"Like greenwashing but for gender"

A thematic analysis on how young women experience gendered practices and structures at the COP conferences

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Abstract

Seeing how climate change disproportionately affects women and children, the voices of young people and women are vital to incorporate into discussions and decision-making processes regarding climate change. This thesis explores the experiences of young women in the climate movement who have participated at the COP climate conferences between 2015-2023. By drawing on the theoretical framework of feminist institutionalism and hegemonic gender order in politics, this study utilizes qualitative interviews to examine the subjective experience of gendered institutional practices and structures at COP. Through a conceptual and thematic analysis of qualitative data derived from interviews, the findings suggest that the participants were affected by gendered barriers and exclusionary practices, such as tokenization, not experiencing safe spaces, and being judged for what they wear at COP, which further reinforces dominant gendered power structures. By researching the subjective experiences and perceptions of the participants, this research has provided a further understanding of how young women in the climate movement participate in multilateral climate negotiations.

Key words: feminist institutionalism, thematic analysis, women's political participation, youth participation, COP conferences
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1   Introduction

"The climate crisis is not gender neutral" (Johnson & Wilkinson, 2020).

Climate change disproportionately affects women (UNFCCC, 2022). While the consequences of the climate crisis are experienced globally, issues such as increased sea levels, declining numbers of biodiversity and extreme weather events, the impacts of these events are not experienced equally (IPCC, 2022). Paradoxically, the majority of the world's population are only responsible for roughly 20% of the global greenhouse gas emissions, which is proven to be the main driver for climate change, however the most marginalised and vulnerable groups, such as women and children in the Global South, are disproportionately affected by climate change and natural disasters (Gaard, 2015). Women worldwide are facing the repercussions of the climate crisis as a "result of systemic gender discrimination and societal expectations related to gender roles" (UNFCCC, 2022) and are therefore experiencing more precarious situations than men due to unjust structural barriers such as gendered social norms, sexist discrimination and poverty (CARE, n.d.). Further, this disparity is especially experienced by girls and young women. Research shows that the consequences of climate change disproportionately negatively affects the lives of young women since/because they are more likely to be displaced, be exposed to gender-based violence, not be able to complete their education and be excluded from climate discussions (UNICEF, 2022). It is therefore vital that young women's perspectives are incorporated into discussions and decision-making processes regarding climate change.

Research shows that, within the activist movement, women's experiences are often overlooked (Craddock, 2019, 6), yet young women and girls are spearheading the youth climate movement and seen as faces of the climate movement (Sorce, 2022). A main arena for international climate change discussions is the annual Conference of the Parties (COP) in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which serves as conferences to assess and discuss the progress of climate change negotiations (Cummings, 2022, 7-10). The COP attracts the participation of state leaders and various representatives from all around the world, as well as stakeholders from civil society and the media, making the conference a leading global movement for discussing climate issues (UK COP26, 2021). Yet, even though the United Nations and its subsidiary decision-making bodies strive to highlight and emphasise the significant participation of both youth organizations and women's organizations within the UNFCCC processes, as part of participation from civil society, both entities have long critiqued the UNFCCC for disregarding their voices (Cummings, 2022, 7-10). This sparked an interest in exploring the gendered elements at play in the youth climate movement and to my knowledge of the researched literature, there is a relatively small body of literature that is concerned with the gender aspect in youth climate activism within the UNFCCC processes, which suggests a research gap in the overall research on young participants from the climate movement who participate in multilateral climate negotiations.

1.1   Research aim and questions

This study aims to explore the ways young women experience instituional gendered practices and structures within the context at COP conferences. It does this by utilising a feminist approach that focuses on the gendered subjective experiences of young women who participated at the COP conferences as representatives from youth organizations, specifically between 2015-2023.

Through a conceptual and thematic analysis of qualitative data derived from interviews, the research seeks to provide a valuable insight into how young female participants navigate their roles, identities and participation at the institutional context of the COP conferences. Furthermore, the findings of this thesis hopes to contribute to the existing body of research on young women in the climate movement participate in multilateral climate negotiations.

In order to fulfil the aim, this thesis will explore the following research question:

- How are the experiences of young female participants in the climate movement shaped by gendered institutional structures and practices at COP conferences?

1.2 Background

This following section contains a description of the empirical background of this study. This is to give context to the studied case of the COP21-28 and to further explain the reasons behind studying these specific COPs. First presented is a short introduction to the United Nations Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is presented. Second, a brief introduction to the Conference of the Parties (COP) is presented, followed by an explanation of the researched COPs in this study. Thirdly,

For clarification, the term *youth* is defined as the period between childhood and adulthood. Many international NGOs determine *youth* within youth groups as young people between 18 to 35 years, which is the definition that will be used as the understanding of young activists or young people hereafter in this study (McCants, 2007).

1.2.1 The United Nations Convention on Climate Change

The United Nations Convention on Climate Change, abbreviated UNFCCC, is an international treaty that was adopted in 1992 in order to address the pressing issue of climate change through international climate negotiations. Since its establishment, the convention has been ratified by 197 states and has formed historical agreements such as the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 and the Paris Agreement in 2015. Summarized, the structure of the convention is made up of the Conference of the Parties (COP), a secretariat and subsidiary bodies, in which the Parties work together to gather scientific data, share knowledge, build evidence, set goals, and track the progress (LSE, 2022).

1.2.2 Conference of the Parties

As previously mentioned, COP stands for the Conference of the Parties, which is the supreme decision-making body of the UNFCCC. The first COP was held in 1995 with the main objective of reviewing the ongoing progress in dealing with climate change, and to negotiate and implement measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and address the impacts of climate change (Cummings, 2022, 7-10). The annual event, hosted in different cities around the world, also serves as a forum for countries to share information, exchange ideas, and coordinate efforts in their progress. The COPs are leading global movements for discussing climate change where the gatherings and negotiations are attended by leaders and representatives, as well as representatives from civil society, private sector, academia, and other stakeholders from nearly 200 countries, who participate in proceedings. Additionally, there are formal and informal discussions all year around where the formal negotiations that precedes COP, known as 'pre-COP', are called intersessional meetings which are held months before the actual COP. The intersessionals form the basis of the decisions made at COP (LSE, 2023; UK COP26, 2021).

The COPs are named corresponding to which year it is held. The table below shows an overview of the COPs researched in this study by presenting the name and what year, city, and country it was held in.

Table 1. COPs included in this thesis:

Name	Year	City, Country
COP21	2015	Paris, France
COP22	2016	Marrakech, Morocco
COP23	2017	Bonn, Germany
COP24	2018	Katowice, Poland
COP25	2019	Madrid, Spain
COP26	2021	Glasgow, Scotland
COP27	2022	Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt
COP28	2023	Dubai, United Arab Emirates

To introduce thesis study and provide context, this first section will reflect on the COPs studied in this thesis, and why it is relevant to mention why they were specifically chosen. There are two reasons behind choosing to study the COP21-28 held between the years 2015-2023. These choices are presented in order to highlight the transparency behind the study's research with the aim of upholding the validity of the study. Firstly, the main reasons for studying the COP21-28 was based on 1) the turning point of the inclusion of youth at COP21 and 2) the development of how young people have spoken about their involvement at the most recent COPs. Also, the span of 2015-2023 guided the interview sampling process which is further explained in the section *4.3 Sampling.*

Moreover, at the COP21 in 2015, the famous Paris Agreement was signed, which in itself was revolutionary with the 1.5°C goal, which is expanded upon later in the study. The agreement was seen as a key instrument for meeting the targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs, and further as a turning point for including youth organizations as "the agreement calls for countries to take ambitious and progressive action and enables a collaborative approach to climate action." By recognizing the importance of including civil society and social actors such as youth organizations, the agreement is argued to be a positive turning point for youth and adolescent voices within the negotiations (UNICEF, n-d.).

