Young adult “migrant” women’s experiences at work

– Exploring intersections of gender, origins and age in Germany and Austria

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1. Introduction

Paid work is an essential part of many people’s lives: one spends a significant amount of time at the workplace, one’s daily life is often revolving around work, it provides for livelihoods and represents an important part of many people’s social network. Some people define themselves via the work they do, while for others it is a mere necessity. Work thus means very different things to different people, and people have diverse experiences at the workplace. My point of departure is that working, however, is also deeply normative: it is “normal” to work, not so much however to be unemployed. Working is thus, for many, a way of fitting in and contributing to society, it is essential to an individuals’ place in the world and how the people around them perceive them.

These personal thoughts can lead us to what interests me in this thesis which consists in what is happening at the workplace itself for people who do work but may otherwise not quite fit the norm. But who are people that are perceived as “out-of-the-norm”? For sure there are many ways in which people differ from some unwritten norm. Categories which we are immediately defined by the people around us are probably different from the ones we define ourselves and our individuality and uniqueness with. Some basic social science categories that are most common to use to understand people and their lives, however, are one’s gender, age and origins. “How old are you?” and “Where are you from?” are probably also some of the most common questions to be asked when you meet a person for the first time. Despite “Which gender do you have?” not being one of them, people constantly categorize each other by gender as well, may it be consciously or unconsciously.

The group that I have chosen to focus on in this study are young adult women that migrated to the German-speaking region of Austria and Germany from places that are not commonly considered “the West” as the West is often considered what is “normal”, and anyone not coming from there is consequently often constructed as not normal. I will henceforward call the subjects of this study “migrant women” for the following reasons. It is for sure not anybody who is technically a migrant, i.e. moved from one place to another, not from “the West”. Nevertheless, the term migrant is, both in academia and the public discourse, mostly used in contexts revolving around problems and it even has developed a negative connotation as some argue. Moreover, somebody with origins outside “the West” is much more likely to be labelled as migrant than a person originating in “the West” who tends to be associated with terms such as “expat” (Cranz, 2016; Ruz, 2015). The term furthermore creates and emphasizes a distance between migrants and non-migrants, and rather highlights differences and problems than positive features (Ruz, 2015).
Lundström (2014) explains it like this:

The discursive concept of ‘the migrant’ tends to be used as a marker of non-whiteness and a non-Westerner, who [...] is certainly confronted by negative racial stereotypes, racism, discrimination, marginalization and exploitation. [...] On the contrary, ‘white migrants’ can inhabit the world as part of a global enterprise, tourists, expatriates, guests, development aid workers, and so on, representing humanity, whose presence remains undisputed (Lundström, 2014: 2).

Moreover, there is the notion that a migrant is only a person who moves from a poor country to a wealthy country, while the migrant is simultaneously associated with low-skilled, not high-skilled labor (Guðjónsdóttir & Loftsdóttir, 2017: 792). Even though I do not wish to impose any negative meaning on the subjects of this study, it is very much those negative constructions revolving around the concept of the migrant, the marking of non-whiteness and othering in this context that are at the core of the interest of this thesis. Migrants with origins out of the normal, or who are perceived to not conform to a norm, are “the other”, outsiders who are, as Lundström noted, often discriminated against, stigmatized and racialized and this is what makes it interesting and important to explore their experiences that are characterized by such processes.

Additionally to investigating the intersection of one’s gender and one’s being a “migrant”, and with it one’s origins, I am also interested in how these social divisions intersect with age as this seems to not have been sufficiently researched so far. While Pompper (2011) has done research on women of color who find themselves at an age in which they are in the middle of their career, research on young adult women and their experiences at the workplace appears to be scarce. I have therefore chosen to put the focus of this study on young adult migrant women, more specifically women who are between 24 and 30 years old, and to try to shed light on this specific intersection of age, gender and origins.

Research in this topic seems to be relevant as so far, the focus of studies in the German-speaking region seems to lie mainly on issues revolving around integration into the labor market as well as discriminatory practices in the recruitment process (Biffl et al., 2013; Granato, 2004; Imdorf, 2015). What happens after the successful entry into the labor market and at the workplace itself is often neglected. Especially intersectionality and how discrimination is often a compound of different forms remains under-researched and are, of course with notable exceptions also in the German-speaking region that foremost focus on the care sector (Lutz, 2011; Roig, 2014), too often failed to be acknowledged in the organizational context (Kamenou, 2008; Kamenou & Fearfull, 2006; Pompper, 2014; Tatli & Özbilgin, 2012).

I see it as important to deal with this topic, however, as, for example, a study by the German state concerning equality of women with a migrant background in Germany suggests, many migrant women experience poorer career opportunities, for instance, due to their gender and origins (Granato,
2004: 45). An Austrian study furthermore describes significant differences regarding income of women with a migrant background outside the European Union both in comparison to men with a migrant background and women without a migrant background which does not decrease even with the increasing duration of having lived in Austria (Hofer et al., 2013: 98-100). At the same time, Gummich (2004) found that especially people who experience discrimination based on more than one category are not sufficiently considered and protected by anti-discrimination laws and policies. Furthermore, there is a necessity for employers themselves to gain a deeper understanding of the problem at hand as only this way, they can work on a potentially unjust organizational culture as well as introduce equality measures or adapt existing measures in order to stop marginalizing and discriminating against young adult migrant women who will in the future, due to demographic changes and migration patterns, pose an increasingly large part of the workforce in Europe (Kamenou, 2008: 107). For tackling inequality experienced by young adult migrant women, an intersectional approach is necessary, however, as different categories, such as gender, age, and origins, play together and create very specific realities that may cause inequality at work. This is due to distinct institutionalized norms and structures of which involved actors, such as co-workers and employers, are mostly unaware of, but which nevertheless are cause to real-life consequences for those who find themselves at those intersections of social divisions and may thus be constructed as “different, deviant, and subordinate” (de los Reyes, 2017: 14).

The aim of this thesis is to gain insights and explore young adult migrant women’s experiences at work in the German-speaking region of Austria and Germany and try to understand them in relation to a larger social context. For this, interviews with young adult migrant women have been conducted and analyzed. The results of this will be presented and discussed in this thesis. This intersectional study hopes to do so in a manner that acknowledges their agency and voice. The subject of this study thus are young adult women who experience discrimination, be it positive or negative, connected to their gender, age and/or related to their origins outside the norm. In this, the study’s main focus is to be located in finding structural meaning in experiences, not diversity management as it is common when studying inequality at the workplace: studies exploring issues concerning women with a migrant background are often concerned with the managerial aspect of diversity management, i.e. are investigating how to maximize profits for an organization by taking advantage of employees’ diversity or minimizing negative effects caused by it (Fischer, 2008; Morden, 2013). I, however, aim to explore these women’s experiences from a perspective that puts the focus on how their experiences can be seen in relation to social justice. The following are questions that guide this study and to which I will try to offer some possible answers:
• Which experiences, both of positive and negative nature, do people have at work that find themselves at the intersection of being a woman, migrant and young adult?
• How do young adult migrant women react to and deal with experiences of inequality and discrimination?
• How can young adult migrant women’s experiences be understood in relation to a broader social context and underlying social structures and norms?

Concerning the structure of this study, I will proceed in the following manner: In the chapter following this introduction, I will elaborate on the study’s methodological and theoretical perspectives that influenced the research. This will include considerations on social justice, social constructionism, intersectionality and the importance of acknowledging difference, social identity difference and the relationship between participants and researcher as well as agency and voice. The next chapter will deal with methods of this study, i.e. how this study has been conducted regarding the gathering of material and its analysis, including thoughts on a phenomenological approach, sampling, interviewing technology and ethical considerations. In the subsequent chapter, I will present and discuss participants’ experiences at work, i.e. the qualitative data that was collected, starting with inequality and negative discrimination experienced by participants of this study, then continuing with their reactions to inequality, positive effects of their location at the intersection they find themselves at, and ending with the importance of individuals’ specific contexts as well as other influences. This chapter will address the first two research questions. Chapter five shall then tackle the third question and consequently offer possible ways of understanding these experiences by connecting them to some theories, concepts and previous research such as power structures and hierarchies, the norm of the ideal worker, how young adult migrant women are constructed, as well as more background on sexualization and sexual harassment. Thereafter, I will end the thesis with a short summary and by sharing some concluding thoughts.
2. Theoretical framework and methodological considerations

This chapter introduces and explains the theoretical framework and some methodological considerations that are central to this study as they inspired my approach and conduction of it, and that are necessary for the reader in order to understand the chapters that follow. I thus drew from those perspectives and approaches in my way of collecting, analyzing and interpreting the data of this study. In this, the structure of the chapter can be explained as such: I am approaching the study’s aim departing at a concept of social justice; I then proceed by elaborating on how the study is framed through a social constructionist view; thereafter, I explain the concept of intersectionality, its central role for the analysis in this study and how acknowledging difference is important in this; this is followed by a section on social identity difference and how this concept influences and can help us understand the relationship between me – the researcher – and the participants of this study; the end of this chapter will then be marked by thoughts on the role of participants’ agency and voices.

2.1 Social justice

As explained in the introductory chapter, this study means to investigate participants’ experiences from a perspective of social justice. But what is social justice? According to Jost & Kay (2010), it is

[...] a state of affairs (either actual or ideal) in which (a) benefits and burdens in society are dispersed in accordance with some allocation principle (or set of principles); (b) procedures, norms, and rules that govern political and other forms of decision making preserve the basic rights, liberties, and entitlements of individuals and groups; and (c) human beings [...] are treated with dignity and respect not only by authorities but also by other relevant social actors [...] (Jost & Kay, 2010: 1122).

More specifically, however, this study is informed by Fraser’s (2007) understanding of justice in the field of feminist studies which can also be applied to research beyond inequalities regarding only gender such as this one. Fraser suggests an approach that focuses on a principle of parity of participation. This principle demands “social arrangements that permit all (adult) members of society to interact with one another as peers” (Fraser, 2007: 27). The nature of this parity is qualitative and means that individuals interact with one another “on an equal footing” (Fraser, 2007: 28). In this, there are two conditions for achieving justice: elimination of firstly maldistribution and of secondly misrecognition. These conditions also serve as dimensions to identifying and questioning injustice in Fraser’s approach. The first one concerns distributive justice, i.e. it is necessary that material resources are distributed in a way that individuals must not be subject to economic dependence and inequality (Fraser, 2007: 27-28). “Precluded, therefore, are social arrangements that institutionalize deprivation, exploitation, and gross disparities in wealth, income, and leisure time, thereby denying
some people the means and opportunities to interact with others as peers.” (Fraser, 2007: 27) The other prerequisite for justice

[...] requires that institutionalized patterns of cultural value express equal respect for all participants and ensure equal opportunity for achieving social esteem. This condition precludes institutionalized value patterns that systematically depreciate some categories of people and the qualities associated with them. Precluded, therefore, are institutionalized value patterns that deny some people the status of full partners in interaction—whether by burdening them with excessive ascribed “difference” or by failing to acknowledge their distinctiveness (Fraser, 2007: 27).

The necessary recognition is not given, for instance, if institutionalized patterns determine a group “as inferior, excluded, wholly other, or simply invisible” (Fraser, 2007: 31) as this inhibits parity. These mechanisms of subordination which hinder parity of participation are based on value systems and institutional structures that establish a certain norm that disadvantage people who do not fit into this norm. Such social arrangements may be androcentric (Fraser, 2007: 31), ethnocentric, and/or favoring any other category of people, as well as conceptions about them, over others.

If any of those two conditions are not met, a “morally indefensible gender order” (Fraser, 2007: 28), or an unjust order concerning any other category or multiple categories that people identify with or are being identified with, such as an ethnicity, religion, nationality or sexual orientation, emerges. Thus, if the state of affairs, as Jost & Kay (2010) call it, is characterized by social subordination and does not enable equal opportunity for recognition as well as economic equality and independence regardless of one’s identity or other axes of difference, it does not resonate with Fraser’s conception of social justice (Fraser, 2007: 28-30).

Consequently, applying this perspective while conducting this study means that I as a researcher am examining whether participants’ experiences match with what can be called social justice by Fraser’s standards, or whether there are shortcomings, and if so, identify these shortcomings. During this process, the different axes of social differentiation that participants find themselves at, such as gender, age and origins, but also potentially other axes, need to be taken into account and which role they play in the justness, or lack of justice, that occurs. Therefore, in reflecting upon the material that is gathered in this research from a social justice perspective, this study shall look for meaning that addresses parity in terms of both distribution as well as recognition and status.

Another aspect to this is that I as a researcher am also a part of social arrangements and Fraser’s conception of social justice thus requires me to constitute participants in this study as equal. I must recognize them as such, and this inhibits making them invisible. In the corresponding sections, I argue that acknowledging and highlighting their agency is also a part of this, as well as critically reflecting power structures between researcher and researched. The scope of this format unfortunately brings limitations with it that make it impossible to include participants as full partners in the research
process. Nevertheless, I tried to conduct the interviews in a way that let us interact as peers, and forms of victimization and objectification were avoided or approached critically to my best abilities. By giving them space as well as voice in the study, I attempt to make them and their experiences as visible as possible and thus to align with requirements of social justice to my best abilities.

2.2 Social constructionism

Regarding social constructionism, I mainly draw from Burr’s (2015) perspective on this concept. Burr explains on the matter that social constructionism “denies that our knowledge is a direct perception of reality” (Burr, 2015: 9). On the contrary, knowledge is always constructed and varies: “There can be no final description of the world, and ‘reality’ may be inaccessible or inseparable from our discourse about it; all knowledge is provisional and contestable, and accounts are local and historically/culturally specific.” (Burr, 2015: 177-178) Therefore, social constructionism is countering conventional scientific approaches such as positivism or empiricism (Burr, 2015: 2). This approach assumes rather that knowledge, or versions of it, equal only ways of seeing and understanding the world, and are produced “through the daily interactions between people in the course of social life” (Burr, 2015: 4). In research such as mine, this means that researcher and participants, as well as their biases and social contexts, construct knowledge together. Social constructionism thus views

[...] objectivity as an impossibility, since each of us, of necessity, must encounter the world from some perspective or other (from where we stand) and the questions we come to ask about that world, our theories and hypotheses, must also of necessity arise from the assumptions that are embedded in our perspective (Burr, 2015: 172).

Participants bring this bias with them into the interview, and researchers into the entire research process. Therefore, in a social constructionist approach, the researcher must firstly be aware of her own bias. Secondly, it is important that the researcher ask herself how participants perceive, understand and describe their experiences. She ought to also remain aware that it is the participants who already interpret their experiences through their specific lens, and pass this construction of their reality on to the researcher through the interview. Burr therefore asserts that “when someone gives an account of an event, that account is simultaneously a description of the event and part of the event because of the constitutive nature of talk” (Burr, 2015: 176). I argue that this construction of knowledge by participants can be considered an agentic action since additionally to unconscious choices, participants make conscious choices about how they portray their experiences and in which way they talk about them in interviews, just as they choose what they share and what they do not share with the researcher.
This is resonated within feminist researchers DeVault & Gross’ (2012) work. They promote an approach that I consider to be social constructionist as they reject the idea that social realities are simply “there for researchers to find” (DeVault & Gross, 2012: 176). They argue that “the social contexts of people’s lives [are] historically situated and constituted through people’s activities, and the research process itself [is] an integral aspect of the construction of knowledge about society” (DeVault & Gross, 2012: 176).

Furthermore, one can identify the influence that social identity difference, which will be discussed further in the corresponding section, has on the construction of knowledge. Participants’ and researchers’ standpoints can differ significantly not only between the two, but also within participant groups or between different researchers as “knowledge is always partial, embodied, and locatable within social and historical forces” (Pompper, 2014: 36). Therefore, Pompper advises that “when collecting stories from research participants, it is important to probe their standpoint; how and why they feel the way they do and why they chose to share the specific stories that they did” (Pompper, 2014: 35). This helps the researcher to better understand people’s backgrounds and social, historical and political influences on their realities (Pompper, 2014: 35).

Another aspect in research that can be related to social constructionism is the use of categories. McCall (2005) argues that some “scholars also see categories as misleading constructs that do not readily allow for the diversity and heterogeneity of experience to be represented” (McCall, 2005: 1783). This can be connected also to the importance of acknowledging differences between people and within social divisions, as social divisions and categories themselves are socially and individually constructed and people belonging to them differ from one another significantly. Categorizing brings with it already a multitude of assumptions that the researcher makes, and thus already constructs a certain knowledge that includes the thinking in categories even before investigating any further in her research. Burr (2015) exemplifies this and argues that “the categories with which we as human beings apprehend the world do not necessarily refer to real divisions” (Burr, 2015: 3), as the binary gender categories “man” and “woman”, for instance, are not as fixed as they are usually dealt with, nor are they the only gender categories that people belong to.

In essence, being influenced by a social constructionist approach for this study means that participants as well as I as a researcher actively created the content of this study and what could be considered the subjective truth of it. In this construction of knowledge, our individual social identities played a role which must be recognized. Through giving participants the space to freely describe and explain their experiences and views, the range of constructing knowledge is wide in this study. It also means that the subject of my research are not only the experiences that participants told me about,
but also in a way the act of them talking to me about their experiences. I must therefore keep social
constructionism in mind when reflecting on the material I gathered as well as concerning my own
preconceptions in categorizing and my own interpretations of the data. It also means, however, that I
as a researcher am just constructing the contents of the study. Therefore, also the chapter which aims
to offer ways of understanding participants’ experiences is only presenting one way of understanding
them.

Moreover, the subjective truth created in this process might have looked very different had I
defined the participant group differently or sampled differently. Had I, for instance, asked
participants’ co-workers, their superiors or customers, the results of this study would in all likelihood
have differed starkly. Their perceptions of how young adult migrant women experience their work
environment are probably different from their own. Simultaneously, another researcher might have
created a completely different picture. Not only my approach in itself defines the content of this study,
but so do the questions I asked, the way I interacted with participants, my interpretation of what was
said as well as my preconceptions which can never be set aside fully.

Regarding categories that I apply throughout this study, I as a researcher must remain with a
certain skepticism towards those categories and acknowledge the importance of keeping the social
constructionist approach in mind, while also being trapped in having to use them as points of
orientation, as research is mostly dependent on thinking in categories to a certain extent for pragmatic
reasons. I thus acknowledge categorization’s material and discursive importance which is why I do
not avoid it altogether (McCall, 2005: 1783). Despite approaching my research thus, it is necessary
to avoid generalizations as well as assumptions of homogeneity within those categories and never
regard them as a truth. I must instead be mindful of other possible influences so that the group that is
to be dealt with is investigated in its complexity.

