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# Gendered Inequalities: A Comparative Analysis of Gendered Experiences of Inequality in Technology in Egypt and the United Kingdom

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## ABSTRACT

Inequality experiences are strongly gendered and context-specific. Drawing on semi-structured in-depth interviews with technology industry employees in Egypt and the United Kingdom, this article explores intersectionality and the contextuality of gendered inequalities. It investigates how context shapes gendered experiences of inequality and how this plays out at the workplace. The paper offers a cross-cultural comparison which shows that the experiences of women in tech reflect the cultural construction of gender roles and the sectoral dynamics. By contrasting the Middle Eastern context of Egypt and the Western context of the United Kingdom, the article unpacks the complicated influence of cultural contexts on the experiences of women in tech and shows that inequality is individually unique, complex, and contextual. The study reveals the mechanisms by which contextual gender dynamics shape the workplace experiences of inequality, and the relational and complex nature of intersectionality.

## 1 | Relationality and Intersectionality in Management Research

Marginalization faced by women takes place at intersections of the identities, power positions and spaces they hold in society and at work. Women of color's experiences are at the core of intersectionality studies, as their experiences lie at the heart of race-gender intersections (K. W. Crenshaw 1989; K. Crenshaw 1991). Both relationality and intersectionality are key concerns among management and diversity scholars. Contextualization of management research has been widely called for (Bhagat et al. 1979; Cappelli and Sherer 1991; Johns 2006; Bamberger 2008) and diversity scholars have been urging for relational research (Van Knippenberg and Schippers 2007; Joshi and Roh 2009, 2013; Özbilgin et al. 2012). Diversity research is criticized for focusing

on diversity dimensions the significance of which has been pre-established by previous scholars (Zander et al. 2010; Tatli and Özbilgin 2012; Hearn and Louvrier 2015). Decontextualized diversity research risks forming incomplete and simplistic understandings of inequality, especially when historical and socioeconomic factors shaping power relations are disregarded (Zanoni et al. 2010; Tatli and Özbilgin 2012; Knights and Omanović 2015). Disregarding intersectionality reinforces a false sense of universalism of inequality experiences (Tatli and Özbilgin 2012), and perpetuates the Eurocentric foundation of diversity management practices.

By acknowledging the complexity of inequality, intersectional research considers the interplay between different strands of diversity leading to inequality (Duncan and Loretto 2004;

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Goldberg et al. 2004; Acker 2006; Hancock 2007; Griffiths and Moore 2010; Griffith 2012). The focus of such research lies on the multiplicity of inequality based on different identities individuals hold (K. Crenshaw 1991; Mccall 2005; Zander et al. 2010). An intersectional lens is thus essential to explore how individuals experience their own identities in relation to inequalities they face (Mercer et al. 2015). Relational diversity research considers contextual factors from an individual perspective as part of a group (Syed and Özbilgin 2009) and accounts for the intersubjectivity between individual experiences and contextual factors (Özbilgin 2006).

The call to explore inequality from an intersectional lens and simultaneously as situated within the wider cultural context comes to address the shortcomings of White liberal feminism (Holvino 2010). The marginalization of women happens at relational intersections of their social and professional identities, and it thus cannot be addressed in isolation from either. Intersectionality comes to recognize that inequality is far too complex to be attributed to singular identities such as gender or race (K. Crenshaw 1991). Experiences of White women cannot and should not be representative for experiences of women of color. Instead, identities intersect at “constellations of power” (Collins and Chepp 2013, 59), forming multifaceted experiences of inequality entangled with context. Intersectionality shows that there is no universally applicable set of diversity dimensions that allow for the prediction of inequality, especially when considering context and intersectionality simultaneously. Despite gender being a major focus of diversity research (Holvino 2010; Zanoni et al. 2010; Hanappi-Egger and Ortlieb 2016), how religion, socioeconomic conditions, and cultural traditions shape gender inequality is superficially addressed (Özbilgin et al. 2012). This paper explores gender dynamics and gendered inequalities in the technology industry comparatively across Egypt and the United Kingdom. The research adopts a relational and intersectional approach to contextually situate the experiences of interviewees. The next section discusses contextual details of the Egyptian, the UK, and the tech industry contexts. The key question explored in this research is how context shapes gendered inequalities and how this plays out in the workplace.