However, over the years of COP, youth voices have become more critical of their participation is viewed in the climate negotiations. The youth organization PUSH Sweden critiqued the COP23 in 2019 of youth-washing, referring to the practice of praising youth for their involvement and action against climate injustice, whilst at the same time excluding them from high-level conversations and actual decision-making processes (Sloan Morgan, Melchior, Thomas, & McNab-Coombs, 2024; PUSH Sweden, 2019). To conclude, the deciding factors for which COPs to study, was decided by both the turning point of youth inclusion in the UNFCCC processes and the recent intriguing statement made by youth actors, and additionally on the fact that all of the interviewees were in the age group that fit within the participation of young people of the COPs. Further, considering the scope of the study and timeframe, studying more COPs dating further back in time might have provided more comprehensive research.

1.2.3 Adding gender to the agenda

Additionally, to add to the empirical background and to further contextualize the concept of gender in this study, this following section briefly presents how the concept of gender is viewed in the UNFCCC processes. The relevance of gender

within climate negotiations has not always been a highly discussed topic at the COP. According to Hahku (2019), discussions on gender issues within climate negotiations at the UNFCCC began at the COP7, in 2001 in Marrakech, with the decision 36/CP.7 that entailed the improvement of the effective participation and representation of women. This was emphasized by asking the Parties of the Kyoto Protocol to contemplate women to be elected in elective posts, hence bettering the question of representation (Hakhu, 2019). Later in 2012, at the COP18 in Doha, the discussions of gender progressed beyond representation by involving the framing of gender-sensitive climate politics in what would become the decision 23/CP.18. Gender was added as a standing item on the agenda and in-session workshops on topics like gender balance were proposed for future COPs. It isn't until COP21, during the decision of the Paris Agreement, that the word *gender* is included in the preface, driven by pressure from civil society and the political arena. By including the word gender, various intersectional points are acknowledged, such as any climate change action should be underpinned by gender considerations (Hakhu, 2019).

1.2.4   Women's and youth organizations at COP

While women of all ages are encouraged to participate in all levels of political decision-making processes such as discussions of climate change (Asuako, 2020), it is also acknowledged that women as a group are excluded or restricted from these contexts worldwide, despite evidence showing that women make more sustainable decisions than men. For example, high numbers of female representation in parliament is shown to lead to more forceful climate change policies resulting in lower carbon dioxide emissions (UNFCCC, 2022). Sadly, at present, young women's influence on governance and decision-making processes are limited. The category of young women and girls, especially from low-income, unemployed, minorities or other disadvantaged groups, are more exposed to "public prejudice and stereotypes, intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion", which can result in highly reduced motivation and opportunity to

actively engage and participate in political processes (Council of Europe, 2020). This throws light on gendered power dynamics within the discussions of climate change and the call for nation states, governments, and institutions to include women's, and especially young women's, voices within these discussions.

For instance, The Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) presents data on gender balance within the UNFCCC spaces which shows that the gender balance in climate negotiations still lacks adequate representation from women. For example, COP27 only had 35% of women participating on party delegations or data of how women serving as Heads of Delegation at COP is always lower than at the intersessionals between COP meetings, suggesting that women often acquire powerful positions when decision-making is considered to be less crucial (WEDO, 2023). Additionally, men are disproportionately represented in institutions (O'Connor Shelley, Morabito & Tobin-Gurley, 2011) and the UNFCCC does recognize this gender disparity by implementing gender-specific decisions and goals such as gender-mainstreaming strategies and gender action plans. Even so, these initiatives are argued to "have not yielded urgent and significant change in overall representation (...), but progress continues to be slow and inconsistent" (WEDO, 2023).

Similarly to statements made by women's organizations and youth organizations at the UNFCCC events argue that their participation and contribution have received little attention, arguing that there is a lack of reflection of how youth participants should best be supported, thus backed by the argument that "in the climate change governance literature, attention to youth is long overdue" (Thew, Middlemiss, & Paavola, 2020). In the more recent years, youth participation has been rising (Thew, 2018) and youth climate activism has accelerated, and young people are increasingly expressing their opinions on the pressing issue of climate change. Activists have been engaging in climate movements such as Fridays for Future, thus receiving both positive and negative attention from the public and the media. In relation to COP, young people have been engaging at the conferences

for more than a decade and are "recognized as critical to ensuring the efficiency, effectiveness and equity of climate change governance" (Thew, et al, 2020) and yet, despite the encouragement of engaging in platforms and activism to make their voices heard, young people have expressed feelings of being overlooked and disregarded. Many young participants feel that their participation was only for show and the term "youth-washing" was coined by the Swiss Youth for Climate delegation, following the COP26 (PUSH Sweden, 2019) which refers to the act of including young people to appear more inclusive but without any sharing decision-making power (Thew et al. 2020).

Overall, drawing on the notion that the UNFCCC seemingly emphasizes the importance of both women participation and youth groups within decision-making processes, there are various voices raising concerns regarding the challenges of access to resources, representation, and gendered power dynamics within the discussions of climate change. Young people, particularly young women may be participating at the COP, but how are they experiencing being young women in male and adult dominated settings, what type of challenges are they facing, and who is listening to them?

2   Literature review

In order to provide context to the study, this following section draws on scholarly literature to present an analytical summary of the current state of knowledge on challenges faced by youth participants at COP and women who are involved in political arenas.

2.1   Youth participation at COP

There is an extensive existing, and growing, body of scholarly literature written on the topic of youth participation in climate change governance and scholars have been examining the importance of young people's voices from various perspectives and approaches. However, it is argued that the perspective of gender is largely absent, and scholars argue for the significance of gender in shaping the experiences of young people who engage in climate activism (Pahkala, 2023).

To set the base of this study, this section presents an analytical summary of youth participation at the COP and some of the challenges they face. To begin, youth participation is described as "the democratic practice of young people actively engaging with their social environment" by involving youth in processes, projects, and initiatives (Wong, Zimmerman & Parker, 2010). Within the UNFCCC negotiations, young actors/people have been participating in the processes since COP5 in 1999, however youth as a group were not granted constituency status until COP15 in 2009, and official constituency status in 2011 (YOUNGO, n.d.), when youth NGOs, called "YOUNGO", were officially recognized as one of nine

civil society constituencies at the UNFCCC (Thew, Middlemiss & Paavola, 2020). Further, the parties of the UNFCCC now realize and recognize the importance of non-state actor participation. By implementing "Action for Climate Empowerment" (ACE) the role of non-state actors is recognized as 'critical to ensuring the efficiency, effectiveness and equity of climate change governance' and youth are therefore emphasized as key stakeholders in the climate change policies and programmes (Thew, Karsgaard, Marquardt, Rist and Yona, 2021).

But why is it important to involve young people in the UNFCCC negotiations? The UNFCCC themselves argue that young people contribute in various ways, for example at deliberations at meetings, at workshops, and direct lobbying with delegates. The involvement of young people provides a more holistic approach to tackle climate change where their involvement furthers a fair, equitable and inclusive climate deal, partly by bringing new perspectives which nuances the negotiation dynamics and outcomes. Beyond adding value to the discussions, young people themselves say that "decisions take about us, should not be taken without us", demonstrating how their participation should be recognized as a means to improve policy responses (UNFCCC, 2010).

