

“QUEEN BEE” SYNDROME IN LEGAL CAREERS: A NON-EXISTENT OR INVISIBILIZED PHENOMENON?

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■ **ABSTRACT:** The aim of this study is to understand, through an integrative literature review, the phenomenon of queen bee syndrome in legal careers. The problem is: how does the phenomenon of queen bee syndrome manifest itself in legal careers? The expectation is to map policies, actions and practices that address the problem within legal careers, enabling greater equity between women and men. Studies on the theme of queen bee syndrome in careers are analyzed. After that, an integrative literature review is performed. It contributes by highlighting the limits, indicating that there is a thematic invisibility, which does not necessarily correlate with the absence of manifestation of the phenomenon. The need for research to map the phenomenon, indicate its origins, manifestations and effects is indicated. The result is the lack of mapping of policies, actions and practices that aim to address the problem within legal careers; and the lack of data on the problem, its incidence and its manifestations in these careers.

■ **KEYWORDS:** Queen bee; legal careers; Law; gender equity; women.

SÍNDROME DA “ABELHA RAINHA” NAS CARREIRAS JURÍDICAS: FENÔMENO INEXISTENTE OU INVISIBILIZADO?

■ **RESUMO:** Objetiva-se compreender, por meio de revisão integrativa de literatura, o fenômeno da síndrome da abelha rainha nas carreiras jurídicas. O problema é: como o fenômeno da síndrome da abelha rainha se manifesta nas carreiras jurídicas brasileiras? A expectativa é mapear políticas, ações e práticas que enfrentem a problemática no âmbito das carreiras jurídicas, possibilitando maior equidade entre mulheres e homens; analisar estudos sobre a temática da síndrome da abelha rainha nas carreiras; realizar a revisão integrativa de literatura; e evidenciar os limites, indicando haver uma invisibilidade temática, que não se correlaciona necessariamente com a ausência da manifestação do fenômeno. Indica-se a necessidade de pesquisas que mapeiem o fenômeno, apresentem suas origens, manifestações e efeitos. Constatata-se a ausência de mapeamento de políticas, ações e práticas que visam ao enfrentamento da problemática no âmbito das carreiras em Direito; e a ausência de dados sobre a problemática, a sua incidência e as suas manifestações nessas carreiras.



■ **PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Abelha rainha; carreiras jurídicas; Direito; equidade de gênero; mulheres.

1. Introduction

The dialogue between Law and other fields of knowledge is fundamental for the advancement of scientific research, especially that applied to solving problems. The theme of equity¹ between women and men in various careers implies the need for knowledge from different areas to achieve effective legal and political solutions. Therefore, any possibility of a legal solution must address the existing knowledge about the existing bottlenecks and problems.

For example, Law No. 14,611/2023 – Equal Pay – directly addresses a problem recognized in Brazilian society, which is: the wage inequality between men and women for performing the same function (Brasil, 2023; Fraga; Rocha-de-Oliveira, 2020, p. 757-769; Souza, Corvino; Lopes, 2013, p. 603-621). Considering the hourly wage, the asymmetry occurs in both higher and lower hierarchical positions (Proni; Proni, 2018, p. 9; Meinhard; Faria, 2020, p. 45).

In addition to the problem of the wage gap, the representation and equity of women and men in careers face barriers due to markers of gender, race, age group, sexuality, and disability (Ferdman; Deane, 2014, p. 1-10; Triguero-Sánchez; Peña-Vinces; Guillen, 2018, p. 378-400).

The glass ceiling – vertical segregation – is the barrier that indicates situations that make it difficult for women to occupy positions of hierarchy and authority in their careers. The phenomenon implies that men are in the highest levels of management

¹ Gender equality is indicated in the fifth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of the United Nations, whose targets, to be achieved by 2030, encompass the eradication of various forms of discrimination, violence, and harmful practices. They include equal rights to economic resources and the guarantee of full and effective participation, also equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life (United Nations, 2015, p. 24), through equity policies and legislation. Equality implies guaranteeing the same opportunities for all people, formally and materially, and treating them equally. However, it is recognized that people have different opportunities, depending on markers of race, gender, sexuality, class, disability, etc. In this sense, the concept of equity seems appropriate to recognize these different opportunities and demand an adjustment of asymmetries and imbalances, including through public policies (Azevedo, 2013, p. 129-145). Although the distinction between the concepts is fundamental in the context of social, political, and economic inclusion of diversity, since the United Nations primarily addresses gender equality, this study will use both concepts interchangeably to imply more inclusive and egalitarian gender conditions.



due to the existence of invisible obstacles to promoting women, based on gender stereotypes (Sobczak, 2018, p. 53).