## 2 | Situating Inequality: National Culture and Sectoral Contexts

Culture is the space within which power constellations form privilege and inequality. Social values are internalized at early age and become guidelines for life (Inglehart and Welzel 2005), justifying attitudes, beliefs, and actions of groups and individuals (Dobewall and Rudnev 2014). Diversity studies show limited diversity in terms of contexts explored and predominantly focus on the US (Joshi and Roh 2009; Jonsen, Maznevski, and Schneider 2011), and Western European countries have only more recently been studied (Syed, Burke, and Acar 2010). Intersectional research in the Middle East which considers gendered inequalities is hard to find. Research that considers how inequalities unfold in Middle Eastern and Western cultures comparatively is even more rare. This research explores women's experiences of inequality situated within their contexts in Egypt, a

North-African Middle Eastern culture, compared with the United Kingdom as a Western culture, thereby countering ethnocentric diversity research (Joshi and Roh 2009; Jonsen, Maznevski, and Schneider 2011). A contextual cross-comparative approach means exploring individual experiences by considering structural conditions that shape inequality. Social structures are formed around constructs such as religion, legislation, social stratification, family values, and education (Syed and Özbilgin 2009). This section contextualizes the research by providing details on the Egyptian and UK cultural contexts and the tech industry context.

In Egyptian cultural context, gender is socially constructed to ascribe women, predominantly, the role of wives, mothers, and household caretakers (Said et al. 2017). Women have fewer legal rights concerning marriage, child custody, and divorce (Kucinskaskas 2010). Work and social life are shaped by the Islamic religion (El-Kot and Leat 2008), and the social gender discourse is shaped by Islamic teachings, social traditions, and colonial influences on women's rights. Efforts for gender reform are impeded by political tension between the government and fundamentalists (Megahed and Lack 2011). The interplay of these factors depicts challenging dynamics for equality and diversity (Traavik and Adavikolanu 2016). In recent years, Egypt has undergone sociopolitical changes fueled by social injustice and lack of economic opportunities (Ersado and Gignoux 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the restrictive social, religious, and cultural barriers women face (Ben Hassen et al. 2022). Egypt is considered a traditional country wherein national pride, religion, respect for and obedience to authority dominate social dynamics (Inglehart and Welzel 2010). These dynamics form organizational structures and shape the reality women face at work. In Egypt, diversity management is often anchored in human resources management. HR practices, in turn, are relatively internationalized as a result of organizations' exposure to international influences (Leat and El-Kot 2007). However, diversity and diversity management research conducted in Western contexts are hardly generalizable to different cultural contexts (Mehng, Sung, and Leslie 2019), and likewise, Eurocentric diversity management policies that disregard the cultural roots of inequality will not be sufficient to address barriers women face at the workplace.

The United Kingdom paints a different picture compared to Egypt concerning diversity and equality. Historically, the United Kingdom experienced large immigration waves, which suggests a degree of cultural acceptance, yet racial inequalities persist (Manning and Georgiadis 2011). Pay gaps, unequal access to employment, and occupational segregation are ongoing challenges faced by religious and ethnic minorities (Klarsfeld, Ng, and Tatli 2012). The United Kingdom is considered a secular context implying tolerance of foreigners, equality of sexual orientation, and of gender diversity, with less emphasis on family and religion (Inglehart et al. 2014). The diversity discourse is framed by multiculturalism and voluntarism, whereas class inequality, quotas, and positive discrimination are socially tabooed (Tatli et al. 2012). Multiculturalism refers to the presence and the equitable participation of culturally diverse groups (Berry 2016). The social tabooing of class inequality and discrimination (Tatli et al. 2012), which historically and structurally intersect with ethnicity-related inequality (Hanappi-Egger and Ortlieb 2016), creates a challenging environment for ethnic minorities in general, and more intensely for women of color. These dynamics

continue to shape gendered inequalities despite anti-discrimination policies adopted by successive UK governments. The United Kingdom has enacted policies relating to gender, race, and disability. Moreover, as per the guidelines of the European Union, sexual orientation, age, belief, and religion have been added as protected categories (Tatli 2010). Despite these legislative efforts, intersectional consideration of gender inequality shows a challenging context for women in the United Kingdom. Women belonging to several minority groups simultaneously, such as ethnicity and religion, face additional career obstacles including large pay gaps and restricted career progression (Tariq and Syed 2018). In the multicultural context of the United Kingdom, navigating cultural gender beliefs thus becomes a complex process for ethnic minority women. Particularly because they must negotiate their roles in the social structures of their home and their birth cultures (Arifeen and Syed 2022).