Furthermore, youth participate and engage as observers at the COP, as NGOs are registered as observer organizations (UNFCCC, n.d-c.), and the majority of youth participants are unpaid volunteers (Thew, 2018). It is argued that limited attention is given to the youth experiences and contributions within the UNFCCC processes where scholars Thew et al (2021) argue that youth do not share the same experiences, nor face the same challenges, as all non-state actors. Youth groups largely face hinders such as lack of resources, recognition, and power. Even before participating at the COP, youth participants face struggle in terms of financial funding for travelling and accommodation. The prices at the COP host city are usually inflated, which means that young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to attend, resulting in their voices *remaining* unheard. This also leads to young people staying at cheap accommodation,

generally located far from the conference venue which demands travelling far at night following the conference which poses a risk for young women and non-binary people. Additionally, cases of sexual harassment has been reported by young people at COPs where protocols have been established in order to ensure participants personal safety and scholars argue for gendered spaces at the conference and safe transport provided by the host city (Thew, et al, 2021).

Moreover, young people have lately been speaking up in the media and on social media platforms regarding their involvement. In 2019, Swiss Youth for Climate Delegation accused the COP25 of youth-washing, a term which refers to the practice of praising youth for their involvement and action against climate injustice, whilst at the same time excluding them from high-level conversations and actual decision-making processes, creating a form of tokenization (Sloan Morgan, Melchior, Thomas & McNab-Coombs, 2024). Since its conceptualization, very annual COP conference since 2019 has been criticized of youthwashing by youth delegates (PUSH Sweden, 2019; Free Malaysia Today, n.d.; Oxby, 2022; Zhong, 2023) who argue that their role as young people at the climate conference "are treated with overt hypocritical respect, viewed more so as a 'tick-box' requirement, as opposed to equals" (Oxby, 2022).

Similarly, young people have reported on events where they are invited to participate, come up with new innovative ideas, and preferably be photographed for social media, however their participation is only seen as a way of diversifying an event, and their opinions and ideas are overlooked (Thew, et al, 2021). By placing heavy burden, or 'responsibilization', on young people to be able and expected to solve the climate crisis themselves is argued to be (MacKay, Parlee and Karsgaard, 2020) and the concept of tokenism is further explored by Nkrumah (2021) who presents tokenistic participation within adult-dominated engagements. Here, the author argues that young citizens face a series of limitations which hinders them to influence discussions since they are viewed as 'not fully human (beings)' yet, therefore more seen as passive, incapable

recipients who are not equal partners to adults. Tokenistic participation focuses on the act of wanting to include a few youths, young people are often outnumbered by adults, by inviting them to make brief appearances at policy discussions, yet whose opinions or recommendations will be diminished in the final product (Nkrumah, 2021).

2.2 Women's participation in politics

There has been a substantial amount of scholarly literature written about women's participation and representation within political institutions. Over the past few decades, several scholars have researched the topic in various disciplines by exploring the many different aspects of women's involvement in for example parliaments, political parties, and local communities. To contextualize the previous literature in this study, this literature will focus on the challenges and hindrances faced by women when participating and engaging within political institutions. Some scholars have researched the complex relation between gender and conceptions of power and patriarchal structures and practices, where the power inequality relies on a patriarchal system that is based on the subordination of women by men (Walby, 1990; de Simone, Putzu, Lasio and Serri, 2018). Through the internalization of gendered norms and the historical association of women doing housework and men labour-working and participating in political activities, these gender relations create power relations. By producing this discourse in everyday life, this "gap of power" between men and women becomes invisible and further seen as legitimate (Bourdieu, 1991).

2.2.1 Women's perceived safety

Furthermore, scholar Caiazza (2005) raises the importance of highlighting how men and women face different challenges when engaging in the civic and political

arena. Caiazza's study investigates the relationship between the difference in men's and women's perceived safety in their communities and how it relates to their involvement in community organizations and activities. The author asks the question: "Do perceived levels of safety from crime or violence influence men's and women's decisions to become involved in their communities?" (Caiazza, 2005, 2) By researching how men and women perceive their personal safety, the scholar found that violence and women's fear of violence can affect women's lives and their behaviour, more than it affects men. The social construction of fear of violence can be explained by looking at socio-gendered division of spaces where spatial boundaries matter. Women can feel "authorized" to visit some places where their presence is "legitimate and allowed", and less bound to go to places where they might overstep these spatial boundaries (Condon, Lieber & Maillochon, 2007). The fear of violence, and especially gender-based violence targeted at women such as sexual assault, affects the way women make decisions regarding their daily lives and thus their decision whether to engage in community activities or not. Most "public" political activities happen after work, in the evenings and when it's dark outside. This aspect of perceived safety is generally not prevalent when discussing the involvement of women or their political power, however Caiazza argues that the aspect is neglected because of women's traditional exclusion from political processes, and the silence regarding this matter comes as a result. Seeing as women are more likely than men to have experienced sexual physical assault, the author asserts that the fear of violence does negatively affect women's political and civic participation. For women as a group, the sense of perceived safety is strongly linked to being involved in community organizations whereas for men, perceived safety does not affect their engagement (Caiazza, 2005).

2.2.2 Gendered Tokenism

This section presents the concept of tokenism seen from a cultural perspective, which further explores the micro-meso level (actions of individuals - parts of

society, e.g. groups, organizations) structural dynamics beyond gender quotas, in order to unveil how gendered power is perpetuated and concealed. To begin, the authors expand on the concept by looking at the modern cultural perspective of tokenism where they defined tokenism as "a pattern of activity meant to foster the illusion of inclusivity with social systems where a dominant group is pressured to share resources (e.g., privilege, power, commodities) with a historically excluded group." (Drenten, Harrison and Pendarvis, 2022, 22; Johnson & Schulman, 1989, 15) The excluded group needs to accept and work in the domain of the dominant group, yet they are evaluated under more strict standards as exemplified by addressing micro-meso level (actions of individuals - parts of society, e.g. groups, organizations) structural dynamics of women's experiences when participating in hyper-masculine subcultures such as motorcycling where women "co-opt masculine behaviors to redefine personal femininities and combat inequity." In their study, tokenized women with the 'legitimate credentials' are allowed to participate if they agree to participate by the dominant group's rules, but they are still labelled as outsiders and relegated to the role of "token women". Here, tokenized women as the marginalized group can be tolerated but not assimilated (Drenten, et al, 2022).

Furthermore, Drenten et al. (2022) argue that past definitions of tokenism need to be developed. Previous scholarship (Kanter, 1977) has focused on critical mass, e.g., gender quotas, as a way of fighting gender inequity by increasing the number of women in traditionally dominated male, or perceived masculine, workspaces. Yet, by implementing representation percentages without considering a broader social context of the group, led by insufficient number of perspectives, it is argued to lead to increased levels of discrimination and harassment. When marginalized groups, such as women, are placed in male-dominated spaces through affirmative action, they can be seen as threatening to men's access to resources, resulting in increased levels of sexism. The scholars have since developed and conceptualized this notion by for example developing the tenet of *role trapment* which refers to "essentializes gendered characteristics in which women's identities and

opportunities become bound by gendered stereotypes" where women are forced to fit into preexisting generalisations of their characteristics, exemplified by, when saleswomen are mistaken for secretaries. Through *role trapment*, women can only exist in masculine dominant spaces as gender stereotypes (Drenten, et al, 2022; Johnson & Schulman, 1989, 15-16).