According to Vaz (2013, p. 765), the glass ceiling indicates the slower pace at which women advance in their careers, resulting in their underrepresentation in leadership positions in organizations and, consequently, in the highest spheres of power, prestige, and remuneration, even when they exhibit superior or identical productive characteristics compared to men. In Brazil, this barrier manifests itself in both public and private organizations (Fraga; Rocha-de-Oliveira, 2020, p. 757-769; Souza, Corvino; Lopes, 2013, p. 603-621).

Horizontal or occupational segregation refers to the barrier that allocates women to spaces considered feminine, according to socially predetermined gender stereotypes, such as caregiving and people management roles (Ribeiro, 2018, p. 5-10). Meinhard and Faria (2020, p. 46) point to the hierarchization of gender relations, maintaining an understanding that the attributes socially imposed on women are biological. Called the “sticky floor”, this segregation translates into the horizontal plane. Historically, women are allocated to spaces considered feminine, poorly paid, and undervalued (Nunes; Lima, 2021, p. 3; Sobczak, 2018).

In both types of segregation, there is direct participation of androcentric values and male managers. To break down these barriers, studies have shown that greater representation of women in leadership, prestige, and management positions would positively impact greater opportunities for other women (Arvate; Galilea; Todescat, 2018). These studies highlight sorority or solidarity among women for career advancement through gender identification (Felix; Laurett; Kalume, 2021).

In contrast, the queen bee syndrome theory suggests that greater representation of women in higher hierarchical positions does not necessarily correlate positively with greater representation of women who are subordinates to them or better organizational practices in terms of equity between women and men (Steiner, 2014; Singh; Vinnicombe; James, 2006). Staines, Jayaratne, and Travis (1974) mention this theory, indicating that women who break through the glass ceiling and reach higher hierarchical positions may keep other women from these positions, hindering their careers.

Based on a systematic literature review, Grangeiro and Neto (2022, p. 121) point out that there is a higher number of studies of the phenomenon since 2016, with a concentration of publications in European and North American journals. These studies have shifted from investigating how women manifested themselves as enemies in the



workplace to suggesting the existence of the problem of masculinist and androcentric organizations, prone to discrimination, which culminated in queen bee behaviors. Especially since 2010, studies have highlighted the phenomenon as a result of organizational culture, shifting the focus away from the individual responsibility of female managers.

We need to understand the phenomenon to develop possible inclusion policies in legal careers. This study addresses the queen bee phenomenon in legal careers through an integrative literature review. We expect that this understanding can provide a foundation for mapping policies, actions, and practices aimed at addressing this problem within the field of law, for greater equity between men and women. Therefore, the problem guiding the research is: how does the queen bee syndrome manifest itself in Brazilian legal careers?

To conduct the research, first, we analyzed the important and recognized preliminary theoretical studies on the topic. Secondly, we undertook an integrative literature review to understand how the phenomenon manifests in Brazilian legal careers.

2. Evidence regarding the queen bee syndrome in organizations and its impacts on careers

The term "queen bee" refers to women who hold management or prestigious positions in male-dominated organizations, who distance themselves from other women and express stereotypically masculine behaviors (Sobczak, 2018, p. 54).

In this sense, the queen bee syndrome term encompasses the phenomenon of women's greater rigidity in leadership positions towards their subordinates. This rigidity seems to stem from the adoption of masculinizing and androcentric characteristics and behaviors - called agency - by women who rise in their careers, mirroring those demonstrated or expected by male superiors, and from the belief in merit and competence, which consequently leads to the idea that all women must go their own way and ascend through meritocracy (Derkx; Van Laar; Ellemers, 2016).

With the self-assessment of ambition and merit, the reinforcement of meritocratic discourse, and the camouflage of gender bias, the term seems to indicate that queen bee women presume that all women must sacrifice themselves for the sake of career success. Queen bees are shown as ambitious women, and there is less identification with less ambitious women in lower positions. Therefore, in androcentric and



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competitive careers, “women who rise in their careers exhibit behaviors that hinder, rather than help, other women to develop professionally” (Neto; Grangeiro; Esnard, 2020, p. 2. Translated from Portuguese).

The queen bee phenomenon is defined by three characteristics:

1. women in high hierarchical positions describe themselves with more masculine traits; 2. they distance themselves physically and psychologically from women who are at the beginning of their careers or in subordinate positions; and 3. they legitimize and perpetuate the status quo of the gender hierarchy (Neto; Grangeiro; Esnard, 2020, p. 8. Translated from Portuguese).