Technology, as a labor market and as an educational field, is an adverse field for both ethnic minorities and women (Trauth et al. 2012; Stoet and Geary 2018). Patriarchal cultural norms shape women's navigation of their careers, particularly when it comes to engineering- or science-related positions (Dutta 2017). Women, ethnic minorities, individuals with disabilities, and individuals from underrepresented backgrounds in Technology face marginalization and exclusionary work dynamics (Leung 2018). Discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, age, mental health, and neuro-divergence are also widespread concerns (British Interactive Media Association 2019). Exclusionary dynamics that women in tech face include lack of part time jobs and flexible working arrangements, which are key reasons for leaving the industry (Hart and Roberts 2011). In tech, diversity initiatives are criticized for focusing solely on gender equality and are considered superficial (Wright et al. 2014). Establishing more inclusive workplaces in the industry as opposed to merely hiring more women is a crucial step toward gender equality (Griffiths and Moore 2010). A further element that intensifies challenges women face lies in the perceived masculinity of technology itself. To cope with the masculinity attached to engineering, women distance themselves either from the technical nature of their work or from their female identities (Adam et al. 2006), and they often “undo” their gender to “do” their engineering roles (Powell, Bagilhole, and Dainty 2009). These dynamics result in both entry and progression barriers for marginalized groups. Finally, the influence of the cultural context on the experiences of women in tech is under-researched (Saifuddin, Dyke, and Hossain 2019), which is a key focus of this paper as it situates experiences of women in tech within the cultural context.

### 3 | Methods: Design, Data Collection, and Analysis

To explore gendered dynamics of inequality in the Egyptian and UK tech contexts, in-depth semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with employees of global tech organizations in both countries. In the scope of this research, tech refers to telecommunications, information and communication technology, software development, hardware development, information technology consulting, and intelligence and financial companies. This research is part of a larger research project that

explored individual diversity perceptions in technology across Egypt, Germany, and the United Kingdom with 68 participants. This paper however focuses on Egypt and the United Kingdom and thus draws on data from 18 participants in the United Kingdom and 35 participants in Egypt. The analysis starts by exploring the gender narrative among interviewees in each country, after which the stories of 4 women interviewees were chosen as examples that show how intersectionality unfolds at the individual level. These narratives were chosen because they highlight the complexity of inequality experiences and show that not only is inequality triggered by multiple identities simultaneously but also that there is no clear mechanism by which these can be disentangled.

The data were analyzed adopting an inductive approach using thematic analysis according to Braun and Clarke (2006, 2012, 2013), thus allowing meaning to emerge from the data as situated within its context which aligns with the aims of this research. Context-specific induction relies on providing contextual details which allow the establishment of empirical authenticity (Ketokivi and Mantere 2010), and hence the cultural context of the participants is explained in detail in the previous section, and Table 1 lists their key demographics and background information. In the next section, the findings and results are discussed for each of Egypt and the United Kingdom with the focus on firstly how the cultural gender construction shapes workplace gender dynamics and secondly, intersectional analysis of two interviewee stories in each country.

## 4 | Findings and Results

Gendered inequality experiences in tech are explored in two ways in this research. Firstly, key themes shaping gender narratives in each country are analyzed and how these shape workplace gender dynamics is discussed. Second, the contextuality and complexity of intersectionality is considered. A discussion of gender and patriarchal norms cannot be dissociated from men's perspectives as those who primarily benefit from patriarchy (Ferry 2024), and hence the data considered for the analysis include subjective narratives of both men and women. The section below discusses how gender manifests in each of the Egyptian and UK tech contexts and includes two participant stories in each country. The stories of Dunia, Tina, Alia, and Nadiya were chosen because they showcase the experiences of women whose identities are considered marginalized in their contexts and highlight the complexity of intersectional research.

### 4.1 | Egypt

Narratives of participants in Egypt centered three aspects that shape gender dynamics: marital gender roles, femininity and fragility, and technology industry working conditions. Marital status was mentioned by interviewees as a key factor that hinders women from working in the industry, especially in tech roles. For example, Yasmine (she/her, Engineer) reflected on hiring processes stating that: “*they are afraid of hiring women as they need engineers to be focused on their work and to go to the field. Marital status is very important, all interviews have two*

