviour manifested itself in verbal and non-verbal to actively destructive actions, such as ignoring, social humiliation or making derogatory remarks. These actions encompassed both direct interactions between employees and employers, as well as wider work dynamics, including institutional management. Sexually transgressive behaviour followed as the second most mentioned form, mentioned in six of the thirteen interviews. Aggression, encompassing both physical and verbal manifestations, was documented in five interviews. Discrimination, in verbal and non-verbal form or explicitly as part of policy or work culture, was mentioned in four interviews. Inappropriate behaviour, such as violation of work ethics, stalking or an unprofessional work attitude, was also mentioned in four interviews.

The concept of transgressive behaviour is closely linked to personal boundaries and experiences, meaning that individuals may respond differently to certain situations. However, what stood out in the interviews was that participants did not necessarily view a single incident as transgressive, but rather perceived the repetition and frequency of the behaviour as key factors. When transgressive behaviour persists without clear consequences, the tolerance threshold of those affected gradually decreases. In some cases, this led to a tipping point where collaboration was no longer possible, or individuals felt that a critical boundary had been crossed. This escalation point functioned as a breaking point, a moment when the situation could no longer be ignored or downplayed. Participant 9 illustrated this with the metaphor of a mosquito bite:

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"One bite isn't a big deal, but being bitten by a mosquito every day drives you crazy.

All those comments build up and can ultimately really damage people." – Participant

9, Victim and bystander.

Just as a single mosquito bite may be tolerable, but the irritation becomes unbearable when the bites accumulate, and the itching persists. This reflects how transgressive behaviour can build up until the situation becomes unsustainable. In nine out of thirteen interviews, the behaviour was described as structural. This suggests that transgressive behaviour is not merely an isolated occurrence but often forms a recurring pattern within the organisational culture. If this pattern is not interrupted, it can lead to a situation where such behaviour becomes normalised and, as a result, is less readily recognised as problematic.

The prolonged presence of transgressive behaviour clearly effected the psychological well-being of both victims and bystanders. Victims experienced feelings of powerlessness, stress, and sometimes self-doubt, while bystanders explained they struggled with guilt or social pressure not to intervene. The protracted display and tolerance of this behaviour can lead to the development of a toxic work environment, wherein negative interactions become an integral part of the daily dynamic. The structural nature of the problem makes change particularly difficult, as it is often deeply embedded in the existing organisational culture and power dynamics. According to Giddens' ST, this creates a complex interplay between structure and agency: on the one hand, existing norms and power relations shape and reinforce individual behaviour; on the other hand, individuals have the capacity, whether consciously or unconsciously, to maintain or challenge these structures. The interviews show that in organisations where transgressive behaviour has been normalised, agency is often restricted by fear of repercussions, social pressure, or a lack of formal support. Participant 3 also highlighted this issue when responding to the interview question: *"Why do you think no one intervenes in this behaviour?"*

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"Fear. If I say something about it, they'll think: 'Oh, he probably wants to climb the

ladder.' People fear being excluded. It doesn't matter whether you work at a desk or

are still involved in the work field. If you call someone out on what they just said, you

still have to work with them the next day." – Participant 3, Victim and bystander

This creates a vicious cycle in which destructive behaviours persist, making change difficult to achieve.

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Table 2.

Overview of manifested transgressive behaviours

Transgressive behaviour	Categories	Definition	Example quotes
Bullying (Einarsen et al., 2020) Verbal bullying	Derogatory remarks	Statements or comments intended to belittle, demean, or insult someone's character, actions, or abilities.	*"When I asked what the real issue was, [colleague's name] brought up examples of things that supposedly happened two years ago. He accused me of mocking him and treating him disrespectfully. He could even recount the events in detail, but it had nothing to do with work anymore."* – Participant 5, Victim.
	Reproaches and accusations	Criticisms or unfounded claims aimed at blaming or embarrassing an individual, often used to damage their reputation.	
Non-verbal bullying	Undermining	Actions that intentionally weaken someone's authority, credibility, or confidence, such as withholding information or distorting facts.	*"From that incident onwards, he completely ignored me. He greeted everyone except me and wouldn't even look at me. It was clear he couldn't stand me. And that was the worst for me. He also knew how much that hurt me. When I was called stupid or completely torn down again, I would come home in tears."* – Participant 13, Victim.
	Ignoring	Deliberately excluding or disregarding an individual, creating a sense of isolation and exclusion.	
	Social humiliation	Publicly embarrassing or demeaning someone in group settings, such as meetings or social gatherings, to diminish their confidence.	
Actively destructive	Sabotage	Intentional actions designed to obstruct or damage someone's work, reputation, or relationships, often through deceitful or disruptive means.	*"My manager had even influenced the HR advisors with lies. She claimed that I had threatened her and had been physically aggressive in the office on a day when I was in The Hague. I asked, 'Did you even check if I was in the office that day?' The answer was no; they believed her without verifying. There were no checks or factual findings, and they mostly took her side without any objective review."* – Participant 4, Victim.
	Making work unpleasant	Creating a hostile or discouraging work environment through unfair practices, excessive criticism, or assigning meaningless tasks.	

	Slander	Spreading false information or defamatory statements about someone with the intent to harm their reputation or credibility.	
Sexual transgressive behaviour (Berdahl & Aquino, 2009) Sexual verbal	Oversharing personal information	Disclosing intimate or overly personal details about one's sexual life or experiences in a way that is inappropriate for the professional setting.	*"[Colleague's name] was going through the menopause. She was very open about it and shared everything in great detail during lunch breaks. She would talk about her period or increased libido, and what she'd been up to with her husband. How they'd really gone for it. Come on, keep that private."* – Participant 6, Victim.
	Inappropriate comments	Remarks or statements with sexual undertones that are offensive, unwelcome, or create discomfort.	
	Making allusions	Indirect references or insinuations of a sexual nature that imply inappropriate intentions or ideas.	
	Gossiping	Sharing or spreading sexualised or private information about someone without their consent, often to demean or embarrass.	
Sexual non-verbal	Inappropriate workplace behaviour	Non-verbal actions of a sexual nature, such as viewing pornography or making sexually suggestive gestures, that disrupt the professional environment.	*"I even remember a moment that I really thought went too far! During lunch, the sergeant suddenly pulled out pornographic films that they wanted to watch. I really thought that was too much. I got up and walked out."* – Participant 9, Victim and bystander.
Sexual physically	Unwanted touching	Physical contact of a sexual nature that is unsolicited and unwelcome.	*"I've been a confidential adviser for a long time, but unfortunately, serious incidents still occur: rape, assault, violence, and other issues. I say this in my role as a confidential adviser, it doesn't happen every day, but it does happen."* – Participant 9, Victim and bystander.
	Sexual acts without consent	Engaging in sexual behaviour with another individual without their explicit and informed agreement.	

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Aggression (Einarsen et al., 2020) Verbal aggression	Unjustified anger	Expressing anger without a valid or reasonable cause, often disproportionate to the situation.	*"While the colleague I normally work with was away, I urgently needed financial advice, so I asked his colleague for help. When he returned and heard what had happened during his holiday, he completely lost it. His colleagues even had to play table tennis with him to calm him down, and he eventually even went home." – Participant 5, Victim.*
	Shouting	Speaking in a loud, forceful manner, often with an aggressive tone, intended to intimidate or dominate.	
	Threatening	Making statements or gestures that imply harm or violence towards another person.	
	Insulting/ cursing	Using offensive language or insults aimed at belittling, humiliating, or provoking another person.	
Physically aggression	Threatening violence	Using physical gestures or body language that implies an intention to harm someone, without actual contact.	*"My boss slammed his hand down hard on the table right in front of my face and shouted, 'How do I get it into your head that you shouldn't do such stupid things?!' At that moment, I honestly thought: he's going to hit me." – Participant 13, Victim*
	Intimidation	Using physical presence, gestures, or actions to make someone feel afraid, powerless, or threatened.	
Discrimination (Jones et al., 2017; Hebl et al., 2002) Verbal discrimination	Discriminatory remarks	Comments that express or imply prejudice or bias against someone based on characteristics such as race, gender, religion, or other attributes.	*"Sometimes remarks are thrown at you by other colleagues, for example, when it comes to a promotion, with comments like, 'That's probably because you're a woman.' For me, it's just comments like these." – Participant 12, Victim and bystander.*
	Direct refusal	Explicitly rejecting or denying opportunities, requests, or rights based on discriminatory reasons.	
	Derogatory language	The use of offensive or belittling words aimed at diminishing someone's value, often based on discriminatory views.	
	Stereotyping of features	Making generalising and harmful assumptions about individuals based on a perceived group characteristic, such as gender, ethnicity, or appearance.	