2.3 Intersectionality and acknowledging difference

Considerations about intersectionality are central to this research due to its design which encompasses
gender, age and origins. Therefore, this section will discuss the basic components of an intersectional
approach as discussed by scholars such as Yuval-Davis (2006), Lorde (2007), Collins (1998), and
McCall (2005), and how intersectionality is relevant for this study. Furthermore, this section will
connect such elements with considerations about the centrality of acknowledging difference of social
identities that I was influenced by from Pompep (2014) and Mohanty (1984).
Intersectionality can be defined as “the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations” (McCall, 2005: 1771). It means to explore how different social divisions, such as origins, gender and age, intersect and are related to one another, since, as Yuval-Davis points out, “all social divisions share some features and are concretely constructed by / intermeshed with each other” (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 200). Hierarchies in societies based on such divisions should therefore not be studied isolated from one another. Researchers must rather examine how they construct one another (Collins, 1998: 62), as being at the intersection of different social divisions has unique effects on people’s experiences that cannot be explained purely by applying an additive approach which would label oppressions including several social divisions as double/triple/etc. oppression. Simply adding effects of different divisions and hierarchical structures, such as saying that a woman of color might suffer discrimination because of her gender and her skin color, thus facing double-discrimination, is not sufficient to address and understand people’s complex realities.

Rather, completely different synergies might emerge from, for instance, being a woman and a person of color at the same time that can neither be explained solely by investigating the person’s gender nor her appearance separately. Therefore, “[t]he point of intersectional analysis is not to find ‘several identities under one’” (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 205), but to explore how different social divisions together construct the specific reality that is subject of the study. In order to fully grasp an individual’s experience or a certain phenomenon, Yuval-Davis argues:

> What is important is to analy[z]e how specific positionings and (not necessarily corresponding) identities and political values are constructed and interrelate and affect each other in particular locations and contexts. Similarly important would be an examination of the particular ways in which the different divisions are intermeshed. One cannot assume the same effect or constellation each time and, hence, the investigation of the specific social, political and economic processes involved in each historical instance is important (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 200).

Thus, a researcher needs to always take into account the context and larger structures revolving around the case, while not taking for granted previous results of intersections’ meanings and implications, or even one's understanding of the categories themselves, as they might “continually [be] challenged and restructured both individually and socially” (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 201).

Beyond that, an oppression may never, as Yuval-Davis (2006) argues, be investigated properly from only one angle, i.e. cannot be explored by only approaching it via one single division, as “in concrete experiences of oppression, being oppressed […] is always constructed and intermeshed in other social divisions” (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 195). Yuval-Davis consequently criticizes the essentialization of terms such as “Blackness” and “womanhood” (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 195), and such a thing as addition of oppressions with their roots in separate social divisions becomes an impossibility. There is a risk, however, in applying such an intersectional approach that different
social divisions are equated to one another when acknowledging their co-dependence. Therefore, Yuval-Davis highlights the following:

While all social divisions share some features and are concretely constructed by/intermeshed with each other, it is important also to note that they are not reducible to each other. We are not talking here only about a unidimensional differentiation between the powerful and the powerless, nor are some differentiations just a reflection of more profound others. To be Black or a woman is not another way of being working class, or even a particular type of working-class person (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 200).

So as we can see, a simplification of individuals’ locations in social power structures does not account for their realities in which there may, or even must, be more than one way of being different that has significant influence on an individual’s lived experience.

This critique of research that focused solely on differences in gender, ethnicity and race ultimately and as such ignored intersections of divisions led to the increased engagement of academia in intersectionality (McCall, 2005: 1780). McCall even calls intersectionality “the most important theoretical contribution that women’s studies […] has made so far” (McCall, 2005: 1771). De los Reyes (2017) especially highlights the importance of intersectionality in the field of investigating inequality at the workplace as this is a space where “different relations of oppression construct informal hierarchies and unequal conditions” (de los Reyes, 2017: 17).

Much of an intersectional approach additionally draws on acknowledging difference in people’s social identity as “[r]efusing to recognize difference makes it impossible to see the different problems and pitfalls facing […] women” (Lorde, 2007: 118) or alternatively, any other category that is under investigation. Often, however, this complexity within a social division is forgotten, and categories are instead seen and studied as homogeneous. In fact, acknowledging diversity and heterogeneity within social divisions and categories is central in research if it is to account for people’s experiences. Pompper thus claims:

A danger is that results from research focusing only on traditional and essentializing interpretations of axes of social identity difference according to binary dualisms (e.g., Christian/Islam, old/young, men/women, heterosexual/homosexual, able bodied/disabled, mind/body, other/self, disabled/non-disabled, East/West, feminine/masculine, them/us, poor/rich, adult/child, liberal/conservative, atheist/religious, Black/White, domestic/foreign, and democracy/socialism) neglect aspects of experience that resist such norms and fail to account for intra-group diversity, or multiplicity within any given group (Pompper, 2014: 28).

Researchers must therefore investigate reality in its full complexity, which includes people’s belonging to multiple social divisions – which may not be of binary nature – and being located at unique intersections of such divisions.

The application of only traditional categories, such as gender, does consequently not reflect people’s complex realities. This is essential also regarding categorization of people into groups along social divisions in research. Mohanty (1984) critically reflects on such practices of categorization that
are already established before the analyzing process. Taking “women” as a group to exemplify the argument, Mohanty points out that often, there is the assumption of an “ahistorical, universal unity between women” (Mohanty, 1984: 344) that ignores any other social divisions such as class and ethnicity and establishes them solely based on social constructions without taking other contexts into account. These practices only draw on a binary view on gender difference which always relates the female to subordination and powerlessness and the male to domination and power (Mohanty, 1984: 344). So in categorizing gender, research often assumes that “[w]hat binds women together is a sociological notion of the “sameness” of their oppression” (Mohanty, 1984: 337). Mohanty claims that this is “reductive and ineffectual in designing strategies to combat oppressions” (Mohanty, 1984: 344). Instead, an analysis that accounts for the situation and context in their entireties should be carried out (Mohanty, 1984: 344-345). This conforms not only with an intersectional and social identity difference approach, but also with a phenomenological approach that, as will be discussed in the following chapter, brackets out preconceptions and focusses on the concrete lived experiences that are at hand.

In line with Mohanty’s argument, I believe that additionally to the lack of addressing intersectionality and difference in an approach that fails to account for diversity within a social division, reproducing such homogeneous definitions of gender, or any other social division, limits people's agency by ignoring diversity and solely highlighting subordination and oppression, as those are, as Mohanty explains, the essence of the categories’ being in the first place when they are constructed in such a generalizing manner. Therefore, an intersectional approach and acknowledging difference within social divisions can at the same time acknowledge agency.

Furthermore, Lorde criticizes feminism and women’s movement for its frequent ignorance of intersectionality and differences between women concerning different social divisions and specific contexts, as well as white women’s “built-in privileges” (Lorde, 2007: 117) and the resulting exclusion of women, such as women of color, that do not conform to a norm of mainstream feminism. She thus views it critically that a “sisterhood that does not in fact exist” (Lorde, 2007: 116) is projected based on an assumed, untrue homogeneity among women. DeVault & Gross agree that “we need to be cognizant of the differences that exist among women and be sure that when we speak on behalf of women, we are not really only speaking on behalf of some women” (DeVault & Gross, 2012: 175) which may for instance be only those that are white, able-bodied and belonging to the middle-class.

Especially in research dealing with experiences at work, an intersectional approach that acknowledges difference and investigates intersectionality is of importance as power relations and
power inequalities along different social divisions are central in work life (de los Reyes, 2017). Such an approach has, however, so far not been applied sufficiently, and especially migrant women have mostly been excluded from research on work experiences. Instead, researchers tend to generalize and take only gender into account without considering intersections and diversity among women (Kamenou, 2008: 100; Pompper, 2014: 111). This, however, is “reflecting and repeating the same ‘exclusivity error’ that [has been] levied against the male-dominated corporate hierarchy” (Fearfull & Kamenou, 2006: 884). This is especially relevant as organizational human resource management frequently fails to address challenges that come with workforce diversity and shortcomings in equal opportunities (Kamenou & Fearfull, 2006: 155). Tatli & Özbilgin (2012) also argue that there is a necessity for “refocusing attention to relations of power in all their different manifestations at work” (Tatli & Özbilgin, 2012: 181) and that an intersectional approach must consider the entire context in which a study and its participants are located.

For the realization of such a study that takes into account intersectionality and social identity difference (the concept of which will be introduced in the next section), McCall (2005) highlights the advantage of qualitative studies in order to apply an intersectional approach as these enable the researcher to gain thorough insights into the complexity of the subject of a study. A qualitative approach thus allows for the multitude of facets to be acknowledged which is important to understand participants’ experiences and their meanings (McCall, 2005: 1782). A quantitative approach may not always equip the researcher with the necessary tools and enable her to gather material that allows for intersectionality to be tackled in a study.

Therefore, this is a qualitative study in which I will explore the intersection, or various intersections, of the social divisions gender, origins and age of participants that self-identify as being women and have origins outside “the West” as well as that can be categorized as being young adults. Even though some experiences of young adult migrant women might center more around their being women, their origins, or their being a young adult than other factors, I wish to look at these divisions integrated to start with, and I am especially interested in experiences that are shaped by the women’s location at the intersection of two or three of these social divisions. Some of these might be explained in an additive manner, while others might be specific to an intersectional approach. Simultaneously, I have to recognize that there are a number of other structural divisions that participants might belong to, such as class or their legal status regarding visa or citizenship, and that might influence the lived experiences they share with me.

In this study, I furthermore attempt to grasp the complexity of participants’ experiences and realities. By trying to be aware of my preconceptions, I focus on the actual gathered material from
interviews and finding meaning in this data while relating it to participants’ concrete situations and the broader context. Only then should I as a researcher connect these meanings to additional sources in order to gain a better understanding and interpret the findings further. I do, however, realize that the format and scope of this study limit me somehow in this, as it is never possible to understand a context in its entirety, and less so by being guided by a phenomenological approach and only interviewing individuals, without for instance gathering more information about the situation from colleagues and other sources.

I hope to address issues concerning the application of pre-set categories by asking participants to explain how they themselves identify and making any categorization dependent on this. This labelling practice also helps reducing misrepresentation and increases a study’s validity (Pompper, 2014: 33). Additionally, McCall (2005) points out that often, “[t]raditional categories are used initially to name previously unstudied groups at various points of intersection, but the researcher is equally interested in revealing – and indeed cannot avoid – the range of diversity and difference within the group” (McCall, 2005: 1782). I, too, selected such a distinct point of intersection – the intersection of gender, origins and age – to start with and then worked from there, exploring the intersection’s meaning and aiming to account for diversity and heterogeneity within the group situated at this specific intersection. In this initial application of traditional categories, I do attempt to bracket preconceptions and/or be aware of them and reflect upon them. This is the precondition to trying to find meaning in my materials that is independent from assumptions, and solely based on participants’ own lived experiences. This meaning then is to acknowledge differences between different participants and to investigate other intersections while I need to, at the same time, reflect on whether the pre-set categories do indeed apply to participants or are meaningful for the study at all.

2.4 Social identity difference and the relationship between researcher and participant

This study is influenced by Pompper’s (2014) view on the importance of the acknowledgement of social identity difference. Social identity difference includes a multitude of facets centering on acknowledging differences in social identity dimensions of people and the consequences for their experiences as well as emerging power relations. The three main aspects that are important to this study are firstly awareness of differences within certain categories that are assumed in research, secondly social constructionist implications of social identity difference, and thirdly critical reflections on the relationship between the researcher and participants. The first and second aspect
have been discussed in the two previous sections in connection with a social constructionist and an intersectional approach, whereas the latter aspect shall be elaborated and reflected on in this section.

Regarding power differentials between researcher and researched, Pompper (2014) sums the issue at hand up in the following passage:

Clearly, there is an asymmetrical power relation between the researcher (dominant, active, an insider) and the researched (outsider, passive, vulnerable). While the former is named in publications, the latter is anonymous; conflated and subsumed in categories and themes, typologies, and data sets. The researcher maintains control over academic discourse, secures funding (or not), selects phenomena for inquiry, defines the research problem and identifies the research questions and hypotheses, and then decides whose voice can be heard when analyzing and presenting results (Pompper, 2014: 29).

This asymmetry might be the cause for distance between the researcher and participants, and hamper rapport in interviewing. Nevertheless, it is necessary that social identity difference is problematized. The researcher must reflect upon how she is different from her participants, what social position she occupies, which power structures exist, and what implications these factors have for her research in terms of not only rapport and her ability to gather material, but also her understanding of the data and her approach to analyzing and interpreting it, as well as processes taking place before and afterwards, such as choosing the topic, considering methodology, and publishing the study (Pompper, 2014: 29-30).

DeVault & Gross (2012) argue that the recognition of power relations in research, and the production of “relational knowledge” which takes potential asymmetries into account, are central in feminist research. They emphasize the importance of understanding “unequal, uneven, complex relationships between women […] and [their] relationships to histories of colonialisms, patriarchies, imperialisms, racisms” (DeVault & Gross, 2012: 191). Furthermore, it is highlighted that “[i]n the conduct of any interview research, feminists must maintain a reflexive awareness that research relations are never simple encounters, innocent of identities and lines of power, but, rather, are always embedded in and shaped by cultural constructions of similarity, difference, and significance” (DeVault & Gross, 2012: 181).

Apart from being mindful of exclusionary practices such as othering participants and applying terms they might not know during the interviewing process, Pompper (2014) recommends actively involving participants not only in the interviewing process itself, but beyond this in analyzing and interpreting what they have been sharing, and discussing what the researcher has made of the material. This breaks down some of the power asymmetry and enables participants to give feedback, agree and disagree as well as correct researchers’ shortcomings. Such an approach and its offering of voice to participants as well as challenging of power structures is both empowering and transformative (Pompper, 2014: 29-35).
While I as a researcher would welcome both these adjectives as characteristics of my study, the scope in space and time of this format puts limitations on this research that are inhibitive of following such an approach through fully. I did my best however, to involve participants as much as possible during the interviews. When something was unclear, I made further inquiries, while asking participants also for their interpretations of experiences they shared and inviting them to give me open feedback on my work and the interviews as such. Additionally, I am hesitant in leaving stories and experiences they shared with me out of this study if I had the impression that they were important to them. Choosing to talk about something specific with a researcher is an agentic choice which should not be violated. Of course, it is not achievable to include everything in a study such as this one, but I am giving participants’ voices as much space as I am able to within the requirements of this study. Keeping the number of participants relatively low facilitated this attempt.

Another important aspect regarding this is that in this study, while participants’ perspectives and ways of explaining their experiences which were mainly of individual nature were included, I also give a structural analysis which may be more detached from their own understanding and explanations of their experiences. This is especially the case in the fifth chapter which means to offer a structural way of understanding participants’ experiences by connecting them to social structures and norms based on other scholars’ conceptualizations and research. This demonstrates the power asymmetry between researcher and researched and difficulties in achieving equality in research.

Concerning the dynamics between researcher and participants during the process of gathering material, Pompper (2014) has advice that is helpful in building rapport, establishing a relationship on equal footing and – which is partly a consequence of these two factors – gaining fruitful insights into participants’ experiences and opinions. Finding communalities between the two parties can be an opportunity, and while differences should not be negated, the researcher should attempt to not let them distance her from participants. For instance, “[e]xperiences of both researcher and researched reveal similarity as well as difference, offering bridges for connection as well as contexts for comparison […] which may help overcome difficulties in relating to one another and understanding each other’s perspectives” (Pompper, 2014: 35). In this study, finding participants via personal networks offered a variety of starting points for establishing a connection, finding communalities and thus overcoming distance. There were, however, numerous other communalities beyond this that participants and I found, such as being woman, being young adult and not originating in the place we currently reside in.

Central to this study in terms of social identity difference are, of course, participants’ backgrounds regarding their origins in the context of this study, and my background of my (especially
perceived) belonging to the ethnic majority in the German-speaking region, as well as in the rest of “the West”. Moreover, participants come from places that belong to the periphery in a world that is from an epistemological viewpoint, but also from a perspective of the challenges they meet in their daily lives, deeply Eurocentric.

2.5 Agency and voice

“As long as humans are alive and in possession of their consciousness, agency exists.” (Musolf, 2017: 5) If individuals’ agency is ignored, however, their possibilities in social structures seem very limited and predictable, as they would be passive actors in a world in which they are mere victims of the circumstances they find themselves in (Musolf, 2017: 5). Consequently, participants’ reactions to inequality as well as possible resistance may not make sense without agency. Agency also “redefines the possibilities for self and society, and reconstructs the self as a meaning maker” (Musolf, 2017: 13). A central aspect of this study is therefore acknowledging participants’ agency and voice as they are without doubt meaning makers. This is why the thesis revolves around their experiences which they shared in the interviews. Telling me about their experiences and reflecting on them is, as I view it, already a display of agency.

In this study, the two binary forces of agency and structure are both addressed with the first one being reflected in participants’ experiences that are the centerpiece of the entire thesis, and the second one mainly being reflected in the chapter dealing with how these experiences can be understood in relation to underlying structures and norms. Agency and structure are, however, highly entangled: while structure can be defined as “patterned social relations, rules, and resources” (Musolf, 2017: 3) that shape social action and build social hierarchies, but which nevertheless lie beyond an individual person’s ability to decide over. Therefore, “[s]tructure can be experienced as centrifugal forces that decenter agency” (Musolf, 2017: 4) but which do yet not act independently from people’s agency as structures are substantially made, influenced, changed, questioned and fought against by people. In this, structure “set[s] the stage for meaningful social action” (Musolf, 2017: 5), and on this stage, individuals act rather than being passive respondents to all-defining social structures (Musolf, 2017: 3-5). Since structure is this central to participants’ experiences and agency, I am including it in this study along with Musolf’s (2017) notion that while structure and agency are forces that constantly interact, they are not contradictory approaches in sociology but that rather, they both need to be taken into account when investigating social justice and people’s lived reality.
In order to enable participants’ agency to penetrate this study and not solely focus on structural forces, during the conduction of interviews I for instance asked participants to share experiences freely and in their own words while making it possible for them to digress from my initial questions and highlight what was important in their own opinion. Therefore, interviews had no time frames, and I let the participants talk freely and give their narratives. All interviews were either conducted in English or German, depending on the individual participant’s preference. I believe it is important that in order to make the participant feel as comfortable as possible and gather rich material which represents the participant’s voice, it is important that she feels confident in the language she speaks. Due to my own lack of language capabilities, it was not necessarily a given that the participant could be interviewed in her native language. I hope, however, and had the impression that was in fact mostly the case, that by letting participants choose between the two languages, they all had the opportunity to share their experiences in a manner that made them feel comfortable in the interview situation.

As DeVault & Gross (2012) point out, participants’ agency is also often about the way the researcher treats and portrays the gathered material. Part of this are, for instance, methodological considerations of social constructionism and highlighting participants’ central role in the study. A social constructionist approach is essential as it emphasizes that participants, who are at the very center of this research, and the researcher do indeed construct the meaning of the study, so therefore it is useful in strengthening this study’s perspective of acknowledging and highlighting participants’ agency. I hope that such an approach also distances participants from objectification and victimization. In this, however, as Devault & Gross (2012) explain, a researcher’s influence on participants’ agency is significant, as she decides how to treat the material and portray it. Therefore, I hope to do agency justice by including a social constructionist view in this study.

Furthermore, I chose to not only explore experiences that young adult migrant women had, i.e. that positive and negative discrimination that were experienced, but also to investigate how participants reacted to and dealt with such experiences. Not to do so would neglect participants’ agency as it would leave them as passive receivers of equality or inequality that are simply affected by the structures that surround them.