As quoted above, the queen bee phenomenon is characterized by the self-presentation of female managers who identify with male leadership stereotypes (e.g., dominance, independence, competitiveness, assertiveness, and ambition), distancing themselves from other women in organizations who conform to feminine gender stereotypes, especially those in lower positions, and legitimizing the gender hierarchy by reproducing stereotypes about women (e.g., passivity, emotionality). Therefore, the term indicates that women play a leading role in hindering the careers of other women, mediated by the adoption of an androcentric organizational culture (Nunes; Lima, 2021, p. 4-5).

Other behaviors linked to the phenomenon include denial of the existence of gender discrimination in the workplace and opposition to affirmative action policies (Grangeiro; Neto, 2022, p. 116). We note that there are no reports regarding distancing from other women who hold the same statutory position, because these women have also managed to dispel gender stereotypes, not mutually reinforcing them (Grangeiro; Esnard, 2021, p. 4).

Scientific evidence in studies on the queen bee syndrome shows that female managers are more critical than men regarding the degree of willingness and commitment of other women in their careers (Felix; Laurett; Kalume, 2021).

On the other hand, there is no corroboration of the syndrome being found in the character or personality traits of women. Conversely, evidence suggests that the syndrome occurs as a reaction to the continuous discrimination suffered by women in the workplace. The behavior is perceived as a social identity response², in which women

2 Responding to the threat to social identity means the possibility of individual or collective strategies aimed at confronting gender discrimination in the workplace. Specifically, in the face of perceived devaluation directed at the female gender, coping strategies can be developed. At the collective level, this involves strategies that emphasize



adopt stereotypically masculine behaviors and distance themselves from other women to guarantee respect and career advancement. This is why the tendency for "queen bee" behavior to emerge in fields still notably dominated by men is observed, as opposed to the occurrence of the phenomenon in spaces perceived as neutral or feminine (Sobczak, 2018, p. 56).

A qualitative study on journalistic careers by Lima-Souza, Mota-Santos, and Carvalho Neto (2021) indicates the existence of a network of cooperation and collaboration among women that does not include those in positions of power, corroborating the queen bee syndrome theory. This study shows that female bosses act more rigidly with their subordinates, and there is no necessary correlation between the increased representation of women in positions of power and the reduction of asymmetries between men and women in the profession.

In Brazilian Higher Education Institutions, a quantitative study by Neto, Grangeiro, and Esnard (2020) indicates a correlation between the domain of the field of knowledge in which women are inserted - traditionally masculine, feminine, or mixed - and the queen bee phenomenon. Women in prestigious positions in traditionally masculine fields of knowledge tend to demonstrate more traits of the phenomenon under analysis, to the detriment of those inserted in traditionally feminine or neutral fields.

In a quantitative study involving the careers of young senior and junior women, Felix, Laurett, and Kalume (2021) showed that the behavioral views of senior and junior women diverge. Senior women perceive their behaviors as indicative of assistance to the careers of junior women, while junior women perceive the behaviors of senior women as providing little assistance. There is also a divergence regarding the view on the degree of involvement aimed at career progression. The judgments of senior women regarding the degree of involvement of junior women for career progression are slightly lower than those expressed by the junior women themselves.

Despite the echo of the queen bee syndrome, the results of this study indicate that "the failure to meet the expectations of these [junior] women is not solely due to a gender issue." (Felix; Laurett; Kalume, 2021, n/p. Translated from Portuguese). The perception of a lack of support for career advancement is rooted in the superior position of

the group; at the individual level, strategies of distancing oneself from the group and adopting traits of the favored group (Grangeiro; Neto, 2022, p. 120).



power. Indicators of the queen bee theory fall on the divergence of perceptions regarding expectations of assistance among women of different hierarchical levels.

Sobczak (2018, p. 59) argues that there are consequences of the queen bee syndrome for women who exhibit this behavior, such as a lack of support from their subordinates. Effects also affect subordinate and young women, impacting professional development, minimizing self-confidence, and, consequently, the chances of success. Finally, it results in the occurrence of gender discrimination in the workplace and contributes to gender biases in organizations.