2.3   Hegemonic Gender Order in Politics

The section presents a concept central to this study and that will recur in the discussion, namely *The hegemonic gender order in politics* which is explored by scholars de Simone, Putzu, Lasio and Serri (2018). To contextualize, research on the topic of hegemonic gender and hegemonic masculinity is very well researched (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Butler, 1990; Duncansson, 2015) as concepts to understand gender as dynamic and relational, however the study by Simone et al (2018) focuses on hegemonic power dynamics within politics, which relates to aim of this study. In their article, the authors present a case study of women's political underrepresentation in politics in Italy. The authors argue that despite the increase of women in top positions in the political arena, they are still underrepresented in politics which reproduces the imbalance and unequal gender relations (de Simone et al, 2018).

Furthermore, the scholars' study shows how the dominant gender order is performed and reinforced through discursive practices, such as *Women's disinterest towards politics* and *Politics as masculine context.* The theme of *Women's disinterest towards politics* presents the idea that women's low representation in politics can be explained by their own lack of interest based on individual factors as "a choice for women" or disinterest to engage, leading to a belief that women voluntarily choose to stay away from the political arena. By implying that women's disinterest reflects their personal choice, it lacks a recognition of the social inequalities that women face when accessing politics. It

removes the attention from "the responsibility of the system to the responsibilities of the individual woman" (de Simone et al, 2018, 837). The second theme *Politics as masculine context* presents an understanding of how despite the increasing number of women in politics, the high positions of power are held predominantly by men. Women's access and opportunities is considered continuously hindered, especially "the real places of power", in a system of power relations that favours the majority group (de Simone et al, 2018, 838).

Further, the dominant masculine context is explored by (Flicker, 2013) who argues that women in politics are "imprisoned in a double-bind" as women who engage in the political arena are often judged on their physical attributes, as well as their professional accomplishments (Flicker, 2013, 202). This double-bind communication emphasizes show female politicians are viewed as "soft players in the hard field of politics" if they dress in feminine ways, whilst accepting a male dress code may be viewed as conspicuous. No matter how women dress, they are regarded and judged either way, reinforcing a hegemonic reproduction of a gender order (Flicker, 2013, 214). There is also a double boundary when women in higher positions distinguishably dress themselves differently to women in lower positions, and from male colleagues. Paradoxically, the author argues that this informally enforces the creation of hierarchies through furthering gender stereotypes that separates men and women, a notion "which should already have become obsolete" (Flicker, 2013, 208).

2.4   Gendered Political Institutions

The notion of gendered political institutions is based on the ways that political institutions such as organizations, establishments, and executive bodies are shaped by gender dynamics (Kenny, 1996; Childs, 2013). Scholar Lowndes (2019) argues that the gendered nature of political institutions is consolidated into the rules of political life which ultimately shapes the behaviour of both male and female

political actors. In the study, gender is understood as 'shaping power relations but within context of intersecting social categories and identities' with the assumption that if political institutions are gendered, as in the concern of gender 'runs right through', we can either view gender through the institutionalist scholarship or through the *micro-foundations* of how political institutions are gendered. The focus of micro-foundations means to research the interaction between actors and institutional rules within a particular political setting by looking at 'the rules of the game', further described as "the shared prescriptions about what actions are required, prohibited or permitted" (Lowndes, 2019). Furthermore, Thomson (2018) discusses the 'rules of the game' within political institutions by undercovering how both formal and informal rules are gendered, thus shaping the institutional structures. Thomson argues that all institutions are gendered which "means that constructions of masculinity and femininity are intertwined in the daily culture or 'logic' of political institutions." (Thomson, 2018, p 179). By looking at the relationships between institutions and actors and further the experiences of women and men, we can highlight how institutions are gendered (Thomson, 2018).

3   Theoretical Framework

This following section presents the theoretical framework for this study which consists of several parts. First, the main theory of *Feminist Institutionalism* is presented which is followed by the concept of *The Gendered Logic of Appropriateness*.

3.1   Theory of Feminist Institutionalism

> "Feminist institutionalism is a growing subfield of feminist political science
> which argues that institutions matter" (Thomson, 2018, 188).

Feminist institutionalism (FI) stems from both political science and new institutionalism (NI). The theoretical perspective of new institutionalism is used as a useful aspect in which to study, understand, analyze the role of institutions in shaping political, social, and economic dynamics, and further their outcome. Institutionalist approaches research institutions and the ways "humans coproduce understanding of the world with institutions through which they live and act" (Singleton & Magnusdottir, 2021, 87) since humans as social beings perform social relationships according to their perspectives and narratives of the world, which together form institutional patterns (Singleton & Magnusdottir, 2021) Furthermore, scholars Mackay, Kenny and Chappell present the focus of new institutionalism as a renewed focus on institutions, which allows for a nuanced understanding of the nature of politics within institutions. The utility of new institutionalism lies in revealing the complexity of political actors by understanding ways in which actors create or resist change within institutions, and

how institutions shape said actors' behaviors by constructing rules, norms, and policies (Mackay, Kenny & Chappell, 2010).

However, new institutionalist approaches have been criticized for overlooking the intricate relationship of how gender and power intertwine with institutions, resulting in a gender-blindness of existing scholarship in the field (Mackay, Kenny & Chappell, 2010). The problem of sustaining a gender-blind analysis remains at international discussions where "climate change is cast as a human crisis in which gender has no relevance, leaving behind imperative perspectives" (MacGregor, 2010). Similarly, scholars Mackay and Murtagh (2019) argue that feminist institutionalism is central in exploring the intersection between institutionalist theory with a gender analysis in order to explain political outcomes. The authors argue that FI adds a gendered dimension to new institutionalism and thus provides critical insights into the institutional dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. The gendering of political institutions are arguably "active processes with palpable effects" where these processes can highlight the subtleties of power relations and thus highlighting the ways power relations are produced and reproduced through gender, and upholding political processes (Mackay & Murtagh, 2019).

To clarify the definition used throughout this study, the element of gender is based on the understanding presented by Mackay, Kenny, and Chappell (2010) where "gender is understood as a constitutive element of social relations based upon perceived (socially constructed and culturally variable) differences between women and men, and as a primary way of signifying (and naturalizing) relationships of power and hierarchy." Here, gender is not only understood on a subjective level, also as a feature of institutions and social structures (Mackay, Kenny & Chappell, 2010). Furthermore, scholars Magnusdottir and Singleton (2021) present that feminist institutionalism highlights the way that institutions organize power inequalities, which is done in two main ways; through formal and informal rules and practices, and also through how the notion of identity

intertwines with daily life and logic of institutions. Hence, how norms are expressed in the rules and culture of an institution will "affect understandings of how social power relations work within policy-making" (Singleton & Magnusdottir, 2021). In relation to this study, by recognizing the social dimension within institutions such as COP, it enables us to see how power relations are further shaped.

Kenny (2007) and Magnusdottir & Singleton (2021) also argue that by studying institutions with a gendered approach highlights the focus of power, and further gendered power dynamics. By shifting the feminist research of understanding gender from an individual to an institutional-level analysis, the scholars argues that gender relations can be conceptualized as social structures, thus seen to be 'institutional', however these relations are dependent on its context which makes them dynamic and fluid depending on the situation, yet institutions in general are argued to be 'masculine' which shapes its structures and practices (Kenny, 2007; Magnusdottir & Singleton, 2021).