I moreover visually highlight quotes in this paper in order to make them, and the people who produced this content, more visible and demonstrate their importance for the study. In order to further emphasize participants’ voice and not make them invisible, they were given pseudonyms when quoting them and talking about their experiences. While this seems useful in terms of acknowledging voice and agency as well as for the apprehension of the reader, one must remain aware that this also comes with disadvantages. The reader might, for instance, associate certain categories and stereotypes
with a name that I have chosen. I have chosen names, however, to my best ability of staying close to participants’ self-identification and chosen alternative names attempting to stay close to their origins, age group and gender.

Like in this study, feminist research often has the aim to “bring people’s experiences forward and make those experiences visible in more public discussions” and raise awareness of the importance of feminism, while also being “strongly linked to social justice concerns and projects and the idea of bringing forward neglected voices” (DeVault & Gross, 2012: 176). Musolf (2017) moreover calls the telling of one’s story and others’ stories of oppression in order to raise awareness a “social weapon” (Musolf, 2017: 12) and the “first act of resistance” (Musolf, 2017: 12). My research is inspired by such aspirations and I believe that it is a responsibility of academia not only to produce knowledge but contribute to society with it in a more transformative way. One cannot forget, however, that it is participants who act out their agency and may even show resistance by sharing their experiences in this study.

Consequently, this work is written in the hope of not only gaining insights that address the research questions that I posed, but also acknowledging agency, giving voice, making visible, and thus empowering the group that is the subject of this research. Even though a strong focus of this study is giving my participants space to tell their stories and be heard in order to achieve these goals, I am aware of the limitations of the format. DeVault & Gross (2012) also problematize the boundaries that institutions like universities create for research that is transformative and acknowledge the difficulties that bureaucratic and scholarly requirements create for feminist research (DeVault & Gross, 2012: 191-192). The required format for this study is neither accessible in the way that it will reach outside a very limited audience, is easily read nor understood by those outside academia or lacking time and patience to read a lengthy, formal thesis, nor is it likely that it be of interest to a relevant number of people to read such a format. Nevertheless, I attempted to create a piece of research which meets those requirements as well as I can. Some space I am giving to participants’ voices might not fit the topic or research questions perfectly, but I owe them due respect, as the women I talked to consciously chose to give me their trust and tell me the very stories they did and they therefore deserve to be written. To ignore these decisions would be to fail to acknowledge their agency and active part in this research.

There is, however, a divergence regarding my analysis of participants’ experiences as a researcher and participants’ own understanding of them: while my focus is to explore ways of understanding their experiences from a structural perspective, they themselves mostly analyze their experiences from an individual standpoint. So even though I mean to acknowledge their agency, I go
beyond this in offering another approach which may, however, not always conform to how participants explained their lived experiences. One must therefore be careful to differentiate between what participants constructed, and what I as a researcher am adding.
3. Methods

Advancing to the matter of methods that were applied, this study employs a qualitative research design inspired by various methods which I will now present and discuss. As underlying to my proceeding of this study is a phenomenological approach, this approach shall be explained first. At the very core of this study are, however, seven semi-structured interviews with women that may be considered migrants from age 24 to 30. Therefore, elaborations of sampling will make up the second part of this chapter, followed by explanations about VoIP tools with which I carried out the interviews. The chapter ends with further ethical considerations that have not been touched upon in the other sections.

3.1 Phenomenological approach

In the procedural conduction of my research, I was strongly influenced by a phenomenological approach. In this, I drew mainly from Creswell’s (1998) work on phenomenological methodology and Alase’s (2017) understanding of an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). I find both works very fruitful for my research because of various reasons that I shall elaborate on further while I summarize the most important points of the essence of phenomenology as a research method for my purposes, as well as how I applied this.

According to Alase, “[t]he most important aspect of IPA tradition is its ability to make sense of the ‘lived experiences’ of the research participants and truly allow the research study to explore the phenomenon that the research is investigating” (Alase, 2017: 11), which is precisely what the aim of this study is, and in line with my research questions. As such, it is fitting if the participants experience or have experienced a particular phenomenon and the researcher wants to explore this phenomenon and gain a deeper understanding of it by describing and interpreting these lived experiences with a phenomenological approach (Alase, 2017: 11). Consequently, a phenomenological study is about the meaning of the lived experiences of a number of people in connection to a specific phenomenon (Creswell, 1998: 51). Applying my case to this, I am exploring work experiences of young adult migrant women at work. I am learning about these experiences through participants, interpreting them and looking for a more general meaning that lies within them. In a phenomenological approach, the researcher thus tries to gain insights into the meaning that individuals develop out of social interactions and their everyday. From this meaning that the participants pass on to the researcher through telling her about their lived experiences, i.e. the material
that the researcher gathers through in-depth interviews, the researcher can then derive a more general or universal meaning (Creswell, 1998: 53). Here it is important to note the limitations of what a general or universal meaning can mean within an approach that is inspired by social constructionism: it is not the one, true meaning that I am looking for, but a possible, wider meaning within, or way of understanding participants’ experiences. And yet, it is a more universal meaning as while looking at their experiences, I will try to take a step back and look at the bigger picture, so to say, that surrounds and influences these lived experiences. Consequently, I aim to find structural meaning in the material that was gathered and am thus examining the meaning that was constructed by participants during the interviews.

For a phenomenological approach it is furthermore essential for the researcher to set aside her own preconceived ideas and personal experiences about what she studies in order to be able to focus on the voices of the participants. Creswell calls this epanechnik or bracketing and points out that this aspect of a phenomenological study can indeed be challenging (Creswell, 1998: 54-55). Alase also highlights that “it is very important that researchers are in a state of constant ‘self-reflections’” (Alase, 2017: 18) so that the meaning of the experiences that participants share can be found. This process is closely related to a social constructionist approach in its acknowledgement of the influence the researcher’s bias has. As a researcher, of course, also have to be aware of my preconceptions, expectations and opinions that I bring with me into the research and further into the phase of interviewing and keep reflecting on them. Choosing a certain topic, considering its relevance and learning about previous studies that have been conducted in the field already imply a multitude of aspects concerning my own bias towards the study and its potential outcome. If my study is to be valid from a phenomenological viewpoint, however, I need to take Creswell’s epanechnik or bracketing seriously and not let any preconceptions blur the focus on the participants. From a social constructionist viewpoint, however, it is not necessarily binding or even possible to completely succeed in this bracketing process.

More concretely, my being aware or suspicions of shortcomings in society regarding equality for migrant women at work, for instance, already is a strong preconception. Nevertheless, this does not mean that participants of my study experience the phenomenon in such a way. I might also unconsciously bring stereotypes about participants into the interviewing process with me. Furthermore, choosing a sample and labelling this sample reflects preconceptions. In order to sample, I already chose a group that was to be dealt with further in this study. Even though no category was imposed upon any participant and they were all labelled and categorized according to self-identification, I made a decision which social divisions were going to be part of this study. Categorizing “migrant women” thus already implies a variety of assumptions or even generalizations
such as the existence of divisions between different genders (Mohanty, 1983: 344). This could also be applied to the division of one’s origins, and even age. Despite this, it is not only from a social constructionist viewpoint, which also inspires me as discussed in the previous chapter, but also for practical reasons in a study such as this one, hard to navigate such problems concerning researchers’ preconceptions.

In order to guide the reader through the study in this manner of bracketing, previous research that is related to the topic will not be discussed in an early part of the format, but only after the discussion of participants’ experiences as these experiences are the core of the research and shall not initially be viewed through a lens of previous research. Therefore, previous research only represents a help in dealing with participants’ experiences – and not a starting point in investigating the material – and is thus included towards the end of the study in the chapter that explores how one can understand these experiences.

After familiarizing oneself with a phenomenological approach and becoming aware of possible preconceptions, the following are the most central steps connected to a phenomenological study which I was guided by in my research. During the data collection process, the researcher gathers material by conducting unstructured or semi-structured interviews with a number of participants that can vary between two and 25, depending on the specific study, about their lived experiences in relation to the research questions (Alase, 2017: 15; Creswell, 1998: 54). Due to richness of the material I collected, the scope and framework of the format, the time available as well as the character of the individual interviews, I conducted seven interviews with lengths varying between 45 and 90 minutes.

When the primary material has been collected, the researcher analyzes this data by firstly finding significant statements in the transcriptions that have been produced, then clustering and organizing the statements by topic or meaning and connecting them to one another. The researcher then describes what was experienced by the participants and how they experienced it, and what underlying meaning exists (if one can be derived based on the material collected) (Creswell, 1998: 55). Consequently, a better understanding of participants’ experiences and of what structures lie behind those experiences is established.

I also proceeded in such a manner and the study is also structured accordingly. Firstly, I found significant statements in my collected material. Thereafter, I organized the data in clusters according to themes and meaning that I identified based on the significant statements. The different sections and subsections of the fourth chapter, in which participants’ experiences are presented and discussed, reflect these clusters that were formed based on common themes and meanings in the material. These
possible meanings, and the connections between different themes, were then connected to other concepts as well as previous research in the fifth chapter. That chapter thus aims to establish a better understanding of participants’ experiences by relating them to social structures and norms as well as to previous research.

3.2 Sampling

Concerning sampling and how to choose participants, there are several relevant factors to this study. The first one concerns the context of the research, while the second one revolves around participants’ identity.

In order to narrow my research down, my study is only concerning young adult migrant women’s experiences who live and work in a specific geographical and cultural area and context. As I myself am a native German speaker from the South of Germany, in proximity to the Austrian border, I decided to conduct my research in the German-speaking region of Austria and Germany. Additionally, this facilitated access to participants. Consequently, I conducted interviews with people who moved to and currently work in Germany and Austria.

Regarding participants’ identity, it was necessary to consider which criteria would be suitable for this research additional to an individuals’ residence in that region. Firstly, the person should self-identify as being a woman, and secondly, the person should be of an age that can be understood as a marker of being a young adult. I view a framework of between eighteen and thirty years as appropriate for this. I chose this age span as eighteen marks the formal beginning of adulthood since it is the age when one becomes of legal age in both Austria and Germany. Thirty seems to be an age by which the majority of people have finished their education, started employment and settled on a career path. Regarding the criteria of one’s origins, I targeted individuals originating in areas of the world that are so-called non-Western for reasons that I have elaborated on in the introductory chapter. In line with these thoughts on who is considered a migrant and often discriminated against based on assumptions that come with this, it is important to note that racialization cannot only take place based on one’s skin color. For instance, people who are perceived as not being from “Western” places, like Eastern Europe, but have a light skin color, can be racialized, as they are often assigned an identity that they do not use as self-identification, and are often discriminated against based on that assigned identity. So for this research, women’s origins outside the norm, which may be interpreted as being non-Western or peripheral from a Eurocentric perspective, are central (Satzewich, 2000). The terms Western and non-Western are, however, highly subjective and fluid, and even though they are
frequently used, they are seldom defined (Iwata & Newoto, 2018; Manalansan, 2006; Nannestad et al., 2014). In line with this fluidity and subjectivity I also proceeded with the sampling: when looking for participants, I asked people within my personal network for contacts that they would consider “non-Western”. Therefore, the origins of participants in this study reflect the subjective perception of Western and non-Western of the person that connected us. Furthermore, I chose to speak to women who migrated to the region (as opposed to children and grandchildren of migrants).

Considerations about narrowing down participants’ identity further than this, like for instance connected to class or sexuality, were discarded, since the diversity within a group that is defined more narrowly was likely to be as high as the diversity to be encountered without such a narrowing-down and would have required a range of presumptions about that narrower group that I did not wish to make. Because, as Pompper (2014) points out, “sampling issues arise as in how to best represent certain social identity dimensions (without essentializing) while knowing that all identities are intersectional and not all of them may be known to a researcher at the outset anyway” (Pompper, 2014: 31). Furthermore, as the aim of this study is not to make any generalizations about any group or social division, I did not anticipate it to be of added value to limit the sampling group further than this.

Consequently, taking these considerations about both participants’ identity and the area to be investigated into account, the sample of this research consisted of self-identified women between 24 and 30 years old that migrated to this German-speaking region, work there and that have origins which were defined as non-Western by the person that connected us. They were found via personal networks and snowball sampling as described by Atkinson & Flint (2001), and thus drawing from both my and participants’ social networks. It is important to be aware, however, that the sample of participants cannot be representative of all young adult migrant women in the described region due to the study’s qualitative nature and the very limited scope. Moreover, accessing participants via personal networks and snowball sampling makes the sample biased and may cause them to have commonalities or reflect my and participants’ personal network in aspects such as for instance education (Atkinson & Flint, 2001).

3.3 VoIP technology as an interviewing tool
The interviews were carried out via Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) technologies, namely Skype and FaceTime, with both transmission of audio and video in real-time. The two different tools were used in accordance with the individual participant’s personal convenience and preference.
Researchers increasingly use VoIP technology that transmits audio and image via the internet between researcher and researched as a means to gather data, as this brings with it a multitude of advantages, many of which also led me to my decision to conduct research with VoIP tools (Lo Iacono et al., 2016: 1).

Such technologies, for instance, significantly broaden the researcher’s range to localities they would otherwise not be able to go to and access participants they would otherwise not be able to interview. Researchers’ range with VoIP technology thus only becomes limited by infrastructural factors. Alternatives to reach certain places would in many cases only consist in trying to access greater financial resources in order to cover travel expenses or invest more time in the research, both of which are often not possible. With this enhanced ability to sample, a researcher can also profit from the bigger variety of experiences and accounts. Apart from this perk regarding locality, VoIP methods also offer more flexibility in the time when the interview takes place as well as the specific place in which they are during the interview for both the researcher and her participants. This flexibility causes many participants to favor VoIP technology over a physical meeting. Participants might choose to be in whichever place they feel most safe and comfortable to take part in the interview from, like their homes, and there is no hassle of finding a fitting venue, which reduces both logistical and financial burdens for researcher and participants and relieves all parties from having to travel (Lo Iacono et al., 2016: 3-5). Lo Iacono et al. therefore even call VoIP technology an “invaluable tool” (Lo Iacono et al., 2016: 4) for research.

This method did in fact allow me to do my research in the first place because of my restrictions regarding location, financial resources and time available, and I had the impression that many of my participants, who are often busy with other obligations, were happy with arrangements via Skype or FaceTime as it made it possible for them to talk to me from a convenient place for them at a convenient time without investing further efforts and time or even money in order to get to a place for interviewing. One participant, for instance, has a small child to take care of, and talking to me over her phone enabled her to juggle tasks while simultaneously taking part in the study. VoIP technology furthermore enabled my sample to be more diverse as I could talk to women with very different backgrounds and occupations who are located in a variety of places within the area I researched.

There are, however, also some limitations to using VoIP technology. Some are straightforward, such as that some people might not be connected to the internet, do not have VoIP technology, or at least prefer to avoid such ways of communication (Lo Iacono et al., 2016: 5). This, though, would mainly affect people that are of advanced age or people located in places with poor
infrastructure. As my target group is a young age group and located in an area with an infrastructure that does not typically inhibit internet connectivity, this was not an issue.

Another issue that researchers using VoIP technology for interviewing may face are technical difficulties, such as poor sound or visual quality, lags in the live feed or other malfunctions that can be caused by poor internet connections or the devices used like a computer or phone. Researchers often do, however, also face a variety of technical difficulties when interviewing face-to-face, mostly related to recording the interview (Sullivan, 2012: 59). In this study, no major technical issues occurred, and I even found that recording directly from my computer was both reliable and gave me very good audio quality that made it easier to deal with the material I gathered.

Moreover, it may be more difficult for the researcher to establish rapport with her participants. Lo Iacono et al. (2016) point out, however, that it is not clear whether this is in fact true, as different researchers have made different experiences with rapport and VoIP technology. There are both indications that rapport is more easily established via tools such as Skype as well as with more difficulty than in a traditional interview situation. Much depends on the character of the specific individual who is being interviewed and skills of the researcher herself. Equally, discussing sensitive topics may be harder to talk about via Skype or FaceTime, as technology might not be fully reliable and the fear of technical difficulties or the occurrence of such difficulties might discourage participants from talking about such topics. A loss of connection, for instance, during a conversation about a sensitive topic might have strong discomposing effects for the participant (Lo Iacono et al., 2016: 6). Additionally, Skype and FaceTime often inhibit actual eye contact because of the position of the camera and the screen, which might hinder rapport further. One might argue on the contrary, however, that the lack of eye contact might even be of advantage in some interview situations as some people may express themselves more openly to a researcher if they do not have to look her in the eye and this would, in turn, enable the gathering of richer data than in a face-to-face interview (Lo Iacono et al., 2016: 7). Another aspect to this is that VoIP technology and the internet provide a more anonymous feeling to the interaction between researcher and participant which might in turn allow some participants to open up more easily, especially concerning sensitive topics or statements that might be considered as potentially negative revelations about oneself (Sullivan, 2012: 56).

In this study, I did not find that my participants and I had trouble concerning rapport or opening up about sensitive topics, even though it is hard to tell what the interviews would have been like in a real face-to-face setting. It might have been of help to gain participants’ trust that I was recommended to them via common acquaintances and that we sent several messages back and forth, as recommended by Lo Iacono et al. (2016: 6), before conducting the actual interview, and that there
were no problems regarding the connection. My participants all were used to using VoIP technology in their daily lives and I believe that this enhanced their trust in this tool as an interviewing method. Additionally, the participants’ ability to choose the locality from which they want to talk to the researcher, as pointed out before earlier, may strengthen rapport as they feel more safe and comfortable while at the same time, nobody is intruding their personal space. This might especially be true for participants that are more introvert or shy (Lo Iacono et al., 2016: 6). Lo Iacono et al. (2016) indeed state that “whether Skype or face to face interviews are better to build rapport, really depends on the topic of the research and on the personality of the participant and interviewer” and that “there are certain situations in which offline face-to-face interviews can produce less effective and less rich data collection than using Skype video or telephone” (Lo Iacono et al, 2016: 7).

Apart from these possible advantages and disadvantages, VoIP technology brings with it some limitations regarding confidentiality. The researcher, for instance, cannot control the space from which the participant has the conversation, and consequently cannot ensure that the interview is solely between the two active participants. Furthermore, Skype and FaceTime are not necessarily safe providers as they themselves might access the data, as well as government agencies whose data surveillance is growing (Lo Iacono et al., 2016). As Sullivan points out, “[i]t is very possible to track conversations, locations, and identities on the Internet. Skype even has the right to record your conversations although they don’t make that clear when you sign up” (Sullivan, 2012: 58). In order to navigate this ethical problem in an appropriate way, I included these concerns in the letter of information that was distributed to each participant prior to the interview. I also created a separate Skype account for the purpose of this study and deleted it after the completion of all interviews, as recommended by Lo Iacono et al. (2016), in order to at least enhance the protection of participants’ anonymity. This was, however, not possible for FaceTime.

All in all, the experiences I had with both VoIP tools during my research were very positive. Participants seemed content with the set up previously to, during and after the conduction of the interviews, and conversations were both relaxed and open which enabled me to gather rich material for the further analysis process.