**TABLE 1** | Background and key demographics of interviewees by country.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Education/Professional role</b>	<b>Tenure</b>
Egypt participants					
Hatem	Male	Egyptian	35–44	Engineering/Engineer	10+
Youssef	Male	Egyptian	25–34	Engineering/Engineer	10
Noha	Female	Egyptian	35–44	Management/Operations	10+
Tina	Female	White	55–64	Management/Director	30
Mourad	Male	Egyptian	45–54	Engineering/Manager	15+
Ezz	Male	Egyptian	35–44	Engineering/Manager	15
Ramy	Male	Egyptian	35–44	Management/Director	10+
Seif	Male	Egyptian	35–44	Engineering/Engineer	20
Dunia	Female	Egyptian	35–44	Management/Director	15+
Jamil	Male	Egyptian	35–44	Engineering/Director	18
Zahra	Female	Egyptian	25–34	Linguistics/CSR	8
Tamer	Male	Egyptian	25–34	Engineering/Engineer	9
Taymour	Male	Egyptian	25–34	Engineering/Engineer	9
Sabine	Female	Egyptian	25–34	Management/HR	8
Emad	Male	Egyptian	25–34	Engineering/Engineer	10
Shehab	Male	Egyptian	25–34	Engineering/Engineer	10
Fawzy	Male	Egyptian	25–34	Engineering/Engineer	9
Shahine	Male	Egyptian	35–44	Engineering/Engineer	18
Shady	Male	Egyptian	35–44	Management/Marketing	15
Farid	Male	Egyptian	25–34	Engineering/Engineer	10
Zaina	Female	Egyptian	35–44	Management/HR	12
Lydia	Female	Egyptian	25–34	Engineering/Sales	8
Doaa	Female	Egyptian	20–24	Management/Customer Service	4
Loai	Male	Egyptian	35–44	Civil Engineer/Procurement	15
Nihal	Female	Egyptian	25–34	Management/Trainer	8
Rana	Female	Egyptian	25–34	Management/HR	10
Bahaa	Male	Egyptian	35–44	Engineering/Marketing	16
Noah	Male	Egyptian	25–34	Engineering/Engineer	8
Yasmine	Female	Egyptian	25–34	Management/Marketing	8
Fady	Male	Egyptian	25–34	Engineering/Engineer	10
Mohab	Male	Egyptian	35–44	Engineering/Engineer	15
Ziad	Male	Egyptian	25–34	Engineering/Engineer	9
Gamal	Male	Egyptian	35–44	Agriculture/Manager	10
Somaia	Female	Egyptian	25–34	Management/Client Management	6
Samar	Female	Egyptian	25–34	Management/Client Management	8
May	Female	Egyptian	25–34	Management/Client Management	8
UK participants					
Sam	Male	White	35–44	Engineering/Sales	18
Jacob	Male	White	25–34	Engineering/Sales	8
Susan	Female	White	25–34	Management/Sales	9
Diego	Male	White	35–44	Engineering/Sales	12
Sama	Female	White	25–34	Management/Sales	8

(Continues)

TABLE 1 | (Continued)

Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Education/Professional role	Tenure
Ronald	Male	White	45–54	Engineering/Sales	25
David	Male	White	25–34	Psychology/Design	6
Sally	Female	White	25–34	Design/Design	7
Alia	Female	Bengali	25–34	Computer Sciences/Design	8
Sam	Male	White	35–44	Management/Sales	20
Mike	Male	White	25–34	IT/Data Analytics	7
Nadiya	Female	Egyptian	25–34	Mathematics/Coder	8
Thuraya	Female	Middle Eastern	25–34	Engineer/Software Development	5
Faris	Male	Egyptian	25–34	Engineer/Software Development	3
Ramez	Male	Egyptian	25–34	Engineer/Software Development	3+
Karim	Male	Egyptian	25–34	Engineering/Engineer	8
Thomas	Male	White	25–34	Engineering/Engineer	9
Nadim	Male	White	25–34	Management/Technical Sales	8

*main questions. Are you married? Do you have any concern about traveling abroad? These are the two concerns.*” Not only was marital status a legitimized question at job interviews but also many positions were advertised as only for men. Gendered job descriptions and recruitment practices which centered the sociocultural role of women, hampered their access to work. Only one interviewee mentioned that her employer has childcare friendly policies: *“there are some benefits for working mums; they have flexible working hours, and the option to work part-time, especially the first few years after giving birth”* (Rana, she/her, HR Manager). This indicates that the dominant view of women as mothers and wives (Said et al. 2017) persists and shows that women's perceived social role strongly shapes their access to work in tech. To an extent, the cultural context justifies the exclusion of women (Dobewall and Rudnev 2014), and the social role of women is reinforced at the workplace.

Another theme shaping gender narrative was femininity; women are perceived as feminine, delicate, and in need of protection, especially considering the perceived roughness of the tech industry. Discriminatory dynamics women face were often framed as being about respect and protection, as narrated by Youssef, a male engineer: *“our culture doesn't prevent women from joining the workplace, it is all about preserving her from running into improper situations. Yes, we differentiate between dealing with men or women, but from the cultural perspective, not for prohibiting women from working.”* This was a common belief among men interviewees. For instance, Shehab, an engineer narrated that *“No, in engineering we don't need more women, because sometimes we work at night until dawn. We must work in the field, we travel a lot, so if a woman can handle this it will be okay, but I don't think many women want to handle this kind of work.”* The justification for the low representation of women in tech roles was mostly related to the industry's working conditions such as night shifts, working on engineering sites (especially at night and during summer heat), dealing with workers on site, staying up to date with new technology (which requires time commitment), and working overtime. As efforts to tackle gender imbalance focus predominantly on recruitment processes (Evans 2012), this research shows that

the prevalence of women's perceived fragility—predominantly culturally rooted—must be considered for these efforts to be impactful.

