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# The gender-job satisfaction debate in the light of the “gendered organizations”

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**Summary:** Extensive research has been conducted on the relationship between gender and job satisfaction. Research conducted in Anglo-Saxon countries has highlighted that women report greater job satisfaction than men despite being in a disadvantaged position at the workplace. However, studies conducted in other countries have indicated opposite results. One hypothesis put forward in this debate deals with gender differences concerning the antecedents of job satisfaction. This study seeks to explore this hypothesis with the theoretical framework of “gendered organizations”, which encourages being attentive toward the interactions between gender and HR practices. Based on GLM models with moderating effects that were used on the French 2017 REPONSE survey, the positive effects of teleworking and performance appraisal on job satisfaction were found to be higher for women than for men, although the effects of part-time work and training were the same for both sexes.

**Keywords:** gender, job satisfaction, gender-job satisfaction debate, gendered organizations, moderating effects

# **Le débat sur le lien entre genre et satisfaction au travail, à la lumière des « organisations genrées »**

**Résumé :** La littérature académique est particulièrement féconde sur les relations entre genre et satisfaction au travail. Des recherches conduites dans des pays anglo-saxons ont montré que les femmes déclarent en moyenne des niveaux de satisfaction au travail plus élevés, alors qu'elles sont généralement désavantagées en matière de conditions de travail par rapport aux hommes. Cependant, d'autres recherches menées dans d'autres pays ont donné des résultats différents. Une hypothèse mise en avant dans ce débat porte sur d'éventuelles différences genrées concernant les antécédents de la satisfaction au travail. Cette recherche vise à explorer cette hypothèse en lien avec le courant théorique des « organisations genrées », qui incite à prêter attention aux interactions entre genre et pratiques de GRH. Elle se fonde pour ce faire sur des modèles de régression linéaire multiple avec des effets de modération, estimés sur les données de l'enquête REPONSE 2017 de la DARES. Elle montre que les effets positifs du télétravail et des dispositifs formels d'évaluation de performance sur la satisfaction au travail sont plus élevés pour les femmes que pour les hommes, alors que les effets du temps partiel et de la formation sont les mêmes pour femmes et hommes.

**Mots-clés :** genre, satisfaction au travail, débat sur les liens entre genre et satisfaction au travail, organisations genrées, effets de modération

# **The gender-job satisfaction debate in the light of the “gendered organizations”**

## **Introduction**

The rapid and significant increase in women’s participation in the labour market has led to the development of numerous fields of research that deal with gender and the labour market. In particular, extensive research has been done on the possible differences between women and men’s relationship to work.

Job satisfaction is a key element in employees’ relationships with work (Garner & Laroche, 2016; Le Flanchec, Mullenbach, & Rojot, 2015). It influences their performance, their commitment, and their intent to stay in a company (Brunetto, Teo, Shacklock, & Farr-Wharton, 2012; Flickinger, Allscher, & Fiedler, 2016), among other things. A considerable amount of research on this topic seeks to identify the determinants of job satisfaction, which include: managerial support (Sawang, 2010), values and culture (Huang & Gamble, 2015), work-family conflict (Garner & Laroche, 2016), and working conditions (Pujol-Cols & Dabos, 2018). With regard to individual determinants, several elements have already been highlighted, such as education (Bender & Heywood, 2006; Clark, 1997), level of responsibility (Smith, 2009), age (Clark, Oswald, & Warr, 1996), and sex<sup>1</sup> (Clark, 1997; Hodson, 1989; Huang & Gamble, 2015).

Hodson’s (1989) seminal article highlighted the so-called “gender-job satisfaction paradox” (Perugini & Vladislavljević, 2019) or the “paradox of the contented female worker” (Valet, 2018), i.e. the fact that, despite facing more precarious employment conditions than men (Ficapal-Cusí, Díaz-Chao, Sainz-Ibáñez, & Torrent-Sellens, 2018), women report a

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the article, we use the word “sex” to refer to the factual, statistical variable, and the word “gender” to refer to gender-related social phenomena.

higher level of job satisfaction than men. Clark (1997) put forward a hypothesis to explain the so-called “gender-job satisfaction paradox” based on the fact that women have lower job expectations than men, which could result in higher levels of satisfaction among women than men. However, this assumption has been questioned in the literature (Grönlund & Öun, 2018).

Generally, the literature on job satisfaction and gender explores two types of antecedents: demographic antecedents (e.g., age) and situational antecedents associated with an employee’s work situation (e.g., type of contract) (Pujol-Cols & Dabos, 2018). On the other hand, the theoretical framework of gendered organizations (Acker, 1990) suggests that organizations are gendered, i.e., they are designed by and for men. Therefore, when studying phenomena related to work and individual relationship to work, one must also look at the organizational level (Payne, 2018), which goes beyond an employee’s work situation and includes HRM (Human resource management) practices. Some HRM practices are more women-friendly and then contribute more to un-gender organizations than others (Mastracci & Arreola, 2016)