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Non-verbal discrimination	Exclude	Deliberately leaving someone out of activities, discussions, or decisions based on discriminatory reasons, creating a sense of isolation.	*"I don't let things slide. But of course, it bothers you when you're treated as a second-class citizen within our organisation. You notice it when, for example, you're ignored."* – Participant 9, Victim and bystander.
	Ignore	Purposefully neglecting someone's presence, input, or contributions, often as a way of marginalising them due to their identity.	
Actions within policy or work culture	Instrumentalization	Treating individuals as tools or means to an end, often exploiting their identity or characteristics for personal or organizational gain.	*"Eventually, I was transferred to another team, with the message: 'We don't have any gay people there yet. We already have enough lesbian colleagues, so if you go there, we'll meet the diversity quotas as well.'"* – Participant 3, Victim and bystander.
	Preferential policy to the detriment of others	Policies that favour certain groups over others, often leading to unequal opportunities or treatment.	
	Unequal treatment	Disparately applying rules, benefits, or opportunities to different individuals or groups based on discriminatory criteria.	*"I wanted to work 40 hours a week, but in response, my boss told me that only men were allowed to work 40 hours, and women could work a maximum of 36. As a result, I have every Friday off every other week. Initially, I thought that was fine, even relaxed, but later I thought: how ridiculous. Either everyone works 36 hours, or everyone works 40 hours. Such inequality is obviously unacceptable."* – Participant 13, Victim.
Inappropriate behaviour (Akella, 2020; Reich & Hershcovis, 2014)	Violating work ethics (e.g. alcohol use)	Involves actions such as alcohol use, which can disrupt the workplace environment and impair an individual's ability to perform their duties responsibly.	*"It's simply unacceptable. There is a possibility that this colleague has a drinking problem and drinks too much during the week, possibly even at work. That affects your performance, and that's not acceptable."* – Participant 11, Bystander.
	Stalking (e.g. observations)	Refers to observations that cross personal boundaries, where an individual may engage in unwanted monitoring or following of a colleague, creating discomfort and anxiety.	*"One of the employees stalked another woman in our team. He was seen standing outside her house a few times. He didn't speak to her or send any messages, but she felt intimidated because he didn't live near her; he*

		lives just by the office, whereas she lives about a 15-minute drive away." – Participant 10, Bystander
Unprofessional work (e.g. bad language, being late or beyond normal expectations)	Encompasses behaviours such as using bad language, being late, or working beyond normal expectations. These actions undermine team dynamics and productivity, contributing to a toxic work atmosphere.	*"My boss wanted us to deal with things directly if they didn't go as expected, without considering the other person. While I always tried to resolve things reasonably in difficult situations, he insisted that you would completely demolish the customers. So, I tried to keep customer service as professional as possible, but actually, I was just supposed to shut them up." – Participant 13, Victim.*

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4.2 Organisational Culture, Tolerance, and Transgressive Behaviour: A Structuration Theory

Perspective

The tolerance of transgressive behaviour within organisations is shaped by a complex interplay of personal, relational, social, contextual factors organisational factors. Prior research has highlighted how individual characteristics, power dynamics, group norms, and organisational policies influence whether certain behaviours are accepted or disapproved (Hess et al., 2019; Khan & Howe, 2020; Okimoto & Wenzel, 2014). The interviews conducted in this study further confirm this complexity, demonstrating that tolerance is not static but shifts in response to societal changes, workplace relationships, and evolving cultural norms. Participants described how their perception of transgressive behaviour has changed over time, influenced by external movements such as #MeToo and internal factors such as leadership and workplace atmosphere.

"Two or three years ago, our organisation had a general policy on transgressive behaviour. It was documented, but the #MeToo movement has brought much more attention to the issue. People react more quickly now, but it has also become more complex. In the past, a pat on the shoulder or a joke was generally acceptable, but nowadays, it is more likely to be seen as transgressive. This makes it especially difficult for managers, as they have to be extremely careful in their interactions with employees."– Participant 2, Bystander.

At the core of these tolerance dynamics lies organisational culture, which provides the broader framework within which transgressive behaviour is perceived, tolerated, or rejected. The same applies to the manifestation of transgressive behaviour, which can be produced by the prevalent organisational culture, but can also be reduced. Through the lens of structuration theory, this section explores how organisational culture influences both the manifestation of transgressive behaviour and the mechanisms that sustain or challenge its tolerance. The key factors influencing tolerance identified in the interviews are summarised in Table 3, with an example of their manifestation.

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4.2.1 Factors Shaping the Tolerance of Transgressive Behaviour

4.2.1.1 Personal Factors. The way individuals perceive and respond to transgressive behaviour is strongly influenced by personal factors. The interviews highlighted five key characteristics: 'personal norms and values,' 'lack of knowledge or awareness,' 'experience with transgressive behaviour,' 'self-confidence,' and 'individual responsibility.' These factors determined the extent to which the participants perceived behaviour as inappropriate, their tolerance threshold, and how they react to such situations.

Firstly, participants talked about how personal norms and values play a role in how transgressive behaviour is experienced and addressed. Individuals with strong moral beliefs about justice and solidarity were more likely to intervene (agency), whereas those who prioritised social harmony or hierarchical obedience (influenced by structure) were more inclined to accept or conceal such behaviour.

A second factor is the lack of knowledge and awareness of what constitutes transgressive behaviour and how to respond to it. This factor lies at the intersection of structure and agency: on the one hand, participants could recognise transgressive behaviour more quickly if they did not yet have knowledge of the prevailing structures within the organisation. On the other hand, individual inexperience or lack of knowledge (agency) further contributes to tolerating the behaviour. For example, Participant 8 stated to be unable to handle the situation correctly because there was a lack of knowledge to confide in someone, as it was the first job:

> *"As a young girl, I really didn't know how to handle that. Now, it's completely different. Here at my current job, for example, there is a confidential advisor outside the organisation, which makes things much clearer. I did miss that at the time, especially because I was still so young." – Participant 8, Victim.*

Previous experiences with transgressive behaviour also influenced participants tolerance towards it. Here, agency plays a dominant role, as individuals who have encountered similar situations in the past develop heightened awareness and a lower tolerance for misconduct. However,

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these experiences are shaped by structural elements, such as whether the organisation previously

addressed such incidents effectively or if a culture of silence persisted.

Self-confidence is another determining factor that primarily falls under agency. Participant

with high self-confidence were more resilient and less likely to tolerate transgressive behaviour.

Victims with confidence are more willing to assert their boundaries, while bystanders feel

empowered to intervene, even if doing so might lead to social conflicts (Wachs et al., 2018).

However, workplace culture (structure) can either reinforce or undermine individual confidence. For

example, Participant 13 stated to be a very confident person, but was discouraged from speaking up

because of the organisational culture.

"I am very talkative and outspoken, but if you asked my boyfriend what I was like

back then, he would say I was incredibly insecure." – Participant 13, Victim and

bystander.

Finally, the extent to which someone feels responsible influences their willingness to take

action. Many participants talked about colleagues who perceive transgressive behaviour as an issue

for which they are not directly responsible, leading them to refrain from intervening or reporting it.

This illustrates how structure and agency interact: an organisational culture that promotes collective

responsibility (structure) can encourage intervention, whereas a culture where responsibility is

diffuse or placed solely on victims may discourage action.

4.2.1.2 Relational Factors. Relational factors within organisations play a crucial role in the

perception and tolerance of transgressive behaviour. The interviews highlighted four key factors:

'power dynamics,' 'collegial relationships,' '(in)equality of treatment,' and 'professional

collaboration.'

First, many participants talked about the influence of power dynamics on the extent to which

employees feel safe reporting transgressive behaviour, particularly when the perpetrator is a

superior. Fear of repercussions, such as job loss or career limitations, may prevent both victims and

bystanders from intervening. In this case, structure plays a dominant role, as hierarchical

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organisational norms and policies determine whether employees feel protected when coming forward. However, individual agency is also relevant – leaders who choose to actively support victims can counteract the structural power imbalance by acting as a trusted confidant.

Additionally, participants also stated that the relationships between colleagues can be decisive in determining tolerance levels. When there is a personal bond between the victim and the perpetrator, agency in the form of personal loyalty, can lead to greater tolerance of transgressive behaviour. Victims may be inclined to minimise the behaviour to avoid damaging their working relationship. However, structural aspects, such as implicit expectations and norms around interpersonal relationships, determine whether these loyalty conflicts emerge. This was evident in four of the thirteen interviews, where participants described feeling torn between protecting or supporting a colleague and addressing or reporting transgressive behaviour. This type of conflict illustrates how agency and structure interact, as both personal choices and the organisation's relational norms contribute to either silence or intervention.

Third, some participants identified an unequal treatment within the organisation as a major contributing factor to transgressive behaviour. Here, structure plays a crucial role—hierarchical biases, informal power networks, and selective enforcement of policies create an environment where certain employees are treated differently. This in turn has an impact on agency, as victims may be discouraged from reporting incidents if they feel that reports are not taken seriously or that certain colleagues are given preferential treatment. The same applies to bystanders, who may hesitate to intervene if they believe their actions will have little impact due to these structural inequalities.

Finally, professional collaboration plays a role in determining tolerance levels. Participants stated that as long as unusual behaviour remains within the boundaries of professional interaction and does not directly affect the work environment, employees may not perceive it as transgressive. This highlights a complex structure-agency dynamic: workplace norms (structure) dictate what is considered acceptable professional behaviour, but individual employees (agency) interpret and

enforce these norms in daily interactions. When behaviour crosses a certain threshold and becomes (too) personal or harmful, the need for intervention increases. Participant 1 illustrated this point during the interview, explaining that while many jokes are made among colleagues, the nature of these jokes varies depending on who they are directed at, as not all colleagues consider them appropriate within a professional context:

> *"We've had people here who would joke back, so you could expect that sort of banter. But if someone is polite and proper and they receive such remarks, it does leave you at a loss for words."* – Participant 1, Bystander.

