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# **The Triggers and Consequences of the Queen Bee Phenomenon: A Systematic Literature Review and Integrative Framework**

Queen Bee Phenomenon: Systematic Review

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## **Abstract**

The term Queen Bee has been extensively employed to explain specific behaviours driven by organisational inequalities where women engaged in leadership positions actively restrain the opportunities of upper mobility for junior women. While the literature constantly addresses the causes and behaviours of this phenomenon, the current scholarship still lacks an integrated view of the Queen Bee Phenomenon (QBP) literature and a concise integrative framework that explores its triggers and consequences to advance research and provide evidence-based results to guide policy and managerial decisions. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to identify, analyse and synthesise the literature on the QBP. We conducted a systematic literature review engaging bibliometrics and content analysis. Our results highlight the current state of the art of the QBP literature and introduce a new integrative framework that shows the interplay between the triggers, traits and consequences of the QBP. Our results explore the QBP as a response to social identity threats and response patterns for inequality in the workplace. The integrative framework explores the links between the antecedents, traits and the impacts on organisations and women's careers, providing evidence-based insights to scholars and practitioners. We contribute to the field by integrating previous fragmented research in the field into a framework that synthesises and connects the scattered literature. Our results are helpful for designing new organisational policies that reduce the impacts of the QBP in the workplace. The research agenda propose avenues for advancing our understanding of the phenomenon.

*Keywords:* Queen bee phenomenon, self-group distancing, leadership, gender inequalities, systematic literature review

Women's experiences in the workplace are shaped by metaphors that point to gender inequalities. Past scholarship in psychology, management, and social sciences have recognised the role that metaphors play in understanding and explaining the myriad of workplace gender inequalities (e.g. Carli & Eagly, 2016; Maheshwari & Lenka, 2022; Smith et al., 2012).

The current research addresses a set of metaphors that shape the experiences of gender discrimination that women suffer in the workplace (e.g. Reinwald et al., 2022; Grangeiro et al., 2021). For example, research has extensively explored the notion of the "glass ceiling" (e.g., Smith et al., 2012; Maheshwari & Lenka, 2022), the "glass cliff" (e.g. Reinwald et al., 2022), and the "labyrinth" (e.g. Carli & Eagly, 2016), among others. Through the use of metaphors, scholars present different sources of explanations for the existence of gender discrimination.

The organisational structure and male-dominated environment, for instance, are the source of inequalities that have created the glass ceiling (e.g. Maheshwari & Lenka, 2022). A growing body of research has argued that women who progress in their careers adopt attitudes and behaviours that are contrary to gender equality. Thus, they can also potentially be a source of barriers to other women in the workplace, resulting in the metaphor termed *Queen Bee* (Staines et al., 1974), henceforth mentioned as the Queen Bee Phenomenon (QBP).

The QBP was first introduced in "Psychology Today" (Staines et al., 1974). The authors suggested that women who achieved professional and social success reinforce discrimination through gender stereotypes directed toward their female colleagues. Thus, they are responsible for other women's low job mobility. Initial research on the phenomenon pointed out that those women in leadership positions preferred their unique status and were unwilling to contribute to the advancement of other women (Cooper, 1997). Furthermore, they also remarked that other women were their worst enemies (Ellemers et al., 2012), describing them as anti-feminists, conservatives and active opponents to changes in gender roles (Rindfleisch, 2000).

Mavin (2008, 2006) argued that, instead of blaming women as the sources for low female representation, gender studies should explore how the gender context in the structures and organisational practices promote environments that discourage women from seeking high-function roles. In this regard, Derks et al. (2011a) referred to the Queen Bee behaviour as a strategy that women undertake to succeed in sexist and male-dominated environments. Therefore, the phenomenon stops being characterised as a natural competition between women and is thus regarded as a response to gender discrimination that women face throughout their careers in male-dominated environments (Faniko et al., 2017).

The current scholarship on the QBP addresses three particular issues. First, the term Queen Bee (QB) has received some criticism (e.g. Mavin, 2008, 2006; Webber & Giuffre, 2019), which argues that, by investigating the behaviours and using the metaphor of Queen Bee, research can inadvertently reinforce inequalities by blaming the women for the barriers. However, research has already shown that QBP is a response to organisational inequalities (Derks et al., 2011) and is a pattern of response to these challenges that women face throughout their careers (Faniko et al., 2017).

A recent research trend has emerged, arguing whether we should indeed continue to call the phenomenon queen bee or if self-group distancing is more appropriate since the current term can inadvertently blame women for the inequalities (e.g. Faniko et al., 2021) instead of the organisation, as previous research has shown its role in creating the QBP (e.g. Derks et al., 2011a; Faniko et al., 2017).

The second stream of research is investigating whether the phenomenon indeed exists in different countries (e.g. Xiong et al., 2022) or in contexts such as football federations (e.g. Cibibin & Leo, 2022) and academics (e.g. Faniko et al., 2021). Lastly, the majority of the research is focused on the attitudes of the queen bees and how these behaviours affect both the

organisation and the colleagues in junior positions (e.g. Corwin et al., 2021; Faniko et al., 2017; Derks et al., 2015).

Despite progress over the years, the mix of evidence, contexts and criticisms over the phenomenon highlights a growing need in the QBP literature: the need for integration and consolidation. The research has grown significantly over the years; however, there is still a need to consolidate previous results to present an overview of the phenomenon and directions for further advancements (in line with Faniko et al., 2021; Post et al., 2020; Snyder, 2019). Scholars are currently experiencing a growing body of literature on the phenomenon and might fail to grasp all the antecedents, traits, and consequences of the QBP in an integrative manner. Furthermore, without a proper integrative framework, scholars and managers might fail to design proper policies to address the consequences of QBP in multiple spheres. We argue that the current scholarship is in a pressing need for research that systematically captures and synthesizes the current body of work on the QBP to inform the research community, practitioners and policymakers.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to identify, analyse and synthesise the literature on the QBP. In order to achieve this purpose, we bring forward four research questions that guided our research process: 1) What are the characteristics of the current body of literature on the QBP? 2) How is the QBP defined within the current body of literature? 3) What are the triggers, traits and consequences of the QBP? and 4) What are the topics, contexts and theories that need to be explored further by conducting research on the QBP?