This study tries to elucidate the relationship between gender and job satisfaction. It focuses on the HR determinants of job satisfaction as well as the possible differences in these determinants based on sex. It aims to answer this research question: Do HR policies which seem to be more women-friendly contribute more to women’s job satisfaction? By addressing this question, this study provides a deeper insight into the three following aspects. First, it extends the literature on gender and job satisfaction and contributes to shed light on the ambiguous links between gender and job satisfaction. Indeed, certain previous studies have identified individual (Clark et al., 1996; Zou, 2015), situational, or even national antecedents (Huang & Gamble, 2015), but only a few have looked into HR practices (Brown, Forde, Spencer, & Charlwood, 2008; Kooij et al., 2013). Second, it contributes to methodological

developments around the “gendered organizations” field by linking it to the issue of job satisfaction, which has not yet been explored in this field. Moreover, the use of a quantitative methodology to understand the influence of HR practices and their relationship with sex helps open up promising research avenues in the field of gendered organizations, which hitherto only inspired mostly qualitative research. Third, this study focuses on the French case, bearing in mind that most research on the gender-job satisfaction paradox has been conducted in Anglo-Saxon countries (Huang & Gamble, 2015) where the satisfaction differential is very much to the disadvantage of men, which is not true for all countries (Eskildsen, Kristensen, & Westlund, 2004; Huang & Gamble, 2015; Sousa-Poza & Sousa-Poza, 2000). Notably, some studies have shown that, contrary to Anglo-Saxon countries, French women report lower job satisfaction than their male counterparts on average (Sousa-Poza & Sousa-Poza, 2000). This, combined with the low gap between the male and female labour supply in France, makes France an interesting case among European countries (Kaiser, 2005).

The study addresses this question through the nationally representative 2017 REPOSE survey and GLM models with moderating effects. The first section examines previous findings and arguments with respect to job satisfaction and gender, which inform this study’s hypotheses. The research methods and empirical results are then introduced in the succeeding sections. The final sections provide further discussion and conclusions.

## **I. Literature review and hypotheses**

### **I.1. Job satisfaction**

The concept of job satisfaction holds several definitions in the literature (Le Flanchec et al., 2015). In a seminal article, Locke (1969) defines it as “*the pleasurable emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job as achieving or facilitating the achievement of one’s job values*” (p. 316). More recently, the literature has specified the definition by associating it

with individuals' perception of their jobs compared to their expectations (Drydak, 2017). This definition thus emphasizes the notion of perception, which was already stressed by Locke (1969). Perception could depend on the different facets of the work occupied (Christen, Iyer, & Soberman, 2006) and on intrinsic or extrinsic sources of satisfaction (Rose, 2003), as well as on personal values (Lange, 2015). Rose (2003) therefore distinguishes between work satisfaction (i.e., intrinsic aspects related to the fact of working) and job satisfaction (i.e., extrinsic aspects such as material, contractual, etc.). Moreover, perception could refer to affective or cognitive elements (Pujol-Cols & Dabos, 2018) and could depend on individual emotional dispositions.

The literature on the antecedents of job satisfaction primarily corresponds to the following three approaches<sup>2</sup>: the demographic approach wherein the demographic characteristics of an individual are considered as determinants of job satisfaction, the situational approach, which looks at the work characteristics, and the organizational approach, which considers managerial and HR practices implemented by the organization (Pujol-Cols & Dabos, 2018). Accordingly, the demographic approach shows the influence of sex (Clark, 1997), age (Clark et al., 1996; Eskildsen et al., 2004), or education (Bender & Heywood, 2006) on job satisfaction; the situational approach highlights the influence of part-time (Fenton-O'Creevy, 1995) or temporary work (Busk, Dauth, & Jahn, 2017); and the organizational approach indicates the effects of determinants such as managerial relationships (Flickinger et al., 2016), coordination relationships (Gittell, Weinberg, Pfefferle, & Bishop, 2008), autonomy (Wheatley, 2017), or HR practices (Brown et al., 2008; Kampkötter, 2017). Some research combines the demographic approach with the situational or organizational approach by looking at the interaction between individual characteristics (sex, in particular) and work-

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<sup>2</sup> Another approach, that is not presented here, deals with the determinants related to individual personality traits (Brunetto, Teo, Shacklock, & Farr-Wharton, 2012; Kampkötter, 2017).

related characteristics (e.g., part-time work, or work–life balance) (Fenton-O’Creevy, 1995; Grönlund & Öun, 2018; Zou, 2015).

## **I.2. The gender-job satisfaction debate**

Sex is a demographic antecedent of job satisfaction. Hodson’s seminal article (1989) pointed out that, paradoxically, women report higher average levels of satisfaction than men, despite generally facing materially less advantageous work situations (Ficapal-Cusí et al., 2018). In particular, women could face precariousness (Young, 2010), involuntary part-time work (Gottfried, 2009), glass ceiling (Coron, 2018; Ng & Sears, 2017), and lower wages (Acker, 1989; Bergmann, Scheele, & Sorger, 2019; Stojmenovska, 2019) in their workplaces. Clark’s (1997) main hypothesis asserts that this “gender-job satisfaction paradox” could be explained by the fact that women have lower job expectations partly due to their lower work centrality (Sharabi, 2017).

This assumption has since been partly questioned by studies that have shown that the “gender-job satisfaction paradox” cannot be attributed to the lower work centrality of women and their eventual work-family trade-offs (Grönlund & Öun, 2018). Studies conducted in non-Anglo-Saxon countries have shown that this so-called “gender-job satisfaction paradox” is not the same in every country (Huang & Gamble, 2015; Lange, 2008; Sousa-Poza & Sousa-Poza, 2000). For example, in Nordic countries, there was no significant difference found between men and women with respect to job satisfaction (Eskildsen et al., 2004). A study conducted in various countries showed that the sex differences of job satisfaction vary across the countries, with a “positive” gender gap (male reporting higher job satisfaction) in Spain, for example, and a “negative” gender gap (female reporting higher job satisfaction) in Great Britain and in the United States (Sousa-Poza & Sousa-Poza, 2000). Other research has pointed out that women and men may have different expectations (Hulin, Lebègue, & Renaud, 2017). Besides, the gendered segregation of the labour market constrains the possibilities of comparison with

male counterparts, which explains why women are satisfied by their wages even if they are aware that they earn less than men (Valet, 2018).