3.4 Ethical considerations

This study was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the Swedish Research Council and I am committed to act out the principles of honesty, openness, orderliness, consideration and impartiality to my best abilities and knowledge (Swedish Research Council, 2006). Some issues
regarding the ethical conduction of this research in line with this have already been touched upon in the previous sections. There are, however, some further considerations which I will discuss now.

Prior to the conduction of interviews, all participants have received a letter informing them about the research and verbally agreed to being part of this study. I consider confidentiality as an uttermost importance and agree with Alase’s statement that “[s]ecuring and managing the data collected in a qualitative research study cannot be over-emphasized” (Alase, 2017: 14). Therefore, additionally to replacing their real names, other pieces of information that would pose their anonymity at risk have been removed. When it seemed that anonymity would be at risk by connecting too many identity markers by telling different experiences of the same participant, this participants’ experiences are told using two different names. Additionally, as many identity markers as possible were removed for the sake of anonymity, while identity markers necessary for the analysis of the material were kept in this paper if they did not compromise the participants’ identity and anonymity.

Furthermore, all audio files were deleted after transcription in order to meet ethical requirements of safekeeping of the material that was created during my research. A concern that remains, however, is that participants might be identified due to the method of accessing participants via personal networks and snowballing as individuals who established the contact to a participant know of the participant’s identity and might consequently then be able to connect stories to that particular person.

Another consideration to be taken into account is that all interview material that was collected in German and that is quoted directly in this work has been translated to English by myself. Even though I am not a professional translator, I translated all material with great care and to my best abilities. Nevertheless, there might be implications in terms of accuracy for these quotes while translation can also never be fully neutral and objective. I therefore marked all translated quotes with an asterisk (“*”).
4. Participants’ experiences

This chapter has at its core the results of the interviews that were conducted within the study. It presents and discusses a part of the experiences of the women I talked to who identify as Iraqi, Indonesian, Russian, Macedonian and Indian and that are or were employed at a wide range of professions, such as train attendant, teacher, researcher, sports trainer and sales assistant and who work in sectors such as IT, project management and social media monitoring.

The structure of this chapter is determined by clusters that have been formed according to a phenomenological approach as described in the corresponding section. I shall therefore begin with experiences participants talked about regarding negative discrimination and inequality at work, while the following section then deals with how participants reacted to such inequality and dealt with discrimination. Thereafter, it will be demonstrated that inequality is not one-sided, but that participants’ background also has positive effects for them at work and may be cause to positive discrimination. A closing fourth section will then take into account different factors that influenced participants’ experiences and discuss the central role that each individual context plays when dealing with inequality. The chapter shall furthermore relate to how these experiences can be seen from a perspective of social justice.

4.1 Negative discrimination and inequality

Participants told me many stories of inequality and how they were discriminated against in a variety of forms. I shall share some of their experiences and discuss them. In this section, they are clustered by themes in the order in which they are named now: participants talked about how they were considered an “abnormal” worker, how they experienced overt discrimination, and how there was and is a lack of recognition of their competence; they furthermore experienced difficulties in establishing one’s position as an equal peer at work as well as the central role that age plays; they also spoke about unequal career opportunities as well as unequal pay; while it also became clear that sexual harassment and oversexualization are serious issues that concern young adult migrant women. The section ends with some considerations connecting participants’ negative experiences to social justice.
Being an “abnormal” worker

Many participants shared stories of how they were in the beginning of their employment, or are up to now, regarded as “not normal” and how this affects and affected them negatively. An example of this is what Dewi, who is employed as a train attendant, told me:

In [...] Austria there are no foreign train attendants, right. And there are actually only men. And in the beginning, they are surprised, like „Huh!“, suddenly an Asian woman, or what?! So they are very sceptic.*

Both her gender and her origins, or her racialization as being Asian, thus automatically identify her as somebody who is not “normal” in her job. Consequently, it seems that in order to fit in at her work as a train attendant, there are very narrowly-defined expectations regarding one's gender, origins, and in line with this appearance.

Elena, who works in the IT sector also mentions experiences of not being perceived and spoken about as the usual worker in her organization:

I noticed that often my boss even sees and introduces me as a “special” employee just because of my background as a woman. [...] I am exposed a lot to men, I have one meeting at least a day with clients, mostly men, in IT areas, on site for my job. And I very often hear comments like “a girl in an IT world”.

While for her, her origins appear to not have an influence on whether she is perceived as a “normal” employee, her gender seems to be important. This, too, seems to be closely connected to the field that she works in: just like Dewi is exceptional because she is a woman among many male train attendants, Elena is a woman in an otherwise male-dominated domain, the IT sector.

Anastasia, who is 24 and works in a research institute, also faced surprise when co-workers discovered her age which is unusual for the position she holds in which most people are older. She was therefore also thought to be “abnormal” in a way.

While being regarded as different and not “normal” in itself may not be a problem in itself, this perception of difference may, however, cause a variety of forms of inequality and discrimination which follow in the subsections that follow.

Overt discrimination

To begin with, there was one specifically extreme case of discrimination that I was told about with which I would like to start in order to demonstrate the gravity of such problems. Nabila talked about her former employment in an advertisement agency where she experienced the following:
That was really beyond all my expectations. I only shortly worked there. [...] We [had] a lot of very important customers like airports [...]. But, well, we had this one customer, and in this way, Austria is, so to say, quite racist, and he said: “Aha, the secretary is not from Austria”, or something like this. And then my boss was also confused and asked: “Yes, so what? But she works very well.” And then this customer didn’t want any cooperation [with the agency] anymore. As long as I would still work there. That’s what he openly said. When you experience this yourself, well I am really out of words. And of course my boss said to me: “Well, I am sorry”, but of course he needs the money. Because this company does not exist without customers. Of course he regretted this a lot, but well, we have ceased our work together, so to say, I was terminated, so to say. Just because of a thing like this. That was really sad.*

So while we do not know if the customer in this case had any concerns about Nabila’s competence related to her origins, or whether his racism just leads to him not wanting to work with people with origins elsewhere altogether, this for sure represents a stark case of discrimination, both by the customer and her superior who exercised, one directly and one indirectly, their power over her. So in this case, Nabila’s origins had a direct impact on her work life and she experienced discrimination she would not have been subject to if she had not had origins outside Austria. There might have been an additional vulnerability here as she had only recently started her employment in the agency, so this might furthermore be connected to her age and implications her being a young adult has for the point in which she finds herself in her career.

Lack of recognition as equal and competent

Beyond this, migrant women’s competence and skills are often doubted specifically the beginning of their occupation, without well-based, objective reasons for this assumption of a lower level of competence, where other co-workers do not have to deal with this problem. Dewi pointed out about perceptions towards migrant women:

When people don’t know us yet, then they underestimate us right away. Then we always have to show them [our abilities], again and again, until we are accepted. And that takes time.*

Samira from Iraq, who works for a social media monitoring company, explained about how her professional abilities are often underestimated or doubted:

They always think that we come from the Stone Age and always ask: “Where have you learned this?” They think we are unalphabetized.*

Thus, her origins are directly linked to assumptions of a lack of education and skills that may be necessary for a work as it is doubted that she as a woman from Iraq could master such knowledge and skills. Participants, like Samira, therefore experienced a multitude of ways how they are being perceived as less capable, educated, etc. and negative stereotypes directed towards them at their job.
Nabila talked about how she believes that being a “foreigner” is considered negative where she lives and works and induces inferior treatment in comparison to women who are not perceived as migrants. She compared this to perceptions and treatment of migrants in Indonesia:

[Where I’m from], it is called an “expat”. Then you get more service with us, you always respect foreigners. We welcome foreigners, no matter if they are tourists or guest-workers, always in a friendly way. And here, it is the other way around. [Reactions are more critical like:] “Huh, where are you from?”*

Nabila specifically told me about her experiences as an elementary school teacher:

Especially in the beginning […] it was difficult, of course especially with the parents, right. […] At first they didn’t really trust me. But because of that I demonstrated them that I can do this and teach children, and I explained: “Because I have studied this!” And in the end, yes, they somehow became more open.*

It can be understood, thus, that people that Nabila was involved with in her work as a teacher also doubted her trustworthiness and abilities solely based on her originating elsewhere. She first had to gain this trust and recognition of her competences through actions as her formal education as well as her having been admitted into the job were not sufficient.

Dewi also faces many problems as a train attendant and especially at the beginning she was questioned in her profession and not taken seriously:

In the beginning this was quite hard with the trains. “Hey, is this a real train now?“, is what was said here. Because usually there are only Austrian train attendants here. People here just talk like this. “I thought maybe there are no good Austrian train attendants available right now that could do the job.” […] And slowly, they are accepting me. But not all. Every once in a while there are some stupid people again.*

So that she is not, or does not appears to be, Austrian caused people to not only doubt the legitimacy of the train or her as a train attendant, it also led them to believe that she may not be a “good” train attendant. In this line of thought, they assumed that there must not have been another, Austrian person available to do the job that would have been more competent in it due to their origins.

Dewi furthermore explained how she as a woman faces challenges as being treated equally to her male co-workers. Physical tasks are often considered to be work that is suitable only for men, so she mainly gets assigned tasks that are considered to be more suitable for women. She says about this:

We always have to couple the trains, connect them to one another. For me it is hard, I have no background with this and lifting heavy things. So I always get the nice work with fancy-schmancy, you know. So you have to dress nice, right, go to meetings, do the computer work and sit at the desk, etc. But these days I go outside more and have to be ready, for example if there is an accident [with the train]. Sure, it was really difficult, for example to lift such a towing hook, and this and that. And then I always think while I do it: “Look, they said it is not women’s work!” And that even motivates me.*
So solely based on her gender, Dewi was assumed not to be able to perform these tasks and thus treated differently from her co-workers that were assigned such tasks. Dewi did, however, manage to be seen more as an equal later, also in what she calls “men’s work”, even though it still causes her co-workers to be surprised and they do not consider it to be “normal”. This was not natural, however, and she had to work hard in order to get this respect.

Dewi also told me about her concerns for gender equality and implications this brings for working women. She argued that there are hierarchies that are especially problematic for young adult women at work whose place in work is not as accepted and deeply rooted. She explained:

Men seem to have more power here in Austria than women. Here it is so sad that the women always have to try to justify “Hey, we are also here, the younger women!” I don’t understand that. Maybe it is another culture [ ] that women [here] should only work part-time anyway. But well, I like to work full-time.*

So she says that in Austria, a young adult woman working full-time is perceived to not conform to what is “normal” and ideal, and she is also seen in relation to such expectation. This may therefore have negative consequences for her as it is seen as outside the norm, and maybe not suitable and right, for her to be working full time. Similar to this, Samira explained:

Some men at work who are Arabs, they do not allow their [female relatives and wives] to work. Some say “We already work, but we don’t allow our women to do so, we are not so open“. They have this mentality that women should stay at home. The majority of who I am working with in the Arab market are men, actually. There aren’t so many women. That might also be because of the shifts and because some don’t allow women to work such a work with shifts very early in the morning and at night.*

So since many of her co-workers have attitudes that a woman’s place – and maybe more so the place of a woman from the Arab region – is not at work, and especially not pursuing a work such as hers, but at home, she may be perceived as out of place at her office. This means that she is does not fit in as well and lowers her acceptance at work, which is connected both to her gender and her origins and specifically the intersection of both.

Another case of inequality related to one’s gender and origins are Naina’s experiences when she worked as an intern in a project management company. She said about this workplace and the way it functions:

This was a pretty hardcore German company, but I was lucky to be in a good team. They understood that of course everybody needs to understand that if you hire someone from another place, you might have to maybe understand what they mean every time and it maybe wouldn’t be so perfect as if you hire somebody from the same place. But still those people that I worked with in the team were really very nice. Even though generally they were local people and hardly any women in that office. So [that company] was like really striving for excellence and [focusing on] delivery of work, things like that.
She furthermore explained about the structure within the company concerning positioning of employees regarding their background:

Women were very few[]. I think they had a percentage of, I’m just guessing, 25 to 30 percent women. And also most of the women that worked there [...] were not in the management level. They were in the team assistant or secretary [level] or students, things like that. If you work in that company for a considerable amount of time, you would realize that you have women employees, but they are only five to ten women in a manager position, you would wonder. [...] In my team there was also one woman who was a team assistant, and [I was] the second woman as an intern. [...] I just like randomly noticed that this company was really big, and all the higher decision-making positions, those were not filled up with women. Not even a certain percentage were filled with women. Then I could only wonder, cause I saw really competitive women, it was not like the women were not educated enough or they didn’t want to have the job or the power, maybe they wanted it, or maybe they didn’t ask for it, but it didn’t matter, they didn’t get it. But [even] all the different levels of women, all the ones that worked there for a long time, they were all local Germans. I don’t think anybody had a migrant background. Hardly.

Naina also pointed out that after her internship in this organization, she decided not to stay in that company and to apply elsewhere.

Thus, in this company, in order to achieve excellence, it is considered to be essential that its employees are fit to bring the company to this place of success. People considered fit for this are apparently, above all, men and “local” people, which, as Naina explained, means people from the country the company is situated in. According to Naina, in the company’s policies, people with origins elsewhere may pose more of an obstacle to this achievement of excellence and the delivery of work, or are at least not suitable for higher positions within the company. This might also explain why career opportunities for women, and people with a migrant background, like Naina who is situated at the intersection of both these divisions, are poor, and why there are few women or “non-local” people are in higher positions in general. Especially relevant is here that Naina explained that there were indeed competitive and educated, and thus potentially suitable women working in this company, so it seems even more like there is a lack of inequality that they are situated poorly within the company. This thus indicates that there is a lack of equal opportunities, recognition and treatment of women and people with origins elsewhere in this company, and explains why people like Naina who may be at a disadvantage in an organization like this one prefer to seek employment elsewhere in order to advance in their career.

Establishing one’s position as equal peer

Participants also talked about how they had to work harder and put more effort into their work because of their background in order to make achievements in their job. To find their place at their workplace and being recognized, the women I talked to thus often had to go the extra mile.
Dewi for instance explained:

I do have the feeling that I can be accepted here. I just always try again and again to do my best for that.*

About the training sessions that employees have additionally to their everyday-work she said:

I do also find it quite difficult. But I studied a lot, right. As long as you have that will, it is all good. Then it is also possible to make a career. And the colleagues, you know, it is all published, what grades we have [in the exams]. But happily, I am always in the first place. No matter if I am not an Austrian, I can show that I can follow what you learn here about technology and railway. So in that way you could say that I have already been respected here now.*

So for Dewi, it is important to give her best in order to be recognized as equal. Standard performance might, in her opinion not be sufficient in order to earn recognition. It is essential that she can show her co-workers in the form of the openly published grades, which objectively display her competence, that she is just as competent as her co-workers. She does imply, however, that if she were not always the person with the best grades, she might not be respected in such a way, and that she needs this in order to be accepted and respected in the first place. So migrant women’s gender and/or origins are a cause to expectations from people that they might not be as competent are more likely to fail in comparison to other employees.

Additionally, many participants highlighted the role of learning and speaking German for the job. Nabila for instance pointed out about how to find one’s place in the job:

I am always happy again that I speak German. [...] And then they realize “Hah, she also speaks German! And then they respect me. And it is quite hard to get respect here.*

This indicates that before people she deals with at her work realized that she spoke the language, she was not regarded or respected as an equal employee. She also argued that speaking the language was a way of proving one’s ability and showing that you are skilled. I was told:

As long as one manages the language somehow, then everything is really ok. In Germany it does not matter where you are from, as long as you can adopt to your environment, and as long as you can work really well. Then it is ok, then there is a great chance, and people can believe us right away.*

This does, however, also mean that if one does not adapt to one’s environment according to others’ expectations, by for instance keeping norms and practices from one’s culture, there might be issues arising.

That participants were not initially recognized as equal workers, first had to prove their competence and demonstrate their abilities, while their co-workers did not have to do so represents a form of discrimination. So if they had not been migrant women, they would not have found themselves in this situation and would not have to put in this extra effort and work. To end up with
the same acceptance, recognition and respect, they had to give more input, be it in the form of studying more for the exams, taking extra lessons or adapting to a culture different to one’s own.

**The central role of age**

One’s age can also be a concern to young adult migrant women. Participants shared their thoughts with me that expressed fears that they might be treated differently because of their age, as well as experiences and co-workers’ behaviors based on their age.

Anastasia, who was 24 years old at the point of interview, told me about her fears:

A concern that I had when I applied for jobs was my age. Because I was younger than most [...] people from western Europe who finished their master and who start their jobs and I was afraid of some kind of discrimination [like people believing] “Oh, she’s young, she can’t do her job”. So that’s why I didn’t put my year of birth in my CVs, to avoid this kind of discrimination. But I got the job in the end.

Consequently, she believed that people might have prejudices and associate a young age with lower competence in the job. Furthermore, her origins were in a way entangled with these fears, as she suspected that employers in the region were more used to older applicants with the same qualifications, while she was at this point of her career at her relatively early age because of her origins, as in Russia, where she comes from, it is normal to be finished with one’s master’s degree at her age. Even though Anastasia did not notice any peculiarities in treatment by her colleagues because of her age, it was still a concern to her whether her age would cause any presumptions related to her competence. She pointed out, however, that some co-workers were surprised when they learned about her age, as they expected she must be older to work in their workplace.

Furthermore, participants told me that there is more towards respect towards older co-workers than towards younger ones in their workplaces. Dewi, who is 28 years old, and who told me that she was frequently mistaken for younger than she is, explained:

[That they have less respect], that is mostly if they don’t know us, right. But most people, when they know what I have done before, then they respect me. “Oh, you already worked this and that! Ok.” But that is just in the beginning. As soon as you are in there [and more established], then it is not so bad anymore.*

So while she did say that co-workers accept her and her age is no big influence anymore, it nevertheless is a factor that especially in the beginning is the cause for attitudes and behaviors towards her that reflect less respect or doubt of her competence. This thus definitely indicates inequality that is related to age.
Samira, who is 24 years old, also told me about difficulties related to age, as she said that in Germany, it is always expected that somebody her age already has a lot of work experience. She did, however, not have any work experience when she came to Germany from Iraq three years ago, and the job she has recently started is her first work experience. She said:

*That was a challenge for me. This here is my first official work experience. In Iraq it is not so normal to work early, they don’t start working with sixteen like here. You don’t work there before you finish your studies, [you go] step by step. It is not like here, and women don’t have as much freedom [to work] in Iraq. So every time when I’m asked how much experience I have, well… I don’t have as much experience as German women. That is the challenge: Here, you always need experience, experience, experience.*

So the intersection of being a woman from Iraq in her age creates this situation for her in which she does not have the experience that is often expected from her and which not only has implications for attitudes towards her at work, but also makes it especially hard for her to find employment.

Gita, who is now 30, wanted to start a vocational training within the company she is working for in order to advance ahead in her career. She had to stay in her position as a sales assistant, however. She told me:

*Actually, I wanted to do a vocational training, but that was not possible because of my age. That’s why I have fewer opportunities in my career. So actually I wanted to start this with 27 and also passed all the exams. And then they realized that I am already 27 and said: “No, we can’t take you for the training, because you are already too old for this.” But well, that’s just the way it is now.*

At an earlier age that would have been considered “normal” to start such a vocational training which is required for all higher skill jobs, Gita was, however, not even in the German-speaking region yet. Consequently, the intersection of her origins and her age represent a specific disadvantage to her career opportunities.