Worth mentioning is a potential drawback of the theoretical framework of feminist institutionalism. During this last decade, feminist research has made significant contributions to the field of new institutionalism, where most of the research seeks to gender establish varieties of the feminist institutionalism theory. However, argued by Boogaards (2022) there is "to date, no consensus has emerged on whether there is, or can be, a singular feminist institutionalist approach" even though attempts have been made to create an independent approach of feminist institutionalism (Boogards, 2022). Similarly, according to Krook and Mackay (2011), there is no one clear understanding of feminist institutionalism although there are several perspectives within. This study acknowledges the lack of "one united feminist institutionalist approach" as a potential drawback, yet still employs its main themes in theoretical framework.

3.1.1 The Gendered Logic of Appropriateness

In order to conceptualize the theoretical framework of feminist institutionalism in this study, the concept of gendered logic of appropriateness will be applied. Several scholars have written literature on the topic of the gendered logic of appropriateness (Chappell, 2006; Krook & Mackay, 2011). Mackay and Murtagh (2019) draw on the work of Chappell (2006) and further presents the concept by researching the dynamic interplay between formal and informal within institutions, which relates to *institutional logics* - a form of sensemaking framework which refers to a 'common-sense'. The framework of institutional logics combines the intertwining of institutional rules, norms, and practices to construct the *gendered logic of appropriateness.* One of the examples presented in their study highlights how bureaucratic neutrality is not neutral, it is rather gendered in the sense of its cultural association of masculinity that fosters a dominant norm, which disadvantages women. Further exemplified is the two central effects of gendered institutional logics which determine 1) the 'acceptable' masculine and feminine norms and behaviors, which as a result establishes which norms and behaviors are unacceptable. 2) Political institutions are ingrained with gendered values of men and masculinity through the association of control and authority, which states cultural and historical practices associated with femininity as a ramification, such as actions of empathy or mutual effort. Drawing on Chappell, the authors state that "at the heart of gendered logic of appropriateness in political life is the coding of public authority, and political presence and agency, as culturally masculine" (Mackay & Murtagh, 2019, p. 13).

3.1.2 Applying Feminist Institutionalism in interview guide

In addition, the theory of feminist institutionalism not only creates the main theoretical framework of this study, it was also used to influence and shape the questions of the interview guide. This was achieved by using at the main aspects

of feminist institutionalism, particularly; an analysis of how social interactions, group dynamics, collective identities and organizational cultures shape gendered behaviors and further power dynamics within institutions. Utilizing this 'feminist institutional lens' when creating the interview guide and later interviewing helped steer the interview guide to not only entail questions regarding the interviewees experience as young activists at the COP, but rather to explore their experience of being in *the position as young women* in a decision-making forum. Further, to give added context to how the interview questions were nuanced, influenced by the underpinnings of the theoretical framework of feminist institutionalism, the topic of the interview questions regarding the subjects such as: group dynamics as in checking in the well-being of colleagues and work division within organization, experiences regarding personal physical safety and similar 'emotional' safety, experiences regarding exclusion or being treated differently to male colleagues or 'silenced' in any way, experiences of being stereotyped, and feeling pressure to perform in a certain way.

These questions were supplementary to questions about the interviewees' overall experience of COP regarding organizing the trip, funding, accommodation, expectations, executed work, and furthermore. The full scope of the interviews can be found in *Appendix 1. Interview guide.* Upon critically reflecting on how the lens of feminist institutionalism shaped the interview questions, it is worth mentioning that other perspectives could have been useful in shaping different outcomes. For example, before choosing FI as the main theory in this study, I contemplated using *ecofeminism* as a theoretical tool to research the intricate relations between women and nature, and how they are oppressed by a patriarchal society. By combining feminism and environmentalism, ecofeminists explore the ways that social norms exercise inequitable dominance over both women and nature (Miles, 2018) which would have provided a different aspect of the interview findings. I believe ecofeminism would have been useful in providing findings that speak to the aspects of power, control and unequal relations and potential research idea/design/aim might have focused on the comparison between

how the outcome of COP differentiates within youth organizations in the Global North and Global South. However, seeing as the aim of this study seeks to explore the inherent ways the young activist experience is gendered within the institution of COP, I argue that feminist institutionalism is better suited.

4 Research Methodology and Material

In the following section, the methodology and material of the thesis will be presented.

4.1 Research design

This thesis will follow a qualitatively driven research design, which is a research method that offers various benefits, such as a flexibility that allows the researcher to adapt during the research process, and it allows for a participant-focused research process which can provide detailed data about the researched area (Creswell & Poth, 2018, 23). To begin, it is important to describe the philosophical underpinnings of this study since they lay the foundation of the research carried out. This study's philosophical approach stems from a post-structuralist worldview which emphasizes the ways in which researchers can analyze and challenge established structures and power dynamics within social practices, such as the problem of social order (Howarth, 2013, 77).

4.2 Interviewing as method

In addition to the previous section on research design, here follows a description of the method chosen for this study. In this study, the collected data was

developed through in-depth, semi-structured interviewing. The benefits of semi-structured interviews were deemed as a suitable method for multiple reasons, which will now be presented. Firstly, a unique benefit of qualitative interviewing is that it brings each interviewees' voice at the core of the research, thus providing insight into their personal experience, thoughts, and opinions. Through interview-based research, we can highlight understudied processes or social patterns (Gerson & Damaske, 2020) which is relevant since there is a research gap when looking at how young female climate people are experiencing institutional structures.

Secondly, qualitative interviewing aims to discover complex social patterns, dynamics and relationships that might *remain* as puzzles or disagreements, and to further discover connections between micro- and macro-processes to develop new ways of understanding these relationships (Gerson & Damaske, 2020). This was suitable since the research question of this study is of an explorative nature. The approach also allows for a fluidity during the interviewing, allowing an open conversation where unexpected themes might arise (Harding & Whitehead, 2016). The structure of the interviewing process was based on the guidance from Mason (2018) which followed these core features; they all were in-depth, semi-structured interviews which contained one-on-one interactions with a relatively informal style. Further, the interviews were based on a thematic, topic-centered approach by using an interview guide to steer the interview, yet they were flexible enough to allow for unexpected themes to arise (Mason, 2018). One-on-one semi-structured interviews allows the researcher to use an interview guide with pre-written guiding questions in order to steer the conversation in the right direction yet also being open to new topics arising (Mason 2018: 12). Semi-structured interviews are also argued to be valuable to the researcher since the topic of discussion is determined beforehand, yet it still allows for follow-up questions and new sub-topics to be raised (Mason, 2018, 16).

4.3 Sampling

The sampling technique chosen for this study is convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is a non-probability technique, commonly used in qualitative research, where researchers select participants based on their convenience and accessibility, rather than through random selection. This approach is considered relatively cost-effective, less time-consuming, and highly applicable within social science research (Golzar, Noor, & Tajik, 2022).

The use of a non-probability sampling technique is bound to the researchers' choice of research context, participants, and methodological framework, which is presented as: "first of all, the researcher creates inclusion criteria and then approaches any member of the target population being available at the moment and who met the criteria. The researcher asks the participants to take part in the study and if they demonstrate consent, they will be selected and added to the sample" (Golzar, et al, 2022). It is important to mention the drawbacks with using the convenience sampling technique, such as sampling bias, the lack of representation and generalizability. In this study, sampling bias is considered a shortcoming, referring to the samples not accurately representing an entire group. With the risk of not ensuring the control of a representative sample, the method is unable to generalize the findings beyond the specific collected sample and may not be representative in a broader context (Golzar, et al, 2022). However, considering these research limitations, the choice of convenience sampling is justified since the aim of this study is not to generalize the collected data, and while relying on available subjects is considered risky, it is sustained considering the benefits of obtaining access to the sample group.