### **I.3. Gendered organizations and gender-focused HR policies**

Certain studies on job satisfaction have also focused on the effect of HR or managerial practices, such as performance appraisal (Kampkötter, 2017), development practices (Kooij et al., 2013), or formal HR practices (Brown et al., 2008), on job satisfaction. The gendered organizations framework theorized by Acker (1990, 2006) claims that organizations are gendered (Metcalf, 2008), designed by men and for men, and could therefore indirectly disadvantage women. Among other things, HR practices defined by organizations are inherently gendered, often to the detriment of women (Dickens, 1998; Mastracci & Arreola, 2016), disadvantage women (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011; Correll, 2004; Gorman, 2005; Ugarte & Rubery, 2021), and ultimately perpetuate the gender hierarchies within these organizations (Mastracci & Arreola, 2016). Therefore, gender-focused HR policies must be implemented to address this issue (Ali, Metz, & Kulik, 2015; Van der Lippe, Van Breeschoten, & Van Hek, 2019) and help create women-friendly workplaces. This requires to take into account the somewhat specific women's needs.

One of the main dimensions of gendered organizations is that most of the organizations reward presenteeism (Mastracci & Arreola, 2016), and value the ideal of a “disembodied worker who exists only for the work” (Acker, 1990, p. 149). This tends to disadvantage women who are more affected by domestic constraints (Fang, Lee, Timming, & Fan, 2019; Mastracci & Arreola, 2016; Sheridan, 2004). Several studies point out that women place more importance on work-family balance than men (Huang & Gamble, 2015). Therefore, part-time work could be a positive determinant of job satisfaction among women, as it allows for more work-life balance (Bender, Donohue, & Heywood, 2005; Van der Lippe et al., 2019). On the

contrary, part-time work, which remains very rare among male (Sheridan, 2004), does not contribute to male job satisfaction (Fenton-O’Creevy, 1995).

*H1. Part-time work increases job satisfaction for women, but has no significant effect on job satisfaction for men.*

In the same vein, Van der Lippe et al. (2019) show that flexibility policies such as teleworking are one of the keys to ensure gender equality. Flexibility policies are notably found to decrease work-family conflict for women (Wheatley, 2017). Research then highlights the importance women attach to flexible solutions (Bender et al., 2005; Chung & van der Horst, 2018; Grönlund & Öun, 2018; Huang & Gamble, 2015) such as teleworking.

*H2. Teleworking increases job satisfaction for women, but has no significant effect on job satisfaction for men.*

The theory of gendered organizations also highlights the weight of the implicit and the need to adopt more standardized procedures that increase transparency (Mastracci & Arreola, 2016), even though Acker’s work recalls that standardized procedures can also incorporate gender bias (Acker, 2006). For example, a formal appraisal can reduce the weight of the implicit judgements, knowing that implicit can leave room for gender discrimination (Baron, Hannan, Hsu, & Koçak, 2007; Mastracci & Arreola, 2016). Besides, previous research shows that women tend to attach more importance to procedures than men (Jepsen & Rodwell, 2012). Among standardized HR practices, individual performance appraisals have been shown to increase job satisfaction (Kooij et al., 2013). It can therefore be assumed that having formal performance appraisals increases women’s satisfaction more than men’s.

*H3. Formal individual performance appraisals increase both female and male employees’ job satisfaction, but it increases female job satisfaction more than male job satisfaction.*

Kooij et al. (2013) also mention development HR practices and, in particular, training, as determinants of job satisfaction. Yet, another dimension of the gendered organizations is that informal networks, mostly male networks, play an important role in the organizations (Mastracci & Arreola, 2016). The implicit organizational functioning tends to deprive women from networks, which are important for career progression (Benschop, 2009; Kalaitzi, Czabanowska, Fowler-Davis, & Brand, 2017). Hence, although training is positively associated with job satisfaction for both women and men (Huang & Gamble, 2015), it can be assumed that its effect is greater for women than for men, because training could enable women to meet people outside their team, reduce their social isolation (Ibarra, 1992; Kaley, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006), and ultimately help them build professional networks.

*H4. Training increases both female and male employees' job satisfaction, but it increases female job satisfaction more than male job satisfaction.*

## **II. Methods**

### **II.1. Sample and data**

The data used in this study were obtained from the French REPONSE Survey conducted by the French Ministry of Labour in 2017. This survey corresponds to a nationally representative survey of French workplaces with 10 or more employees and was inspired by the British Survey Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS) (Bryson, Erhel, & Salibekyan, 2021). It is possible to extrapolate the results obtained in this study by using employee weights as the sample is a stratified random sample with weights.

The survey covers a wide range of topics. At an employee level, there are questions about the individuals, their work, certain managerial practices, their feelings about their work, and their feelings about the unions.

The entire sample consisted of 28,724 employees. After deleting incomplete responses for the main variables of interest, a sample of 26,465 respondents (11,538 females, 14,927 males) was obtained.