To answer the research questions, we conducted a systematic literature review of the QBP literature and analysed the previous scholarship by performing bibliometrics and content analysis. Despite a considerable number of theoretical papers that provide a narrative or conceptual review of the QBP (e.g. Derks et al., 2016; Mavin, 2006, 2008), none of the papers have undertaken a systematic view (i.e. through the use of research protocols and replicable

procedures to ensure reliability and replicability) of the QBP literature to answer specific questions and consolidate the existing knowledge.

We contributed to both the academic literature and the practitioners. From the academic perspective, our results highlight an overview of the current scholarship on the QBP. We provide a systematic synthesis of the QBP literature by integrating past research findings into a framework that can be used to advance the field and spark further academic discussions about this phenomenon. The integrative framework proposed shows the interplay among the triggers, traits and consequences of the QBP. Furthermore, we provide evidence-based answers to the research questions with the potential to advance our understanding of the QBP and guide future research endeavours. From a practical perspective, the antecedents and the consequences of the QBP may be useful for discussing new public and managerial policies to change the unequal gender landscape.

## **Method**

### ***Sample and Data Collection***

After the definition of the research questions, we proceed with an elaboration of the research protocol by choosing the set of search terms (i.e. keywords used to find the papers). The search terms must be clear enough to provide coverage for the available literature and avoid relevant studies being excluded (e.g. Snyder, 2019). We followed the recommendations of Fan et al. (2022) for building the sampling process in a structured manner, covering the available and relevant literature, and remaining transparent in reporting all the steps undertaken in the process.

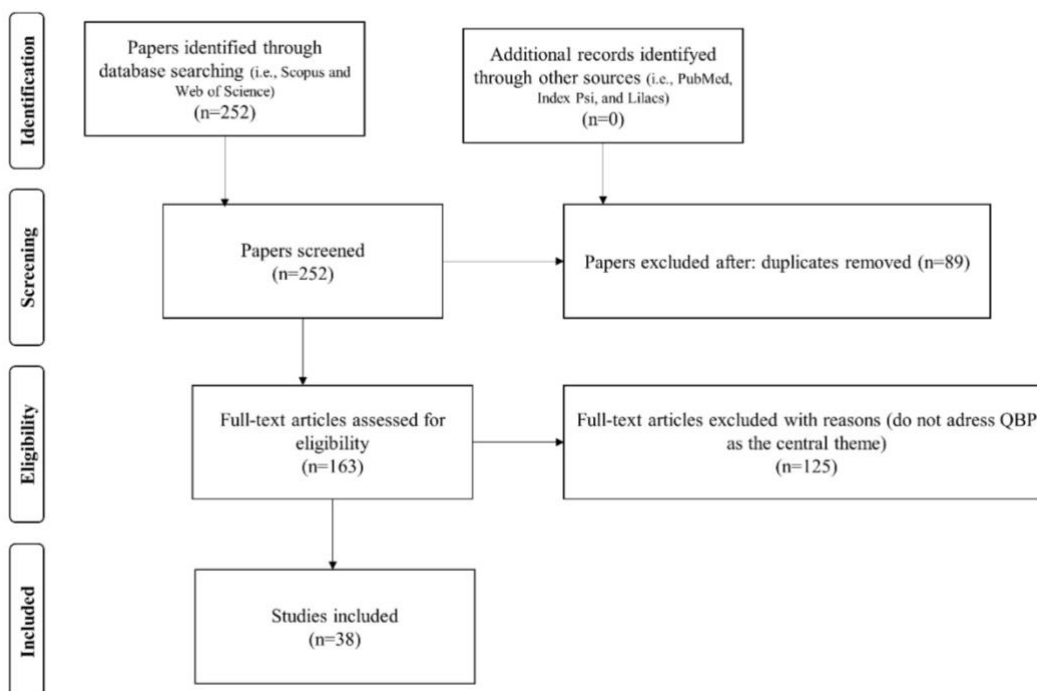
We built our set of search terms based on previous research (e.g. Staines et al., 1974; Derks et al., 2011; Ellemers et al., 2004; Faniko et al., 2021). To answer the research question and retrieve the relevant research, we employed the following search string: (“queen bee

phenomenon” OR “queen bee” OR “queen bee stereotype”) AND (“women\*” OR “woman\*” OR “female\*” OR “stereotype\*” OR “gender\*” OR “leader\*” OR “manage\*” OR “work” OR “implicit bias\*” OR “women in leadership”).

We retrieved the literature from Scopus and Web of Science, as they provide enough coverage of literature and have been popular in previous systematic reviews (e.g. Maheshwari & Lenka, 2022). Additionally, we conducted searches on traditional psychology databases (i.e. PubMed, Index Psi, and Lilacs); however, the results from these data sources did not provide new additional articles in relation to the searches conducted on Scopus and Web of Science. We included papers that followed the inclusion criteria of (1) articles and reviews (as they undertook a rigorous peer review) and (2) only papers in English (which are representative of the international scholarship). This ensures coverage of the relevant literature and the quality of the evidence under review (Fan et al., 2022). The sampling process is presented in Figure 1. We employed the PRISMA flow diagram to ensure replicability and transparency (Moher et al., 2009).