4.2.1.3 Social Factors. Social factors play a crucial role in how transgressive behaviour is perceived and addressed within an organisation. The interviews highlighted three key factors: 'group norms,' 'solidarity and loyalty,' and 'social pressure.' These factors influence both victims and bystanders and can determine whether transgressive behaviour is tolerated or actively challenged.

First, group norms were frequently mentioned as unwritten rules that dictated what behaviour was considered acceptable within a team. This is a clear example of structure, as these norms shape how employees perceive and respond to transgressive behaviour. In workplaces where such behaviour is normalised, victims may feel pressured to accept it or avoid reporting it out of fear of social exclusion. However, agency plays a role in how individuals choose to conform to or challenge these norms. Bystanders, for example, may be influenced by structural expectations that discourage intervention, but they can also exercise agency by actively rejecting these norms and speaking out. The fear of being labelled as 'difficult' or being excluded further illustrates how structure constrains agency, reinforcing the normalisation of transgressive behaviour.

Solidarity and loyalty within teams were also highlighted as factors that could either support or hinder responses to misconduct. Structure is evident in the way organisations cultivate workplace solidarity, shaping whether employees feel safe enough to report incidents. However, agency becomes relevant when loyalty is directed toward the perpetrator rather than the victim, reinforcing a structure that isolates victims and discourages intervention.

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Finally, social pressure emerged as a key factor in whether transgressive behaviour was tolerated. This factor exemplifies the structure-agency interplay, as hierarchical or tightly-knit workplace cultures create an environment where complaining is perceived as risky. The structural power of these cultures discourages individuals from speaking up, reinforcing the silence around misconduct. Participant 12 illustrated this tension during the interview:

"I think people sometimes find it intimidating to call someone out on their behaviour. That's where the power dynamic comes into play again. Sometimes you just let things happen because you think: if I speak up about this, I'll be the one who suffers the consequences." – Participant 12, Victim and bystander.

Participants who identified themselves as bystander also described experiencing pressure to conform, noting that when a group implicitly accepted misconduct, fear of repercussions made intervention less likely. As a result, many participants observed that such behaviour persisted due to collective silence and reluctance to act.

4.2.1.4 Contextual Factors. Contextual factors play a role in the level of tolerance for transgressive behaviour within organisations. These factors include external circumstances and environmental influences that shape how organisations, victims, and bystanders respond to such behaviour. The interviews highlighted two key aspects: 'economic pressure' and 'external pressure'.

First, the interviews indicated that economic pressure plays a significant role in shaping tolerance towards transgressive behaviour, particularly among bystanders and within organisations. This is an example of structure, as organisational constraints create an environment where misconduct may be deprioritised or ignored. Some participants noted that during financially challenging periods, such incidents often received lower priority, as management focused on issues such as cost-cutting or staff retention. Participant 4 specifically mentioned that economic concerns contributed to initial reports being ignored or met with a lack of intervention. Additionally, some participants observed that economic pressure was used as a justification for tolerating inappropriate behaviour. Bystanders also expressed hesitation in intervening (agency), fearing potential

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consequences for their own job security or the organisation's stability, illustrating how structure can constrain agency.

The interviews also indicated that external pressure, such as societal norms, media coverage, and public opinion, influenced how participants perceived and responded to transgressive behaviour. This is another example of structure, as these external forces create expectations for how organisations and individuals should handle such incidents. Several participants discussed the role of media in shaping these responses. Some victims described feeling more aware through social movements like #MeToo, which encouraged them to report incidents. In this case, agency is evident in how individuals use external discourse to challenge or reinforce existing organisational structures. However, others hesitated, fearing that their experiences would not be considered 'serious enough' in public discourse. Bystanders also expressed mixed reactions to external pressure. While some felt encouraged to take action due to growing societal awareness, others worried about reputational damage or how their organisation might be perceived, making them more reluctant to intervene.

4.2.1.5 Organisational Culture. Beyond personal, relational, social, and contextual factors, participants frequently indicated that their organisational culture influenced the tolerance of transgressive behaviour. They identified the following aspects of organisational culture as factors affecting tolerance: 'norms and values', '(good) leadership', 'normalisation of behaviour', and 'policies and procedures'.

First, the interviews showed that the norms and values within an organisational culture strongly influence which behaviours are considered acceptable. These norms function as structures that dictate the social environment of the workplace, shaping attitudes toward misconduct. Examples of norms and values described by participants include regional culture, hierarchical structures, male dominance, work environment (e.g. hybrid or remote), informal interactions, a culture of fear, conservative values and victim blaming. All of these examples contributed to different perceptions of transgressive behaviour, often constraining individuals from speaking out and

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demonstrating how structure can limit agency. However, employees who actively challenge these norms by voicing concerns or advocating for change exhibit agency within the existing structure.

Secondly, the normalisation of transgressive behaviour emerged as a factor contributing to its tolerance. When inappropriate behaviour becomes routine and goes unchallenged, it solidifies as part of the organisational structure. This was evident in several interviews where misconduct was downplayed with remarks like: *"That's just how he is."* Such statements reinforce structural barriers that discourage victims from reporting incidents. However, agency is evident in individuals who resist this normalisation, whether by speaking out, seeking external support, or pushing for policy changes.

Third, leadership was identified as a crucial factor in either addressing or enabling transgressive behaviour. Leaders hold structural power within organisations, meaning their actions significantly impact the workplace climate. Participants reported that their leaders either engaged in misconduct themselves or remained passive, allowing misconduct to persist. This demonstrates how structure reinforces itself when leadership fails to intervene. In contrast, strong leadership that prioritises respect and accountability can reshape the structure, making it easier for victims and bystanders to speak up. In this sense, leadership represents a key structural force that can either constrain or empower employees' agency.

Lastly, organisational policies and procedures play a crucial role in addressing transgressive behaviour, yet they were often found to be inadequate. Policies function as formal structures designed to regulate behaviour, but their effectiveness depends on implementation and enforcement. In six out of thirteen cases, participants reported that policies were unclear or insufficient, leading to a lack of trust in reporting mechanisms. The structure-agency dynamic is particularly evident here: while policies exist as part of the organisation's framework, their impact relies on individuals' willingness to use them and leadership's commitment to enforcement. When policies fail to lead to concrete action, structural deficiencies constrain agency, resulting in a cycle of silence and tolerance. A lack of trust in reporting mechanisms further reinforced structural barriers to addressing misconduct. As Participant 5 described:

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"Nothing really happened after we reported it; our story was heard, but that was it.

We didn't receive any further information or updates. So we said: 'Well, then we'll

just stay away, because we don't want to run into him again.'" – Participant 5,

Victim.

This highlights how organisational inaction reinforces structural constraints, discouraging future reports and maintaining an environment of tolerance. However, the interviews also provided examples of effective policies, where clear procedures helped raise awareness and improved the identification of transgressive behaviour. In these cases, individuals exercised agency within a supportive structure, using policies to drive change and improve workplace safety.

4.2.2 Organisational Culture and Transgressive Behaviour

The interviews show that transgressive behaviour occurred in organisational cultures with both masculine and feminine characteristics. However, the ways in which this behaviour was manifested and addressed differed according to the structural characteristics of each culture.

In organisational cultures, characterised by a strong hierarchy, competition, and traditional role patterns (masculine characteristics), gender-related transgressive behaviour and discrimination were more frequently identified, often originating within the systemic structure. Participants described workplaces where strong competitive norms and rigid leadership models reinforced traditional gender roles, leading to unequal treatment and, in some cases, sexually inappropriate behaviour. These behaviours were often normalised rather than actively challenged, as they were embedded in the organisation's culture and reinforced by both formal policies and informal social dynamics.

From the perspective of structuration theory, this illustrates the interplay between structure and agency. Employees who recognised discrimination or transgressive behaviour often refrained from speaking up due to hierarchical power dynamics, fear of repercussions, or a lack of institutional support. Over time, these behaviours became ingrained, making change more difficult. Participant 9,

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for example, described her struggle to adapt in a traditional male-dominated organisation when she just started the job:

"I've become quite assertive, but I've experienced a lot of sadness. I really struggle with injustice and power games. That affected me a lot, though it got easier over time. At first, I thought: 'I'm welcome in this organisation.' How naïve I was. I really had to fight for my place." – Participant 9, Victim and bystander.

In highly masculine organisations, hierarchical structures could also lead to power abuse, making it difficult for subordinates to report inappropriate behaviour. Similarly, a competitive work environment encouraged aggressive or intimidating behaviour and was often dismissed as 'part of the game.' This demonstrates the duality of structure: while structures seem rigid, they are continuously reinforced through daily interactions. If masculine norms legitimise transgressive behaviour, these structures persist unless actively challenged.

However, individual agency also played a role in resisting and transforming these norms. Employees who confronted discriminatory language or behaviours contributed to raising awareness and questioning existing power dynamics. Participant 3, for instance, deliberately challenged homophobic remarks to make colleagues aware of their impact:

"If someone makes a joke, like 'dirty faggot,' I raise my hand and say, 'Hello, I'm here. Are you talking about me?' Then they say, 'Oh no, sorry, I didn't mean it that way.' But I make it clear that such a remark can have an impact on me. Sometimes I do this deliberately, even when it doesn't bother me, because people need to be aware of what they are saying." – Participant 3, Victim and bystander.