## **II.2. Measures**

In this study, the dependent variable (job satisfaction) is based on six questions that are similar to the ones mentioned by Laroche (2017). The first one is: “When you think about your work in general, are you...” and the responses are rated using a four-point scale ranging from “1=strongly satisfied” to “4=strongly dissatisfied.” The other questions are based on the same scale: “And more particularly, are you satisfied with: Your working hours / Your working conditions / Your wages / Your opportunities for training / Your workplace atmosphere.” Responses for each item were rated on a four-point scale ranging from “1=strongly satisfied” to “4=strongly dissatisfied.” The order of responses was reversed (“1=strongly dissatisfied” to “4=strongly satisfied”) in order to make the results more easily readable. The arithmetic mean of the 6 questions was then computed, which provided an indicator of job satisfaction. The resulting alpha coefficient is 0.80, which is higher than the suggested reliability level of 0.70. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics as well as correlation matrix of the variables. This indicator combines various indicators suggested by previous research. For example, Clark (1997) used an indicator that groups together an overall satisfaction measurement, followed by measurements on more specific dimensions such as working hours, pay, and atmosphere. Similar to this study, Jones et al. (2009) and Huang and Gamble (2015) used an indicator that includes other dimensions such as training opportunities.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Overall satisfaction	2.88	0.68	1						
2. Working hours	3.05	0.76	0.36***	1					
3. Conditions	2.83	0.76	0.61***	0.42***	1				
4. Pay	2.36	0.81	0.44***	0.27***	0.44***	1			
5. Training	2.60	0.86	0.42***	0.24***	0.43***	0.37***	1		
6. Ambiance	2.84	0.84	0.52***	0.26***	0.53***	0.29***	0.38***	1	
<b>7. Arithmetic mean (=Job satisfaction)</b>	<b>2.76</b>	<b>0.55</b>	<b>0.78***</b>	<b>0.59***</b>	<b>0.80***</b>	<b>0.67***</b>	<b>0.69***</b>	<b>0.71***</b>	<b>1</b>

Significance levels: \*=0.05; \*\*=0.01; \*\*\*=0.001

The study utilised various types of explanatory variables, which correspond to each aforementioned hypothesis: the fact to work part-time, the possibility of teleworking, having had a personal evaluation interview with a supervisor in the last 3 years, and having had professional training in the last 3 years. All variables were dichotomous (“Yes” or “No”).

Concerning the control variables, this study utilised both demographic and situational variables. The literature on educational attainment led to contradictory results at times, particularly because education affects different dimensions of job satisfaction (Ganzach, 2003). Satisfaction linked to job content tends to increase with educational attainment (Tlaiss & Mendelson, 2014). However, the level of pay satisfaction tends to decrease with educational attainment (Bender & Heywood, 2006) and the likelihood of feeling overqualified for a job, which tends to increase with educational attainment, negatively affects job satisfaction (Alfes, Shantz, & Baalen, 2016). Overall, educational effects are frequently found to be negative (Neil & Snizek, 1988; Perugini & Vladisavljević, 2019). In this study,

educational attainment was divided into seven levels in ascending order, which correspond to the French educational system: “No educational qualifications” / “Brevet” / “CAP-BEP” / “Bac/high school diploma” / “Bac+2” / “Bac+3 or 4 (undergraduate)” / “>Bac+4 (graduate).”

The literature has also examined the effect of age and job tenure on job satisfaction. Several studies have confirmed the existence of a U-shaped curve wherein job satisfaction decreases with age and then increases again (Clark et al., 1996; Eskildsen et al., 2004). In this study, in line with this U-shaped effect, age was categorized into three groups (Clark et al., 1996; Moullet & Salibekyan, 2019) : “16-29 years” / “30-49 years” / “More than 49 years”, as well as workplace tenure: “Less than 5 years” / “5-10 years” / “More than 10 years.”

Promotion opportunities are important predictors of job satisfaction (Top, Akdere, & Tarcan, 2015). This study utilised the variable “having been promoted in the last 3 years” (“Yes” or “No”).

Previous studies have shown that temporary work leads to a reduction in job satisfaction (Busk et al., 2017; Hünefeld, Gerstenberg, & Hüffmeier, 2020). In this study, the type of contract variable was divided into two categories (i.e., “permanent contract” and “temporary contract”).

Occupational category and function are also usually used as control variables in previous research (Valet, 2018; Wheatley, 2017) In this study, occupation was divided into the six following categories: “specialized worker/skilled worker” / “employee” / “technician” / “engineer and manager” / “other.” Function corresponds to the five following categories: “production/maintenance” / “accounting & finance/R&D” / “other.”

The full list of variables is presented in Table 2, together with some descriptive statistics.

Table 2. Main variables and descriptive statistics of the REPONSE 2017 sample

	<b>Whole sample</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>
Number of observations	26,465	11,538	14,927
<b>HRM practices</b>			
Part-time work			
No	86.00	73.64	94.86
Yes	14.00	26.36	5.14
Teleworking			
No	90.37	91.58	89.50
Yes	9.63	8.42	10.50
Performance appraisal			
No	21.05	19.67	22.04
Yes	78.95	80.33	77.96
Training			
No	53.16	56.25	50.95
Yes	46.84	43.75	49.05
<b>Control variables</b>			
Education			
No ed. qualification	7.81	6.02	9.08
Brevet	5.58	6.08	5.23
CAP-BEP	23.34	18.28	26.96
Bac (High school)	19.24	21.02	17.97
Bac+2	17.31	18.59	16.40
Bac+3 or 4 (undergrad.)	11.72	15.41	9.08
>Bac+4 (graduate)	14.99	14.60	15.27
Age			
16-29	15.75	16.64	15.10
30-49	57.35	57.08	57.54
50+	26.90	26.28	27.35
Workplace tenure			
4-	20.82	22.19	19.84
5-10	28.11	28.94	27.52
11+	51.07	48.87	52.64
Promotion			
No	71.64	74.65	69.49
Yes	28.36	25.35	30.51
Type of contract			
Permanent	94.29	93.67	94.74
Temporary	5.71	6.33	5.26
Occupational category			
Specialized worker	13.13	8.69	16.27
Skilled worker	15.04	6.16	21.30
Employee	19.47	34.97	8.53
Technician	17.76	15.70	19.22
Engineer/Manager	23.79	19.62	26.73
Other	10.81	14.85	7.95
Function			
Production	27.80	14.61	37.08
Maintenance	9.42	1.60	14.92
Accounting/Finance	8.61	13.60	5.10
R&D	8.18	5.69	9.93
Other	45.99	64.50	32.96