**Figure 1**

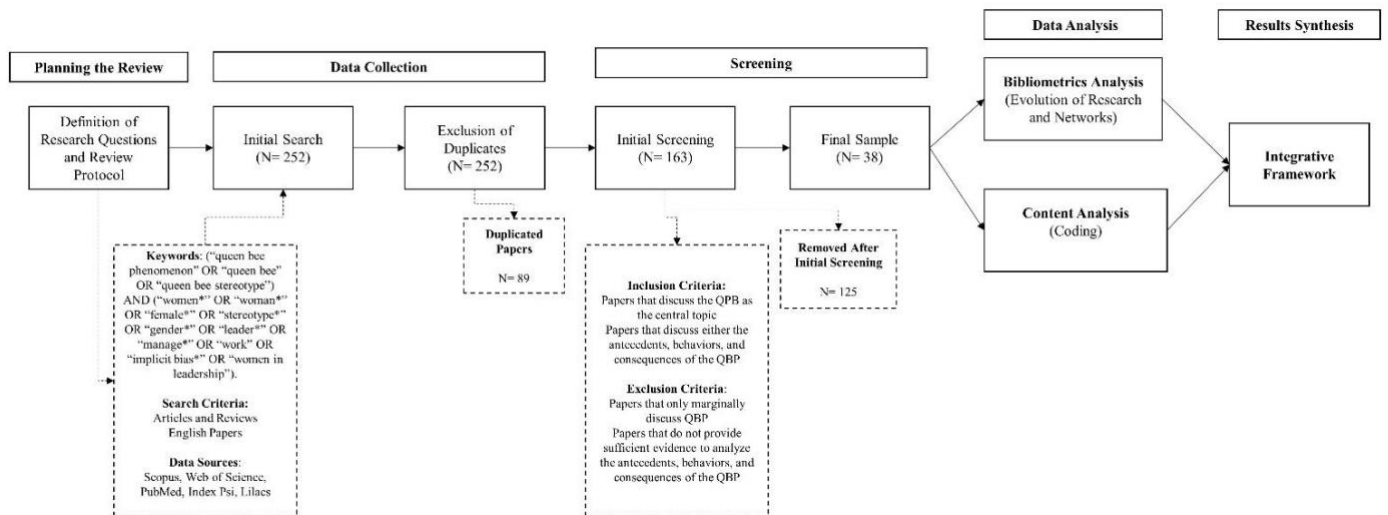
PRISMA flow diagram



The initial search resulted in 252 articles and reviews. We combined the data from both databases and excluded the duplicates, resulting in a database composed of 163 papers. We used the Bibliometrix package on R to make the merging and exclusions (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). We proceeded in cleaning the database by assessing whether the papers actually addressed the QBP as its central topic. We read the title, abstract and keywords of all the papers. When the information was not clear, a full read of the paper was conducted. We then analysed whether the papers fit the scope of our review. The discrepancies or questions that emerged during this process were solved among the authors through discussion until a consensus was reached. The final sample for the review was composed of 38 papers. The steps are highlighted in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*Methodological Framework*



**Data Analysis**

*Bibliometric Analysis*

We began the review by analysing and providing an overview of the current state of the art of the QBP through a bibliometric analysis. Bibliometric analysis provides a rich set of tools

for quantitatively analysing the literature and has been widely accepted within the academic community (e.g. Donthu et al., 2021). This set of tools allowed us to quantitatively investigate the literature and provide an overview of the trends in the current scholarship.

We analysed the evolution of the papers, top journals, methodological approaches and an account of the global state of publication on the QBP. The analyses were conducted using the Bibliometrix package on R (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017) and Microsoft Excel. This software allowed us to more deeply explore the data from the sample and provide more richer and more relevant results.

### *Content Analysis*

To further analyse the literature and provide evidence-based answers for the research questions, we also conducted a content analysis (in line with Thomas & Tee, 2021). We conducted a full read of the papers to identify the triggers, attitudes and consequences of the QBP, as well as to determine how the phenomenon is defined within the literature. All the papers were downloaded from the publishers' websites and were fully coded using the initial knowledge we gathered from our theoretical framework. The content analysis was conducted in Excel.

We began the analysis by coding how the QBP was addressed and the features of the phenomenon. We then employed axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2011) to identify the second-order themes (definitions of the QBP, types of explanations for the phenomenon and consequences of the QBP). The last step was to explore and combine the second-order themes to find the aggregated dimensions. Overall, the analysis allowed us to identify the literature's structure and what explanations and discussions are relevant in the QBP literature. Finally, we contrasted our coding with the available literature to develop a new integrative framework of the QBP research.

### *Assessing the Quality of the Review*

A key aspect of the systematic literature review is its capacity to provide reliable results through a replicable research design (e.g. Snyder, 2019). To ensure both the reliability and replicability of our study, we registered the research protocol in the Open Science Framework Home (<https://osf.io/jzebh/>). This allowed the readers to take a deeper look at the review's planning process and find all the specific processes that allow replication. Moreover, in the search/extraction process, we performed multiple searches with combinations of terms to find the most appropriate set of keywords that allowed fuller coverage.

Regarding the findings and discussions, we constantly compared our results with the foundational literature on the QBP, both to ensure that our results were representative of the literature and also to enable us to identify the contributions of our paper. Lastly, we held multiple meetings to discuss and improve the results and the quality of the final report.

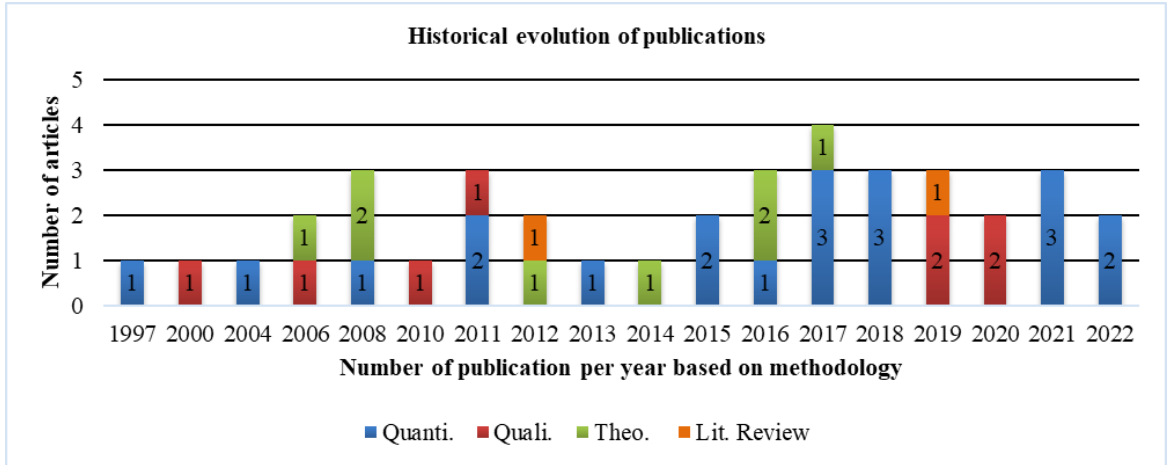
## **Results**

### *What are the characteristics of the current body of literature on the QBP?*

Our final sample is composed of 38 articles and reviews published in 29 different journals. The pioneer article on the QBP (Staines et al., 1974) is not part of our sample since it is not indexed in any of the databases selected. The journal was deactivated and the paper is currently not found on other search websites. Figure 3 presents the historical evolution of the QBP literature, based on the methodology employed by the article.