The choice of convenience sampling was chosen for several reasons. Firstly, the technique enables practical access to individuals who are available and easily reached (Babbie, 2017) which I regarded as valuable considering the timeframe of

this study and my limited access to the chosen sampling group. It is worth mentioning that I, the researcher, have no personal contacts or affiliations with climate youth organizations, which also motivates the use of a convenient method which selects participants based on their accessibility to the researcher (Golzar, et al, 2022). Secondly, convenience sampling enables a relatively time-efficient method since researchers can spend less time selecting participants compared to other non-random sampling techniques (Golzar, et al, 2022). In order to gain access to participants, convenience sampling was deemed suitable since I could reach my participants based on the chosen criteria. The sample criteria consisted of individuals who were members of a recognized youth climate organization, identified themselves as women and had participated at one or more COP conferences since 2015.

The sampling process began by reaching out to individuals and youth organizations online via email and social media platforms, which is seemingly a cost and time efficient method of reaching participants. Further, I initiated written contact with chosen female participants online who openly were a part of a youth climate organization and had participated at one or more COP meetings in recent years. The means of communication was via my student email account, Whatsapp, Linkedin or Instagram messages in order to broaden the search by using multiple online platforms, in order to reach more individuals. Since this thesis is based on qualitative research, the sampling focuses on specific individuals within the relevant context that is applicable to the study in order to conceptualize the project (Mason, 2017, p. 58). By contacting specific individuals or organizations, I hoped to create a personal connection and incentive for them to voluntarily participate.

I found feasible interviewees and asked them to spread the information about the study to other individuals, hence providing an additional sampling technique of snowball sampling. This type of sampling relies on the availability and willingness of the initial participants to refer the information to others who might be suitable (Babbie, 2017), which was deemed suitable in order to gather more

data within the network of young activists, who seemingly have a tight-knit network of contacts. The sampling process for this study was conducted the latter half of the semester, with an initial search starting on the 22nd of March and ending on the 10th of April, as the amount of conducted interviews was considered to be sufficient. The sample size of a study is commonly based on theoretical saturation, which is reached when new data is no longer providing deeper insight into the research problem (Oppong, 2013) which was determined at ten purposeful in-depth interviews for this research.

The final sample consisted of a total of ten interview participants (see table 1) who ranged in ages from 22-34 years old, were members of seven different youth climate organizations, and had participated at seven different COPs and two different intersessional meetings (SB48 and SB50). As mentioned in earlier sections, the specific COPs that the interviewees had attended coincided with my initial scope of researched COPs. The table below shows a detailed view of the interviewees and which COP they participated at.

Table 2: Description of final sample

Anonymised name	Participated at which COPs
Maria	COP28
Elena	COP27, COP28
Alessia	COP26, COP27, COP28
Julia	COP21, COP23, COP26, COP27, COP28
Sandra	SB48
Hannah	COP28, SB50
Sophia	COP23, COP24, COP25, COP26
Eva	COP24, SB48, SB50
Leah	COP28
Lily	COP28

The interviewees were members of the following organizations: Climate Action Network (CAN), CliMates Austria, European Youth Forum (YFJ), Fältbiologerna, Plant-for-the-Planet, PUSH Sverige and World's Youth for Climate Justice (WYCJ).

4.4   Data collection

The following section will provide insight into how data was collected for this thesis. First, a description of the interview process will be presented, followed by a description of thematic analysis, limitations and delimitations of the study, ethical considerations and lastly a reflection of the positionality of the researcher.

4.4.1 Semi-structured interviews

For the individual semi-structured interviews, ten individuals from seven different youth organizations were interviewed. One interview was held in person, at the request of the interviewee and the rest of the interviews were held online via Zoom, during the period of the 29th of March - 19th of April and lasted from 49 to 78 minutes. In order for the interviewees to feel enough to speak freely during the interviews, the written consent form was emailed to them before the interviews, stating the objective of the study, which type of personal data was collected and that the interview was audio recorded. Which data was collected was mentioned in the beginning of the interview and I additionally asked for verbal consent. In addition, I mentioned that they could at any point take a break or skip a question if there was anything they did not feel comfortable answering. The consent form can be found in Appendix 2.

I created an interview guide in both English and Swedish since my interviews were held in both languages, where I stated open-ended questions that would guide our conversation. This was done in order to actually formulate what my research aim was and further to conduct my interviews in a lightly structured way. As mentioned earlier, the interview questions were largely guided by the theoretical framework of feminist institutionalism which inspired questions formulated through a *gendered lens.* I decided to transcribe the audio recording manually ad verbatim following each interview, in order to summaries any notes, thoughts, or patterns. The decision to transcribe manually stems from my previous experience of doing so during my bachelor's studies, and more importantly it allowed for a deep dive into the material where I could familiarize myself deeply with the transcript, in order to later create meaningful thematic coding. The interviews were transcribed in their spoken language, yet the quotes in the 5. Results have been translated by me, to the best of my ability, being native in both languages. In order to maintain the anonymity of the interviewees, their names are anonymized throughout the thesis.

4.4.2 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is commonly used within the roam of qualitative social science where the approach, conceptualized by Braun & Clarke (2022), is well elaborated. The authors write that there is not one specific way to create a thematic analysis and it should be seen as: "... a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data." (Braun & Clarke, 2022). In the same way, Byrne writes that thematic analysis is "an easily accessible and theoretically flexible interpretative approach to qualitative data analysis" which allows the researcher to familiarize themselves with the data in order to develop codes or themes, which are presented as summaries of a particular topic in the data (Byrne, 2021). One beneficial aspect of thematic analysis is its flexibility, which when researching the complex and nuanced ways of qualitative research can be proven helpful. This flexibility allows the researcher to organize and describe the data in full detail (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Further, drawing on Braun and Clarke's own acknowledgement of the suggested critique directed at the use of thematic analysis as a method, there are aspects to the analysis that demands attention. TA is argued to require a heavy conceptual and design thinking from the researcher, since it lacks an inbuilt theoretical framework, which is in contrast to other methodologies, and can be viewed as a drawback. However, the authors argue that the conceptual work of TA provides theoretical flexibility as well as the requirement of deliberation from the researcher which subsequently results in a "thoughtful, reflective research practice." (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Similarly, Harding and Whitehead (2016) argue the benefit of a thematic analysis lies in its ability to treat data as a mass of information that should be understood as a whole, rather than dividing it into smaller sections. The researcher can then, in the analysis process, identify relevant themes that are broader than a category, and can be seen as a central idea or pattern (Harding & Whitehead, 2016).