Table 2 shows that women are more often than men in part-time work and report more often that they have had a performance appraisal in the last 3 years. However, they report less that they can telework and that they have had a professional training in the last 3 years.

### **II.3. Methods**

Four linear regression models were estimated with job satisfaction as the dependent variable. The first model (Model 1) includes sex, education, age, type of contract, part-time work, teleworking, performance appraisal, training, and promotion, as well as the control variables (i.e., workplace tenure, occupational category, and function). The second model (Model 2) includes all the exogenous variables and adds interaction effects with sex. Hence, the following moderators were included: sex x part-time work, sex x teleworking, sex x performance appraisal, and sex x training. Indeed, interaction effects with sex enable the examination of the relationships between job satisfaction, sex, and HR practices. As all of these variables are categorical, significant interaction effects were visualized through plots that show the group means and the corresponding 95% confidence intervals of job satisfaction for each joint level of the regressors (Figure 1). Two additional models were estimated in order to gain a deeper understanding of these relationships, one exclusively for the female population (Model 3) and one for the male population (Model 4). This follows Wheatley's (2017) research design. SAS software was used for all analyses.

### **III. Main results**

Table 3 presents the average satisfaction for women and men depending on the different facets of job satisfaction and indicates whether there are significant differences in job satisfaction between men and women (ANOVA tests).

Table 3. Average job satisfaction by gender

	Whole sample	Female	Male
<b>Job satisfaction***</b>	<b>2.76</b>	<b>2.74</b>	<b>2.77</b>
Overall satisfaction***	2.88	2.85	2.91
Working hours*	3.05	3.06	3.04
Working conditions*	2.83	2.81	2.83
Pay***	2.36	2.29	2.38
Training	2.60	2.59	2.58
Ambiance**	2.84	2.84	2.87

*Significance levels: \*=0.1; \*\*=0.01; \*\*\*=0.001*

This table indicates that women report a lower average job satisfaction than men for every facet of job satisfaction except for working hours (women are more satisfied than men) and training (no significant difference between women and men). Overall, the job satisfaction computed as the arithmetic mean of the six other facets is higher on average for men than for women.

Table 4 shows the average job satisfaction for the men and women separately and for the sample as a whole, according to different characteristics, and indicates whether the differences in job satisfaction according to each modality of the categorical variable are significant for each sample (i.e., whole sample, female sample, male sample).

Table 4. Average job satisfaction by gender and main characteristics

	Whole sample	Female	Male
<b>HRM practices</b>			
Part-time work			*
No	2.76	2.74	2.77
Yes	2.75	2.74	2.81
Teleworking	***	***	***
No	2.75	2.73	2.76
Yes	2.86	2.85	2.86
Performance appraisal	***	***	***
No	2.62	2.60	2.63
Yes	2.79	2.77	2.81
Training	***	***	***
No	2.65	2.64	2.65
Yes	2.88	2.87	2.89
<b>Control variables</b>			
Education	***	***	***
No ed. qualification	2.70	2.69	2.70
Brevet	2.69	2.65	2.72
CAP-BEP	2.67	2.68	2.68
Bac (High school)	2.71	2.70	2.72
Bac+2	2.78	2.76	2.80
Bac+3 or 4 (undergrad.)	2.82	2.80	2.85
>Bac+4 (graduate)	2.92	2.87	2.96
Age	***		***
16-29	2.79	2.73	2.83
30-49	2.75	2.75	2.75
50+	2.76	2.74	2.78
Workplace tenure (years)	***		***
4-	2.79	2.76	2.83
5-10	2.74	2.74	2.75
11+	2.75	2.74	2.76
Promotion	***	***	***
No	2.67	2.66	2.67
Yes	2.98	2.96	2.98
Type of contract	***	***	**
Permanent	2.75	2.73	2.76
Temporary	2.83	2.84	2.83
Occupational category	***	***	***
Specialized worker	2.60	2.57	2.62
Skilled worker	2.67	2.62	2.68
Employee	2.69	2.69	2.67
Technician	2.79	2.81	2.77
Engineer/Manager	2.94	2.90	2.96
Other	2.74	2.72	2.76
Function	***	***	***
Production	2.69	2.62	2.70
Maintenance	2.76	2.76	2.76
Accounting/Finance	2.87	2.84	2.91
R&D	2.92	2.90	2.93
Other	2.75	2.73	2.77

Significance levels: \*=0.1; \*\*=0.01; \*\*\*=0.001

The difference in job satisfaction according to working time is only significant for men: part-time male workers reported higher job satisfaction. This could be explained by the fact

that involuntary part-time work is more common among women than men and is associated with precarious employment (Young, 2010). Therefore, the female part-time workers may include both women who are satisfied because they deliberately chose to work part-time for a better work-life balance and women who are dissatisfied because they would prefer working full-time. Although the data used in this study does not allow us to differentiate between voluntary and involuntary part-time work, controlling for job characteristics would help clarify this point. The three other HRM practices identified in the hypotheses (teleworking, performance appraisal, training) are associated with higher job satisfaction for both men and women.