Nevertheless, without structural changes, personal agency alone was not always sufficient to transform deeply embedded norms. Participants who challenged transgressive behaviour often faced resistance, highlighting the importance of both cultural shifts and formal interventions.

Within organisational cultures where participants described their organisation as informal, with a flat hierarchy and a conflict-averse approach (feminine characteristics), the structural aspects

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influenced how inappropriate behaviour was perceived and addressed within the workplace. ST illustrates how informal norms shape behaviour while simultaneously being reproduced by employees' actions. The absence of hierarchical control mechanisms in flat organisations meant that boundaries were less clearly defined, and social cohesion was prioritised over addressing transgressive behaviour. Employees often prioritise group harmony over individual grievances, delaying necessary interventions. Participant 5 described a situation where an issue with a colleague was prolonged because they initially attempted to resolve it informally, believing formal intervention was unnecessary:

> *"I thought for a long time: 'I should be able to work this out with someone. We are adults and should be able to have a conversation.' We should be able to reach a solution. To me, it felt somewhat like a failure that this wasn't possible."* – Participant 5, Victim.

Conflict avoidance also influenced the reporting of transgressive behaviour. Some participants expressed concerns that addressing issues too early could have negative consequences for both the perpetrator and the victim. Participant 11 described this dilemma:

> *"Yes, we tend to avoid difficult matters when they arise. Not because we fear the consequences, but because we do not want to hurt others. But at the same time, you are not helping anyone by staying silent."* – Participant 11, Bystander.

Despite these challenges, individual agency could disrupt established norms. Employees who advocated for clearer policies and reporting mechanisms initiated cultural change. Participant 2 described how taking formal action against inappropriate behaviour led to increased awareness and reflection among colleagues:

> *"The conversation you have with someone like that has an impact. You agree that the group knows he is working on his behaviour, but you cannot share the details. Yet you see a change in the group. People start talking about the situation more, and a sense of reflection emerges: how did we, as a group, let this happen? People also*

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start looking at themselves and wondering why they did not say anything sooner. The

group realises that, although they thought they communicated openly, they actually

allowed it to happen." – Participant 2, Bystander.

This example illustrates how agency can challenge cultural norms and prompt collective reflection. Once individuals recognised the limitations of informal conflict resolution, they could advocate for more structured responses to inappropriate behaviour.

4.2.3 Victim or Bystander

The analysis of the interviews show that tolerance for transgressive behaviour is shaped by whether individuals experience it as victims or observe it as bystanders. While victims often face the emotional and psychological consequences of the behaviour directly, bystanders may view the behaviour as less serious or even normal, depending on their position and interpretation. To provide further clarification, an example has been formulated for each tolerance factor category. The following statements show the multifaceted perspectives of the victims and bystanders as articulated by the participants.

The first example, from the category of personal factors, illustrates the difference between a bystander and a victim particularly well through the lens of norms and values. From the victims' perspective, personal norms and values can influence the extent to which they tolerate transgressive behaviour. Victims with strong ethical values are more likely to reject such behaviour and report it, whereas those who have been raised with norms of obedience, for instance, may tolerate or conceal the behaviour to avoid conflict. This was the case for Participant 13, who was brought up with certain norms and values, leading to a prolonged acceptance of transgressive behaviour in the workplace:

"I also come from a family where I was taught: 'Who pays, decides.' So I learned that

you have to respect your employer. Do you get me?" — Participant 13, Victim.

In contrast, bystanders may remain passive for reasons of loyalty or group cohesion, even if they do not internally agree with the behaviour. This was evident in the case of Participant 4, who had a conflict with her line manager. She reported the issue to the most senior manager in the

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organisation, but did not receive a serious response, mainly due to a difference in perception rooted in norms and values:

> *"In the end, I filed a formal report about an unsafe work situation at my organisation and this was even before the physical threats. But my organisation thought it was just a conflict between her and me. They literally called it a 'bitch fight.' They even said: 'You probably wanted her position, which is why you can't get along with her.'"*
> — Participant 4, Victim.

Within the category of relational factors, the interviews clearly demonstrate the influence that relationships between colleagues can have on tolerance levels for both victims and bystanders. Personal relationships can increase tolerance for transgressive behaviour (O'Sullivan & Ngau, 2014). When victims have a good relationship with the perpetrator, they may minimise or rationalise the behaviour. Similarly, bystanders may hesitate to intervene if doing so could jeopardise their social status. This aligns with research showing that personal relationships often lead to greater tolerance for undesirable behaviour, even when bystanders are aware of its harmful impact (Khan & Howe, 2020; O'Sullivan & Ngau, 2014). Participants indicated that this internal conflict often resulted in such behaviours being overlooked or excused with responses such as, "*He didn't mean it badly"* or *"She doesn't usually behave like that."* Participant 2 shared an example from their organisation: colleagues who had worked with the perpetrator for years regarded him as a good colleague, whereas newer employees did not share this perception and were therefore more likely to view his behaviour as transgressive.

> *"He was always seen as a nice, helpful man, but new employees found his behaviour intimidating. For example, a young colleague no longer wanted to work with him. She felt uncomfortable, even though there were no extreme incidents."* – Participant 2, Personal Communication, Bystander.

In the third category, social factors, interviewees identified social pressure as a factor influencing tolerance for transgressive behaviour. This was often due to fear of exclusion, potential

negative consequences, or the desire to conform to established group norms. When victims feel that speaking up about an issue could lead to conflict or exclusion, they often choose to tolerate the behaviour. When victims feel that speaking up about an issue could lead to conflict or exclusion, they often choose to tolerate the behaviour. In the case of Participant 13, social pressure increased due to the fear of being left alone within the organisation:

> *"We [several victims within the organisation] should have left a long time ago, but we didn't at the time. We also didn't dare to give each other the push to leave. We were afraid that we'd be left alone."* — Participant 13, Victim.

The same principle applies to bystanders, especially in situations where group norms implicitly accept transgressive behaviour. In such cases, the pressure to "fit in" may lead bystanders to remain passive or even minimise the perpetrator's behaviour. Participant 12 reflected on an incident that occurred within their organisation:

> *"During a meeting, we had a situation that was completely unacceptable. We later evaluated it afterwards. At the time, no one intervened; it was only addressed later. The person involved was later supported by a colleague who was also present at the meeting. That colleague said something along the lines of, 'Oh, what happened there? I didn't actually think that was okay.' But it wasn't addressed directly in the moment itself."* – Participant 12, Victim and bystander.

From the perspective of contextual factors, external pressure from societal norms, media attention, or public opinion can influence the tolerance of transgressive behaviour. For both victims and bystanders, this external pressure can either encourage or discourage action in addressing such behaviour. On the one hand, the presence of media coverage and societal norms may encourage individuals to act or report misconduct, knowing they are likely to receive broader support and potentially prevent reputational damage. On the other hand, public opinion can also have a discouraging effect. Many people perceive such news reports as 'exaggerated', or only the most

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severe incidents receive attention, leading to the underreporting of smaller cases. Participant 12 also

highlighted this but believes that a critical perspective on our behaviour is essential:

> *"Society is very focused on this issue, especially since #MeToo. Personally, I think sometimes it's a bit overblown. That's why we find it important to properly prepare and train our people on what is and isn't appropriate."* — Participant 12, Victim and bystander.

In the final category, organisational culture, leaders play a key role in shaping norms and

values within an organisation, thereby influencing how employees behave or respond to

inappropriate behaviour. When leaders demonstrate a serious approach to reports of misconduct,

victims feel more supported, and bystanders are more likely to intervene. However, when such

misconduct is normalised within an organisation, employees are less encouraged to speak up due to

fear of repercussions or pressure to conform to the social norms set by leadership. Participant 5

stated to be grateful for the support of the team and leader but noted that the predator also

received support from their own team leader, which made the conflict more complex. This ultimately

resulted in a delayed report.

> *"My team leader fully supported me and my colleague [who was also a victim of transgressive behaviour], even before the incident involving my colleague took place. She believed me and stood by me. But his team leader also supported him. So, the two team leaders were completely opposed to each other and could not reach a resolution. The domain manager should have stepped in, but that didn't happen."*
> — Participant 5, Victim.

In summary, the interviews indicate that both victims and bystanders can perceive and

interpret transgressive behaviour differently, depending on the specific context. Participants

described how situational factors influenced their understanding of what is considered acceptable,

making such behaviours complex and difficult to assess in a straightforward manner. This variability

was not only evident in the factors previously discussed but also in broader aspects of organisational

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culture, which participants noted could manifest differently depending on circumstances and those

involved.

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Table 3.