Therefore, the evidence regarding the queen bee syndrome is not unanimous in the scientific literature. Some studies challenge the phenomenon, indicating a judgment bias in analyses supporting the syndrome (Derkx; Van Laar; Ellemers, 2016; Felix; Laurett; Kalume, 2021; Neto; Grangeiro; Esnard, 2020). In this sense, Grangeiro and Esnard (2021, p. 5) point out that the phenomenon stems from the direct and indirect discrimination suffered and experienced by women, implying the need to demonstrate ambition and agentic traits to achieve success, with the adaptation of attitudes and behaviors in accordance with these traits. Furthermore, it is not a global phenomenon, occurring especially in androcentric organizations or those still dominated by men. Moreover, research reports various cases of women who exhibit behaviors that contribute to increasing the representation of women in organizations and in leadership positions.

In particular, a systematic review study with sixty papers on the queen bee syndrome, from six databases, with bibliometric, quantitative, and content analyses, was developed by Grangeiro and Neto (2022). The result is a maturation of the studies, especially since 2010, with a shift in responsibility for the phenomenon from the woman to the masculinist organizational culture.

Despite the use of the term queen bee to discredit the image of female managers, there are other possible conclusions, namely: 17% of the analyzed studies point to the phenomenon as a response to the discrimination suffered by women; 15% indicate the phenomenon as a response to the threat to social identity; and 20% mention both reasons. In this sense, the queen bee phenomenon is not a personality trait of the woman but emerges as a response to the discrimination and barriers she suffers in the male-dominated organizational environment, generating a low gender identification and making it more likely for her to distance herself from other women (Grangeiro; Neto, 2022).



These preliminary discussions about the queen bee syndrome, as Grangeiro and Neto (2022, p. 121) point out, become important for questioning organizational culture, organizational practices, and inclusion and diversity, because they highlight the lack of acceptance of women in various careers. While a superficial reading of the term might suggest the problem stems from the behavior of female managers or their personality traits, a deeper understanding of the phenomenon requires considering the problem as linked to organizational culture and its effects.

Therefore, there is a need for further investigation of the subject in various fields and careers. In particular, studies that do not merely report the behavior of women identified as queen bees, but that clarify the "psychological mechanisms that generate the phenomenon, the impact of the context, the importance of demystifying the conflict between women, and changes in organizational policies and practices that favor gender equality." (Grangeiro; Neto, 2022, p. 121).

Based on this preliminary exposition, this study seeks to understand, through an integrative literature review, the queen bee phenomenon in Brazilian legal careers.

3. Method

The preliminary studies we analyzed mention that a greater representation of women in higher hierarchical positions does not necessarily correlate positively with greater equity between men and women in organizations or with a greater representation of women in careers. These studies point to the so-called queen bee syndrome and challenge assumptions of sisterhood or solidarity among women.

In the last fifteen years, the central problem under study has shifted from the individual behavior of queen bee women to the androcentric and masculinist organizational culture, in the face of which there is an indispensable behavioral adaptation for retention and advancement in careers. Understanding this phenomenon is important for inclusion and diversity policies and actions in organizations. This research focuses on the field of Law and aims to understand, through an integrative literature review, the existing mappings of the queen bee phenomenon in legal careers.

We used the six-phase protocol for integrative review according to the Cochrane Collaboration³: elaboration or definition of the research question; location of studies

³ Cochrane. Available at: <https://www.cochrane.org>. Access on: Jun. 8, 2024.



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in the literature; critical evaluation of the studies; data collection; analysis and presentation of the data (meta-analysis); interpretation of the data; improvement and updating of the review (Galvão; Pereira, 2014, p. 183; Rodrigues; Grubba, 2023).

The research question that guides this study is: how does the queen bee syndrome phenomenon manifest itself in Brazilian legal careers? The literature search is limited to the following scientific databases: *Scientific Electronic Library Online - SciELO*⁴, and Capes periódicos⁵, with the descriptors: legal career* (synonym: career in Law); queen bee (synonym: queen bee). The inclusion criterion refers to studies published as articles. The exclusion criteria are studies not available in full and those that, after analysis of the abstract, do not address the theme of the queen bee syndrome in legal careers.

Next, we evaluated the bibliographic references of the selected studies, verifying their relevance for inclusion, which depended on thematic adherence and availability for full access. The included studies will be analyzed using the content analysis technique, according to Bardin (2011).

The searches were conducted on June 18, 2024. In both databases searched, there were no findings for the search terms or their synonyms. Given this situation, assuming that this is a topic not analyzed by the scientific literature in the field of legal careers, this first limitation found in the research becomes evident: the absence of scientific literature in the SciELO and Capes Periódicos databases on the queen bee syndrome in legal careers.

Therefore, the search was expanded to other databases: BDTD - Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations, Lilacs - Latin American and Caribbean Literature in Health Sciences, and Latindex - Regional Online Information System for Scientific Journals of Latin America, the Caribbean, Spain, and Portugal⁶. The searches carried out in these databases also yielded no results, corroborating the initial limitation identified.