To elaborate on the conceptualization of the thematic analysis, presented by (Braun & Clarke, 2022) in this study, the six steps of the coding process are now described. Utilizing a thematic analysis lets the researcher to either identify patterns and themes within the material with an inductive/bottom-up approach or a theoretical approach/top-down. Considering this study's objectives, a theoretical approach was chosen due to its analytical nature and explorative emphasis on the aim and research questions. With this approach, patterns and themes within the material are detected based on the pre-existing knowledge of the topic, which then guides the analysis process accordingly (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Firstly, I familiarized myself with the interview transcripts by reading and re-reading several times in order to identify patterns and important words, sentences, and paragraphs. Secondly, I generated initial codes of the transcribed material and also from my own notes which led to the third step of analyzing and categorizing the codes into themes. The fourth step is a thematic review which lets the researcher reflect upon the entire material to ensure that the themes were aligned with the initial coding as well as their representation of the entire dataset so that no important information was overlooked. During this step, some of the initial codes formed the main themes whilst some formed sub-themes. In the fifth step, I defined and named the themes that reflected their content, which are presented in Table 1. Overview of themes. The sixth and final step refers to writing the report, which includes quotes from the interview transcripts to strengthen what was being stated by the interviewees (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

The thematic analysis resulted in three main themes. These are presented below in Table 3:

Main theme	Sub-theme	Sample of codes
Feeling (un)safe	Division of gender Navigating in the host city of COP Inside the COP conference venue	Feeling unsafe during taxiride and at hotel at COP27 Physically safe due to other young people and women Uncomfortable looks
Engaging with decision-makers	Youth-washing Gender-washing	Lack of resources Being disregarded or excluded Superior attitude from policymakers Feelings of intimidation
Reflections on dresscode	Gender disparity	More restrictive for women Dressing professionally

4.4.3 Limitations and delimitations

This thesis project has a few limitations and delimitation, which will be addressed for the purpose of transparency and validity of the research. Firstly, a limitation that must be stated is that I myself have not participated at any COPs, intersessional meetings, or pre negotiations leading up to the climate conferences, nor am I part of any climate organization. I have therefore no personal contacts or network that would grant access to the specific group that I wanted to interview for this project. Whilst gaining access to a specific research group is arguably one of the most challenging parts of a research project (O'Reilly 2009: 6-7), I found the sampling process relatively uncomplicated, and I had little to no problem in accessing suitable participants. The aspect of not having personal access to interviewees could also be seen as a delimitation as it was something that I was aware of before and during the research process. However, after further reflecting upon this matter, it could also be argued that my lack of personal affiliations or

contacts enhances the validity of the research process as I don't know any of the interviewees personally and did not relay any particular personal sentiment during the interview or during the transcribing process.

As previously mentioned in *4.3 Sampling*, the individuals, and organizations who I reached out to were eager to participate in the study and also spread the word about my project. On the other hand, being an insider or youth/younger participant at the COP conferences myself would most probably granted me a number of benefits, mainly; valuable contacts to interview, a possibility to observe the conference firsthand, and it might have eliminated the possible 'observer effect' which O'Reilly (2004) describes as the stance of the researcher who is never fully an insider in the field of interest. The outsider, in this case the researcher, does not necessarily belong in the context of the interviewees (O'Reilly, 2004, p. 152) and is something I reflect upon in the next section *4.4.5 Positionality of researcher.*

Within qualitative research, the subjectivity of the researcher is always going to influence the outcome of the research (O'Reilly, 2004). This is a limitation of the study as the researcher *needs* to interpret and analyze the findings of the interviews in order to produce the analysis. I, as the researcher, reflect upon my own positionality and subjectivity further on in the text. Furthermore, to remain transparent regarding the translation process of the interviews, five of the interviews were conducted in Swedish and the five were conducted in English, and I transcribed the interviews in their original language, whilst translating specific quotes from Swedish to English for the analysis to be coherent. This could be seen as a small limitation of the collected data. Whilst the translating process was done as accurately as possible, yet every language is unique, and words can sometimes never be fully translated in its proper form. However, by using translating tools online and seeing that I am native in both languages, I believe the translations are as accurate as possible.

To conclude the aspect of limitations, a concept within the theory of feminist institutionalism is intersectionality, which aims to emphasize how gender is intertwined with other social identities such as class, ethnicity, sexuality and so forth. By utilizing an intersectional approach, it is possible to analyze how multiple parts of one's identity can shape the experience of power, privilege and oppression within political institutions which is important in order to understand the complexity (Krook & Mackay, 2011). However, considering the scope and timeframe of this study, and additionally for the purpose of this study, I had to limit the scope resulting in that the concept of intersectionality fell outside of the scope.

4.4.4 Ethical considerations

The ethical consideration of qualitative research is a key aspect when researching people and their personal experiences. The topic of the interviews was not necessarily of sensitive matter and the interviewees were not put in a vulnerable position by participating or speaking truthfully. However, two of the interviewees emphasized gratitude for the fact that they were anonymous in the study, which suggests that some things that were said during the interview were highly personal. Therefore, it was appropriate to ask for written consent for the processing of sensitive personal data such as age, names, current occupation, geographical location, previous and current organizational affiliation, which was sent out to the respective interviewee before the interview. The written consent forms have been signed by each interviewee and they were informed before and at the beginning of the interview that identifiable personal information would be anonymized. The consent form used can be found in Appendix 2.

4.4.5 Positionality of researcher

Through most qualitative perspectives, the researcher can never be a neutral entity who collects information about the social world, more so as a part of actively constructing knowledge about the world (Mason, 2018, 20). Moreover, a reflexive approach as the researcher was maintained throughout the research process by critically examining my privileges. This self-reflection can help minimize potential researcher bias and increase the objectivity of the thesis (Mason, 2018). Before conducting my interviews, I reflected upon my own stance and positionality as a researcher, and how this possibly impacted several parts of the research process. Drawing on the notion that an interview setting can be experienced as setting where asymmetrical power dynamics are present (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014, 52), I first reflected upon the fact that I am, and present as, a young, white, educated woman from a Western country who has certain privileges in relation to reaching the intended research group, which in this study are other young women. I believe my ability to reach possible interviewees quite easily was facilitated due to my position since I, 1) had the means to quickly broaden my search for interviewees through my personal media accounts and 2) relayed a type of "relatableness", both during the sampling process and the interview, since the interviewees might have seen us as quite similar in terms of gender and age. I believe us being women and of similar age contributed to the interviewees willingness to talk to me, the number of interviews that I was able to conduct, and also a "safe" interview setting. Further, after interviewing the participants, I reflected upon the atmosphere during the interviews which I felt was comfortable and open throughout. I did not experience any discomfort in the interviewees' behaviors or answers, and I asked after the interview what they had felt about the conversation. They all answered that they enjoyed talking about their experience at COP and reflecting on topics that they might have not thought about earlier.

5   Results

The thematic analysis of the interview material resulted in three major themes. The first main theme, *Feeling (un)safe* presents, through the sub-themes of *Division of gender, Navigating in the host city of COP* and *Inside the COP conference venue* the various ways that the participants perceived their own safety. The second main theme, *Engaging with decision-makers,* presents the experiences of interacting with decision-makers at COP by focusing on the sub-themes of *Youthwashing* and *Genderwashing.* The third and final main theme is *Thoughts on dress code.* These themes are presented in the following sections.

5.1   Feeling (un)safe

The first main theme derived from the interviews were notions of how the participants perceived the aspect of feeling safe. The theme is constructed on the three sub-themes of 1) *Division of gender* which presents the experience regarding gender division, 2) *Navigating in the host city of COP* which refers to how the participants felt moving around the public space outside of COP and 3) *Inside the COP conference venue* which presents how the participants experienced moving inside of the COP venue.