The level of job satisfaction increases with education for both women and men. This could be attributed to the fact that higher levels of education are linked to better working situations. However, research has shown that expectations also increase with education (Perugini & Vladislavljević, 2019). Hence, this descriptive result should be examined further through a regression analysis to control for the work situation. The relationship between age and job satisfaction follows a U-shaped curve (i.e., job satisfaction decreases with age and then increases again) for the sample as a whole and for men, but not for women. Promotion increases the level of job satisfaction, as in previous research (Top et al., 2015), knowing that women are less promoted than men (Table 2). The results for the type of contract contradict previous research (Hünefeld et al., 2020) with temporary workers reporting a higher average level of job satisfaction.

Those descriptive statistics partly explain why women are less satisfied by men: notably, they telework less and they are less trained, whereas telework and training are associated with higher levels of job satisfaction. However, they have more performance appraisals, which contribute to job satisfaction. Table 5 reports the results of the models.

Table 5. Models

	<b>Model 1</b> <b>(Whole sample)</b>	<b>Model 2</b> <b>(Whole sample)</b>	<b>Model 3</b> <b>(Female sample)</b>	<b>Model 4</b> <b>(Male sample)</b>
Intercept	2.61***	2.61***	2.56***	2.62***
Sex				
Female	-0.03***	-0.04**		
<b>HR practices</b>				
Part-time (ref. No)				
Yes	0.07***	0.09***	0.06***	0.10***
Teleworking (ref. No)				
Yes	0.02*	0.02	0.04*	0.01
Performance appraisal (ref. No)				
Yes	0.08***	0.07***	0.10***	0.06***
Training (ref. No)				
Yes	0.17***	0.17***	0.16***	0.17***
<b>Interaction effects</b>				
Sex x Part-Time				
Sex x Teleworking				
Sex x Performance appraisal		*		
Sex x Training				
<b>Control variables</b>				
Education (ref. CAP-BEP)				
No ed. qualification	0.07***	0.07***	0.06*	0.08***
Brevet	0.04	0.04**	0.01	0.06**
Bac (High school)	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.01
Bac+2	0.00	0.00	-0.02	0.01
Bac+3 or 4 (undergrad.)	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.02
>Bac+4 (graduate)	0.01	0.01	-0.01	0.03
Age (ref. 30-49)				
16-29	0.02	0.02*	-0.01	0.04**
50+	0.05***	0.05***	0.04**	0.06***
Workplace tenure (ref. 11+)				
4-	0.04**	0.04***	0.03*	0.04**
5-10	-0.02*	-0.02*	-0.02	-0.02*
Promotion (ref. No)				
Yes	0.25***	0.25***	0.25***	0.26***
Type of contract (ref. Permanent)				
Temporary	0.10***	0.10***	0.13***	0.07***
Occupational cat. (ref. Eng./Man.)				
Specialized worker	-0.20***	-0.20***	-0.16***	-0.22***
Skilled worker	-0.17***	-0.17***	-0.16***	-0.18***
Employee	-0.14***	-0.14***	-0.10***	-0.19***
Technician	-0.11***	-0.11***	-0.05*	-0.14***
Other	-0.10***	-0.10***	-0.08***	-0.12***
Function (ref. Other)				
Production	-0.02*	-0.02*	-0.05**	-0.01
Maintenance	0.01	0.01	0.06	0.02
Accounting/Finance	0.07***	0.07***	0.08***	0.06**
R&D	0.04**	0.04**	0.04*	0.04*
R2	0.13	0.13	0.12	0.14
Adjusted R2	0.13	0.13	0.11	0.14

Significance levels: \*=0.1; \*\*=0.01; \*\*\*=0.001

Model 1 was applied to the whole sample and did not include moderators. In this model as in Model 2 (with moderators), women report lower job satisfaction than men.

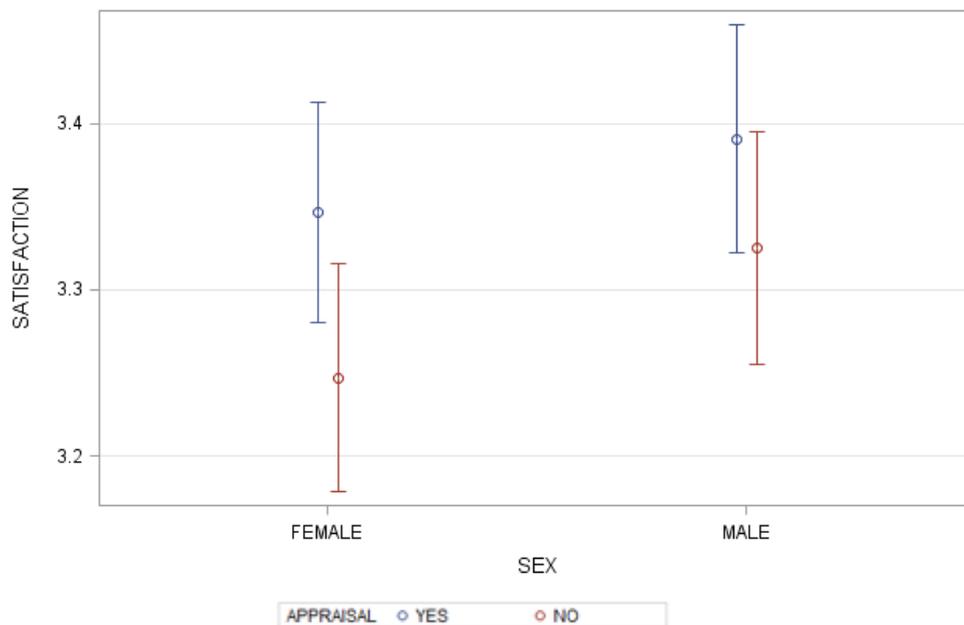
Part-time work is associated with higher levels of job satisfaction for women as for men (Models 3 and 4). This shows that when controlling for job characteristics, women derive the same satisfaction from part-time work as men. This is confirmed by the insignificant interaction effect between sex and part-time work. Therefore, Hypothesis H1 is only partially supported because part-time work increases job satisfaction for men too.