Overview of tolerance factors and definitions

Tolerance factors	Characteristics	Definition of characteristic	Example quote's
Personal factors	Personal norms and values	An individual's deeply held beliefs and principles that guide their behaviour and perception of acceptable or unacceptable actions in the workplace (Gellman & Turner, 2013; Hansson, 1991).	*"I don't tend to see things as transgressive very quickly. On the construction site, they sometimes shout something at you, but I think: 'Ah, it doesn't really bother me,' even though it's actually not okay."* — Participant 12, Victim and bystander.
	Lack of knowledge or awareness	Insufficient understanding or recognition of what constitutes transgressive behaviour, leading to either unintentional tolerance or failure to address it appropriately.	*"Maybe it was a shortcoming on my part that I never approached the confidential advisors, because I didn't know what they could do for me. I understand that better now, but it usually comes down to: 'What can I do for you? What do you want to do about it?'"* — Participant 3, Victim and bystander.
	Experience with transgressive behaviour	Past encounters, whether as a victim or observer, that shape a person's sensitivity, reactions, and approach to handling similar situations in the future.	*"I would respond very differently now. If it happened again, that person would immediately be shut down. Like: 'Stop. Not again, not now. End of discussion.' And I think that if I found myself in a situation where I didn't belong to the inner circle, I would still say something right away."* — Participant 6, Victim.
	Self-confidence	The level of trust in one's abilities and judgments, which influences whether a person feels capable of confronting or addressing inappropriate behaviour (Al-Hebaish, 2012; Judge & Bono, 2001).	*"I'm someone who knows how to stand my ground and was directly involved in founding a women's network to bring like-minded people together. I don't let people walk all over me."* — Participant 9, Victim and bystander.
	Personal responsibility	The sense of accountability an individual feels for taking action, either by addressing transgressive behaviour directly or by reporting it to appropriate channels.	*"I couldn't take it further within this organisation. But the truth is, none these managers felt like they were responsible for addressing the problem."* — Participant 4, Victim.

Relational factors	Power dynamics	The balance or imbalance of authority and influence within workplace relationships, shaping how individuals interact, make decisions, and assert control, often impacting behaviours, communication, and perceptions of fairness.	*"Moreover, she held a higher hierarchical position than I did. If she reports feeling unsafe, it seems to carry more weight than if I, as an employee, say the same."* — Participant 4, Victim.
	Relationships between colleagues	The interpersonal connections and interactions among team members, which can influence workplace harmony, collaboration, and the ability to address challenges, including the handling of conflicts or transgressive behaviour. A *loyalty conflict* is a consequence of tensions within colleague relationships and arises when an individual feels torn between protecting or supporting a colleague and addressing or reporting transgressive behaviour.	*"Another colleague and I still get along well. He no longer works at the organisation, but we speak regularly. He made a comment that I wasn't happy with. Before he left the building, he called me: 'I think I should apologise, right?' I said: 'Yes, we get along well, but what we discuss outside this room shouldn't be repeated, because others will think they can do the same.'"* — Participant 3, Victim and bystander. *"The possible consequences make it difficult for employees because they don't want to come across as 'snitches.' They are often aware of the potential consequences for a colleague, such as being suspended during an investigation."* – Participant 2, Bystander.
	(Un)equal treatment	Refers to the perception or reality of being treated differently compared to others, often based on personal characteristics or biases, which can lead to feelings of exclusion, favouritism, or discrimination.	*"Because I was a woman in a malefield... I was treated differently and excluded, for example, in communication, I really felt that as a boundary being crossed. I was not seen as an equal colleague, and that really went too far."* — Participant 9, Victim and bystander.

	Professional collaboration	The quality of teamwork and cooperation between colleagues, characterised by mutual respect, effective communication, and a shared commitment to achieving organisational goals. In the absence of maintenance of these professional boundaries, transgressive behaviour becomes evident.	*"I used to think the same way for a long time: I don't need a good relationship with my colleague; we just need to work together professionally, and that didn't seem too difficult. But at some point, that just stopped working because it was no longer about work at all; it was only about personal matters and what he was struggling with. Then it started to backfire on me". – Participant 5, Victim*
Social factors	Group norms	Shared expectations and unwritten rules within a group that guide how members should behave and interact, shaping acceptable and unacceptable actions (Feldman, 1984). They often arise implicitly and are enforced through social control mechanisms such as approval, disapproval, or exclusion.	*"I once gave an interview to [Scientific Publisher] ... It was also about how women were perceived within our organisation... When I came back to work, I was completely ignored. They were angry that I had shared my story." — Participant 9, Victim and bystander*
	Solidarity and loyalty	A sense of unity and commitment among individuals in a group, fostering mutual support and allegiance, sometimes even at the expense of addressing issues or holding others accountable.	*"It took me a while to realise that my colleague was crossing my boundaries, and when I shared that with my co-workers, it wasn't really acknowledged. Everyone said, 'Oh, I feel so sorry for you, but I just can't imagine that, because he's always so friendly and proper. He always seems to have everything in order.' And I thought, 'No, I really see it differently.'" – Participant 5, Victim*
	Social pressure	Influence exerted by a group or society on individuals to conform to certain behaviours, attitudes, or decisions, often driven by the desire for acceptance or fear of exclusion.	*"They don't want to or dare not oppose it. It's all about self-interest. People want to advance in their careers, fit in, or are afraid to speak up because they fear not belonging to the group." — Participant 9, Victim and bystander.*
Contextual factors	Economic/ work pressure	influence of (financial) constraints or concerns, such as job insecurity, budget cuts, or performance targets, which can lead individuals or organisations to tolerate or overlook transgressive behaviour to protect economic interests. In periods of financial stress or instability within an	*"I initially reported it to the HR advisor, but they said, 'I'll deal with you in the evening, I don't have time for this.'" – Participant 4, Victim.*

		organisation, transgressive incidents are often not addressed because other issues, such as cost-cutting or employee retention, are considered more important.	
	External pressure	The impact of factors outside the organisation, societal norms, media attention, or public opinion, which can shape how individuals and organisations respond to or manage transgressive behaviour.	*"What was considered normal 27 years ago is now regarded as transgressive behaviour. Society has changed entirely. I think this applies to a large extent to society as a whole. It's a sliding scale that gets adjusted gradually. If I don't pay attention for a year, I'm behind. And yes, habits change, but that takes a long time.*" – Participant 6, Victim.
Organisational culture factors	Norms and values	The shared beliefs, principles, and behaviours that define how things are done within an organisation. These establish what is considered acceptable or expected in the workplace, influencing interactions and decision-making. During the interviews, it emerged that the norms and values within an organisational culture are often influenced by *regional factors, hierarchical structures, work environment (hybrid or remote), male dominance, informal interactions, a culture of fear, conservative values, a culture of harmony, and victim blaming.*	*"They [the employee's] don't think it's normal, but there's a culture of fear, so they don't dare say anything. Once the partners leave, they sometimes come to me to ask why they treat me that way. They know, but they don't speak it out."* – Participant 7, Victim. *"We also have a woman on the construction site, and we occasionally discuss this. She has to adhere to the safety regulations, which means she can't wear anything too tight, short, or revealing. It's part of the safety dress code. But it does make me think: she's being addressed about her clothing choices to prevent others from reacting inappropriately, while it should really be the other way around."* - Participant 12, Victim and bystander.
	(Good) leadership	The behaviour and actions of leaders that set an example for others in the organisation. Leaders are expected to model the organisation's values and norms, and their conduct often shapes the organisational culture. Nevertheless, in the absence of effective leadership, this	*"I recently gave a small preview to managers. I intentionally made an unpleasant remark to a colleague and later referred to it in the presentation. I asked them: 'Did you find that okay?' No one said anything, and that says a lot about the system we're in. If everyone laughs, people think it's fine, but you need to be*

		dynamic can be reversed, resulting in the tacit acceptance of transgressive behaviour.	*able to say: 'This isn't acceptable.'"* – Participant 9, Victim and bystander.
	Normalisation of behaviour	The process by which certain behaviours become accepted as standard or routine within an organisation, even if they might be considered inappropriate or problematic outside that context. This can lead to the toleration or minimisation of negative behaviours. One of the factors contributing to the normalization that was observed among the interviewees was the long-term presence of some employees.	*"It's a bit of the workplace culture. The guys [employees] have been used to interacting this way for years. So, when transgressive behaviour suddenly becomes a topic of conversation, they think, 'What nonsense.' They've been talking like this for so long, so they see it differently."* – Participant 1, Personal communication, 7 October 2024.
	Policies and procedures	The formal guidelines and rules set by an organisation to regulate transgressive behaviour and their associated procedures. These provide structure and clarity, and also influence the culture by either promoting or discouraging certain actions. The findings of the interviews indicated that *the efficacy of policy and procedures* surrounding transgressive behaviour is often questionable. The phenomenon of reporting such incidents can be accompanied by a *social stigma*, and there is often an absence of *effective follow-ups* and a *sluggish response* to reports made. However, the allocation of *supplementary resources* has the potential to enhance the efficacy of this policy.	*"I was never told anything about a confidant person or anything like that within or organisation. And I must admit, I never thought about it myself, so I never looked into it."* – Participant 8, Victim. *"But if you don't trust how the organisation works, then it's pointless. I was told so many times: 'Go to the company doctor.' But I thought, I've already approached the two highest-ranking employees; what do you think a company doctor can do then? There's a difference between what you can formally do and what you can emotionally do. There should be a route for both."* – Participant 4, Victim. *"Everything is documented so that we can analyse trends. Bullying clearly shows up, and that's why we've decided to take action. We carefully prepare our interventions. For example, the data shows that bullying occurs more in some teams than others, and that needs to be monitored. We are researching why that is."* – Participant 9, Victim and bystander.