## **Figure 3**

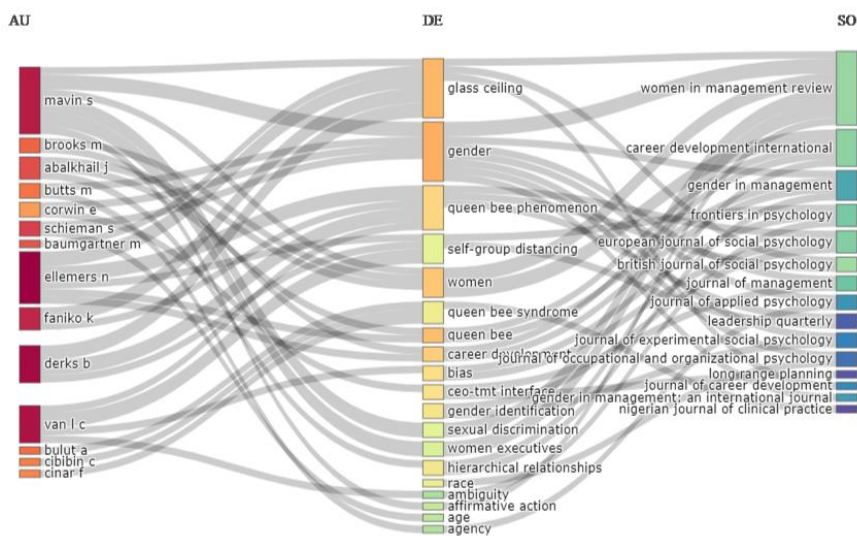
### *Historical Evolution of Publications*



The QBP literature is predominantly quantitative (n = 20, 53%), followed by qualitative studies (n = 8, 21%), theoretical papers (n = 8, 21%) and literature review (n = 2, 5%). The number of QBP studies increased slowly, with years going by without a related publication and peaks of only three papers in a year. In 2017, the peak of publication reached four papers. European countries (i.e. Netherlands, United Kingdom and Sweden) and North American countries (i.e. United States and Canada) present the highest number of papers. Figure 4 presents a three-field graph showing the main authors, the topics being investigated and the journals.

**Figure 4**

*Three-field Plot (Author, Topic and Journal)*



Among the journals, we highlight *Gender in Management: An International Journal* (five papers), *British Journal of Social Psychology* (three papers), *Career Development International* (two papers), *European Journal of Social Psychology* (two papers), *Frontiers in Psychology* (two papers), and *Journal of Management* (two papers). The remaining 23 journals published one paper each.

We can observe a predominance of papers with a woman as the first author and studies with only female authors. The following authors stand out within our sample: Ellemers, N.; Derks, B.; Van Laar, C.; Mavin, S.; and Faniko, K. The scholars Ellemers and Derks present the largest collaborative network among authors on the QBP, with eight papers in partnership.

The first paper from the sample was published in 1997. Cooper's (1997) "*Homophily or the Queen Bee Syndrome: Female Evaluation of Female Leadership*" evaluates the relationship between leadership and the behaviour of traditional and non-traditional women with their colleagues. The results point out that non-traditional women evaluate leaders, in general, and their own experience of non-traditional leadership more positively. On the other hand, traditional women evaluate the traditional experiences of leadership more positively. Similar to Staines et al. (1974), Cooper (1997) reinforces the idea of the QB as a behaviour of female competition.

The first significant and impactful collaboration was published in 2011, titled "*Do Sexist Organizational Cultures Create the Queen Bee?*" This paper is a pioneer in the discussion of the QBP as a response to the individual mobility of women who face gender discrimination in the workplace.

Faniko et al. led the most recent collaboration, titled "*The Queen Bee Phenomenon in Academia 15 Years After: Does it Still Exist, and If So, Why?*" (2021). The authors replicated the most cited QBP paper, "*The Underrepresentation of Women in Science Differential Commitment or the Queen Bee Syndrome*" (Ellemers et al., 2004). The research investigated

whether the QBP is still present in the more recent generation of scholars. The results reinforce the findings of the original study (i.e. Ellemers et al., 2004), arguing that professors underestimate the career engagement of junior colleagues and auto-describe themselves as more male (i.e. with more traditionally male traits) and committed.

Lastly, the papers analysed present heterogeneous samples with professionals in different hierarchical levels. Furthermore, the articles present a tendency towards exclusively female samples, reflecting on the experiences, styles and impact of female leaders on the organisation and other female colleagues.

***How is the QBP defined within the current body of literature?***

The literature on the QBP uses different explanations for its occurrence (Table 1). The first and most significant (24 articles) explains the QBP as a response to experiencing discrimination. The studies emphasise that women’s performances in traditionally masculine, competitive, hostile environments that have a high level of inequality requires them to meet the demands imposed by the leader. In this sense, QB behaviour emerges as a way to overcome negative expectations linked to women and improve their individual opportunities (e.g. Faniko et al., 2017; Hurst et al., 2016).

**Table 1**

*Queen Bee Definition and Theoretical Perspective*

<b>Queen Bee Definition</b>	<b>Theoretical Perspective</b>	<b>References</b>
Tendency to assimilate the norms of the culture of which they are a part, due to experiences of discrimination	Response patterns of experiences of inequality in the workplace	Derks et al. (2011); Faniko et al. (2017); Hurst et al. (2016); Kaiser & Spalding (2015)
Disengagement from their group, which is seen as disadvantaged (Individual strategies for professional advancement)	Social identity theory	Cibibin & Leo (2022); Derks et al. (2016); Xiong et al. (2022)

Competition from other women and hindering the career advancement of junior colleagues	Female workplace conflict	Cooper (1997); Johnson & Mathur-Helm (2011); Schieman & McMullen (2008); Staines et al. (1974)
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The second stream of literature is based on social psychology theory (18 articles), which presents it as a response to identity threat (e.g. Derks et al., 2016). The articles argue that male stereotypes associated with leadership lead women to disengage from their group, which is seen as stigmatised, in a quest to assimilate into the non-stigmatised group. Thus, women distance themselves from other women in order to not be associated with the low-status group, a phenomenon that has been called *self-group distancing* (e.g. Sterk et al., 2018). There are nine articles that explain the phenomenon as a simultaneous tendency to assimilate the norms of the culture and as a disengagement from their group. This is the reason that the total number of articles from the three types of explanations is higher than the sample examined here.