**Unequal career opportunities**

Regarding career opportunities, participants in fact struggled in a variety of ways. The lack of recognition regarding one’s competence and not being regarded as an equal peer from the beginning, as discussed in previous subsections, can be counted as some of them as they represent unequal points of departure for one’s career and obstacles for advancing further. Gita’s disadvantage in not being able to do a vocational training is another example for equal opportunities, while in the case of Naina’s previous employer, the make-up and structure of workers indicated unequal opportunities for people with a migrant background and women.
Another example is Anastasia’s situation: at the time of the interview, she held a student visa which did not allow her to work full-time, while both she herself and her employer would have preferred her to do so. This is an obstacle to equality in career opportunities. Anastasia also explained that since she is not a citizen of the European Union and due to Austria’s “strange rules” that make it much more difficult for her to work, she faces visa issues which cause a lot of extra work both for her and her employer. She perceives this to be an obstacle in her career path. She explained that she “definitely need[s] more support from the HR office and talk[s] to [her] boss about future plans more than [her] colleagues from the EU”.

Samira also talked about career opportunities in relation to men’s and women’s behavior at work, or much more she described typical behavior for women as a contrast to men’s, which she did not describe in such depth which already implies that men’s behavior is the “normal” and neutral standard. She said the following about femininity and how she believes women tend to behave:

**Women are always nice, they always show more feelings. And men, they are just direct and straightforward. It’s about women’s character, and feelings dominate our character. Women gossip more, and they hear better. [...]**

Here, she associates some specific attributes with people that depend on one’s gender. She furthermore said about how this is important in one’s job:

**As a team leader, you have to be strict in your personality. But we, women, have to show more feelings, we are not like men. Some men don’t show them like this, they are not so nice. But women, they are completely different. [...] If I were a team leader, I would also have to adapt in that regard.*

So in order to advance in one’s career, these attributes play a central role. For her to get ahead in her career, Samira believes she would have to behave less in a way that is perceived to be typically feminine, and more in a masculine way. That co-workers have attitudes that women should not work, but stay at home, as she also talked about, may also pose a hindrance to equal opportunities in her job.

Furthermore, participants talked about inequality connected to issues regarding the formal approval of one’s qualifications in Germany and Austria that were achieved in other countries, as well as issues in pursuing legal or full-time work due to one’s visa or working permit. Nabila, for instance, had difficulties in having her university degree approved in order to work as a teacher, while Anastasia could not work full-time because of her visa. This also has serious implications for one’s career and is probably a greater concern to people originating in non-Western places than people from the West who may have it easier to get their qualifications officially approved.
Inequality in career opportunities is also reflected in organizational structures that are dominated by men, people without a migrant background and above all non-migrant men. An example of this are Naina’s reflections that I discussed before on the lack of women and people with a migrant background in higher positions in her organization. This also affected other participants, however: when they talked about their superiors, they always referred to their superior as “he”, not a single time did a participant mention a female superior. This therefore indicates unequal opportunities and structures in their organizations.

Consequently, there was a variety of factors affecting participants’ career opportunities negatively. In Samira’s case, for instance, typically feminine patterns of behavior represent and obstacle to advancing in her career. Their official migrant status, work permit and/or visa also made it difficult for some of this study’s participants, such as Anastasia, to advance in their careers as best as they would wish and in the same way that other co-workers are able to. This thus also inhibits equal career opportunities. In such cases, the cause of inequality may not necessarily be one’s being a migrant or one’s origins, but much more one’s positioning in regimes that favor people holding some nationalities or citizenships over others.

Income inequality

Closely connected to this is another point that some participants talked about, which is income inequality. Nabila, for instance, told me the following about earnings in relation to her former employment as an assistant in an advertisement agency:

As man, one surely earns more money [than as a woman], even as an assistant. As a man, you get 300 euros more. For the exact same work. Because you get the same work done as they do actually, right.*

Elena explained that she believes that women will mostly only receive a fair income if they ask for it and that otherwise, they will be paid less than their male counterparts.

Unequal career opportunities as the ones discussed in the previous subsection do, of course, result in inequality also regarding income. An example for this is also Anastasia’s inability to work full-time which has a direct impact on her income. Irregular work may also imply a lower and less secure income as the affected person is in a generally more precarious employment situation and can, for instance, not demand the respective minimum wage. Many participants also believed that there is an issue regarding income inequality based on one’s gender even when two people of different genders hold the same position. Even though many felt not personally affected by it and some talked about policies in their organization that inhibited a difference in income that ensures that people with
the same qualifications and/or experience receive the same renumeration, some also felt personally affected by unequal pay and many saw it as a general problem in society.

**Sexual harassment and oversexualization**

Another issue that came up during many interviews and that may be related to age is sexual harassment and sexualization at the workplace. One experience revolving around harassment by customers I was told about by Natalya. She told me about her employment as a private sports trainer and had the following experience regarding sexual harassment with one of her clients:

> I was coming to people’s homes to give their children lessons, and there was one man who really flirted with me a lot and he was maybe more than twice older than I am and he still thought it was kind of ok to tell me things that he told me and it was really not nice. [He was] being pushy, I told him “no” like 1000s of times, [but] he would be like “why don’t you stay for dinner, like lalala” and I would say “no, no, no, no”, and he just wouldn’t get it.

There was also a connection to her origins, as she pointed out that she believes that the harassment might not have taken place had she had a different background:

> The man is also from my country. I would say that there is a difference of how women are treated in Russia and here. So maybe that influenced him as well. He thought [] “I can treat her the way I treat women in my own country”. But that’s maybe also his background, not mine, or our background, so to say, not just mine.

Consequently, there is a certain ambiguity here: Natalya was specifically perceived to be a target by her harasser because of her being a Russian woman so that both her gender and origins, and even more so the specific intersection of the two are central as well as possible stereotypes that come with her positioning at this intersection; simultaneously, the participant highlighted the importance of the man’s own origins and how he might apply other norms to her than he might have to a non-migrant woman or more specifically, a non-Russian woman.

An aspect about this specific case that might be important is that her occupation as a private trainer was irregular, and therefore she might have been an easier target as the irregular nature offers little protection from harassment or might at least be perceived so by potential harassers and their targets. So irregular employment creates a certain vulnerability towards sexual harassment.

Dewi also frequently experiences sexual harassment by customers at work. She told me that in this job, there are good channels for employees for what to do in situations like this one in order to ensure their safety and that it is easy to access help like in that situation. She said, for instance:

> During late shift, or when people are drunk, then it happens again and again that you are harassed. There is an extra team there for this in order to calm us down. And they can also give us psychological care so that we are doing well. I can give them feedback, for instance, and if we
need more security. They listen to us and also do what we tell them to. I find that to be very good. There is also a self-defense course for us, and de-escalation.*

So sexual harassment in general seems to be an issue in this kind of occupation as there are installments in order to prevent harassment and mechanisms how to deal with incidents in this organization. Nevertheless, the woman expressed that she thinks that her origins make harassers target her more than women without origins outside the norm.

It is, however, not only customers who harass, but also co-workers. Dewi told me, for instance, that two co-workers had “grabbed [her] ass once”. She also said about sexual harassment that she and other female employees experience at work:

We also have male bosses, right. And they do try to seduce us. […] But I have no interest. And also if I have to stay overnight [during nightshift], then there are more male locomotive engineers, and very, very few female locomotive engineers. And sometimes they are also very stupid [these male ones] […] and expect things from us that I do not want to do.*

When talking about her experiences with sexual harassment with a female co-worker, Dewi was told that she may have invited such harassment:

A colleague from here once told me that I had always smiled in such a way and that the men might have interpreted this differently. That might have been an invitation or something. So maybe now I have to look a bit tougher, and not laugh anymore. Maybe it was because of this.*

From outside, thus, it was perceived as if it was not so much harassers’ fault, power structures, the participant’s gender, age or origins, but much more her own behavior that was the cause for sexual harassment.

Samira also emphasized experiences concerning advice from co-workers how to behave in order to avoid sexual harassment. She told me:

In the beginning I always wore short skirts, but then not anymore. Somebody had told me: “Better wear something else, you are working in the Arab market, and I see how they look at you! Maybe it gives them ideas.” It happened before at my work that a girl who used to wear skirts and stuff, and she had to leave the work because somebody [did something]. And they said: “Oh she was the one who wanted to get harassed.” So I used to wear short skirts, and then I stopped wearing them. Because “you don’t know the way they look at you, it’s better not to wear it”. You have to always be careful when it comes to work and what you’re are wearing there. […] This also comes from Arab culture, you know: “She must not show her skin.” Unfortunately it is like this.*

She furthermore talked about how her co-workers’ culture might influence expectations towards her behavior:

In the Arab culture, when the woman always laughs and speaks to men, then you think she is not so good, that she has a lot of relationships with men and things like that. […] It is like this with Muslims. […] Where I am from […], also the handshake is not allowed. […] This is also a problem at work sometimes, depending on the people. It depends on how they grew up. […] Between men and men it is ok, but between women and men, it is not always.*
Participants’ backgrounds thus created specific intersections of age, gender and origins that makes them vulnerable to sexual harassment. These intersections may cause harassers to have certain perceptions and stereotypes. Anastasia, for instance, believes that her harasser saw her as victim because she is a Russian woman which implies that he could treat her in this way, while Samira also said that Arab culture and the depiction of a woman from that region played an important role for the norms she is subject to at work concerning behavior and dress code. Dewi also expressed that stereotypes towards her as a person who is frequently racialized as an Asian woman depict her as overly sexual. She talked about stereotypes she specifically faces based on the intersection of both her gender and origins. She explained, for instance, that there is a certain stereotype about women who are racialized as Asian that labels them as “cheap to have”*, and that they have relationships with European men and come to Europe for financial exploitation. She said that this creates stigma towards her also at work:

And especially Asian women, that is so terrible. I also sometimes pity my husband. Because you know, you always think that Asian women, they just want the money. But that is not true at all. [...] So we are always branded like this, right. I don’t like that. I always have to explain myself: “No, with me it is not like this. And my husband is not like this either.”**

Her being located at this specific intersection, thus, has impacts for how she is perceived and may influence her experiences concerning sexual harassment.

**Participants’ experiences from a perspective of social justice**

These different stories that I was told about during the conduction of interviews with young adult migrant women show that their association with these social categories often had serious negative implications for them in their careers and daily work life. It thus becomes clear that in many ways, participants of this study did experience injustice and inequality from Fraser’s perspective of social justice. Many participants’ stories indicate that there are status hierarchies at work between different groups of workers in which one’s origins, gender and age play a role and in which young adult migrant women are constructed as subordinate in status. One’s gender as well as one’s racialization due to one’s origins and/or appearance are consequently often a cause for the lack of equal recognition and respect at work. Furthermore, interactions are not always, as Fraser calls it, on an equal footing and thus there is no parity of participation or interaction as full peers with one another. Much more, categories such as origins outside the norm and being a woman as well as presumptions and stereotypes that come with these social divisions are depreciated in many work environments and inhibit equal opportunities for achieving social esteem as Fraser demands in order to accomplish social justice. Instead, structures seem to favor a norm which young adult migrant women do not fit
into. This social injustice based on misrecognition is reflected in, for instance, presumptions of lower competence in one’s job and the need to prove oneself more than co-workers that belong to advantaged groups. In a distributive manner, inequality in career opportunities and income as well as dependencies translate into injustice. These inequalities might, however, be closely related to misrecognition which can be the cause of lower incomes, poorer career opportunities and dependencies on one’s current employment.

4.2 Reacting to and dealing with inequality and injustice

Participants dealt with inequality and injustice due to their gender, age and origins in various ways. They also displayed a multitude of behaviors which not only demonstrate their agency but may even be seen as resistance. The woman who was afraid that she would face trouble finding employment because of her young age and associations with less competence based on that, for instance, showed resistance by excluding her birthdate from her applications despite possible conventions to include it.

Dewi displayed verbal resistance, sometimes serious, sometimes with humor, but always with self-confidence. She said about situations in which her competencies were questioned based on her origins and gender:

*Usually, I am really always friendly, right, but if I am treated like this now, then somehow I also want to defend myself.*

She explained:

*I can always answer back, I can always be cheeky. As soon as someone insults me or the like. […] That it is hard to get respect should not demotivate us, but hey, show them what we can do and achieve, right.*

For this form of resistance, Dewi said it is of course important to be able to speak the language. Interestingly enough, she perceived this verbal form of resistance and defense against people discriminating against her as unfriendly or rude.

Furthermore, in Dewi’s case, when not seen as equal in tasks that are not considered to be typical “women’s work”, she took action in order to also be able to do this work and demonstrate that she has the capabilities to do so. When talking about coupling trains, she said the following:

*I specifically took a [training] hour for this, and heavy things I just lifted also, right. And in the end I think, you don’t always have to do everything with force, so then I did it with technique, propped the [train wagon] hook with my knee, and so now I can couple so quickly like this. That surprised all the men, like “She does it differently“, but that also works. The most important thing is that you are motivated.*
She explained that motivation is key to her facing the many challenges she meets at her work, and to come up with solutions like this one. So instead of accepting that she is not assigned specific tasks because of her gender, she remains motivated to prove her competence and actively aims to do other tasks in order to be treated equally and show that she has the same abilities as male co-workers.

About establishing one’s equal place at work and how she achieves equality, Elena said:

*It is good to actually challenge men a little bit. Some women I know, they actually give the space to men instead.*

Reactions to sexual harassment were quite diverse. They ranged from avoiding critical situations by remaining “professional” or dressing “appropriately” to confronting harassers directly and threatening them with legal consequences.

Dewi explained how she directly verbally confronts harassers:

*I actually told them over and over, no matter if they are [from here] or foreigners: “That does not work, you can’t just touch women in such a way! Hello?! I mean, who are you?! This is my body.”*

Concerning the sexual harassment she experiences from co-workers, she reacted to their actions with straight-out telling them that they cannot harass her and that she can take legal action against them. She pointed out that she always insisted that she is not interested, even if there was a clear dependency, such as when the harasser is her direct superior. The most important thing is, she explained, to show and explain harassers their limits.

Participants also adapted by dressing and behaving in a way that would hopefully keep others from harassing them. Samira, for instance, stopped wearing skirts, and Dewi who wears a uniform at work says she tries to smile less in order not to give anybody “wrong ideas”.

Elena explained about how she avoids sexual harassment:

*I try to avoid uncomfortable situations at work when I see them coming up. Starting from dressing appropriately, up to behaving professionally. It is very important the way you appear. Often people treat you the way you want them to treat you. […] By dressing appropriately, I don’t mean a specific dress code that a woman should respect. What I refer to is a decent clothing, because you also see women, I think, in every setting that appear as if they are going to a bar or a restaurant at night. It’s a fact that the dress code can sometimes trigger this behavior from men, that’s a fact.*

It was also pointed out by participants that in order to fight discrimination and be accepted as equal, hard work and motivation is required, as well as the right attitude. Examples of this are instances when participants did in fact work more and harder than their co-workers in order to be accepted, as was pointed out in the previous section. So as they were not from the beginning treated in an equal manner, participants proved that they did deserve equal treatment, by for example doing better than
co-workers in exams like Dewi. She also kept good humor and laughed when speaking about discrimination, and said about the challenges and showed how she stays positive in order to cope:

Yes, there are really a lot of challenges for me. But this is also what makes life here interesting, right?*

She explained, despite the many problems she faces, the following, also saying that just indulging in the negative aspects is not helpful for her:

I work for me, and myself. As soon as I decided to take this job, then I also want to enjoy it. [...] So if I love this job, then why not?*

It is, however, not always clear for migrant women how to best deal with shortcomings in equal treatment. In the case of Nabila, who was laid off because of her not being an Austrian, for instance, she felt helpless, and despite her knowing that this action was illegal, she did not take any action against it.

But what should one do? I mean, this is also a small company, but this company nevertheless has such big customers. And if they get the money from the customers… The money also comes from them to pay the employees.*

So Nabila knew that she could have taken legal action, but did not do so out of empathy for her boss who is dependent on customers, and the situation he found himself in. She did, however, say the following:

Life is like a catapult: afterwards you always fly farther.*

Consequently, it seems that it was helpful for her to deal with such a setback in an optimistic manner in order to be able to advance and keep a positive mindset.

Moreover, several participants highlighted the importance of staying “professional” not only in one’s way of dressing, but also in the way one behaves in order to be treated equally. This implies, however, that there is a clear divide between one’s personal identity and others’ assumptions about one’s background a, and what is considered professional. It furthermore indicates that professionality is in some way the opposite of one’s otherness.

Additionally to those ways of dealing with inequality and reacting to it, there is, however, a multitude of dependencies that make it difficult for young adult migrant women like this study’s participants to deal with such inequality and discrimination as they told me about and display resistance. For instance, as it is hard for many young migrant women to find work – both work at all and work that they are content with –, which many participants emphasized, they are more dependent on their current employment and therefore more vulnerable to discrimination. The cause for this is
that if they show resistance, they may either face difficulties in their future career in this workplace, the social interactions there, or even be laid off.

An example may be Samira who felt to never have enough work experience due to her origins in comparison to German competitors on the job market, and therefore was dependent on her employer as it would be difficult to find another job while she is very much dependent on having full employment in order to maintain her residence permit. She told me:

*I think I should change to another job, because every week I have another shift, it always changes, and my biological clock [does not take it well]. It doesn’t match anymore. It rebels. And I always feel tired. […] We also always have to work on weekends and holidays. We do get extra money for that, but not so much. I only took it [the job] for the permanent residence permit. Because I have been here for three years and have the C1 language level, and there is a new law that you have to work full-time in order to get the permit. Yes, there are many challenges because of that for me, that really makes me down.*

Furthermore, irregular employment such as Natalya’s creates a vulnerability as irregularity may keep workers from seeking help. One might argue, for instance, that Natalya, the private sports trainer who was informally employed and experienced sexual harassment, was less likely to seek legal action against her harasser both due to the irregular nature of the employment and the dependency on the job.

Another aspect of agency and dealing with inequality and discrimination is the way one talks about such experiences. One example for this is how one shares experiences as a participant of a study like this one and even the participation in research as such can be seen as an agentic action. As their lived experiences, which they passed on through the interviews, are the center piece of this study, the participants actively constructed the study’s content and form a truth. The multitude of quotes used in this study already give an impression of how participants spoke of their experiences at work. Furthermore, I had the general impression that participants did in fact not portray themselves as victims and passive to discriminatory structures and practices that they encountered. Much more, they spoke about how they are often actively tackling problems and reflected upon their own role in the difficulties they face. In this, explanations for inequality and discrimination mostly revolved around the immediate situation as well as behaviors they themselves had shown which may have caused the issue, such as being harassed because of smiling too much or dressing “inappropriately”. Another example of this may be Naina’s explanation of why structures in the company where she worked as an intern were unequal regarding gender and origins of employees:

*Maybe they just want people who can understand the local market well, which I wouldn’t blame them for. It’s true if you’re from here and you’re born here and you’re working here, you will definitely have a better understanding for the local market or the kind of thing that you’re expected, things like that. For a person, man or woman, any person with a migrant background, the only advantage you have is that you know the market of another country, or you are better at
an international scope of work. But when it comes down to the really local scope of work, then probably you will have a little bit of disadvantage I would say. And if a company just wants that, they can definitely decide who they want, I can’t blame them for that. If they have a requirement for only local people, yes, then it’s is true.