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The responses from the interviewees highlighted that the factors do not stand alone but interact with each other to determine whether transgressive behaviour is tolerated. Several participants described how organisational structures, social dynamics, and individual agency influence how behaviour, initially seen as undesirable, is ultimately normalised through frequency or escalation. This reflects the interaction described in structuration theory, where multiple participants indicated that organisational norms are both shaped by and influence individual behaviour. Participants pointed out that transgressive behaviour is not solely determined by formal policies but emerges through the ongoing interaction between employees and the structural environment in which they operate. This was evident in organisations with both masculine and feminine characteristics. In organisations with a strong hierarchy and competition (masculine characteristics), transgressive behaviour was often normalised, partly reinforced by rigid structures and a culture that legitimised such behaviour. At the same time, personal actions, such as challenging transgressive behaviour, played a crucial role in breaking these norms. In organisations with informal, feminine characteristics, transgressive behaviour was often minimised due to social pressure, but here too, personal agency and advocating for structural change played an important role.

In summary, the findings show how the interaction between organisational structures, social dynamics, and individual actions collectively determines the tolerance for transgressive behaviour.

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5 Discussion

5.1 Main findings

The aim of this study was to gain insight into how organisational norms, rules, and implicit expectations both facilitate and constrain tolerance for transgressive behaviour and to examine whether different forms of such behaviour manifest in organisational cultures with masculine and feminine characteristics. To achieve this, data were collected through 13 semi-structured interviews with individuals who had experienced or witnessed transgressive behaviour, providing valuable insights into this topic.

The interviews revealed that, in addition to personal, relational, social, and contextual factors, organisational norms, rules, and implicit expectations play a dual role in shaping tolerance for transgressive behaviour. Organisational structures and social dynamics play a crucial role in determining the level of tolerance for undesirable behaviour. This reflects the interaction described in structuration theory, with multiple participants indicating that organisational norms are both shaped by and influential on individual behaviour. Participants noted that transgressive behaviour is not solely determined by formal policies but emerges through the continuous interaction between employees and the structural environment in which they operate, such as a flat organisation or a highly hierarchical one. Literature supports these findings, such as the study by Boucaut (2001), which applies structuration theory to workplace bullying and suggests that understanding social processes can help organisations effectively manage such behaviour.

Additionally, the interviews indicate that transgressive behaviour manifests in different ways depending on an organisation's characteristics. In organisations with a strong emphasis on hierarchy, competition, and traditional role patterns (masculine characteristics), various forms of discrimination, such as gender discrimination, were more frequently observed and were harder to address due to structural and informal power dynamics. This finding is supported by the study of Alonso & O'Neill (2021), who argue that highly masculine cultures value stereotypically male characteristics, making it more difficult for women to gain status. Conversely, in organisations with a

more informal structure, a flat hierarchy, and a conflict-avoidant attitude (feminine characteristics), inappropriate behaviour was more commonly observed. In such environments, behaviours were often minimised in the name of group cohesion. This aligns with the research of Kawatra & Krishnan (2004), who explain that feminine organisational cultures focus on collaboration and team orientation while reducing aggression and competitiveness.

5.2 Theoretical implications

This study contributes to the existing literature on transgressive behaviour by examining its relationship with organisational culture, an aspect that has received limited attention in previous research. While studies on workplace transgressive behaviour have increased in recent years, they have primarily focused on specific sectors, such as healthcare, sports, or tourism (Chapman & Light, 2016; Haandrikman & Schipper-van Veldhoven, 204; Vandecasteele et al., 2015), or on power dynamics between perpetrators and victims, such as the relationships between managers, employees, and clients (Davies, 2021; Maskor, 2022; Vandecasteele et al., 2015). These studies have provided many new insights into specific work relationships and organisational cultures, but they do not provide insight into the broader sense of organisational culture on the prevalence and acceptance of transgressive forms of behaviour. By placing organisational culture at the centre, this study offers a new perspective on how specific cultural characteristics, such as hierarchy, competitiveness, or conflict avoidance, can create environments where transgressive behaviour is either enabled or discouraged. This perspective helps to explain why transgressive behaviour is more prevalent in organisations with certain cultural characteristics, and how some organisations can normalise or actively challenge such behaviour.

Additionally, existing literature on organisational culture and transgressive behaviour primarily focuses on structural factors, such as hierarchy, power dynamics, and formal behavioural regulations, or on individual agency, including personal norms and moral beliefs (De Bruijn, 2021; Roszkowska & Melé, 2020). Many studies highlight how established cultural characteristics, such as a masculine or feminine organisational culture, influence the likelihood of transgressive behaviour (e.g.

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Adams, 2002; Stratton et al., 2020). Conversely, other research examines the role of individuals within organisations and how, depending on their position and beliefs, they may either tolerate or challenge transgressive behaviour (e.g. Lukic et al., 2013; Bergemann, 2024). However, the interaction between agency and structure in sustaining or disrupting such behaviour remains relatively underexplored. This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that transgressive behaviour within organisations is not solely a product of fixed cultural characteristics; rather, these characteristics are continuously reproduced or reshaped through individual actions. In line with structuration theory, this research highlights that organisations should not be viewed as static systems but as dynamic social structures in which agency and culture are in constant interplay resulting in specific behaviours within the organisation. This insight has valuable implications for future research on how organisations can facilitate cultural change and how interventions targeting individual behaviour can influence broader organisational culture.

Lastly, this study contributes to the literature on tolerance factors in transgressive behaviour, specifically by distinguishing between victims and bystanders. Existing research has primarily focused on victims' experiences or the general perception of transgressive behaviour within organisations. At the same time, the role of bystanders, and the factors influencing their response, has remained largely overlooked. This distinction is crucial, as research by Hamby et al. (2015) indicates that bystanders are present in approximately two-thirds of workplace incidents. Whether they intervene or not can have direct consequences for both the victim's experience and the overall organisational culture. Literature on bystanders highlights that their response depends on situational and contextual factors. For instance, Janson et al. (2009) found that bystanders are more likely to intervene when transgressive behaviour is recurrent or when the harm to the victim is visibly evident. These studies, as well as the findings of this research, highlight the importance of including bystanders' perspectives in future research, as they reveal the nuances of understanding the development and maintenance of tolerance of transgressive behaviour.

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In addition to the aforementioned implications, new insights have emerged that warrant further exploration. During the research, several factors were identified that did not directly align with the traditional organisational culture characteristics of masculine or feminine cultures, such as new work environments (e.g. hybrid or remote working), but were still mentioned as factors influencing tolerance. This opens the possibility for follow-up research into the manifestation of transgressive behaviour in digital environments and how the tolerance of victims and bystanders is affected. This could be particularly important as there are increasingly more forms of digital working, which may also contribute to digital transgressive behaviours.

Additionally, in more than half of the interviews, it was noted that there is often a lack of proper policies and follow-up. It was frequently mentioned that there is poor communication with victims or perpetrators, and that follow-up is often delayed or that reports are not taken seriously. The reasons for this vary but often relate to a lack of experience or the appropriate resources. This aspect of organisational culture is often overlooked or is undermined by the limited number of reports. Future research could delve deeper into which leadership styles and HR interventions are effective in breaking the tolerance for transgressive behaviour to improve policies and procedures.

5.3 Managerial Implications

This study also offers practical implications for organisations and HR policies. The findings highlight the influence of organisational culture on either tolerating or reducing transgressive behaviour. Organisations can benefit from understanding how different cultural types shape the perception and handling of transgressive behaviour, enabling targeted interventions tailored to their specific organisational culture.

Insights from structuration theory emphasise that the interaction between agency (the capacity to act independently) and structures (rules, norms, implicit expectations) is continuously in dynamic interplay. This means that interventions targeting both the structures of the organisation and the agency of individuals are necessary to effectively prevent transgressive behaviour. In cultures where assertiveness, competition, and power dynamics are strongly present (masculine

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characteristics), transgressive behaviour can arise from abuse of power or disregard for employees' vulnerabilities. In cultures which emphasise collaboration and harmony (feminine characteristics), transgressive behaviour may be more subtle but no less harmful, as conflicts tend to be avoided. It is essential for organisations to monitor their cultural structures and, if necessary, implement cultural change. However, this is a complex and multi-layered process, requiring the transformation of both formal and informal structures. Cultural change is often accompanied by conflicts and uncertainty, making the process time-consuming and strategically challenging. It requires patience, strategic planning, and a willingness to navigate a period of transition.

At the same time, organisations must actively engage employees in raising awareness of transgressive behaviour and hold them accountable for maintaining a healthy work environment. Leadership plays a crucial role in this, but it is not sufficient on its own. Employees at all levels must be able to recognise both overt and subtle forms of transgressive behaviour and understand how to respond. One effective approach is to provide role-specific training: while managers might need training on handling complaints and setting clear boundaries, employees should be trained on recognising early warning signs and safe intervention techniques. It is crucial that organisations influence both the structures of their culture and the agency of individuals so that an integrated approach can effectively address transgressive behaviour.

Moreover, organisations must critically assess their internal policies on transgressive behaviour. Monitoring behaviour and procedures can facilitate reflection and optimisation of processes, with transparency in reporting procedures significantly impacting whether employees feel safe to speak up. Organisations should communicate more clearly about how reports are handled, what steps are taken, and what employees can expect. A best practice is to analyse annual or biannual reports on behaviour and implement targeted interventions, such as workshops or new reporting mechanisms.