Subsequently, the search was expanded again to the Google Scholar database⁷, where results were obtained.

⁴ SciELO. Available at: www.scielo.br. Access on: Jun. 18, 2024.

⁵ Capes Periódicos. Available at: www.periodicos.capes.gov.br. Access on: Jun. 20, 2024.

⁶ Latindex. Available at: <https://latindex.org/latindex/ultimo> Access on: Jun. 20, 2024.

⁷ Google Scholar. Available at: <https://scholar.google.com> Access on: Jun. 20, 2024.



3.1 Results

We conducted the searches on June 18, 2024. We only obtained results from Google Scholar, totaling 546 studies. We analyzed these studies according to the established inclusion and exclusion criteria, and selected only five, which corresponded to publications in scientific articles with thematic relevance, available in full, and not duplicated.

Of these studies, only two address the Brazilian reality. All the authors of the studies are women, with the exception of one co-authorship by a male researcher. Furthermore, the selected studies are relatively recent (2023, 2018, 2013, 2009) compared to the beginning of research on the topic in 1973.

— TABLE 1 – STUDIES SELECTED FOR QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS

Title	Author	Year	Country
Mulheres na advocacia: o machismo estrutural em paralelo à ascensão profissional	Isabela Bruno de Almeida, Francieli Puntel Raminelli Volpato and José Ricardo Sabino Vieira	2023	Brazil
Em um reino de poucas rainhas e meias-irmãs? As mulheres na gestão e os desafios da liderança feminina na advocacia pública federal	Joana Alcantara Castelo and Juliana Mansur	2023	Brazil
Myths about women's careers in Law	Patricia M. Wald	2013	United States
Diversity and gender equity in legal practice	Deborah L. Rhode	2018	United States
Women in the legal profession from the 1920s to the 1970s: what can we learn from their experience about law and social change?	Cynthia Grant Bowman	2009	United States

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Despite the high number of eligible studies found in the Google Scholar searches, we selected only a few, mainly due to the thematic scope analysis. This information is relevant when contrasted with the absence of eligible studies in the searches conducted in the SciELO, Capes Periódicos, BDTD, Lilacs, and Latindex databases, which seems to indicate the invisibility of the study on the queen bee syndrome in various legal careers, especially in Brazil. This is particularly relevant because the invisibility of the topic does not necessarily correlate with the absence of the phenomenon itself. Therefore, this is an important limitation evidenced by this research, which highlights



the need for further research on the topic, especially qualitative and quantitative empirical studies that map the phenomenon and indicate its origins, manifestations, and effects.

Subsequently, we analyzed the bibliographic references of the selected studies, verifying their relevance for inclusion. At this stage, we did not select any studies because they either address the queen bee phenomenon generically in careers, without relation to legal careers, or are not fully available for access and consultation.

3.2 Discussions

We selected two Brazilian studies that focus on the legal profession, one on private law practice and the other on federal public law practice (AGU). Therefore, in addition to the evident limitation of the few existing studies in the databases, there is the limitation of the centrality of the studies on two legal careers – private law practice and public law practice, accessible through public examination – among the others that exist (e.g., Public Prosecutor's Office, Public Defender's Office, Judiciary, police careers), so that the queen bee syndrome phenomenon may occur and have different effects in the various careers. In other words, conclusions about the phenomenon in private and public law practice cannot necessarily be replicated to other legal careers.

A study developed in Brazil to analyze the insertion of women lawyers in this legal career addressed the phenomena of the glass ceiling, the sticky floor, and the queen bee syndrome. Highlighting the existing gender inequality, the study concludes that women, when occupying managerial and traditionally male spaces, adhere to “preventive behavioral patterns, ‘harsher’ and meticulously thought out.” (Almeida; Volpato; Vieira, 2023, p. 200. Translated from Portuguese). On the other hand, it should be mentioned that this conclusion is based on a study by Savone and Rodrigues on careers, not evidencing this phenomenon in the specific situation of Law or law practice. This conclusion should therefore be understood with caution.

Furthermore, Almeida, Volpato, and Vieira (2023) present an analysis of the queen bee syndrome for the legal profession based on the individual behavior of women, indicating:

[...] regarding human and female life and competitiveness, it becomes apparent that the need to eliminate, diminish, and/or not empower another woman in the social environment directly



aligns with the dynamics of a beehive, thus revealing the primitiveness by which we understand society (2023, p. 200. Translated from Portuguese)

Also:

It is in this scenario of rivalry between women that the queen bee syndrome becomes evident; they begin to see each other as enemies, not as collaborators, treating themselves as 'prey' in a food chain (2023, p. 203. Translated from Portuguese).