Finally, the third and weakest QBP explanation (five articles) points to a female conflict in the workplace. These papers point out that women who achieve prominent positions display sexist and competitive behaviours. They do this to prevent other women's progress, thus protecting their individual achievements and maintaining their power (e.g. Cooper, 1997; Staines et al., 1974).

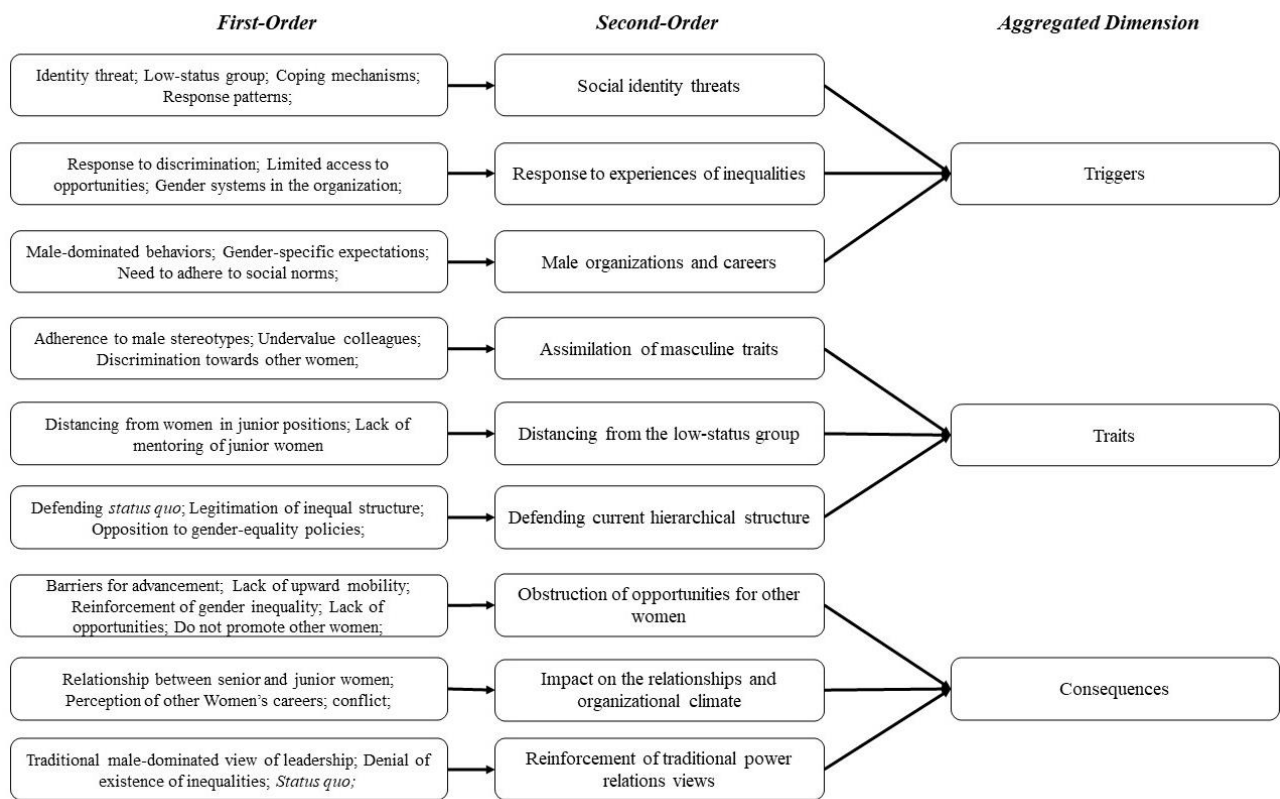
***What are the triggers, traits and consequences of the QBP?***

The coding process allowed us to identify the triggers, traits and consequences of the QBP that the literature has been addressing over the last 25 years of research. The triggers refer to all the individuals or organisational mechanisms responsible for driving women in leadership positions to engage with QBP traits. The traits include all the cognitive and behavioural processes that women in leadership positions engage in as a response to the triggers. The

consequences refer to the impacts that QB behaviour has on women and on the organisational context. The data structure is presented in Figure 5.

**Figure 5**

*Coding Tree*



First, as we previously discussed, the QBP has been investigated through two specific lenses as a response to social identity threat (i.e. the self-distancing group perspective) (e.g. Corwin et al., 2021; Abalkhail, 2020; Sheppard & Aquino, 2017) and as a response pattern to experiencing inequality (e.g. Cibibin & Leo, 2022; Johnson & Mathur-Helm, 2011; Kalogeraki & Georgakakis, 2021). These two perspectives are fully connected and represent an explanation or an overall precursor of the QBP. A deeper analysis of the antecedents led us to find three specific triggers that the literature uses to explain the QBP: male-dominated organisations and careers, experiences of inequality, and social identity threat.

Women working in male-dominated organisations and careers must walk a tightrope, as Van Veelen and Derks (2022) mentioned. They cannot oppose their gender-specific expectations, so they must present themselves as warm, socially oriented and cooperative. At the same time, women have to adhere to their profession's social norms and be competitive, self-focused and self-confident. Moreover, in male-dominated organisations and careers, women threaten the existing gender arrangement and highlight conflicts of interest in the distribution of career opportunities. Thus, in male-dominated organisations and careers, women are more prone to experience gender discrimination. Derks et al.'s (2011) findings show that women that declared stronger stereotyped perceptions about their female colleagues' career commitment also declared have lived through more gendered discrimination in their own careers.