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5.4 Limitations and Future Research

First, a potential limitation of the current study is its utilisation of a cross-sectional design for data collection. The interviews, with an average duration of 49 minutes, provided valuable insights but do not offer a comprehensive view of an entire organisational culture, which develops over a longer period. Organisational culture is dynamic and multi-layered. For example, previous studies indicate that new employees require an average of six months to integrate (Morrison, 1993; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992). This process includes acquiring job-related skills, understanding cultural norms, and achieving social integration. In addition, the participants reflect their own perception of the organisational culture, which can sometimes be experienced very differently in another department within the organisation, which also can affect the data. Future research would benefit from a ethnographic approach to better understand how organisational culture evolves and changes following significant events, such as scandals or policy adjustments. This could provide valuable insights for both academia and practice.

A second limitation of this study is the absence of a second coder, which is often recommended to enhance intersubjectivity and reliability in qualitative research. While initially considered, this approach was deemed impractical due to the complexity and context-specific nature of the data. Studies have shown that while multiple coders can offer diverse perspectives, they also introduce methodological challenges, such as inconsistent coding and difficulties in standardizing interpretations (Burla et al., 2008; Cheung & Tai, 2021; Clarke et al., 2023). To mitigate this limitation, frequent consultations with the research supervisor ensured a consistent coding process and minimized bias, preconceptions, and assumptions. This approach helped preserve the nuances of the interviews while maintaining analytical coherence. Future research could explore inter-rater reliability tests or involve a second researcher in a complementary role to further strengthen validity.

A third limitation of this study is that all interviews were conducted within a single region in the Netherlands. However, organisational culture is partly shaped by broader sociocultural contexts, meaning that regional differences may influence how transgressive behaviour is experienced and

tolerated. For instance, an conflict-avoidant attitude within their organisation may stem from the regional culture, making employees less likely to call out inappropriate behaviour. This suggests that certain norms and behaviours do not solely arise from organisational culture itself but are also influenced by broader regional perspectives on hierarchy, conflict avoidance, and social cohesion. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of how regional differences impact organisational culture and transgressive behaviour, future research could conduct a nationwide comparative study across different regions of the Netherlands. This could provide insights into how local cultural characteristics, such as directness or conflict avoidance, shape organisational responses to transgressive behaviour.

Lastly, a potential limitation of this study is the use of Hofstede's dimensions to characterise organisational culture through masculine and feminine characteristics. While Hofstede's framework provides a useful lens for understanding cultural differences, it has been criticised for its tendency to oversimplify complex cultural dynamics, treat culture as relatively static, and show inconsistencies in its categorisation across different contexts (Signorini et al., 2009; Wallace et al., 1999). This also became evident in the data, as no organisation was perceived as fully masculine or feminine; rather, each exhibited a combination of characteristics from both categories. Organisational culture is inherently dynamic, shaped by internal and external influences, and may not always align neatly with Hofstede's predefined dimensions. Future research could therefore adopt a more nuanced approach by incorporating multiple theoretical frameworks, such as Schein's organisational culture model or Cameron and Quinn's Competing Values Framework. Additionally, a longitudinal approach would be beneficial for future studies. By examining organisational culture over an extended period, researchers can investigate how cultural characteristics evolve and how these changes influence the manifestation and tolerance of transgressive behaviour. Exploring these aspects would allow future research to refine the understanding of how organisational culture shapes the occurrence and acceptance of transgressive behaviour.

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5.5 Conclusion

Overall, this study highlights the critical role of organisational culture in shaping not only the manifestation of transgressive behaviour but also the factors that determine its tolerance. The findings demonstrate that workplace culture influences whether such behaviour is normalised, challenged, or ignored, with structural elements reinforcing or mitigating tolerance levels. Organisational cultures, characterised by hierarchy, competition, and dominance, may foster environments where power imbalances and aggressive behaviour are more easily accepted, making intervention less likely. In contrast, organisational cultures with their emphasis on collaboration and conflict avoidance, can create barriers to addressing transgressive behaviour directly, leading to a culture of silence or informal resolution attempts that may not be sufficient.

Moreover, this research underscores the dynamic nature of organisational culture, showing that it is not a fixed entity but one that is continuously reproduced and reinforced through the actions, interactions, and decisions of individuals. This interplay between culture, structure, and agency suggests that change is possible but requires deliberate and sustained effort. Effective interventions must address not only individual behaviour but also the broader cultural norms that shape what is deemed acceptable within an organisation. Empowering employees and leadership to critically reflect on and actively reshape these norms is essential in fostering a workplace where transgressive behaviour is neither tolerated nor normalised, but actively prevented and addressed.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Searches in ChatGPT

During the preparation of this work the author(s) used ChatGPT, Elicit and Scite in order to look for articles, write formally, check for APA rules and tips to improve my research. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the work.

Appendix A: Searches in ChatGPT

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Appendix B: Ethical Approval

UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE.

Dear Meike Pegge,

This is a notification from the Humanities & Social Sciences (HSS) Ethics Committee to inform you that your research project has received a **positive advice.**

Application nr.	: 240726
Title	: Exploring Transgressive Behaviour in Organisational Cultures: A Comparative Study of Masculine and Feminine Values
Application date	: 16-Sep-2024
Researcher	: Meike Pegge
Supervisor	: Suzanne Janssen
SONA	: No
Date of advice	: 28-Sep-2024

The ethics committee has reviewed the ethical aspects of your research project. Based on the information you have provided in the web application, the ethics committee has no major ethical concerns for the research project to go forward as proposed. Please find attached the PDF with the application together with the review comments and advice.

It is your responsibility to ensure that the research is carried out in line with the information provided.

Future communication regarding this research project should also be directed to the secretary of the HSS Ethics Committee via ethicscommittee-hss@utwente.nl, stating the Application nr. 240726.

If you later make considerable changes to the research project that might affect the ethical aspects or raise new ethical concerns, you must submit an amendment. For this, please send a concise description of the intended changes to the secretary of the HSS Ethics Committee, stating the Application nr. 240726. An additional review of the proposed changes will be performed.

Best regards,

Humanities & Social Sciences (HSS) Ethics Committee

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Appendix C: Informed Consent

Informed Consent Formulier

Titel van het Onderzoek: Het onderzoeken van grensoverschrijdend gedrag in verschillende organisatieculturen

Onderzoeksdoel:

Het doel van dit onderzoek is om grensoverschrijdend gedrag in organisaties te onderzoeken. En om te onderzoeken of dit verschilt tussen organisatieculturen.

Wat houdt deelname in?

Als deelnemer aan dit onderzoek neemt u deel aan een interview. Dit interview duurt ongeveer 70 minuten en, als u daarmee instemt, wordt er een geluidsopname van het gesprek gemaakt. Tijdens het interview zal ik u vragen stellen over uw ervaringen en observaties van grensoverschrijdend gedrag binnen uw organisatie.

Vrijwilligheid en vertrouwelijkheid:

Uw deelname aan dit onderzoek is geheel vrijwillig. U bent vrij om op elk moment met het interview te stoppen, zonder reden. Uw antwoorden tijdens het interview worden vertrouwelijk behandeld. Uw naam zal nooit worden genoemd in mijn afstudeerscriptie of andere rapporten. In de rapportages zal niet te herleiden zijn wie wat heeft gezegd. Er worden geen andere gegevens opgenomen die u kunnen identificeren. De gegevens worden alleen voor dit onderzoek gebruikt en na afloop van het onderzoek vernietigd.

Voordelen en risico's:

Er zijn geen bekende risico's, behalve de mogelijke emotionele impact van het bespreken van grensoverschrijdend gedrag. We benadrukken dat u zelf bepaalt welke informatie u met mij deelt, en dat deze vertrouwelijk wordt behandeld.

Vragen:

Als u vragen heeft over het onderzoek of uw deelname, kunt u contact opnemen met de onderzoeker via de hierboven vermelde contactgegevens.

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Toestemming:

Door ondertekening van dit formulier geeft u aan dat u de informatie op dit formulier hebt gelezen en begrijpt wat deelname aan dit onderzoek inhoudt. U stemt vrijwillig in met deelname aan dit onderzoek.

Ondertekening:

Naam deelnemer: _____ Naam onderzoeker: _____

Handtekening: _____ Handtekening: _____

Datum:_____ Datum:_____

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Appendix D: Interview Scheme

Part 1: General Introduction

Interview number:

To start with, I would like to ask a few questions to get an idea of what your work involves.

1. Can you tell me what kind of work you do?

   a. Tasks and responsibilities?

   b. Since when?

2. Is this the organisation where you experienced transgressive behaviour?

➔ If yes, continuation of the interview.

➔ If no, the questions will need to focus on the focus on the location where the inappropriate

   behaviour took place.

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Part 2: Organisational Culture

I would now like to get a general impression of the culture within your organisation.

3.   If you had to describe the organisation in 3 key words, what would they be? And why?

4.   What do you value within your organisation? How do you see this reflected?

5.   Has a policy been established within your organisation regarding inappropriate behaviour? If

so, what is it? How do you see this reflected within the organisation?

6.   How do you communicate internally with colleagues? For example, formally, informally, etc.

7.   What do you think are the most important qualities that make someone successful in this

organisation?

I would also like to analyse the organisational culture using an organisational matrix, which you can

see in front of you. This is a matrix where two options are provided each time. I would like to know

to what extent you think these options apply to your organisation. To begin with, could you indicate

where on the matrix you would place your organisation in relation to the relevant element? Could

you also provide a brief explanation for your choice?