So Naina argued that in a sense, it can be logical for an organization to employ fewer people with a migrant background or have them in lower positions within the organization as their background may also imply the lack of some knowledge and skills. This does not explain, however, the lack of people who have a migrant background but have the necessary knowledge and skills anyway, for instance due to their education or since they may have lived in the region for a significant time or are even born or raised there as children and grandchildren to migrants.

Interesting is also how Dewi, for instance, was careful to construct the company she is employed by as one that she is happy with despite experiences she told me about that clearly reflect discriminatory attitudes. Furthermore, she emphasized the importance of speaking German and how this will erase practically all problems, even though she herself speaks the language fluently and yet experienced inequality. What especially struck me is how Nabila rationalized her superior’s behavior of giving in to the advertisement agency’s customer’s demand to lay her off by showing empathy and understanding for his situation in which he is reliant on important customers.

Consequently, in some ways there seems to be a strong focus of one’s own responsibility and agency as well as empathy for the people they work or worked with in participants’ perspectives on their experiences that almost legitimizes inequality, while some participants also talked about, or at least implied, the importance of structural coherences and how discrimination based on one’s origins, gender and age come into play. Nabila did, for instance, also call Austria “racist” when speaking of the customer’s demand to lay her off, Dewi elaborated on the poor acceptance of young adult women at work, and several participants spoke of prevalent stereotypes that led to discrimination as well as gender inequality rooted in society when sharing their views on and experiences of unequal pay.

Participants’ ways of understanding, reflecting on, sharing and constructing their experiences were thus interesting and offer important ways of understanding their reality. Nevertheless, I shall offer more considerations of how one can understand their experiences which may in some ways agree, and in some ways stand in contrast to participants’ explanations. None of these ways of understanding their experiences can, however, be labelled as the one, objective truth, independently of who suggested them, since social constructionism inhibits such conclusions as elaborated on in a previous chapter.
4.3 Positive effects and discrimination

One’s gender, origins and age represent, however, not only a disadvantage and are not always the cause of inequality. Participants in this study also told me about perceptions of fair and equal treatment as well as some experiences they had in which their belonging to these categories represented an advantage or an asset. This section shall therefore deal with positive effects that participants’ background and belonging poses to them and experiences of positive discrimination they shared with me.

Stereotypes, for instance, are not necessarily negative and do not always represent a disadvantage to those who are associated with them. An example for this is what Anastasia told me about her work in the research institute and stereotypes she faces that co-workers might have about her:

They’re not really bad stereotypes, you know, they tell me for example: “Looks like you are cold, but you can’t be cold, you are from Russia!” So I wouldn’t say that it influences my work.

On the contrary, she took these sorts of comments with humor and even considered them to be a source of interest and conversation and therefore opportunity for networking and advancing in one’s career. About the importance of networking Anastasia pointed out:

I [...] feel that people there are really friendly, and then they like when you are friendly, too, and communicate and go for lunch together, and keep this connection. People become interested in you and your culture.

She then went on to explain how specifically her background is an advantage in that regard:

People ask me about [my home city]. People want to connect and ask questions. So in this way, [my background] is definitely an advantage. [...] One of my colleagues is married to a Russian woman, and he tells me about his experiences. And he is a talkative person who loves to talk to everyone. So I guess [my origins] just provide more topics of conversation [and] more interest towards me from other people.

Consequently, her origins serve as a gateway to get conversation started and thus network better. Naina told me about similar experiences in her current employment as a project manager in the construction industry. She said the following:

The people who supervise me, or in my team, or who are directly above me, actually they have been very accommodating I would say. They’re like always interested in different cultures and they ask me all the time: “What happens in your country? How nice is it, the food and the culture? And let’s do an Indian night!” And we always go to the restaurant to taste some food. And it’s really nice. Because who wants not to be welcomed to a new place! So I had a really nice experience.

Another example of how one’s origins elsewhere may pose an asset is how Anastasia, as mentioned before, frequently has to speak to her superior about her career due to her legal status and work permit
arrangements. As mentioned before, she said that she “definitely need[s] more support from the HR office and talk[s] to [her] boss about future plans more than [her] colleagues from the EU”. In some ways, this is an obstacle, on the other hand, however, more frequent conversations about one’s career with the employer are also a chance to advance in one’s career and keep the topic of one’s future career present.

For some others, their origins brought with them skills that helped them do their job in the first place or better than women that do not have origins elsewhere. Naina talked about some advantages she sees in her background:

Sometimes in the workplace, as you know, Asians have a different working culture. Overtime and everything like that is not very well controlled. So in Asia people are already accustomed to work more than what they are supposed to or what they are even told to do. They just like do a little bit more because in Asia there is a lot of competition. If you don’t do more, then somebody else will and that will not help you get ahead. So people who really want to excel, they do it. So for me when I came here, I knew that everything is super controlled, you have a 40 hour work week, you shouldn’t work more. But for example for me there are some weeks where you have crazy deadlines and you have to work for it. So my advantage is that I wouldn’t have a problem with working more that week and stress out about it. Work ten hours more the one week, and then ten hours less the next week. That works fine for me. But I have seen for other people here, that is a problem. It doesn’t matter how much work there is, if they have to leave at five, they have to leave at five. And everything else comes later. But for me, overtime is not that bad. So I see that as an advantage for me that I can cope better with that kind of pressure and stress than other people who are not accustomed to this kind of work and they would actually be super stressed even if they have to do something in one week for half an hour more.

Consequently, her attitude and culture helped her ahead in her job. Nevertheless, this may actually also be interpreted as overexploitation which was enabled by her origins. Another perspective is seeing it as a form of positive discrimination: co-workers with a different attitude due to their origins are disadvantaged as they cannot compete with Naina in the same way when they stick to the standard of a 40-hour workweek.

Dewi also explained about positive effects that come with her background:

My boss is [] quite happy because there are also many tourists [who take the trains]. And since I also look quite Asian, and they also want to talk and [therefore] feel quite comfortable […]. Because the Austrian train attendants, they don’t speak English so well, right, so then [the tourists] can talk to me. There are always advantages and disadvantages of course.*

So her origins are an advantage to her, and it is not only her physical appearance which helps her with customers, but also her language abilities that are connected to her being a migrant that can be considered assets. Elena also mentioned it as an advantage to her in her job that she can talk to certain customers in her language which her co-workers cannot do.

Furthermore, one’s gender can also be perceived positively. Elena, for instance, said about comments she receives about how special it is that she works in the IT sector as a woman:
But I would say that 60 percent of these comments were in a positive manner, and not in a negative way.

In general, she expressed that there is an appreciation of femininity at her workplace. She explained:

In my company it is seen that it is an advantage if some women do specific tasks, because it is assumed that we have more of an eye for aesthetics for example, and women are also often seen as more empathetic. So for example when there is a powerpoint presentation to prepare, I am asked as a woman because they think I can do it better.

So because of her gender and the association of femininity, Elena is assigned some attributes and strengths, which is, regardless of whether these assumptions are true or not, often an advantage to her in her work.

One can thus conclude that being a young adult migrant woman does not necessarily mean that one will constantly be discriminated against. Much more, there are also positive effects one’s background can have and opportunities that it can represent.

4.4 Influences on participants’ experiences and the importance of the individual context

As anticipated even before conducting the interviews and discussed previously in the section dealing with theory and methodology, participants’ specific contexts are highly influential for their individual experiences and I expect this to be true for all young adult migrant women. Such contexts do not only include their specific ethnic background or origins, but also, for instance, their legal status or personality, their employers, co-workers, as well as the specific location of where they work and live. This was also present in the interviews. Diversity among participants’ social identity was high, just as individuals’ agency is unique. Therefore, one cannot draw any generalized conclusions for young adult migrant women.

Nevertheless, I shall in this chapter give a few impressions of influences on participants’ experiences and how the specific context of an individual is central to their experience. An example of the centrality of one’s specific background is how Nabila, who had formerly lived and worked in Germany, but is now located in Austria, talked about her experiences and compared them. This quote shows her perception of differences well:

And Germany is completely open. Why Austria not? It is really different. The Austrian and Swiss, they may speak German, but their relation is really different. When one speaks badly about Germans, I can't understand that. I have also studied in Germany, therefore. I have not experiences anything terrible. Because of that I don't want to judge anything badly. [...] Actually, I want to go back to Germany.*
Another example is this:

They actually see us in Germany as long as we can show somehow what we can do. Then in Germany, they can right away accept that we are somehow partners.*

So even though this already indicated that expectations towards her are different than what people expect from others who may conform more to the norm and there is more criticism, she here means to construct Germany as a fair place in which one is treated well in contrast to experiences she made in Austria.

Once, for instance, she specified and highlighted “I mean here in Austria”* so that I would not get the story she told confused with her previous experiences in Germany. About her frustrating experiences with sexual harassment she told me the following:

I only do my work, but I do not want this. I have no interest. The Germans understand this right away. But the Austrians in the beginning [not so much] – ah.*

She also explained:

[Where I am from] it is very normal that men catcall women. But in reality, it is an insult. […] So this does not only exist in Austria, but surely in the entire world. But in Germany I have actually never experienced this, that is strange.*

Beyond that, participants quite often referred to the nation state that they work in, i.e. Germany and Austria. This might indicate the importance of the specific nation state and the difference between experiences between the two despite my clustering them into the German-speaking region.

Participants furthermore referred to differences that exist between cities and the periphery. Samira had, for instance, lived on the countryside before moving into a city and noticed differences between people’s attitudes. Dewi said about experiences she made with sexual harassment:

Two colleagues of mine, they come from [the province of] Steiermark. There, they only have village. There it’s like that, that you can just touch women and this and that.*

About a previous employment in another city, she had before pointed out that the small size of the city made it harder for her to be accepted in her work.

When it comes to the specific workplace a person is employed at, this factor seems to be of importance as well. When participants were happy with the way co-workers and superiors treated them, for example, they frequently pointed this out and explained that this was an organization that they are content with. Describing the atmosphere at her workplace, the railway company, and comparing it with a previous employment, Dewi for instance explained that she was content with her employer, as this one’s atmosphere was in contrast to one of her former employments a lot more favorable. She said:
Here it is really different, somehow more international and the people are a lot more open.*

In general, many participants seemed to favor a so-called international workplace. This means that many, or even a majority, of their co-workers also had origins outside the German-speaking region. Many of them talked about this in a positive way and especially when asked if they felt they were treated differently based on their background, they brought up and highlighted that they worked in a workplace with a high diversity.

Gita, for instance, who works as a sales assistant in a large store, stated when asked about challenges at work:

Well, there are really so many different people from thousand places, it’s very international. And I really don’t have a problem with the colleagues there at all, yes, I am really getting along well.*

Naina, who had identified injustices and discrimination of women and “non-locals” during her internship in a project management company, said the following about her current employment as a project controller in a different company:

I’m actually really proud of this office. […] You know, this company wants diversity, and also they want to develop their women employees, they try to do something [in that regard]. This company is always advertising that they have a higher number of women as compared to traditional engineering and project management offices which is true. It’s a huge number what we have actually. [In this office] we have people from twelve to thirteen different nationalities out of only 35 people. They really try to support diversity. They actually believe that people with other backgrounds could also perform or even have more innovative ideas than if one wouldn’t leave one’s country or have so much international experience. I think this kind of mentality really helps them to get along with different kinds of projects even though they only have local projects. If they wanted they could just hire local people and be done with it. So their strategy is a little bit different and it’s really nice. […] The person who is leading this office is pretty fair. This year, four people were promoted, and three of them were women. […] In this company I also really feel that they don’t bias on the basis of whether you’re a man or a woman.

Anastasia, who works in a research institute, highlighted how diverse her workplace is despite its small size, not only in terms of employees’ origins, but also sexual orientation and skin color. She expressed, for instance, that she appreciates that colleagues smoothly switch between German and English as soon as somebody joins who struggles with German, or is not a native speaker, in order to avoid exclusion.

Nevertheless, a so-called international workplace does not necessarily only bring advantages with it or is perceived as positive by employees. Samira, the Iraqi participant who is working in her social media monitoring company’s department for the Arab market, talked about problems that came up because of her co-workers’ background. Additionally, the diversity of backgrounds at her work kept her from being able to improve her German language skills at work. She said:

One of the disadvantages of my job is that I can’t speak German anymore. The official language [at office] is English. One also sees Germans, and always when I see them, they speak English to
me. They always want to speak English. They think English is a cool language. All of us start speaking English right away with each other, that’s really bad.*

Three participants also shared experiences connected to issues arising between them and migrant men at their workplace that are connected to intersections of gender and origins.

Dewi, for instance, experienced sexual harassment during work regarding people waiting at train stations and said the following:

I don’t wanna accuse asylum seekers. But they also have lived very differently in Arab countries. They have, unfortunately, treated women so badly, and now they also want to bring such conditions to Europe, but I’m afraid that doesn’t work.*

Samira also told me about her experiences regarding migrant men. She believes she might face different treatment based both on her own gender and origins, but also co-workers’ attitudes that may be connected to gender and ethnicity as her co-workers that work in the Arab market department with her also have origins elsewhere. So their attitudes regarding her as a woman not being suitable for doing the work she does are, as she explained, dependent on their cultural background. Consequently, there is a specific intersection here both for attitudes from co-workers and how she as a woman is accepted. At this intersection also lies another difference in treatment towards her:

The men [at my work] are always just men, surely that also has to do with their background, that men in the Arab culture should not show so many feelings. Germans are always more spontaneous. The [Arab] women, however, they are always very nice. […] It is also that the men are always nicer with [other] men, because in the Arab culture women should also not be so nice with men.*

Samira talks about certain norms that she perceives her co-workers to have internalized and according to which they treat her as a woman, who is from what they perceive as their own culture, different from male co-workers.

It is not only the make-up of people working in a place, however, that influences young migrant women’s experiences. Anastasia said:

The work environment determines a lot how everything works and how people are treated, [and my job is in] a university and academia background and this has influence on the treatment, I guess. It’s a different world. I guess women working on lower skilled positions might have completely different challenges.

Participants working in office environments and so-called higher skilled jobs pointed this out repeatedly, and there may even be a pattern in this research of how women employed in lower-skilled jobs experience more negative discrimination based on their background than their counterparts in higher-skilled jobs, even though the scope of this study inhibits any conclusions from this.

But this is not all. Their lived experiences as we get to know them in this study depend entirely on the participants in the sense that I received them directly from them via personal interviews. So it
is central how they constructed their lived experiences, i.e. what they decided to tell me as a researcher, and how they told it to me. Consequently, their own choices about this and their way of sharing, thus how they construct meaning in the research, may be just as important or even more so than the other factors explained above.

It is because of all these factors that one should not make any generalizations about young adult migrant women’s experiences and, except for maybe this one: differences between individuals are always present and shape their experiences and lives substantially. Therefore, they can never be neglected in research. It is also therefore that intersectionality and social identity difference approaches are so important. Acknowledging them is one way to try tackling diverse issues and lived realities as the ones that young adult migrant women, such as participants of this study, experience.
5. Underlying social structures, norms and constructions

In the previous chapter, it became clear that young adult migrant women experience inequality and discrimination in a variety of ways that affect their work life. Especially negative discrimination and effects of inequality are an urgent matter. Therefore, this chapter shall now investigate social structures, norms and constructions that interact with one’s agency and may help us understand these experiences. This chapter is especially important as only if we have an understanding of possible causes for inequality, we can find ways of countering it. For this, I am drawing from other scholars’ previous research and concepts. From a social constructionist viewpoint, there is of course no claim of truth to this and there are many ways of understanding participants’ experiences. There are many other ways of understanding them, as participants also had their own perspectives which were mostly of individual, not structural nature. I shall here, however, apply a structural perspective.

It is also important to note that much of the previous literature that I am using for this purpose is not only dealing with migrant women, but also women who belong to an ethnic minority and/or are racialized. Nevertheless, I believe that the chosen contents are relevant for this study as there are many overlaps between being a migrant, origins, ethnicity and being racialized: one’s origins, especially if they are outside “the West”, may often be connected to a physical appearance that cause racialization, while migrants frequently belong to ethnic minorities in the place they now live in and people from non-Western places are more likely to be perceived as ethnically different. Furthermore, literature that is used mainly originates outside the German-speaking region. Despite this, I believe that the chosen studies are of relevance as structures and norms in other places that may be categorized as “the West” may give indications also for the context that is researched in this thesis. Where possible, I will therefore not only create links to the material gathered in this research, but also to the German-speaking region.

Concerning the structure of this chapter, I shall begin by explaining main power structures and hierarchies that are of help in understanding participants’ experiences. I will thereafter elaborate on ideas and normative constructions of what may be considered an ideal worker in many organizational settings that are inherent to those power structures and hierarchies. This ideal worker has a specific role in the power structures and hierarchies that will have been introduced in the first section. The aim of the third section is then to discuss constructions of those people who do not conform to this norm of the ideal worker. This is then followed by explaining relations of sexualization and sexual harassment, which are consequences of structures and hierarchies that are revolving around the ideal worker and constructions of people outside that norm. These sections will
also refer back to participants’ experiences and how they can be related to and seen from a viewpoint departing at the social structures, norms and constructions that are discussed in this chapter.

5.1 Power structures and hierarchies

Power structures and hierarchies are central in any organization and employment context and subordinate certain people in relation to others who find themselves in superior locations within those structures (Bradley & Healy, 2008: 49). According to de los Reyes (2017), “discrimination and inequality are not considered anomalies in an otherwise fair order, but rather are seen as central components in the organization and distribution of material and symbolic resources in society” (de los Reyes, 2017: 16), especially when investigated from an intersectional perspective. These “inequality regimes” (Acker, 2006: 443) that produce and uphold inequality based on differentiated gender, class, race, bodily impairment, sexual orientation, nationality/citizenship and other categories, consist in organizations’ norms, practices, policies and processes that are intertwined with one another (Acker, 2006: 443). As such, social divisions play, to varying degrees and in diverse ways, a vital role in organizations and often hinder equal opportunities as they relate to obstacles that people face if they are constructed as inferior or systematically disadvantaged due to their belonging to one or more of these divisions. It is important to note, however, that most structures and norms that cause inequality in organizations remain largely unrecognized (de los Reyes, 2017: 14). This, of course, makes it especially difficult to uncover and counter such structures and norms and change organizational culture in favor of equality.

While these power structures are closely related to post-colonial relations and subordinate, racialize and stigmatize women from outside “the West” as strangers to Western organizational culture as a consequence of this (de los Reyes, 2017: 17), I shall not focus on historical and political origins of hierarchies and power structures, but on their contemporary impact and manifestations in order to link them more closely to participants’ experiences and remain within the scope of this study.