Teleworking is associated with higher job satisfaction for women (Model 3), but not for men (Model 4). Therefore, Hypothesis H2 is supported.

Formal individual performance appraisals increase job satisfaction for both women (Model 3) and men (Model 4). The interaction effect sex  $\times$  performance appraisal is significant. A closer look at this moderator (Figure 1) indicates that the positive effect of individual performance appraisals is higher for women than for men, therefore supporting Hypothesis H3.

Training is associated with higher job satisfaction for women (Model 3) and for men (Model 4). Hypothesis H4 is only partially supported, as there is no significant difference between women and men (the moderator sex  $\times$  training is not significant).

Figure 1. Sex x Performance appraisal



*Displayed are group means and the corresponding 95% confidence intervals of job satisfaction for each joint level of the regressors for women and men and for different situations of performance appraisal.*

Concerning the control variables, in all four models, people without educational qualifications report higher job satisfaction. This result, combined with the descriptive statistics, which indicated that the average job satisfaction increases with the educational level, supports the idea that people with educational attainment have better working situations and therefore have greater average job satisfaction. However, they also have higher expectations and consequently lower average job satisfaction when controlling for the job characteristics. This is true for both men and women. In all four models, people aged 50 and over report the highest job satisfaction among all age groups. Promotion increases job satisfaction for both women and men. In all four models, having a temporary job increases job satisfaction. Some of these results are rather surprising as they contradict previous research and are discussed below.

## IV. Discussion

This study deals with the relationship between sex, job satisfaction, and HR practices. It attempts to shed some light on the gender-job satisfaction debate. While some previous studies have indicated that women report a higher level of job satisfaction than men (Clark, 1997; Hodson, 1989; Zou, 2015), others have challenged this result, claiming that the relationship between sex and job satisfaction depends on the country (Eskildsen et al., 2004; Huang & Gamble, 2015; Sousa-Poza & Sousa-Poza, 2000). Using a French nationally representative dataset, the results of this study indicate that French women report lower job satisfaction than men.

In line with the theoretical framework of gendered organizations, the following variables related to HR practices were introduced: part-time, teleworking, performance appraisal, training, and promotion. In an attempt to gain deeper insight into gender-job satisfaction relationships, interaction effects were employed and the models were estimated separately for women and men.

Part-time work increases job satisfaction for both men and women, which contradicts previous research that found no effect of part-time work on men's job satisfaction (Booth & Ours, 2008; Fenton-O'Creevy, 1995). This could be explained by the fact that the data in the study are very recent (2017) and are specific to France. Indeed, it has been shown that the youngest generations are more in search of work-life balance (Pedulla & Thébaud, 2015). Moreover, only a few French men work part-time (5.14 % in our data) and the majority of them are voluntary part-time employees (e.g., because they have another professional activity or follow a training course) (Pak, 2013), which could explain why they are more satisfied.

Teleworking is associated with a higher job satisfaction for women, but not for men. This could be explained by the fact that teleworking offers flexibility in terms of working hours without sacrificing salary, which could be appealing to people in charge of domestic tasks

who do not want to give up their careers or salaries (Chung & van der Horst, 2018). This is in line with previous research which shows that flexibility policies help reduce gender inequalities (Van der Lippe et al., 2019).

Having an individual performance appraisal increases both female and male employees' job satisfaction. The size of the positive effect of individual performance appraisals is higher for women than for men. This supports the idea that women benefit more from formal performance appraisals because they can reduce the weight of the implicit (Mastracci & Arreola, 2016; Ugarte & Rubery, 2021) and because women tend to attach more importance to procedures than men (Jepsen & Rodwell, 2012).

Training increases job satisfaction for both women and men (Kampkötter, 2017; Kooij et al., 2013; Top et al., 2015). It has the same effect for women as men. Again, consistent with the most recent research in non-Anglo-Saxon countries (Huang & Gamble, 2015), this result updates the literature on the determinants of job satisfaction for women and men as well as on gender and work orientation. Indeed, it shows that similar to men, working women derive satisfaction from their professional development, which contradicts older studies on the subject (Clark, 1997; Hakim, 1991; Zou, 2015), but is in line with the most recent studies that indicate that women no longer want to make work-family tradeoffs (Grönlund & Öun, 2018; Huang & Gamble, 2015, 2015).

Surprisingly, for the whole sample, having a temporary contract is associated with higher job satisfaction, which contradicts previous research which finds a lower level of job satisfaction among temporary workers (Busk et al., 2017), or no significant difference between temporary and permanent workers (De Witte & Näswall, 2003). This paradox could be explained by the fact that, in France, workers with fixed-term contracts are entitled to a specific financial compensation guaranteed by law, which increases their salary. Another

explanation can be found in the heterogeneity of the temporary workers group, between executives who have opted for flexibility and underqualified people, but also between fixed-term contract and temporary agency workers. Indeed, it has been shown that contractors have a higher level of job satisfaction than agency workers (Wilkin, 2013).