From this, the study concludes that "[...] women weaken themselves as a form of frustrated and deceptive attempt to establish themselves in places and positions that, as a rule, are historically occupied by men." (Almeida; Volpato; Vieira, 2023, p. 200. Translated from Portuguese). These conclusions should be understood with caution. First, because the study does not report qualitative or quantitative empirical analysis on this legal career. Second, because the conclusion is based on a study by Miltersteiner et al.⁸ on female leadership in public administration, a study that does not directly address legal careers, especially the legal profession. Third, because the presented interpretation of the queen bee syndrome based on individual women's behaviors, in recent studies, has been replaced by an interpretation of the androcentric organizational culture.

Despite the importance of the study for the thematic discussion, caution is advised in understanding its conclusions, as it is not possible to determine the occurrence of the queen bee syndrome phenomenon - or its effects - in the Brazilian legal profession, mainly because it is a study with low scientific evidence - a narrative literature review - and whose conclusions are extended from conclusions of studies on other careers.

The second study developed in Brazil, with an emphasis on the federal public legal profession, was undertaken by Castelo and Mansur (2023). It is a qualitative and cross-sectional study with fifteen female participants holding leadership positions in the Attorney General's Office (AGU), from the five regions of the country, who

⁸ This is a study entitled "Liderança feminina: percepções, reflexões e desafios na administração pública", written by Renata Kessler Miltersteiner, Anderson de Souza Sant'anna and Luiz Carlos Moura, published in *Revista Cadernos EBAPE*, v. 18, 2020.



responded to a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions. This study has a higher level of scientific evidence than the previous one, which was a narrative review.

The study indicates, based on the participants' accounts, the challenges they face in their careers (e.g., prejudice and gender stereotypes, resistance to female leadership, difficulty in balancing family life and work). In particular, with regard to advancement to leadership positions, they indicate the predominance of personal support over institutional support. They mention that the current mentoring programs did not exist at the time they rose to leadership positions, although they are in favor of them. Regarding the expression of these women as leaders, the interviewees report that they believe that "society still demands from women as leaders an approach to behaviors related to the masculine leadership style, marked by agentic qualities, conveying assertiveness and control [...]" (Castelo; Mansur, 2023, p. 11. Translated from Portuguese).

In a slightly different way, the interviewees mention that in addition to the traditional leadership characteristics, they must convey "a concern for the human being, and the particularities of femininity should not be left aside." (Castelo; Mansur, 2023, p. 11. Translated from Portuguese). There is a certain framing of the queen bee syndrome, evidenced by the statement of one of the interviewees: "[...] I see that there is some competition. There are those who think that they want to compete. It exists. Some may think that, because a woman gets a position, she has to be, she will be isolated, right? Others help because they are women." (2023, p. 11. Translated from Portuguese) Other statements indicate the behavior of female bosses as worse bosses: "So, she made my life and a colleague's life hell." (2023, p. 11. Translated from Portuguese) These statements are illustrative; however, in general, the interviewees expressed the need for unity among women, "in the sense of empowering and encouraging more women to rise to leadership positions." (2023, p. 11. Translated from Portuguese).

This study, analyzed with scientific evidence, points to the manifestation of traits of the queen bee syndrome phenomenon in the legal career within the Attorney General's Office (AGU). In particular, it reports the androcentric organizational environment and the need for women leaders to incorporate agency traits - "[...] approximation of eminently masculine leadership characteristics when beginning their leadership trajectories, as stated in the queen bee syndrome theory." (Castelo; Mansur, 2023, p. 14. Translated from Portuguese). Furthermore, there are reports of competition among women and accounts of women harming others while in leadership positions. On the other hand, there are reports of the need for women's empowerment and



responses to negative attitudes, as well as the urgency of greater institutional support for the training and development of women leaders.

Thus, in the legal career within the Attorney General's Office (AGU), traits of the queen bee syndrome are observed, in accordance with the discussions offered by Derkx, Van Laar, and Ellemers (2016), Felix, Laurentt, and Kalume (2021), and Neto, Grangeiro, and Esnard (2020) for other careers. However, we need to read this conclusion with caution. The existence of queen bee syndrome traits within the AGU does not corroborate the same conclusion for other legal careers in Brazil. We recommend further research focusing on these careers and a longitudinal study regarding the AGU to analyze how the phenomenon behaves over time.