Power structures and hierarchies are interwoven with the overarching concept of class. Class can be seen as “enduring and systematic differences in access to and control over resources for provisioning and survival” (Acker, 2006: 444) and is thus especially relevant within the employment context while also very much based on historical and political circumstances of certain groups and their positioning within society. Class is highly entangled with and encompassing other social divisions, however. An example of this is, as Acker (2006) explains, how gender and class were, and often still are, overlapping to a high degree concerning professions and positioning in organizations.
in many contexts and localities: until recently, almost all superior positions, high-skilled and simultaneously prestigious jobs as well as high-income work was very much reserved for men who posed as managers, bosses, lawyers and doctors, while positions as secretaries and nurses were reserved for women who had male superiors and received lower wages. With these structures also came highly gendered and sexualized assumptions, attitudes and practices within organizations, which also reflect class in society as a whole. While a gendered class structure like this is not as clear-cut as before anymore, much of this still prevails. It is not only gender, however, that is essential for class, but people are also systematically excluded, disadvantaged and positioned lower in class relations based on other divisions like their ethnicity, origins and skin color (Acker, 2006: 444-445).

Collins (1998), for instance, emphasizes the centrality of age in hierarchies and internalization of power structures according to this, as seniority in age is one of the “fundamental principles of social organization” (Collins, 1998: 65). This is reflected in the traditional family ideal which is led by the privileged male, senior father, and further consists of a subordinate female mother figure, who is typically younger in age, and dependent young children that have, again, implications of different roles according to age and gender (Collins, 1998: 65). Such power relations exist, however, not only within the family, but manifest themselves outside the family as internalized in social norms and attitudes.

In organizational hierarchies and power relations, however, social divisions and inequalities related to them cannot be viewed separately or out of context: here, too, an intersectional lens is necessary in order to grasp “interwoven logics of power [] in specific work contexts” (de los Reyes, 2017: 17) fully. Young adult migrant women may be especially disadvantaged in power structures at work. The intersection of gender and origins, ethnicity or race, for instance, often implies a poor positioning in Western class and organizational structures. Bradley & Healy (2008) noted in their intersectional study dealing with the European and North American context that ethnic minority women are situated worse than their white female or ethnic minority male counterparts in “the gendered and ethnici[z]ed occupational hierarchy” (Bradley & Healy, 2008: 49).

How do these power structures and hierarchies manifest themselves, though? Hierarchies and power structures that are present in the work context result in inequality which Acker (2006) defines more concretely as

[…] systematic disparities between participants in power and control over goals, resources, and outcomes; workplace decisions such as how to organize work; opportunities for promotion and interesting work; security in employment and benefits; pay and other monetary rewards; respect; and pleasures in work and work relations (Acker, 2006: 443).
According to a study that was commissioned by the German Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency, the workplace as the life sphere in which experiences of discrimination are most common (Lüders et al., 2016: 10) and people with migrant background for instance often have poorer working conditions and are assigned less interesting and demanding work. An example for this is that a cleaning contractor distributed tasks of cleaning toilets to employees with a migrant background while tasks that were considered more pleasant were assigned to their co-workers without a migrant background (Lüders et al., 2016: 6-7). Regarding the aspect of unequal income, inequality in pay is not only based on the sort of occupations and positions that women are employed in, but also an on average lower income for women working in the same job as men (Acker, 2006: 448). Consequently, the gender pay gap in Germany currently lies at 21 percent (Destatis, 2018) and at about 20 percent in Austria (Statistik Austria, 2018). Regarding women that find themselves at the intersection of gender and origins, Hofer et al. (2013) for instance found that women with a non-European migrant background in Austria have lower incomes not only than women without a migrant background, but also than men with as well as without a migrant background. As this income inequality also remains with an increase of the duration which these women have lived in Austria, it becomes clear that the nature of these inequalities is structural (Hofer et al., 2013: 98-100). Acker furthermore speaks about sexual harassment as the result of power structures as well as more subtle forms of inequality such as described in the following passage:

White men may devalue and exclude white women and people of color by not listening to them in meetings, by not inviting them to join a group going out for a drink after work, by not seeking their opinions on workplace problems (Acker, 2006: 451).

Such practices also have negative consequences for workers who are subjects to inequality in terms of career opportunities. Women and especially women of color suffer, according to Fearfull & Kamenou (2006), often from exclusion from important networks in organizations that are essential for advancing in one’s career and that are mainly occupied and run by white men who are the main beneficiaries of such supportive networks. A consequence of organizational hierarchies and social power structures is that “[w]omen in general are less likely than men to have powerful and influential network connections” (Fearfull & Kamenou, 2006: 886). In their study about ethnic minority women in organizations, Fearfull & Kamenou (2006) explain that many of their participants found it hard to penetrate such informal, exclusive networks that are central to establishing fruitful, career-fueling work relationships. This, of course, also has implications for one’s positioning in the organizational formal hierarchy: Bradley & Healy’s (2008) study showed that in the United Kingdom, the percentage of white men in management positions is significantly higher than the percentage of men belonging to an ethnic minority, while white women are even less likely than them to hold such a position, followed by people who are at the intersection of both being a woman and belonging to an ethnic
minority and thus have the poorest representation in management levels. In Germany, many women with a migrant background in fact believe to be at a disadvantage regarding career opportunities because of their origins and gender, as was found by a study conducted by the German state (Granato, 2004: 45).

The structures and hierarchies discussed in this section are relevant in explaining this study’s participants’ experiences if social norms and organizational culture in the German-speaking context relate to them. I do believe that hierarchies and power structures in this context are closely linked to the described ones, and another indication of this are the results of a study of global scope in the field of economics, the GLOBE project (2016, standing for “Global Leadership & Organizational Behavior Effectiveness”) that deals with culture, leadership and organizational effectiveness and which collected data by interviewing management level employees in different industries, conducting group discussions in companies as well as analyzing further literature. The GLOBE project also clusters Austria and Germany together into the “Geramic cluster”, which furthermore includes Switzerland and the Netherlands (House et al., 2004: 185), and, for instance, describes the cluster’s overall societal, cultural and organizational norms as “characterized by a strong tendency for standardization and rules, hierarchy, assertiveness, and gender inequality” (Szabo et al., 2002: 64). In comparison to other clusters, it rates low in gender egalitarianism, institutional collectivism as well as group and family collectivism, while rating high in masculinity which makes it high in gender discrimination and gender differentiation. Furthermore, leadership styles and preferences are similar in Germany and Austria in their favoring of strong, charismatic and autocratic leadership (Szabo et al., 2002: 64-66). These factors moreover have strong implications for expectations specific to gender in organizations as well as for equal opportunity practices and attitudes (House et al., 2004: 344-345). Consequently, the previous elaborations on hierarchies and power structures are especially relevant in the German-speaking social and organizational context and are thus central to experiences that were shared as part of this study.

The power structures and hierarchies that have been discussed in this section offer a way of understanding participants’ experiences since they create the framework for the organizational environments they find themselves in and thus for their work life. Many of the inequalities that are a consequence of these relations in fact are related to concerns of participants of this study and their gender, origins and age, intersections of these categories as well as more subtle class belongings are central in power structures that cause issues of unequal recognition and treatment as equal peers. Young adult migrant women are especially poorly positioned in such hierarchies. Their gender is a disadvantage to them within male-dominated power relations in which women are structurally disadvantaged, and their origins outside the West cause them to be even more likely to be
discriminated against in such hierarchies. Their age not only constructs them as subordinate in structures that empower people, and especially men, who are senior in age, it often implies a point in their work life in which they are not settled in their career and are dependent on co-workers and superiors.

Examples of manifestations of such power structures and hierarchies that may allocate participants low in the organizational hierarchy are plentiful in the material that was gathered for this study. Often, participants were treated different to co-workers and disadvantaged connected to their age, gender and origins which indicates their subordinate positioning in such power relations. It also became clear that many of this study’s participants encountered unequal career opportunities and unequal income. Many of them were also being subject to sexual harassment and found themselves in dependencies towards their employers. In the most extreme case, a woman was laid off due to her origins. Unequal power relations are furthermore reflected in participants’ experiences that concern the lack of women, migrants and especially migrant women in higher positions in their organizations. These examples can be interpreted as manifestations of and caused by social and organizational power structures that are especially dominant in the German-speaking context.

From the contents of this section, one can argue that existing power structures and hierarchies that affect each person in an organizational setting stand in stark contrast to Fraser’s understanding of social justice: a just society in which everybody is an equal peer that is recognized equally and with equality regarding the distribution of resources and opportunities inhibits the structuring of society according to social divisions. The German-speaking context is probably especially unfit to match the concept of social justice due to its high degree of inequality and hierarchization, and this is also reflected in this study’s participants’ experiences.

5.2 Normative constructions of the ideal worker

Embedded deeply within power structures and hierarchies in organizational culture is the norm of an ideal worker which is helpful in further exploring participants’ experiences as young adult migrant women may not conform to this norm. This especially explains experiences participants had concerning them not being regarded as a “normal” employees in their jobs and not fitting the norm. The ideal worker, however, is situated at very top of organizational hierarchies and is, in many ways, the only worker accepted as truly “normal”, desired in an organization, competent and suitable for superior occupations and positions, while he also dominates career networks and is likely to receive a higher income than all workers who deviate from the norm.
But who is this ideal worker? Lorde (2007) speaks of a “mythical norm” which is constructed as being “white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, christian, and financially secure” (Lorde, 2007: 116). “It is within this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within this society” (Lorde, 2007: 116), and if a person deviates from this norm in any one or more ways, this person is already not conforming to this mythical norm anymore. Swan & Fox (2019) furthermore highlight in their elaboration on norms of an ideal worker that this norm is characterized by able-bodiedness while simultaneously being “profoundly disembodied” (Swan & Fox, 2010: 579). Sexuality itself, thus, as well as bodily functions, are detached from the ideal worker, which distances women who menstruate, are oversexualized, are pregnant, and give birth even farther from this constructed norm. I would furthermore add to this norm of an ideal worker the social divisions of citizenship and native tongue, i.e. the ideal worker is characterized by having his origins in “the West” and holding the national or a privileged citizenship (i.e. for instance European Union citizenship in this context) as well as by being a native speaker (i.e. German native speaker in this context).

To this mythical norm, however, relates a number of attributes and behaviors that are associated with the ideal worker that create deeply androcentric and ethnocentric organizational environments and cultures (Fearfull & Kamenou, 2006: 896). Central to this is the concept of hegemonic masculinity which revolves around a specific, heterosexual image of masculinity. This is because attributes and behavioristic patterns that are typically considered masculine or are associated with men are part of the norm of the ideal worker. They are as such internalized as the standard, neutral and universal way of acting and are expected in order to be fit to succeed in an organizational setting (Pompper, 2014: 108). Some favored, masculine attributes are, for instance strength, competitiveness and aggressiveness (Acker, 2006: 445) as well as tough-mindedness, lack of emotion and analytic ability (Pompper, 2014: 102). Other traits that are typically judged to be masculine are objectivity and capabilities of detachment and diplomacy (Hughes, 2004: 536). The body as highly gendered, however, is detached from notions of masculinity, and the mind, i.e. one’s thinking and reasoning, is much more representative of masculinity (Ahmed, 2000: 40-41). A person that matches this masculinity is furthermore somebody who is

[…] totally dedicated to the work and who has no responsibilities for children or family demands other than earning a living. Eight hours of continuous work away from the living space, arrival on time, total attention to the work, and long hours if requested are all expectations that incorporate the image of the unencumbered worker (Acker, 2006: 448).

With this comes also a norm of appearance and dressing, which may be perceived as professional, but is implicitly a white, masculine, Western way of appearing. Even organizations without a formal dress code mostly require their workers in an unspoken manner to adapt to such a norm in order to be accepted (Kamenou & Fearfull, 2006: 169).
Any person who does not fit into this norm – be it because of one’s gender, or because one is a man that does yet not conform to the desired model of masculinity – is disempowered by it: it limits one’s suitability not only for holding a superior position, but also decreases one’s importance for the organization (Uggen & Blackstone, 2004: 67). Therefore, other, non-standard groups of people that cannot or do not want to live up to expectations of the ideal, masculine worker, such as women, LGBTQ+ and racialized people as well as some men, are “assessed as opposite and lesser” (Pompper, 2014: 102).

A consequence of this constructed norm is that organizations and their policies and practices are designed in a way that requires masculinity in order to perform well and advance. Networks in organizations are deeply characterized by this norm and in order to be included in such networks, adapting as much as possible to this norm is necessary (Kamenou & Fearfull, 2006: 169). Career opportunities, for instance, are centered around male and furthermore white work patterns which make it especially hard for ethnic minority women, who are at a structural disadvantage and may face difficulties due to stereotypes and racism at work, to advance in their careers (Fearfull & Kamenou, 2006: 885-896). To exemplify this, Pompper (2014) found that women are “routinely [] urged to enroll in assertiveness and management training programs where they are taught stereotypically masculine behaviors” (Pompper, 2014: 104). People who do not conform to the mythical norm, thus, are encouraged and even expected to strive for and change to approach this masculine standard in order to fit into the organizational setting. As a result of this pressure, many women who do not fit into this norm may feel, try, and proceed in adapting in a way that brings them closer to the ideal and conforming to organizational culture. This may include a change in behaving, dressing, speaking, or even in their attitudes (Kamenou & Fearfull, 2006: 158-159). Kamenou (2008) found that this kind of adapting and acting in a “non-ethnic” and “white” manner was often seen as “demonstrat[ing] appropriate professional behavio[rs]” (Kamenou, 2008: 105-106).

Yet again, there are indications that the German-speaking region may be especially problematic regarding the construction of an ideal worker. Germany and Austria are rating high in masculinity, also in comparison to places like the UK and the US where much of the previous research used in this thesis originates (Hofstede, 2001: 294). This implies a high gender differentiation and gender discrimination as well as a competitive mindset in organizations while in leadership, strong, autocratic and charismatic behaviors are predominant (Szabo et al., 2002: 64). In this study, masculine societies as this cluster are furthermore characterized by the lack of equal opportunities for men and women and favor masculine working patterns, and there is a higher acceptance of machismo styles in leadership (House et al., 2004: 344). Moreover, Hofstede (2001), whose cultural dimensions were used as a starting point for the GLOBE project, highlights expectations regarding distinct contrasts
and differences between women’s and men’s behaviors and traits as well as a tendency to be more skeptical towards others in masculine societies (Hofstede, 2001: 291-297). This study furthermore found that in a society which is characterized by masculinity, “knowing influential people counts more than ability” (Hofstede, 2001: 291). This aggravates the situation for those who are excluded from networks that are central to one’s career and that are, however, dominated by those who conform to the norm.

The material gathered throughout this study suggests that participants experienced inequality related to this norm of the ideal worker and expectations of masculinity. Young adult migrant women do, in fact, not fit into this mythical norm in many ways: all identified as women, many of them were not white and none of them originated in “the West” or were native German speakers, while due to their age and life circumstances probably few of them were financially wholly secure. There is a multitude of examples of how these, and other categories such as their legal status in the place they live in as well as non-masculine characteristics and behaviors, fueled inequality for them at work.

Many experiences that participants told me about indicated that they were not perceived as workers who fit the norm. I noted, for instance, that frequently, participants highlighted their being different by including themselves in a group of others which they referred to as a vague “we” of persons that are different and often discriminated against based on this difference from a norm which they did not define, but which probably comes close to the norm discussed in this section. Further examples of participants deviating from this mythical norm for instance include Dewi’s experiences in which customers of the railway company that she works at doubted her employment. She related this closely to her not conforming to the norm of a typical train attendant, and this overlaps with the concept of the ideal worker: she is neither Austrian, nor male or white. Elena was moreover labelled and specifically introduced as a “special” employee, while Samira explained how she believes she may have to behave in a more masculine way if she wanted to be a team leader. In a society which is dominated by a masculine norm, this makes sense since masculinity is associated with a variety of attributes and behaviors that are constructed as necessary in order to hold a position of leadership. Moreover, acting and dressing in a “professional” way, which would be, according to this chapter’s suggestion of understanding participants’ experiences, getting closer to norms of the ideal worker, was a recurring theme during the conduction of this study as a mechanism of being accepted and successful as well as in order not to be discriminated against. Examples of this are wearing short skirts or dressing in a way which is connected to how one would go to a club to, for instance, which is typically associated as a female way of dressing, was labelled as unprofessional and inappropriate for the workplace and thus a hindrance in being successful and not discriminated against by Elena. It was furthermore an issue for some participants that they did not have the right citizenship and legal status.
in order to hold the position they would like, as for instance Anastasia was hindered in her career opportunities due to a visa that kept her from working full-time. This can also be explained if assuming that their citizenships and legal status were not conforming to the norm that is expected in order to excel at work.

5.3 Constructions of those outside the norm

The world is often, however, constructed in simplistic dualisms, and “[a]s women and men go about their everyday work, they routinely use gender-, race-, and class-based assumptions about those with whom they interact” (Acker, 2006: 451). So, when the norm of an ideal worker is constructed in specific ways, where does this leave young adult migrant women?

From many viewpoints, they are oppositional to this desired ideal and this causes their subordination in organizational power structures and encompasses a variety of attributions that disadvantage them. In the dualism of the two, mutually exclusive opposites of masculinity and femininity, women are excluded from adhering of norms of being masculine, and automatically associated with femininity that comes with assumptions of subordination and passivity. Women tend to furthermore be stereotyped at work as good at social interaction, glamorous, caring, and sexually attractive (Bradley & Healy, 2008: 12). In contrast to men’s behavior that is perceived to be unemotional and objective, women are associated with being traits such as being overly emotional, emotion-driven and also publicly displaying these emotions (Hughes, 2004: 536). Cockburn’s (1991) study on men’s discourses about gender differences at work moreover showed men to classify women as better at relating and more sympathetic regarding staff feelings, but also as not capable of authority and too emotional for leadership. Additionally, women may be assumed not to be able to cope with stress that management positions bring with them (Pompper, 2014: 105). In the dualism of body versus mind, women are perceived as “overwhelmingly embodied” (Swan & Fox, 2010: 579) both in that they are sexualized and associated with bodily processes that are undesired in the traditional work context, as for instance menstruation, breast feeding, and being pregnant (Pompper, 2014: 102).

Nevertheless, gender stereotypes are also racialized (Bradley & Healy, 2008: 22), and as Kamenou & Fearfull (2006) argue, ethnic minority women are especially marginalized in their construction in organizations since the intersection that they find themselves at is often aggravating and deepening gender stereotypes while also related to specific stereotypes and assumptions about them. These often, in fact, stretch beyond ethnicity and gender and make, often ungrounded, assumptions about one’s culture, and label women who are racialized as Asian, for instance, as
submissive, subdued, and without ambitions regarding their career development (Fearfull & Kamenou, 2006: 894; Kamenou & Fearfull, 2006: 157), while women who are racialized as Eastern European are often ascribed attributes like good housekeeping and availability for marriage (Lutz, 2011: 153). Ethnic minority women may furthermore be constructed as in need of protection and overly sexual (Kamenou & Fearfull, 2006: 161). In constructions of embodiedness, racialized women are perceived as overly embodied, and this may lead on the one side to their objectification and a high visibility sexually and physically, while on the other side having negative impacts on equality at work as it leaves them invisible regarding their professional, organizational and intellectual relevance (Forbes, 2009: 606-607).