The literature on female leadership has extensively discussed how women are often seen as less capable than men in leading positions (Van Veelen & Derks, 2022). In this context, there is the traditional view that a leader must possess agency traits (Carli & Eagly, 2016). The traditional female leadership traits (i.e. communal) are seen as insufficient or unfit for leadership roles. Therefore, there is a traditionally-held view that male traits (i.e. performative) are more positively accepted for leadership (Carli & Eagly, 2016). This process of defeminising leadership leads women to perceive their own group as being low-status while targeting their perceived identity's social threat.

Overall, the triggers (social identity threat, response to experiences of inequalities and male-dominated organisations and careers) explain how the male-dominated system hinders women's opportunities, makes their career paths more difficult, and favours the arising of underlying psychological mechanisms of the QBP.

The second dimension that we uncovered with the literature was the QBP traits. The women who identified as queen bees present three typical traits of the phenomenon. The first

refers to the assimilation of masculine traits. In this sense, women resemble their male colleagues in the way they dress, speak and relate to subordinates. Moreover, QB women show remarkable career ambition, valuing their commitment and the professional sacrifices made as being superior to those of their colleagues (Derks et al., 2011a; Ellemers et al., 2004; Faniko et al., 2016).

The QB women report low identification with colleagues in positions at the bottom of the organisational hierarchy, with women who are at the beginning of their career, and/or with those who have made stereotypical gender choices. As a consequence of lower identification, QB women distance themselves from these colleagues. Examples of gender-stereotyped choices include prioritising one's partner's career and family life tasks over one's own career. Such attitudes are identified in the literature as self-group distancing. Deeper research into this particular trait has shown that queen bees do not distance themselves from women who are at the same hierarchical level or have similar trajectories (Derks et al., 2016; Ellemers et al., 2012; Faniko et al., 2017).

The third trait of QB women refers to the legitimization of the gender hierarchy (LGH). The LGH, also referred to as the legitimization of the status quo, can be observed through denying the existence of gender discrimination in the workplace (Derks et al., 2011); the reproduction of the meritocratic discourse that highlights individual effort as the main factor responsible for professional success, even in the face of clear situations of inequality; and hostility towards affirmative policies that attempt to promote gender equality in positions of responsibility (Derks et al., 2016; Faniko et al., 2017). These three attitudes promote the defence of the hierarchical structure or legitimization of the status quo.

Overall, the traits shaped by the antecedents present the attitudes and behaviours of women who reach a position of command. These women are particularly critical of female colleagues and collaborate directly in the reproduction of gender barriers, thereby reducing

other women's chances of advancement (Derks et al., 2016). Moreover, these traits make it harder to notice sexist behaviour and reduce the effectiveness of gender equality policies.

The third and last dimension from our integrative framework highlights the impacts of the QBP on both women and the organisation. Initially, the studies highlight the impacts of the phenomenon in obstructing opportunities for other women, given that QB women reinforce female characteristics being less suitable for leadership positions (e.g. Van Veelen & Derks, 2022; Carli & Eagly, 2016) and make biased judgments of their colleagues (e.g. Ellemers et al., 2004). This behaviour makes junior female employees question their abilities, feel more demoralised than inspired, and avoid seeking promotions because they fear that they will not be rewarded even if they make greater efforts (e.g. Abalkahail, 2020). In addition, every imposition and pressure of queen bees on junior women can impact the job turnover rate (e.g. Derks et al., 2016).

The second impact is on relationships and organisational climate, because the QBP creates a negative work environment for women at the beginning of their professional trajectory by reinforcing the male organisational culture and intensifying competition among women for resources that seem less accessible to them than to men (Sheppard & Aquino, 2017). In addition, queen bees do not benefit from the psychological effects of mutual support that help them face situations of discrimination and organisational stress, and are hardly enriched by collective gender actions (e.g. Derks et al., 2016).

The third consequence is the reinforcement of traditional power relations views, where the QBP i) reinforces gender stereotypes, making them more credible and making it difficult for sexist situations to be perceived and corrected (Webber & Giuffre, 2019); ii) produces and reproduces the idea of gender equality and parity of opportunity in traditional organisations, disseminating that dedication to work and excellence is enough for professional advancement (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012); iii) expands the problematisation of female conflicts and

the belief that women have more dysfunctional same-sex relationships in the workplace when compared to men (Sheppard & Aquino, 2017); and iv) hinders and limits the benefits arising from gender diversity for the organisational environment.

***What are the topics, contexts and theories that need to be further explored by the research on the QBP?***

The current literature on the QBP has provided rich and powerful insights that further highlight how inequality in the workplace can create mechanisms that trigger women to perpetuate certain stereotypes. The research has advanced significantly since 1974 and has been published in the top journals in the psychology, sociology and management fields. More recently, the field has experienced a discussion regarding using the metaphor and its possible setbacks (e.g. Faniko et al., 2021), exploration of new context and samples (e.g. Cibibin & Leo, 2022), and the development of measurement instruments (e.g. Grangeiro et al., 2022), which can be further applied in another context to more fully understand the QBP. Despite the field's potential, the systematic literature review allowed us to identify specific areas where further research is needed.

First, we note the predominance of quantitative studies on the phenomenon (n = 20, 53%), thus highlighting the need to implement qualitative research; not to replace, but to complement quantitative studies. Conducting qualitative research enhances the emergence of new insights on the QBP and provides an in-depth understanding of women's experiences from their own accounts, supporting the development of studies on the QBP. The qualitative research design is also suitable for examining sub-study groups, investigating specificities regarding variables that influence women to adopt QB behaviours; social and cultural factors that impact the career advancement strategies of these women; and how support for the feminist movement relates to the phenomenon's emergence.

Second, despite our efforts to review the international literature, most of the peer-reviewed articles from the data sources are from Europe and North America (Table 1). It is consistent with the search for only papers in English and findings from previous studies on metaphors of gender inequalities (e.g. Grangeiro et al., 2021). This data sheds some light on the inequality of the research, with the predominance of the studies focusing on Western culture and, more specifically, on developed countries.