The above dynamics and conceptions of gender roles result in exclusionary dynamics wherein women, if hired, mostly get hired in nontech roles. For instance, male interviewees stated that *“We have many women working in functions like team admin managers, which is basically someone who deals with the needs of the team members. If I need to book something, I call her.”* (Taymour, Engineer), and *“...in sales, in marketing, in call centres, in HR, we have many women, but in the technical part it is much more men”* (Tamer, Engineer). Women interviewees similarly referred to this dynamic and expressed the challenges to access the positions they want: *“Gender really mattered. There were many teams I was very interested in joining and I would be told no we do not hire females in these teams, we only want males”* (Reem, HR Manager). Furthermore, an HR manager in Egypt stated that the problem with recruiting women engineers lies in the resistance of the line managers involved in the selection process. She said that *“...not a lot of females graduate as engineers and even when they do, management would be a bit resistant, unless they are very good and they have an amazing track record, then they would consider taking them”* (Sabine). These narratives indicate a pattern of marginalizing women by hiring them in nontech positions, which can create an additional gendered hierarchy. When nontech roles are intended to administratively support tech roles, which are mostly occupied by men, the cultural gender roles are extended to the workplace. These dynamics are partly in line with research on elitism between different roles in technology (Marks and Scholarios 2007; Andrews, Lair, and Landry 2004). However, it shows how patriarchal structures interplay with sector-specific dynamics to further complicate experiences of exclusion and marginalization.

In sum, Egyptian women's employment conditions are heavily influenced by their ascribed cultural role. The prevailing femininity standards, the perception of women as less physically able than men, their ascribed social role as wives and mothers



first, employees second, combined with the heavily gendered nature of tech created profound structural challenges for women. The next section presents the stories of two interviewees in Egypt: Dunia, an Egyptian Managing Director, and Tina a European Country Director whose stories showcase how context impacts the experiences of inequality.

#### 4.1.1 | The Stories of Dunia and Tina: Age and Gender Intersections

Having risen through the organizational structures impressively fast, Dunia, a managing director in Egypt, tells her story and reflects on how in her early days in a high management position, her competency to be in her role was doubted and she faced severe resistance. Dunia narrates “*iiiiiggghhh, of course; it was two things, I was young—and I am still young—I was younger. Let’s put it correctly, I was 25, and I used to manage guys with moustaches as we say, who were 35 and 36.*” Intersections of age and gender were at the center of Dunia’s experience. As she was exceptionally competent as an engineer, her progression to management was fast compared to her peers. A pattern of employing younger women in low to midlevel managerial positions or administrative functions was evident in her context, especially as organizations strategically adopted this to improve their gender balance without allowing women to progress to top management positions. The majority of Dunia’s team consisted of older men and hence, her direct team context, played a key role in her experience, which indicates an additional relational complexity. Reflecting on this, Dunia states that: “*Maybe it would have been better, if I had more grey hair by that time, so at least they would have seen me as more experienced, if I was at least a little older maybe than the men in my team, then they might think ok so she is a female, but she might have more experience than I do.*” She further recounts that a male colleague who got a similar promotion was well accepted in his role, despite his equally young age. Most women in this research reported that being young and female constituted a challenge. It negatively influenced their perceived competence by others, whilst if they were/looked older, they might be perceived to deserve the positions they hold. The majority of studies on gender and age intersectionality focus on comparing the experiences of women in different age groups (Moore 2009; Gander 2014), and have shown that women belonging to younger or older age groups, experience discrimination (Duncan and Loretto 2004). This research shows that context—such as team composition—can significantly shape the dynamics of marginalization women face based on age–gender intersections.

Dunia’s story comes in contrast to the story of Tina, a White European woman working in tech in Egypt who expressed: “*I always feel that somehow you are helped by your position.*” her experiences indicate a degree of acceptance that Dunia did not experience. “*It probably helps being in an international company as well, then of course with the position you have, you also have some respect coming just from the position.*” Tina mentioned that certain identity nuances “*made up*” for being female in tech: her managerial position, her age, her ethnicity, and nationality, and her organization’s commitment to achieving gender equality. These factors enabled Tina to be more accepted in her position

than an Egyptian younger woman like Dunia, despite working in similar organizations and at higher managerial levels. Her Western background in Egypt subdued the influence of age–gender intersections. Additionally, managerial seniority “*validated*” being accepted as competent, which did not occur in Dunia’s case. Considering the discrimination women face in tech globally (Wright et al. 2014; Stoet and Geary 2018), it is questionable whether Tina would have this more positive experience in technology companies located in Western contexts, where her privilege would be positioned differently. These two stories demonstrate that identities interact with different layers of context and show that the influence of these interactions needs to be considered when addressing inequality.