This is especially important because the study proposed solutions to minimize the phenomenon in AGU, such as institutional investment in courses and training for women's leadership, a competency-based management program, creation of a space for sharing experiences and skills, and a support network. Furthermore, in February 2023, normative ordinance 85 was issued by AGU, creating the Diversity and Inclusion Committee, with the objective of creating institutional tools for welcoming, empowering, and promoting inclusion and diversity within the organization. Therefore, a longitudinal study will allow for understanding the nuances and manifestations - or minimization - of the phenomenon over time, to encompass the social impacts of the policies, and possibly, if there are positive impacts, the replication of these policies in other legal careers that also show traits of the queen bee syndrome.

The other selected studies do not refer to the Brazilian reality. In the United States, Wald (2013/2014, p. 14) references the "queen bee syndrome" in legal careers, highlighting the lack of interest among many female judges or lawyers in assisting the development of other women (e.g., hiring women, mentoring young women), as well as the perception of these women as potential competitors, to the detriment of the possibility of a worthy future succession. This can impact the career development of women, mainly because there is a myth of meritocracy, according to which one can "be whatever you want if you have high enough goals and work hard enough. Unfortunately, that's not true," says Wald (2013/2014, p. 15). As Wald explains, "luck" plays an important role (e.g., who your partner or supervisor is and whether that person leverages or hinders your career, whether your family demands constant attention or not, ethnicity, affiliation with or without disability).



On the other hand, Rhode (2018, p. 882) challenges the assumption of the queen bee syndrome in the United States, at least in reference to the behavior of women. For her, the problem of lack of representation is numerical; that is, given that many organizations lack women and diverse individuals in management positions who can mentor the careers of other women or diverse individuals, it is not a lack of commitment, but a lack of people qualified for this role. Furthermore, Bowman's study, referring to the experience of some women in the United States, also disputes the idea that they are queen bees, without further developing this phenomenon.

In the overall analysis of the qualitatively analyzed studies, it is clear that the small number of studies found and selected does not indicate the absence of discrimination against women in the organizational environment, but rather the low visibility of the topic. On the other hand, to change a situation and promote social impact, it is necessary to bring it out of invisibility. According to the 2018 handbook of the American Bar Association, "You can't change what you can't see: interrupting racial & gender bias in the legal profession," it is necessary to recognize the existence of gender and racial biases to act on this situation in a meaningful way, aiming for positive impacts.

In the United States, within the legal profession, for example, gender and racial biases involve the need to continuously prove competence to occupy space in the workplace and to obtain validation and credit for ideas; also, inequality in hiring, performance evaluations, mentoring, access to quality cases, networking opportunities or connections, provisions, and salaries, and access to promotions. Furthermore, it mentions the interruption of women's and Black people's speech, the negativity attributed to motherhood, and the violence inherent in sexual harassment (American Bar Association, 2018, p. 6-23).

The American Bar Association (2018, p. 88) states that biases originate from stereotypes - automatic activations of cognition that can be rationally controlled in their application. In particular, biases can be controlled by implementing the use of structured and published metrics, accessible to all employees. These metrics should be designed in a way that does not perpetuate gender and racial stereotypes.

Not only in the legal profession in the United States, but in the corporate environment, gender biases harm women's careers at all levels, especially: inequality between men and women in hiring and promotion; at senior levels, there is greater inequality in the representation of women. In the corporate environment, changing this situation with positive impacts involves implementing gender diversity, practicing equitable



hiring, promotion, and evaluation policies, investing in training, and promoting due diligence of results (Mckinsey & Company, 2016).

It is mentioned that globally, a document drafted by The Law Society of England and Wales in 2019, based on quantitative research with 7,781 respondents in 2017 and 2018, mentions gender bias in the careers of women lawyers, especially the harmful perpetuation of stereotypes (e.g., lower salaries and fewer opportunities for promotion) and a lack of flexibility in working hours. Solutions presented address these bottlenecks, particularly the need for training on stereotypes, equal pay policies, and flexibility in working hours. Furthermore, directly addressing the effects of the queen bee syndrome, it suggests the creation of forums that encourage collaboration among women, the encouragement of networking opportunities among women at different stages in their careers and institutions, and the organization of international debates for women on the topic, aiming at building shared solutions (The Law Society of England and Wales, 2019).

The results and discussions of this study, given the limitations evidenced, do not allow us to answer the research question: how does the phenomenon of the queen bee syndrome manifest itself in Brazilian legal careers? In fact, instead of providing an answer, the data indicate the need for further research on the topic, including longitudinal studies. Therefore, a result is the absence of mapping of policies, actions, and practices aimed at addressing the problem within legal careers; also, the absence of data on the problem, its incidence, and its manifestations in these careers.