There is a need to explore contexts in which the phenomenon is less explored (i.e. Latin America). Xiong et al. (2022, p. 9) investigated the QBP in China and found that female managers “generally hold a more positive view of gender equality and stand against the current gender hierarchy.” At the same time, women who rapidly rose to the top of the organisation tended to defend the unequal hierarchical structure (Xiong et al., 2019). While the result is insightful and shows the landscape of the phenomenon in China, there is a scarcity of other studies in the same context to corroborate the results and provide more robust evidence. Therefore, there is a need to advance the research on the QBP to other cultural contexts, which would allow identifying new insights to advance our understanding of the triggers, traits and consequences of the QBP.

Third, new work contexts need to be explored. The findings of this study exhibit the trend of research in academia (e.g. Faniko et al., 2021; Ellemers et al., 2004), public organisations (e.g. Abalkhail, 2019; Arvate et al., 2018) and the health field (e.g. Magee & Penfold, 2021; Şengül et al., 2019). However, the broadly prestigious fields, identified by the acronym STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), remain predominantly male and lack investigations under the prism of the QBP.

Sectors such as agribusiness and mining, political and military careers can also be objects of studies on the phenomenon in research that questions how male-dominated fields impact the relationships between women. We underline the importance of reflecting on

intersectionality, thereby expanding the discussion on race, ethnicity, sexuality and social class. As a result, there is a need for research that fosters debate on the phenomenon in new professional fields, investigating beyond its existence and underlying behaviours, sociocultural factors and power relations, as well as the cognitive and subjective processes of the ties established in the work environment.

Lastly, Table 2 presents some research questions based on triggers, traits and consequences of the QBP discussed in question 3. The table also points out some references that may be used to develop future research.

**Table 2**

*Future Research Questions on the QBP*

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Future Research Questions</b>	<b>Helpful References</b>
<b>Triggers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do different and new organisational structures (e.g. high-tech start-ups with flatter organisational structure) provide mechanisms that constrain or trigger the QBP?</li> <li>• What is the role that policies targeting inequalities play in reducing the triggers that drive the QBP?</li> <li>• How does the Gender Inequality Index (GDI) relate to the existence of the QBP?</li> </ul>	Abalkhail (2020); Derks et al. (2011); Derks et al. (2016); Ellemers et al. (2012); Faniko et al. (2016); Faniko et al. (2021); Sheppard & Aquino (2017).
<b>Traits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did the COVID-19 pandemic changes in the workplace (i.e. working from home, flexibility in working hours and work-life balance challenge) affect how senior women see their junior colleagues?</li> <li>• Do different professional fields show different traits of QBP?</li> <li>• In different cultures, do women show different traits of QBP?</li> </ul>	Cibibin & Leo (2022); Corwin et al. (2021); Faniko et al., (2017); Harvey & Tremblay (2020); Xiong et al. (2022).
<b>Consequences</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the consequence of the presence of female queen bees in relationships of subordinate women to each other (i.e. informal networks)?</li> <li>• How does the phenomenon affect organisational results (e.g. satisfaction, climate organisation, productivity)?</li> <li>• What is the impact of women queen bees in a company that develops diversity programs?</li> </ul>	Abalkhail (2020); Baykal et al. (2020); Ellermers (2014); Kalogeraki & Georgakakis (2022); O'Neil et al. (2018). Sheppard & Aquino (2017).
<b>Other Topics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can male subordinates benefit from queen bee managers?</li> <li>• How does the QBP relate to other metaphors in genre literature (e.g. the gaslighting metaphor refers to manipulating individuals by denying and distorting true claims made by victims)?</li> <li>• What interpersonal conflicts and ambiguities do women queen bees face?</li> </ul>	Faniko et al. (2016); Hurst et al. (2016); Sterk et al. (2018); Paustian-Underdahl (2017); Webber & Giuffre (2019).

## **Queen Bee Phenomenon: An Integrative Framework**

Taking into consideration the way pioneering texts on QBP classified women who reached high positions in the organisational hierarchy, Mavin (2008, 2006) denounced that gender studies should not blame women for the low female representation in positions of high responsibility. The author suggests that organisational structures and practices must be explored in order to find evidence of the reasons that discourage women from taking on high positions of command.

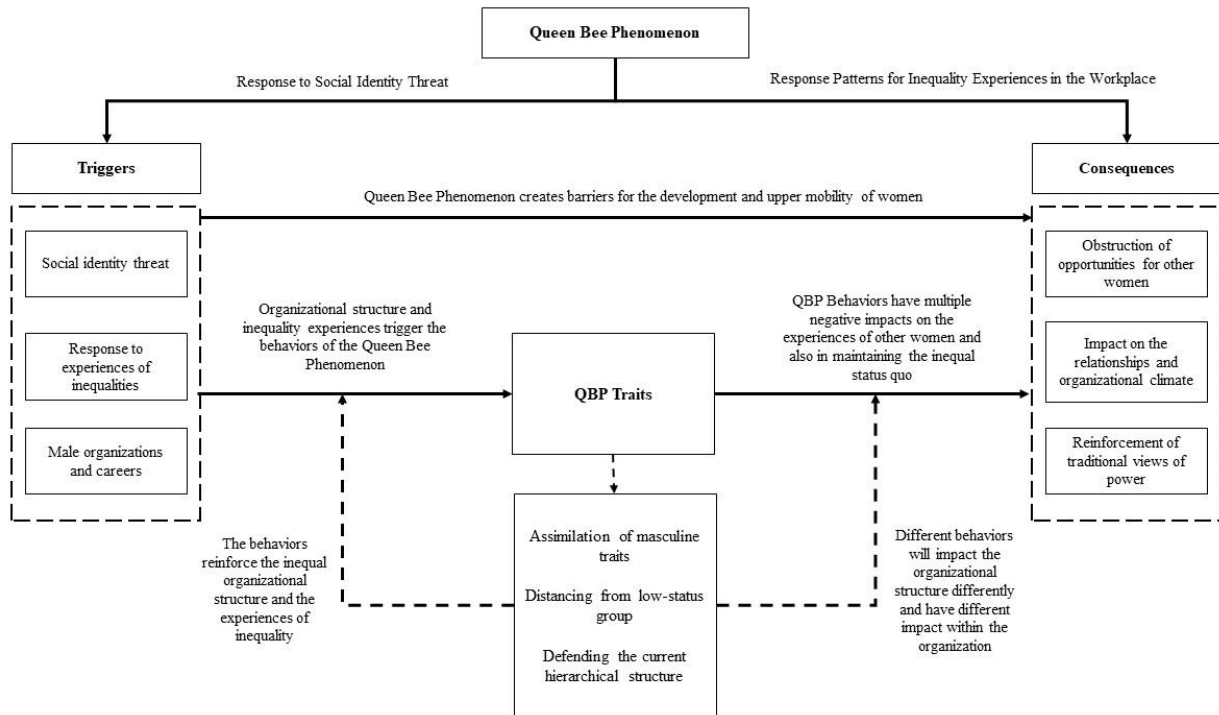
In line with Mavin's (2006, 2008) reminder, scientific productions on QBP from the first decade of the 21st century highlight that women can adopt collective or individual strategies to address the threat of social gender identity experienced in the work environment. When members of a disadvantaged group perceive that the typical characteristics of their group are undervalued, they can adopt two strategies: i) the first at the collective level, where they develop actions aimed at emphasising the requirements of the group as a whole; or ii) the second, at the individual level, which emphasises individual results by distancing oneself from the disadvantaged group and adopting the traits of the favoured group. This second strategy provides the emergence of the QBP (Derks et al., 2016).