#### 4.2 | The United Kingdom

Addressing gender dynamics in the UK tech industry centered the critique of the White male domination in the industry, with the narrative focusing on the challenges faced by women and the inefficiency of diversity management initiatives implemented by firms. Reflecting this, the gender issues addressed revolved around diversity management initiatives such as gender quotas and women’s networks, structural inequalities such as gender pay gaps, and the low representation of women in leadership positions.

Although women in tech in the United Kingdom also faced complex gendered inequalities, the nature thereof was different to those faced by women in Egypt, and this paper illustrates that in the United Kingdom, the tech-specific dynamics dominated the narrative of participants more than the UK cultural context. The low representation of women in tech dominated the gender narrative, as illustrated by the following quotes: “*They managed to find three women who all are good. I don’t know how they found these women, because I know it is hard to find people who are diverse in a wider sense and capable and want to work for us*” (David, he/him, Software Designer). “*Three out of four teams will have at least one girl*” (Faris, he/him, Software Developer). The gender discussion in the United Kingdom was more progressive compared to Egypt, and the focus lied on career- and industry-specific dynamics, despite not necessarily depicting a better working context for women in tech.

The UK context is shaped by multiculturalism (Tatli et al. 2012), and legislative efforts have been in place to address inequality based on—among others—gender and ethnicity (Tatli 2010). Despite these contextual factors implying a more positive climate for women and ethnic minorities, access and representation of women of color remains a challenge, as narrated by David, a Software Designer: “*They are all guys, all fairly multicultural, but mostly American white guys.*” This view of White male dominance in the industry was shared by most interviewees of this research, Sandra, a technical sales manager narrated that “*it is very rare to see a leading female in a pure technical role.*” When exploring the causes of the low representation of women of color, some participants attributed it to the low representation of women in tech-related education: “*I mean it’s a problem; it starts much earlier than the workplace. It starts from university and schooling. So, if you take, like, the ratio*

of males to females on engineering majors at universities, it's like the ratio we have at the workplace.” (Adam, Male, Software Developer). This resembles a striking difference to the Egyptian narrative of tech not being a suitable working environment for women. Almost all UK interviewees stated that gender balance and women's quotas are the most addressed diversity issues by their employers. The low impact of gender policies and initiatives was equally highlighted, including the fallout from women's quotas, the inadequacy of maternity policies, the lack of women's networks, and the absence of appropriate career progression guidance. Thus, although the narrative on gender equality is more progressive compared to Egypt and is moderated by the business case for diversity rather than sociocultural gender constructions, the prospect for women of color in the industry is far from optimistic. These findings confirm research suggesting the contextuality of the business case for diversity in tech and that meaningful cultural change requires leadership support who are usually White and male (Wright et al. 2014).

It is thus shown that in the case of the UK tech industry, the impact of the industry being White male dominated was stronger than that of the cultural context, which presented a degree of multiculturalism and policy and legislative efforts to address gender inequality. The notion that tech is not suitable for women was less evident in the United Kingdom, compared to Egypt, instead, the narrative was largely shaped by the shortcomings of diversity management programs. The UK context being shaped by multiculturalism and policy level efforts to address inequality does shape the diversity narratives by the evident focus on the diversity business case for gender balance. The below stories of Alia and Nadiya, two ethnic minority women working in tech in the United Kingdom show how this context plays out at the individual level.

#### 4.2.1 | The Stories of Alia and Nadiya: Gender and Ethnicity Intersections

Alia's story as a woman of color software designer illustrates how her experiences are shaped by intersections of race, gender, and age. When asked about how she feels at work, her first thoughts were: *“it's a bit of a struggle to be heard and to be taken seriously and so I feel like I am more conscious of the diversity card that I wave and how I present myself. I am always the odd one out. Because I carry both; I'm both female and non-white.”* Reflecting on her identity at work, she struggled to detangle her gender from her ethnicity, and her experiences of inequality were shaped by both equally. She described the challenges of being and looking young as an “addition” to the gender–ethnicity intersection.