Let the participant mark their position on the matrix.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Formal								Informal
Controlled								Uncontrolled
Top-down								Bottom-up
Individual performance								Collaboration
Hierarchical								Flat / equal organisation
Goal-oriented								Process-oriented
Career development								Work-life balance

O = Organisation

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Part 3: Transgressive Behaviour

Now that we have a clearer picture of your organisation, I would like to move on to the next topic, namely inappropriate behaviour. This is a broad topic, which covers many different types of behaviour in various forms and degrees. Think, for example, of behaviour such as an unpleasant remark, discrimination, gossiping, swearing, or sexual behaviour. Even minor incidents are of great importance to my research. I would like to hear about your experiences and perspectives on this topic.

8. Could you describe a situation in which you or someone else in the workplace experienced behaviour that you or they considered inappropriate?

9. What happened? Where and when did it take place? Who was involved? What was the setting?

10. What aspect of the event made you perceive it as inappropriate behaviour?

11. Did you see this as an isolated incident or something that could happen more frequently within your organisation? Could you explain why?

12. How did you and/or others respond to this behaviour when it occurred? And later?

    a. In hindsight, would you have wanted to act differently in this situation? What prevented this?

13. Did the incident have consequences for you/your relationship with the person/others?

    a. Short-term/long-term effects?

    b. How did it make you feel?

14. Why do you think this inappropriate behaviour occurred?

15. Do you think the organisational culture influenced this incident?

16. How do you look back on [the behaviour/event]?

    a. Could anything have been done differently to prevent this behaviour? What?

Repeat if there were multiple incidents.

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Part 4: Conclusion

In this part of the interview, I would like to give you the opportunity to make any comments you feel are relevant to the research.

17. What measures or changes do you think would help prevent inappropriate behaviour in the future?

18. Do you have any further comments regarding the interview that may be useful for my research into transgressive behaviour within different organisational cultures?

19. Do you agree that, if I am missing any essential information, I may contact you by phone or email? (Email address, phone number)

20. Would you also like to receive the report with the results?

Part 5: General Information

Lastly, I would like to have a brief overview of some (demographic) information about you and the organisation. Could you please fill in the following form?

1. Age:

2. Gender:

3. Name organisation:

4. Number of years employed:

5. Size of the organisation:

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Appendix E: Code networks

Network 1: Transgressive Behaviour:

Code Distribution by Document

D 1: Interview 1 - Parti... 6
D 2: Interview 2 - Part... 4
D 3: Interview 3 - Part... 8
D 4: Interview 4 - Par... 11
8

Verbaal pesten — IS PART OF — Denigreren...
IS PART OF — Verwijten en b...

Pesten — IS PART OF — Non-verbaal/soci... — IS PART OF — Ondermijnen
IS PART OF — Negeren
IS PART OF — Sociale vernedering

IS PART OF — Actief destructi... — IS PART OF — Sabotage
IS PART OF — Werk onaangenaa...
IS PART OF — Laster

Verbale discriminatie — IS PART OF — Discrimineren...
IS PART OF — Directe weigering
IS PART OF — Denigrerende taal
IS PART OF — Stereotypering van kenmerken

Discriminatie — IS PART OF — Non-verba... — IS PART OF — Buitensluit gedrag
IS PART OF — Negeergedrag

Acties binnen beleid of werkcultuur — IS PART OF — Instrumentalisering
IS PART OF — Voorkeursbeleid ten nadelen van anderen
IS PART OF — Ongelijke behandeling

Verbale agressie — Onterechte boosheid
IS PART OF — Schreeuwen
IS PART OF — Dreigen
IS PART OF — Uitschelden

Agressie — IS PART OF

Fysieke agressie — IS PART OF — Dreigend geweld
IS PART OF — Intimidatie

Grensoverschrijde... — IS A — Agressie

Seksueel verbaal — Oversharing v...
IS PART OF — Ongepaste...
IS PART OF — Toespelingen maken
IS PART OF — Roddelen

Seksueel — IS PART OF — Seksueel non-verbaal — IS PART OF — Inappropriate workplace behaviour

Seksueel fysiek — IS PART OF — Ongewens...
IS PART OF — Seksuele handelingen zonder toestemming

Ongepast gedrag — Schenden v...
IS PART OF — Stalken
IS PART OF — Onprofession...

Network 2: Organisational Culture

Organisatiecultuur F/M

Masculiene e... (IS PART OF)

Doel- en resultaat... (IS A PROPERTY OF)
- Ambitieus — IS A PROPERTY OF
- Resultaatgericht — IS A PROPERTY OF
- Competitief — IS A PROPERTY OF
- Innovatie e... — IS A PROPERTY OF
- Individueel prestatie

Structuur en hiërarchie (IS A PROPERTY OF)
- Gecontroleerd — IS A PROPERTY OF
- Top-down — IS A PROPERTY OF
- Hiërarchisch — IS A PROPERTY OF

Werkcultuur... (IS A PROPERTY OF)
- Materiële beloning — IS A PROPERTY OF
- Werk boven privé — IS A PROPERTY OF
- Energiek en dynamisch — IS A PROPERTY OF
- Formele sfeer — IS A PROPERTY OF
- Stereotypis...

Communicatiestijl M (IS A PROPERTY OF)
- Communica... — IS A PROPERTY OF
- Conflict acceptabel — IS A PROPERTY OF

Feminiene ei... (IS PART OF)

Samenwerking en menselijke focus (IS A PROPERTY OF)
- Samenwerking — IS A PROPERTY OF
- Mensen centraal — IS A PROPERTY OF
- Zorgzaamheid — IS A PROPERTY OF
- Sociale waardering — IS A PROPERTY OF

Structuur en... (IS A PROPERTY OF)
- Bottom-up — IS A PROPERTY OF
- Platte organisatie — IS A PROPERTY OF
- Gelijkheid — IS A PROPERTY OF
- Ongecotrontroleerd — IS A PROPERTY OF
- Procesmatig

Werkcultuur... (IS A PROPERTY OF)
- Langzame groei — IS A PROPERTY OF
- Flexibiliteit — IS A PROPERTY OF
- Balans wer... — IS A PROPERTY OF
- Informele sfeer — IS A PROPERTY OF

Communicatiestijl F (IS A PROPERTY OF)
- Communica... — IS A PROPERTY OF
- Conflictvermijdend — IS A PROPERTY OF

Code Distribution by Document

Document	Count
D 1: Interview 1 - Parti...	10
D 2: Interview 2 - Part...	14
D 3: Interview 3 - Part...	31
D 4: Interview 4 - Par...	25
D 5: Interview 5 - Part...	19
D 6: Interview 6 - Part...	27
D 7: Interview 7 - Part...	14
D 8: Interview 8 - Part...	10
D 9: Interview 9 - Part...	26
D 10: Interview 10 - P...	17
D 11: Interview 11 - Pa...	29
D 12: Interview 12 - P...	25
D 13: Interview 13 - P...	22

Network 3: Tolerance Factors

Persoonlijke factoren
- IS A → Persoonlijke normen en waarden
- IS A → Gebrek aan kennis of bewustzijn
- IS A → Ervaring met grensoverschrijdendg...
- IS A → Zelfvertrouwen
- Persoonlijke verantwoordelijkheid

Relationele factoren
- Machtsverhoudingen
- IS A → Relaties tuss... ← IS PART OF → Loyaliteitsonflict
- IS A → (On)gelijk...
- IS A → Professionel...

Escalatie van h...
Frequentie van gedrag

Tolerantiefactoren van slachtoffer

Tolerantiefactoren

Sociale factoren
- IS A → Groepsnormen
- IS A → Solidariteit of loyaliteit
- IS A → Sociale druk

Tolerantiefactoren van bijstander(s) of orga...

Contextuele factoren
- IS A → Economische druk
- IS A → Externe druk

Organisatiecultuur
- IS PART OF → Normen en waarden
- IS PART OF → Voorbeeld...
- IS PART OF → Normalisatie gedrag
- IS PART OF → Beleid en procedures

Normen en waarden
- IS A PROPERTY OF → Werkomgeving
- IS A PROPERTY OF → Regionale invloed
- IS A PROPERTY OF → Hiërarchisc...
- IS A PROPERTY OF → Mannelijke dominantie
- IS A PROPERTY OF → Informele omg...
- IS A PROPERTY OF → Angstcultuur
- IS A PROPERTY OF → Veranderende normen en waarden
- IS A PROPERTY OF → Conservatieve waarden
- IS A PROPERTY OF → Harmoniecultuur
- Victim blaming

IS CAUSE OF → Langdurige aanwezigheid van...

Beleid en procedures
- IS PART OF → Stigma rondom h...
- IS PART OF → Gebrek aan effectieve processen
- IS PART OF → Reactiviteit op signalen
- IS PART OF → Hulpbronnen vo...

Code Distribution by Document

Document	Count
D 1: Interview 1 - Participant 1	14
D 2: Interview 2 - Participant 2	13
D 3: Interview 3 - Participant 3	24
D 4: Interview 4 - Participant 4	40
D 5: Interview 5 - Participant 5	24
D 6: Interview 6 - Participant 6	19
D 7: Interview 7 - Participant 7	9
D 8: Interview 8 - Participant 8	12
D 9: Interview 9 - Participant 9	26
D 10: Interview 10 - Participant 10	13
D 11: Interview 11 - Participant 11	23
D 12: Interview 12 - Participant 12	22
D 13: Interview 13 - Participant 13	23