Another strand of literature on the phenomenon, led by Shepard and Aquino (2013, 2017), compares men and women in terms of competition with their same-gender counterparts. The authors show that competition between men is also a reality in organisations and propose a reflection on how much the exaltation of conflict between women maintains the status quo of the dominant group (Shepard & Aquino, 2017).

In addition to examining mixed samples (of both men and women) (e.g. Sterk et al., 2018; Faniko et al., 2016), research on the QBP has moved towards examining cultures other than those traditionally studied by the phenomenon (e.g. Xiong et al., 2022; Johnson & Mathur-Helm, 2011). The analytical process employed allowed us to develop an integrative framework

of the QBP literature, a research tradition approaching its 50th year. The integrative framework is presented in Figure 6.

**Figure 6**



*Integrative Framework of QBP Research*

If the focus is on the QB traits of female competition, we may highlight the image offered by the gender discrimination metaphor that points to women themselves as being responsible for gender inequality in positions of high responsibility. However, this systematic review allowed us to identify that the scientific literature on the phenomenon goes beyond QB attitudes and behaviours, and seeks to analyse their antecedents and consequences. The analysis of the triggers and impacts of QB traits allowed the development of an understanding of QB, going beyond the idea of competition and conflict between women.

That said, the QB metaphor becomes inappropriate and obsolete for analysing the relations built between women in a professional context. This is because the QBP and its outcomes go beyond the image originating from biological sciences that present a set of hereditary behaviours of the QB in relation to the worker bees.

Addressing the QB rather as a phenomenon is more appropriate because it allows one to appreciate the complexity that research on the subject has reached. These women's attitudes, understood from theories of social psychology, are anchored in triggers that belong to the context of male organisations and/or experiences of discrimination faced throughout their careers. Finally, the literature is also concerned with the impacts that the phenomenon has on organisations and presents suggestions of practices that are susceptible to reducing the emergence of the QBP and its harmful consequences on the organisational climate.

## **Conclusions**

### *Research Implications*

Literature reviews are powerful avenues to reflect on what has been investigated and to seek new paths for advancing the literature (Post et al., 2020; Snyder, 2019). In this sense, this review of the scientific production on QBP contributes to the elucidation of methodological gaps, presenting the need for new studies to be conducted with participants engaged in careers that are little examined (e.g. start-up employees) and from countries out of Europe and North America through qualitative methodological approaches.

This review also contributed to the field by pointing out the theme's conceptual advances. The QBP overcame the idea of competition and conflict between women. Explications of the QBP traits passed from identifying competitive behaviours between women, supposedly based on biological grounds, to a contextualised understanding of their attitudes based on a robust theoretical framework. The evidence-based framework systematises and

synthesises years of research advancements and provides a tool for a new path of development in the field. Moreover, the review highlighted how the elucidation of the intersection with other themes (e.g. self-group distancing) contributed to the phenomenon's development.

While self-group distancing is a rich theoretical background for investigating the QBP (e.g. Van Veelen et al., 2020; Faniko et al., 2021), traditional research in this field focused on the mechanisms on which individuals recognise the threat and proceed to distance themselves from the low-status group (e.g. Van Veelen et al., 2020). However, QBP research also addresses the mechanisms for which women engage in attitudes that actively defend the current hierarchical structure (e.g. Sterk et al., 2018; Faniko et al., 2016); thus, we need to continue investigating the phenomenon through diverse theoretical lenses, testing how its dimensions configure themselves in different cultures and different professional contexts. This is important for advancing our understanding and providing more evidence of both the (in)existence of the phenomenon and the causes that need to be remediated.

### *Practical Implications*

By critically assessing the queen bee literature, this review study offers valuable insights for practitioners, such as top managers, HR managers and policy-makers. The theoretical framework proposed in this study highlights that queen bee attitudes are triggered by (un)conscious gender stereotypes addressed in discriminatory organisational cultures. Moreover, the theoretical framework shows that queen bee attitudes negatively impact the organisational climate and women's career development. Hence, training programs could be a practical avenue to raise managers' and employees' awareness of the unconscious gender stereotypes reflected in their behaviours.

The literature on the QBP highlights that inequality in the workplace can create mechanisms that make women themselves perpetuate gender stereotypes. The findings arising

from the present review allow us to conclude that literature on the QBP is also concerned with pointing out core factors that trigger QB behaviours and possible solutions to it. Therefore, to reduce the triggers of the QBP, it may be worth considering developing practices that identify and prevent sexist behaviours and discourage “chilly climate” behaviours and interactions within the organisational environment.

The proposals are not just palliative solutions, such as advancing a few women to top positions. Radical transformations are needed in organisational policies and practices (accompanied by reflections on the consequences of each proposed change) to expand the possibilities of professional development for women. Moreover, the findings presented here are important for top managers who are aware of diversity, as they refer to the culture, policies and practices that make organisations unwelcoming for women and especially for their ambitions for professional development.

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