She narrated that, *“I do feel more under pressure to present myself in a way... I was conscious that I was by far the youngest person in the room and so I needed to act older. I needed to be taken seriously and I was very conscious that I would never tell people my age at work.”* At the core of her struggle was her perception by others as being incompetent, and being the only employee of color intensified the experienced exclusion and feeling of “otherness.” Her age thus added to the already complex dynamics she is facing. When directly asked whether she ever felt that she was being treated unfairly, Alia responded *“a couple of*

*times. They're both related to my gender maybe, and my ethnic background; I felt undervalued. Or I didn't feel like I had the power to make myself heard. I had to decide what was the better evil, so I would either push something and be considered this crazy woman, who doesn't know what she is doing, or I would just swallow it and go ahead. I wish I could do the crazy one all the time, but I think that also comes with experience, I'm too early in my career to take these risks.”*

She experienced unfair treatment which she consciously attributed to intersections of her gender and race, and her age added to the complexity of the situation by shaping her sense of having power to react. Finally, Alia went on to describe that a lot of her energy at work was consumed with having to “*manage male egos*” and that she was consistently conscious of her femininity, and had to be mindful of her clothing, communication, and friendliness with male colleagues, to not be “*misunderstood.*” Her story illustrates what intersectionality translates into at an individual level and in daily life at work. It particularly displays the complexity of disentangling the roots of inequality. Alia's story supports the literature suggesting that skills and competencies for working in tech are deeply rooted in a gender–ethnicity stereotypes (Trauth et al. 2012; Kvasny, Trauth, and Morgan 2009) as well as research on age–gender intersectionality in tech, suggesting that women's experiences are shaped by the age group they belong to (Moore 2009; Jyrkinen and Mckie 2012; Gander 2014). Her story also shows the complexity of identifying which intersections shape inequality experiences most and indicates the limitations of the dyadic approach to intersectionality research.

Alia's story is to an extent aligned with the story of Nadiya, also a woman software engineer in the United Kingdom, but the complexity of Nadiya's reality at work was intensified by being a visibly Muslim woman wearing the hijab. Her experiences differ from Alia's since her experiences of marginalization were rooted also in her religion. She narrates how the visibility of her religious background put pressure on her: *“There aren't so many Arabs, I am the only one wearing a head cover in the entire office. And we are talking about thousands of people in one place, right? It is a bit stressful. I would like my mistakes to be only my own, but I also like my achievements to represent something else. I must live with the tax that if you mess up you mess up as a 'hijaby' woman.”* Nadiya also emphasized that the hijab has had a significant influence on her career in the United Kingdom, which would not be the case in her home country, an Arab, Muslim-majority one, which confirms the contextuality of intersectionality, and demonstrates how the roots of marginalization shifts based on the context. The shifting of experiences to be centered on religion instead of age in Nadiya's narrative confirms the necessity for contextual intersectionality research (Mercer et al. 2015; Collins and Bilge 2016).

Nadiya also addressed contextual issues and critiqued the multicultural approach that is often the lens through which she is seen: *“I am a Middle Eastern woman who is sort of a victim of multiculturalism, I am not sure if victim is right. I feel like you just need to be aware of and survive this cultural standardisation, this homogenisation.”* This critique and Nadiya's experiences as a *Hijabi* woman come in contradiction to the suggested equitable treatment of cultural minority groups implied by the United

Kingdom's multiculturalism (Berry 2016), and shows that the multiculturalism approach can render certain experiences invisible. Two key differences to Alia's story are observed. Firstly, the Arab and Muslim identities are contextually more challenging to embrace, which is indicated by the differing narratives of Alia and Nadiya. Alia focused on aspects relating directly to her role as a woman in tech, in particular, the perception of her skills and competencies. Nadiya's narrative revolved around deeper ideological discussions, addressing perceptions around her religious beliefs. In intersectionality research, gender, class and race are perceived as three major identities to consider (Yuval-Davis 2011); however, the stories of Alia and Nadiya illustrate that context can indicate other salient identities, in Alia's case, age, and in Nadiya's case, religion.

## 5 | Conclusion

Drawing on a comparative study of gendered experiences of inequality across the Egyptian and UK technology industries, this research sheds light on the contextual and intersectional nature of these experiences. It made evident the ways in which cultural context shapes gender narratives and how these in turn impact experiences of marginalization and inequality. Furthermore, it contributes to the debates surrounding the consideration of the complexity and contextuality of intersectionality in gender research.