De los Reyes (2017) furthermore describes how migrant women are subjects to inequality at work as they are stereotyped as uneducated, unqualified and unskilled. This is closely related to barriers that women, people belonging to an ethnic minority and all the more women that are at the intersection of both gender and ethnicity face regarding their acceptance at work: unlike co-workers conforming more to the norm of the ideal worker, they do not enjoy “their organis[iz]ations’ recognition of their capabilities as fundamental components of their core, loyal workforce” (Kamenou & Fearfull, 2006: 156) without it being subject to doubt until proven otherwise.

These perceptions, assumptions and stereotypes regarding women in general and ethnic minority, racialized and migrant women in particular can also be found in the experiences of participants of my research. Sometimes, assumptions of their lack of competence was based on difficulties of formally getting one’s qualifications approved, while other times, assumptions of inferiority in the profession were solely based on participants’ gender, age and origins. Several participants told me about doubt of their professionality, competence and suitedness for their jobs; Nabila experienced difficulties in being accepted as a capable and trustworthy teacher at the school she worked at and first had to prove, despite her qualifications and formal acceptance for the position, that she was an equally competent teacher; Samira pointed out that because of her origins, she is often labelled as “unalphabetized” and it is assumed that she is not able to do tasks and have knowledge due to her background; and Dewi talked about how in her being a woman made her not fit for some tasks which can be related to perceptions of femininity. Furthermore, she had experiences of having to prove herself in order to be accepted as an equal worker: while other employees’ abilities were not questioned to begin with, she felt that it was central for her acceptance as equal peer and being respected in her work that she achieved above-average and even excellent results in exams that she and her co-workers had to take. She moreover talked about being perceived as overly sexual and being associated with specific stereotypes that are intersectional in nature based on her racialization as an Asian woman. Similarly, Natalya was constructed as a target for sexual harassment, and thus
discrimination, by a customer which was related to the specific intersection of her being a Russian woman which led her harasser to project certain stereotypes and assumptions onto her.

From a social justice perspective, both constructions of the ideal worker and of migrant women that have been discussed are clearly fueling misrecognition and inequality. Fraser even calls androcentrism “a major feature of gender injustice” (Fraser, 2007: 26). The different and in the organizational context highly relevant constructions, assumptions and stereotypes that were discussed in these two sections are part of value and behavior patterns that create status inequalities that privilege some people, social divisions, attributes and behaviors over others and inhibit an interaction as equal peers. This consequently strongly contrasts with this study’s understanding of social justice.

5.4 Sexualization and sexual harassment

Another construction of young adult migrant women which has already been mentioned and which shall be discussed more in depth in this section is that they are, more so than other groups, often especially prone to oversexualization. A key consequence of oversexualization is that young adult migrant women maybe targeted more for sexual harassment. Young migrant women’s harassment at work must therefore also be investigated from an intersectional viewpoint since, as de los Reyes (2017) points out, being subject to the different forms of oppression that come with structures of age, gender as well as appearance (which is related to both a person’s ethnicity and skin color) increases one’s vulnerability to sexual harassment. A central cause of sexual harassment are thus power structures in which gender and age empower adult men that conform with the specific form of heterosexual masculinity which is privileged in organizations over younger workers, and especially women, and may trigger harassing behaviors. “When these behaviors are severe or pervasive and concurrent in time and place, they constitute a syndrome of behavioral sexual harassment.” (Uggen & Blackstone, 2004: 68) In this, young adult women are not only viewed as vulnerable, but also attractive victims which exacerbates their situation further. Power structures are thus lived through sexual harassment in a belief system in which masculine norms define men as sexually aggressive and women as passive, indirect and unfathomable and thus normalize harassers’ behavior (Uggen & Blackstone, 2004: 66-68).

Racialized gender stereotypes further increase the risk for sexual harassment for migrant women who may thus be constructed as suitable targets (Forbes, 2009: 583). There may, for instance, be certain stereotypical perceptions of migrant women. Kamenou & Fearfull (2006) found that participants in one of their studies faced “certain sexual and racial stereotypes that migrant women
have to deal with when they come into contact with white people, and specifically white men, in 
organizations.” (Kamenou & Fearfull, 2006: 161) An example of this is submissiveness and 
inferiority of Asian women in relation to “their men” that is linked to gender, ethnicity and religion 
(Kamenou & Fearfull, 2006: 161).

In fact, studies have shown that women of color are experiencing more sexual harassment 
than white women (Forbes, 2009: 582-583). McLaughlin et al.’s (2012) quantitative research about 
sexual harassment at the work also indicates that young adult migrant women’s origins and 
racialization may increase their risk for sexual harassment. Especially women who work in 
environments in which predominantly males are employed experience are at higher risk as women’s 
marginalized position in an environment which is so profoundly dominated by masculinity may 
isolate them and increase their vulnerability to sexual harassment (McLaughlin et al., 2012: 638-641).

According to a study by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA, 2014) 
dealing with violence against women that talked to 42,000 women of all EU member states, sexual 
harassment differs greatly dependent on a person’s age. The study furthermore found that women 
between 18 and 29, an age group that largely overlaps age-wise with the persons who are the subject 
of this study, are the group most vulnerable to sexual harassment in all but one member state (which 
is Luxembourg). More than one third of all women in that age group who participated in the FRA 
survey had, for instance, experienced sexual harassment in the year predating the study, while the 
percentage of women between 30 and 39 years was already much lower at 24 percent. Numbers keep 
decreasing further with participants’ age: between 40 and 49 years, it was at 20 percent; between 50 
and 59 years at 15 percent and at above 60 years at 9 percent (FRA, 2014: 106-108). The centrality 
of one’s age regarding sexual harassment moreover becomes clear when disintegrating different 
forms of sexual harassment: the survey found that 43 percent of women between 18 and 29 years old 
who participated had experienced unwelcome touching, hugging or kissing in the last year, while the 
percentage of the age group of women between 30 and 39 years lies at 18 percent. Similarly, 47 
percent of women between 18 and 29 years were subject to inappropriate staring or leering, 39 percent 
to sexually suggestive comments or jokes, and 43 percent to intrusive comments about their physical 
appearance when less than one fourth of the women belonging to the age group starting at 30 years 
experienced these forms of harassment (FRA, 2014: 108).

The FRA study also confirms the importance of one’s origins: it found that women with a 
migrant background are affected more by sexual harassment than their counterparts without a migrant 
background (FRA, 2014: 189). The study also found that migrant women worry more about sexual 
assault than women without a migrant background (FRA, 2014: 143).
Furthermore, the workplace as a place profoundly shaped by hierarchies and power relations is especially prone to sexual harassment. The FRA study found that almost a third of their participants that had experienced sexual harassment before were harassed by a co-worker, superior or customer, and only the category “unknown perpetrator” was answered more frequently than “somebody from the employment context” to the question of who harassed them in the most serious incident of sexual harassment since the age of fifteen. Additionally, irregular work and work with precarious conditions and contracts are representing a place of high risk for sexual harassment (FRA, 2014: 111-114).

Sexualization does, however, also have a multitude of other negative consequences for young adult migrant women, and experiences sexual harassment may aggravate those. Therefore, sexualization and sexual harassment are not only results of unequal power, but also cause to further inequality. By shifting the focus in the mind-body-dualism from mind to body and emphasizing women’s physical attributes, one’s credibility, professionality and relevancy in the job is reduced, for instance, and one is thus placed in a subordinate position in the organizational hierarchy (Kamenou & Fearfull, 2016: 161). Forbes moreover explains:

[…] [W]omen who are sexualized or are victims of sexual harassment at work experience isolation and lack of access to mentoring and informal networks, which may also limit the quality of their interpersonal contacts at work and cause them to quit their jobs. Stereotyped views of men and women, then, often pervasive in organizations that are male dominated, serve as a key barrier for women’s career outcomes and well-being at work (Forbes, 2009: 583).

Sexual harassment can furthermore create an intimidating and offensive work environment that interferes with one’s ability to do one’s job. This is not only the case for people who have been harassed directly, but also to other workers that may, for instance, fear to become subject to harassment (Uggen & Blackstone, 2004: 65).

The coherences presented in this section are reflected in the experiences that participants of this study shared with me. Several women I talked to experienced sexual harassment at work and the intersection of gender, age and origins they find themselves at and power structures that influence them may help us understand their experiences. Participants as young adult migrant women are thus especially prone to sexualization and sexual harassment, and an example of this may be Dewi and her experiences as she is probably at an especially high risk: not only is she a young adult and frequently perceived as younger than she is and works as a train attendant with almost only men as co-workers and superiors, she is also racialized as an Asian woman and therefore often stereotyped in a specific way that sexualizes her. Natalya’s case, however, in which she was harassed by a much older customer in an irregular employment, may be characterized through age relations and a vulnerability that is inherent to irregular work. While women, and especially migrant women, are constructed as embodied in comparison to men at work, anyway, her profession as a sports trainer is even more so
embodied. Thus, this may even increase Natalya’s risk for harassment in such a workplace in addition to the irregularity of this work. In general, most participants are highly dependent on their current employment as they pointed out how difficult it is to find a job as a migrant woman and Samira, for instance, is in need of an occupation for her visa, while others are financially relying on having work. This dependency, additionally to their often subordinate position in the organizational hierarchy due to their early point in career (which is of course also related to their being a young adult), thus creates a situation in which they are even more so prone to sexual harassment. How participants dealt with the risk of sexual harassment is also interesting in this context: many, such as Samira and Elena, tried to act in accordance with norms of masculinity in order to decrease their vulnerability in hierarchies defined by this masculinity, such as behaving and dressing more in a more “appropriate” and “professional”.
6. Conclusion

In order to conclude this study, I will now return to the aim and the research questions that I presented in the introductory chapter and give some answers to and reflections on them, also taking into account methodological and theoretical considerations that framed the study. I will then give some conclusions regarding the limitations of this research, further research that is required as well as an outlook.

The aim of this study was to gain insights and explore young adult migrant women’s experiences at work in Germany and Austria by conducting and analyzing interviews with young adult migrant women. Part of this was understanding these experiences also in relation to a larger social context. Revisiting the research questions that have been introduced in the beginning of this thesis one by one, I will now summarize the insights that have been gained and the ways that young adult migrant women’s experiences have been explored in this study.

To the first question, i.e. which experiences, both of positive and negative nature, people have at work that find themselves at the intersection of being a woman, migrant and young adult, there is not a single answer, but much more a kaleidoscope of possible answers. Experiences of young adult migrant women at work depend very much on a sheer endless variety of factors. Not only do their experiences depend on their specific background, context and other social divisions they belong to such as class and citizenship as well as on in which way they build intersections and how these intersections function, but also on how their experiences are constructed. As such, it is important not only how a researcher approaches the topic but also how the person whose experiences are explored constructs these lived experiences. Factors that are central may furthermore include the person’s personality and character, the organization, sector, locality and context they are employed at, as well as the people that are involved, such as their co-workers, superiors and customers. One should therefore be very careful not to make any generalizations as the subject’s specific background, context and situation make every person’s experiences unique. Therefore, I can give no definite answer to this research question. I could, however, gain insights into the experiences the young adult migrant women have at work that participated in this study which can give indications what other young adult migrant women experience.

Therefore, I give a short summary of some of the experiences participants had. To begin with, not everybody experiences or perceives inequality. In many ways, participants were content with their work, their opportunities and the way they were treated there. On the contrary, one’s age, gender and
origins outside the norm may even be cause to positive effects and discrimination. One’s origins might for instance spark interest and initiate a welcoming culture which can be of advantage regarding networking in one’s organization. One’s background may furthermore be connected with other assets and skills, may they be actual or just be perceived, in the job. This are for instance additional language skills related to one’s origins as well as the association of women with attributes like empathy and having a good eye for aesthetics.

Participants did, however, foremost focus on negative discrimination and inequality that they experience at work. Their experiences were often dependent not only on one of the social divisions of age, origins and gender, but the specific intersection and synergies of several of them as well as other categories such as nationality and legal status of their employment. They ranged from overt discrimination because of their origins outside the German-speaking region to more subtle forms of inequality like facing difficulties gaining the same recognition as other co-workers. Participants of this study told me stories about how, for instance, they were, especially in the beginning of their respective employment, not accepted as a “normal” and equal worker, and how there were shortcomings in being recognized in one’s professionalism and competence. It was therefore often difficult for them to find their place at work and they had to prove themselves when others did not have to do so. Many participants also saw issues regarding equality in career opportunities as well as income. Other manifestations of inequality include their oversexualization, sexual harassment, and dependencies on their employer due to difficulties of finding a job as well as disadvantages connected to their nationality. Often, stereotyping and other assumptions about them because of their age, origins and gender were central to such forms of discrimination.

It therefore becomes clear that young adult migrant women’s experiences of inequality are diverse. This brings us to the second research question of this study: How do young adult migrant women react to and deal with experiences of inequality and discrimination? Just as their experiences are diverse, so are the reactions and ways of dealing that participants of this study, and thus probably young adult migrant women in general, show. Central to results of this study was that participants displayed a high amount of agency not only in the reactions they told me about, but also in the way they spoke about their experiences which can be seen as an agentic act in itself. Concrete, immediate reactions to inequality that participants told me about were for instance changes in behavior, such as dressing differently in order to avoid further discrimination, as well as verbal confrontation of people that had treated them in an unequal manner. Participants furthermore adapted a positive attitude in order to cope with the challenges they face and put extra effort and work into establishing their place at their workplace and proving that they were competent and equal workers. Regarding the way participants shared their experiences with me as a research, it seemed like they did not construct
themselves as victims, and even though many saw structural issues of inequality, they mainly approached their experiences and reflected upon them from an individual, situational perspective. Part of this was, for instance, trying to understand their own role in their experiences and actively trying to tackle problems they faced, as well as trying to understand the concrete causes of inequality which sometimes involved rationalizing and legitimizing discrimination as well as showing empathy for people or organizations that did not treat them as an equal peer. This sometimes even involved self-blaming, such as considering that one’s behavior might not have been appropriate or professional and thus provoked discrimination.

So while participants did offer ways of understanding their experiences, I also introduced some further thoughts on how experiences of inequality and negative discrimination can be explained. Part of this were other scholars’ concepts and previous research that can be seen in relation to participants’ experiences. This can be connected to the third research question which was the following: How can young adult migrant women’s experiences be understood in relation to a broader social context and underlying social structures and norms? A possible way of understanding the material that was gathered in this study that I presented consists in relating it to underlying social structures, norms and constructions. These revolved around power structures and hierarchies that systematically disadvantage and subordinate certain people, like young adult migrant women such as participants of this study, in organizational settings in terms of for instance networking, career opportunities, income and interesting work. Power relations of the context that is subject of this study, i.e. the German-speaking region of Austria and Germany, are probably especially prone to being characterized in such a way.

These structures and hierarchies are both andro- and ethnocentric and favor people over subordinated workers that conform to a specific norm of the ideal worker that is defined by for instance being male, white, financially secure, holding the right citizenship and originating in the region. This norm is also related to a normative masculinity that is associated with attributes that necessary for one’s success in the predominant organization culture like objectivity, detachment, aggressivity, tough-mindedness, as well as an analytical and dedicated way of working. Young adult migrant women, however, are in many ways not perceived to live up to expectations of this norm of the ideal worker. This comes with a variety of other constructions that they are subject to. While the ideal worker is disembodied, they are overly embodied and sexualized and often perceived to be very emotional, less educated and unskilled as well as passive and submissive. A consequence of this is that they are constructed as inferior in the organizational setting and less suited for superior positions. Their treatment is often according to these assumptions and causes discrimination. Likewise, sexual harassment of young adult migrant women can be explained by such structures, norms and
constructions as well as by their location at this specific intersection and stereotypes that often come with it. Participants’ experiences of inequality might thus be understood in the frame of these social structures, norms and constructions that place them in a subordinate situation at their workplaces.

Throughout this study, I have furthermore found participants’ experiences, especially in relation to underlying social structures, to be in discordance with an understanding of social justice as the one considered here. This is because in order to live up to demands of Fraser’s concept of social justice, there must be a parity of participation in terms of distribution as well as recognition of every person as an equal peer. This, however, is, as was shown in this study, not the case as many young adult migrant women, such as participants of this thesis, are disadvantaged.

There were, however, a number of limitations that I encountered in my research which can also serve as aspirations for further research. The scope of this format inhibited, for instance, the involvement of participants beyond the gathering of the material through interviews so that the power asymmetry between them and me as a researcher remained relatively large. Moreover, it may have been interesting to draw from a larger number of theoretical concepts in order to gain a deeper understanding of participants’ experiences, like for instance systematical discrimination of migrants in a regime built on nations and borders that advantages certain citizenships over others. A more profound analysis of participants’ ways of reacting to inequality in relation to concepts of resistance would furthermore have possibly been interesting. It would likely also have been helpful for further insights to gain a deeper understanding of participants’ workplaces by researching their organizations in depth and for example talking to other people in their organizational setting. I thus suggest the need for further research, especially in the German-speaking region. This includes for instance researching specific organizational settings from a perspective of social justice – not diversity management – in order to gain deeper insights in how discriminatory structures in a concrete organization, and finding out how different factors such as sector, low-skilled versus high-skilled, and make-up of the workforce influence young adult migrant women’s experiences. More research could also be conducted in how resistance by young adult migrant women functions and what impacts it has; as well as around bodily functions such as menstruation, pregnancy and breastfeeding and which experiences young adult migrant women have in relation to them in the organizational setting.

Nevertheless, this study was extremely useful for me in understanding young adult migrant women’s experiences at work. Additionally, I hope to have contributed to the field by not only applying an intersectional approach taking into account gender and origins, but furthermore investigating how this can be related to age. This study has furthermore explored migrant women’s experiences that go beyond ethnicity but are related to one’s being a migrant while starting at a point
at which much research ends as it is investigating what happens after one has successfully entered into work life. In this thesis, it has also been demonstrated that the topic is profoundly complex related to the particularities of each person’s character, context, workplace, background, social divisions and the way in which they intersect as well as how these factors play together. But this complexity does not reduce the urgency of the injustice that many young adult migrant women face and there is a need to tackle these issues and therefore research the topic further. It became clear, however, that change is not easy as underlying structures, norms and constructions are deeply embedded in the social reality and such an endeavor of such scope will probably take much time and effort. It seems to me, however, from both this study and personal experience, that awareness for inequality is rising and this is an essential part of changing the structures that cause injustice.

In this, awareness for inequality and what attitudes and behaviors induce it is also the centerpiece on which I recommend that actions for countering social injustice should mainly build. After conducting this research, I believe that awareness within, and also outside organizations, for power relations and hierarchies that systematically disadvantage certain groups such as young adult migrant women is essential, as to my understanding, these are the major causes for injustice at work. Tackling this systematic inequality is dependent on changing organizational culture because it is this culture that brings with it norms and constructions that subordinate some people. Culture, however, is not easily changed. Change is only possible when co-workers, superiors and even people from the outside that are relevant for one’s work life, like customers, are aware of this unjust culture of inequality, and thus are able to change attitudes, like normative expectations and the constructions of some people as inferior, and with it their patterns of behavior.
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