The results of this study offer three main areas of discussion with previous research. First, the relationship between sex and job satisfaction depends on the country. Contrary to Anglo-Saxon countries (Zou, 2015), but similar to other countries such as China (Huang & Gamble, 2015), women in France report lower job satisfaction than men. This cannot be entirely attributed to the fact that they face more precarious working conditions, as women with part-time jobs and temporary contracts report higher job satisfaction. However, this could be due to the fact that they have less interesting jobs, with less autonomy, and lower salary. Indeed, the findings show that the differential of satisfaction between men and women is the most important for satisfaction in terms of pay (Table 3).

Second, this study confirms the strong impact of HR practices on job satisfaction (Kooij et al., 2013) and that certain practices (e.g., teleworking, formal performance appraisals) have a greater effect on women than on men. This could be explained through the theoretical framework of gendered organizations, which assumes that organizations are implicitly designed by men and for men. Therefore, some HR practices that reduce this implicit (e.g., formal performance appraisals in this study) benefit women more than men. Other practices that offer more flexibility (e.g., teleworking in this study) benefit women more than men. However, some other HR practices, as part-time work and training, do not have different effects for women and men. The difference between part-time work and teleworking is interesting. Indeed, both are included in so-called flexibility policies (Van der Lippe et al., 2019), but this study shows that actually they have different effects, as teleworking does not

have effect of male satisfaction. Teleworking may benefit women more because it offers the flexibility they need without being associated to a wage loss. This suggests that the theories claiming that work orientation between women and men is profoundly different (Hakim, 1991, 2006) should be updated. In 2017, French working women want to succeed too, and therefore value more flexible working arrangements (teleworking), which allow for the reconciliation of work and family life without sacrificing either of them (Grönlund & Öun, 2018). This assumption is also supported by the most recent studies carried out in other countries (Chung & van der Horst, 2018).

Third, the descriptive statistics (Table 3) indicate that the differential of satisfaction differs across the dimensions of job satisfaction: it is more important for pay, but less important for working conditions, training, and ambiance. This indicates that, contrary to previous research on the topic conducted in Anglo-Saxon countries (Davison, 2014), French women are aware that they earn less than men (Valet, 2018), and this is detrimental to their overall job satisfaction.

## **Conclusion and implications**

Using a nationally representative French survey, this study assesses the extent to which the determinants of job satisfaction vary according to sex. First, the findings indicate that in France, there is no such thing as the paradox of the contented female employee: women report lower levels of job satisfaction, even after controlling for individual characteristics. Among the HR practices, the study shows that teleworking and performance appraisal have more positive effects for women than for men, while part-time work and training have the same effect for women and men.

The findings of the study have theoretical implications as they enable a discussion of Acker's (2006) theoretical framework of gendered organizations, which assumes that traditional HR practices are gendered (Metcalf, 2008) and may indirectly disadvantage

women compared to men (Mastracci & Arreola, 2016). Indeed, the results suggest that among HR practices, teleworking and formal performance appraisal benefit women more than men. Therefore, it can be assumed that these HR practices help reduce gender inequality and undo the gender hierarchies within organizations. The result concerning teleworking is not surprising (Chung & van der Horst, 2018; Van der Lippe et al., 2019). Previous research shows that formal performance appraisal could introduce transparency and formalized bureaucratic rules that can mitigate bias, but also that performance evaluation could disadvantage women when work qualities that are often associated with male workers are valued (Mastracci & Arreola, 2016; Ugarte & Rubery, early view). The study's findings suggest that the transparency effect is more important than the latter one, as in some previous research (Baron et al., 2007). The result concerning part-time work indicates that this “flexibility policy” does not particularly benefit women.

Managerially, this implies that teleworking could enhance gender equality and increase women's job satisfaction. Indeed, it allows women to keep working without losing pay (as part-time work implies). Previous studies have already proven that family-friendly policies could help women feel better within organizations (Huang & Gamble, 2015) and could contribute to the reduction of gender inequalities (Van der Lippe et al., 2019). The study's results, backed by other recent studies (Chung & van der Horst, 2018), identifies teleworking as a specific family-friendly policy that could most likely help women deal with work-family conflict. Second, having formal performance appraisals also appears to be an effective means of reducing gender inequality within organizations, as they benefit women more than men. Again, this helps determine the formal policies that could most likely reduce the weight of the implicit within organizations, which are often detrimental to women.

The limitations of the study include the fact that it is based on cross-sectional data; therefore, causation cannot be definitively established. In addition, job satisfaction is certainly

influenced by unobservable data such as personality traits or content of the work in itself, which the REPOSE data set does not cover. Another limitation is that the questionnaire does not contain any information about race or ethnicity (due to the French law which prohibits the collection of data on race or ethnicity). Another limitation is related to the impossibility to differentiate between voluntary and involuntary part-time work in the data, even if controlling for the other job characteristics is a first step toward this distinction, as involuntary part-time work is more present in some sectors and occupations. Finally, the data used for the study do not include individual wages, whereas it can be one of the determinants of job satisfaction.

The results call for more extensive research on the gender-job satisfaction debate in non-Anglo-Saxon countries. Further research is needed in order to identify the determinants of job satisfaction for women and men, as well as to understand why the effects of some determinants vary according to sex. The results also suggest that the relationship between sex and job satisfaction will change over time, notably with the current pandemic situation which has made teleworking widespread. This calls for longitudinal studies.

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