The dissimilar challenges faced by women in the Middle Eastern context of Egypt versus the Western context of the United Kingdom emphasize the role of context in gendering inequalities. The key obstacle for women in Egypt is anchored in the patriarchal norms shaping the Egyptian culture which ascribes women the role of mothers and wives, and the perception of women as fragile and in need of protection. Interactions of the social construction of gender with the sectoral nature of technology, the perceived roughness of which was presented as a justification for limiting women's access to employment in tech are identified. The centering of women's roles on their marital status and family obligations is suggested by previous scholars (Said et al. 2017), this research contributes to this literature by identifying the resulting workplace dynamics, specifically, the exclusion of women from technology positions. Additionally, the replication of social gender roles at the workplace by limiting women to administrative positions was identified. The formation of social structures around family values (Syed and Özbilgin 2009), is shown to create unique tech industry-specific challenges for women, indicating the interplay between different layers of context. Contrarily, the UK gender rhetoric was driven by the business case for diversity and focused on the low representation of women in tech. The UK context multiculturalism (Tatli et al. 2012) was less evident in the findings of this research, as shown by the marginalization faced by ethnic minority women. Furthermore, this research aligns with scholars suggesting that gender initiatives in technology—despite being a key organizational commitment—are largely superficial (Wright et al. 2014). A key difference between Egypt and the United Kingdom is the different response to the low representation of women in technology roles. In the Egyptian context, there was an explicit resistance to

enabling women's access to tech roles. The United Kingdom, on the other hand, showed a degree of openness to hiring more women in technology, yet with little perceived success of efforts to increase representation of women. A further significant difference this research has uncovered between Egypt and the United Kingdom is the extent to which cultural context shapes workplace gender dynamics. The impact of culture in Egypt is shown to be more explicit and generally stronger than in the United Kingdom, and this research has shown that the Egyptian cultural context significantly shapes experiences of women at the workplace and presents strong barriers for women to access employment in tech roles. The United Kingdom, however, showed less evident impact of the social role of women and instead the challenges faced by women were attributed to the shortcomings of gender diversity initiatives. Finally, the perception of women to be too fragile and thus the tech industry not being a suitable context for women was not evident among UK participants, instead, the ineffectiveness of gender diversity policies in creating an inclusive working culture was considered the reason of low representation of women. It is thus essential to consider cultural context when designing diversity policies, and the contextuality of inequality highlights the necessity for relational diversity research, which focuses on the individual as part of the wider context (Syed and Özbilgin 2009).

The relational consideration of intersectionality shows the individual and contextual nature of both intersectionality as a construct and of inequality experiences. This relational approach enables scholars to make use of intersectionality as an analytical tool, which can be applied to different disciplines and contexts. The research findings indicate that inequality experiences are individual, contextual and unique. And while women in tech globally face challenges rooted in gender, their context (country, organization, position, team composition, and their identities) strongly influences the nature of these challenges. Intersectionality analysis focused on the stories of women who were not representative of the “mainstream” identities in their contexts: young women, women of color, Muslim women in the United Kingdom, and European women in Egypt. Most significantly, this showed the shifting of the source of inequality based on contextual factors. Hence, both the relational and contextual nature of intersectionality and identity are key insights gained from this research. The debate surrounding which categories or pairs of categories to include in intersectionality research is ongoing among psychology and social psychology scholars (Cole 2009; Warner and Shields 2013), a contextual approach to studying intersectionality can contribute to resolving this debate.

Intersectionality scholars typically fall into those studying gender–ethnicity intersections (Yuval-Davis 2011), or scholars addressing sex–race (Graves and Powell 2008), class–gender–race (Acker 2006), or age–gender intersections (Gander 2014). This research adopts an intra-categorical approach, which neither fully deconstructs nor adopts categories, thereby unveiling the complex lived experiences of individuals who are not members of traditionally constructed groups in a specific context (McCall 2005). This approach contributes to the discussion concerning which identity intersections to include in research. That is, instead of solely relying on dyads considered salient by existing research, it is pivotal to analyze the context within which inequality unfolds to identify these. The dyadic



approach to intersectionality research offers valuable insights into experiences of specific groups (i.e., women of color, young women, older women, etc.). The advantage of a context-specific approach to identifying salient identity intersections is that it evades the risk of excluding intersections that significantly contribute to marginalization and inequality.

To conclude, it is pivotal to highlight the limitations of this research. Although the diversity of participants was actively sought and to an extent achieved, participants' backgrounds are reflective of the lack of diversity in the industry, for example, there is a lack of women in tech roles in Egypt in the sample, as well as only a few individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds in the United Kingdom. Future research would thus benefit from addressing, for instance, experiences of ethnic minority Muslim women in tech in the United Kingdom, or experiences of women in tech roles in Egypt. Similarly, interviewees were all employed at global organizations, contextual research that investigates experiences of local organizations would add value to the existing body of literature on gender issues in tech.

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### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

### Data Availability Statement

The author has nothing to report.

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