5. Conclusion

Barriers such as vertical and horizontal segregation are widely recognized as obstacles to women's careers. These barriers commonly instrumentalize the participation of male managers and androcentric values. Studies indicate that policies for better representation of women in leadership positions enable greater gender equity and opportunities for other women. These indications were based on the values of sisterhood and solidarity founded on gender identification. For these understandings, this study referenced the research of Arvate, Galilea, and Todescat (2018) and Felix, Laurett, and Kalume (2021).

However, in 1974, a study published by Staines, Jayaratne, and Travis coined the term "queen bee syndrome" to acknowledge that there is no necessary positive



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correlation between greater representation of women in management or leadership positions and greater representation of subordinate women or greater gender equity within careers. In contrast, this study showed that women who break through vertical segregation may keep other women away from these higher hierarchical positions.

Furthermore, Grangeiro and Neto (2022) point to the high incidence of studies on this phenomenon since 2016, although there is a greater focus on the effects of the masculinist and androcentric organizational culture on queen bee behavior and less focus on the queen bee syndrome - the individual behavior of women. Therefore, the study of this phenomenon in legal careers is considered essential to enable effective inclusion policies. Thus, this study aimed to understand, through an integrative literature review, the phenomenon of the queen bee syndrome in legal careers.

Methodologically, first, we report on recognized national and international research on the topic. The queen bee syndrome is linked to greater rigidity of women in leadership positions towards their subordinates (Derks; Van Laar; Ellemers, 2016) and to the role of women in hindering the careers of other women, mediated by the adoption of the androcentric organizational culture (Nunes; Lima, 2021). On the other hand, studies diverge in their analyses regarding the occurrence of the syndrome. Current studies mention that there is no corroboration of the phenomenon's occurrence in the character or personality traits of women, indicating that it is more closely linked to a reaction to the continuous discrimination suffered by women in organizations. In this sense, there is a greater probability of queen bee behaviors in masculinist and androcentric environments (Sobczak, 2018; Grangeiro; Esnard, 2021; Grangeiro; Neto, 2022). For this reason, current studies on the topic do not aim to discredit women managers, primarily considering the problem of organizational culture and its effects on the careers of women, young, and senior.

Next, we undertook an integrative literature review to understand the manifestation of the phenomenon in legal careers. This understanding seems indispensable for proposing inclusion and diversity policies and actions in organizations. On the other hand, despite the breadth of the search databases (SciELO, Capes Periódicos, BD TD, Lilacs, and Latinindex), due to the absence of studies corresponding to the topic in June 2024, only Google Scholar yielded results, totaling 546 studies, with 5 selected for content analysis, according to the established inclusion and exclusion criteria. Furthermore, we did not select any bibliographic references from these studies. Of the selected studies, only two address the Brazilian reality, with three addressing the reality of the



United States. We therefore mention that this research is limited by the low indexation or existence of studies on the topic, which seems to indicate the invisibility of the subject in Brazil. We understand that the invisibility of the topic does not necessarily correlate with the absence of manifestation of the phenomenon, and we indicate the need for further research, preferably qualitative and quantitative empirical studies, aiming to map the phenomenon, indicate its origins, manifestations, and effects.

One of the Brazilian studies we selected focuses on private law practice, limiting itself to inferring the existence of the phenomenon from a bibliographic review of the literature. Despite the thematic importance of the study, this conclusion should be understood with caution, because other studies that point to the queen bee phenomenon in careers do not allow us to conclude that the phenomenon manifests itself equally in private law practice. The second study we selected on the Brazilian reality focuses on federal public law practice and is undertaken using a qualitative and cross-sectional method, concluding that there are traces of the queen bee syndrome in the Attorney General's Office (AGU).

The results and discussions of this study, given the limitations evidenced, do not allow us to answer the research problem. Instead of providing an answer, the data allows us to indicate the need for further research on the topic, including longitudinal studies. Despite the scientific evidence from the AGU study, we point out the need for longitudinal research due to the issuance of normative ordinance 85/2023 in this institution, which aims at inclusion and diversity policies and actions. Furthermore, we consider that the results obtained within the AGU do not allow us to conclude the phenomenon for other legal careers not studied, requiring new specific studies on these careers.

Therefore, the result of our research is the absence of mapping of policies, actions, and practices aimed at addressing the problem within legal careers, as well as the absence of data on the research problem, its incidence, and its manifestations in these careers.

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