To begin, a sub-theme that was depicted in the interview transcripts related to how the interviewees experienced the gender division of women and men at the COPs. Some of the interviewees reflected on the gender division, saying that there were generally more men than women. Lily and her female colleagues at COP28, reflected on the gender distribution, both at the airport of Dubai where she

estimated the majority of people were men, and she thought this uneven division continued at the conference:

> "...even at the conference it was still like 65/35, I would say, for men to women. And it wasn't an unsafe feeling, but it was strange. To enter a room and that it was not evenly divided by gender." - Lily

Similarly, Elena reflected upon her experience at some of the side-events, saying that they contained mostly older men:

> "...I have participated to some, some side-events and they were always like male and elderly people, like I would say more than 60 years, 60 year old." - Elena

5.1.1 Navigating in the host city of COP

A main pattern in the interview findings related to how the participants experienced navigating in the host city of COP. All of the interviewees were asked and thus talked about how they had experienced travelling to and from the conference venue from their accommodation, if they had travelled by themselves or in larger groups with other participants, and the overall adjustment of moving around a new city or country where they had not been before. When asked if they ever felt unsafe outside of COP, several of the interviewees brought up situations where they felt unsafe or uncomfortable. Two of the interviewees, Julia and Alessia, recalled feeling uncomfortable in situations where they had to travel to their accommodations of hotels, hostels, or Airbnb's late at night. They both attended the COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, and both stayed in accommodations that were far away from the conference venue, distances required public transport or taxi rides. Julia recalled feeling uneasy about the fact that hotel staff had keys to their hotel rooms where she was staying:

"Yeah, I think it was really unsafe. Also, they *(editor's note: hotel staff)* could lock their *(editor's note: young activists)* rooms and didn't feel very, yeah, very comfortable." - Julia

Additionally, Alessia recalled a taxi ride to her back to her hotel from the conference venue late at night:

"I remember that we had to take a taxi at some point in the evening, but it was like really dark desert area and I was like, oh, no, I hope he doesn't like, take us somewhere. Yeah, I didn't feel like super safe, honestly. I would really recommend to being groups or to try to have several people in the hotel where you, you go back (...) Not the best, the best experience I would say." - Alessia

She did not feel comfortable or safe being out late in the evenings which later during the COP week led her to refrain from late night dinners or other social events with colleagues or other members of civil society at COP since that meant that she had to travel late at night, and she was not sure if she had to travel alone which she did not want to do. The uncomfortable feeling of taking taxis in Sharm El-Sheikh was shared by Julia, who said that she felt uncomfortable due to male-dominated spaces:

"We felt very uncomfortable in the taxis, you know, again, there was only men. There's just no women working there except in the women's toilets, its women cleaning, but everything else is just men. They wouldn't. I mean, I don't know. I think some people said just culturally, they're trained, they wouldn't touch you, but it's definitely, you feel uncomfortable." - Julia

Further, Julia reflects her experience at COP27 in Egypt and the fact that local men were hired to work as security. She said that it is quite common for locals to

work at the COP, selling food or cleaning, but at COP27, local men were security guards. Julia said that there was a protest during the conference where the security staff filmed her very closely, which she felt was uncomfortable:

> "The venue itself, we knew it was, there was a lot of local Egyptian security staff. (...) But doing security was very odd. We had read all these reports that human rights records of Egypt was really bad. And, you know, was all men when there was protest, they would film you come up very close. You wouldn't know where this is going." - Julia

5.1.2 Navigating inside the COP venue

The second sub-theme presents the interviewees' experiences of navigating inside of the COP venue. To begin, not all interviewees thought of their experience at COP as unsafe or felt concerned with maneuvering in the host city or within the conference venue. One participant, Sophia attended multiple COPs and whose overall feeling regarding her own safety was positive:

> "I felt especially inside the conference, I probably never felt unsafe, there are a lot of security guards, like at the entrance and who walked around (...) so there were no problems there." - Sophia

Similarly, participants Hannah and Leah both felt safe moving around the COP venue. They both mention that they felt comfortable as young people due to the fact that there were many other young people in their surroundings:

> "And at the conference, I didn't feel that I felt any discomfort as a women, and maybe it's also because it's like that, there are so many young people in place, there are many women in place, so it's all kinds of people there and it's during the day and everyone is there to sort of attend this conference." - Hannah

> "I actually did feel fine because especially the year the young participants of COP and the young delegates were all respectful and nice and I never felt unsafe there." - Leah

Leah continues to talk about how she felt safe since there were other young participants around, and she did not feel unsafe in any way, however she said later in the interview that men and women might differ in regarding a situation as safe or not:

> "Some, you know, things, girls, women think about which men would never do." - Leah

Furthermore, another participant, Sandra, brings up an encounter during a meeting that made her feel insecure. She said that she felt physically safe moving around the conference venue, but was given "dirty looks":

> "At the meeting itself, there was nothing like this, nothing that I felt was like a security risk. (...) Okay, I just know that it was like sometimes, you got these dirty looks in the corridors (...) it wasn't like I felt that it was like a threat to my personal safety." - Sandra

However, despite feeling that she was physically safe, Sandra states that some of the older male attendees gave her looks in the corridors, which later continued in the negotiation room, where they discussed conflict of interest during an intersessional conference meeting. Sandra describes how the male senior participants in the room looked at her in uncomfortable ways, not as in that they were going to hurt her but still in ways that made her feel uncomfortable. She says:

"But it was still kind of uncomfortable like and 'ugh, they're sitting there' and (...) like there's men sitting from the other corner and they're just kind of staring at you, and you're like 'okay, they're sending very clear signals that they don't want us here'." - Sandra

She further explains how she did not know if the older men were looking at her in an aggressive way because she was a young activist or because she is a woman, or because of the fact that her and her colleagues were there to discuss and lobby a discussion point that contradicted theirs. She felt like the opposite sides of the meeting table were at the time made enemies since they were lobbying for different things, and also due to the fact that these interactions between youth organizations from civil society and individuals or groups from the private sector act, and present themselves in dissimilar ways:

"There were a lot of young women also in the youth organizations. But it's a very hierarchical environment. There were a lot of men also, so there were like a lot of men in suits and they were like from the private sector and they were from the industry sector, and so it was like a whole you know, facial expressions and everything. I think, it wasn't like I wasn't aware of these things, some of those things you kind of felt anyway: there's some kind of power dynamic here that you felt very clearly." - Sandra

The quote from Sandra highlights how she, as a young woman, noticed subtle looks from older men in the meeting room, which made her recognize certain power dynamics in the room between some of the meeting attendees.

5.2   Engaging with decision-makers

This second main theme relates to how the participants experienced their interactions with decision-makers at the COP. The theme is constructed upon the two sub-themes: *youthwashing* and *genderwashing.* The sub-themes will be presented continuously throughout this section.

While the interviewees were granted observer status and attended several negotiations and panel discussions as observers, they also engaged directly with politicians and decision-makers outside of the negotiation rooms. All of the interviewees talked about having planned meetings with ministers, several country delegations and interest groups in order to talk about their organizations work, mostly with the aim of sharing information about their current projects or further securing future commitments. The interviewees also spontaneously met decision-makers in the more informal setting of the 'corridors of COP' or at side-events held by civil society interest groups, where they were able to talk for a shorter amount of time.

Further, a recurring theme during the interviews was if and how the participants had experienced, seen, or felt excluded in any ways at the COP. Some of the interviewees responded that they did not experience any direct exclusionary practices such as being denied access to a meeting or workshops. However, other interviewees stated that having limited access to financial funding, a restricted number of badges that grant access to the conference, and less personal or professional contacts within the climate movement network limits the ways that young people are able to fund and participate at the COP. One example is portrayed by the participant Hannah, who brought up a moment when she and her colleague tried to participate at a negotiation meeting that they were invited to. However, upon arriving at the meeting room, they were told that they needed a 'special ticket' to get in and that they were out of those since the meeting was

already fully booked. Hannah said that they tried to get a ticket twice but ended up not getting a spot at the negotiation meeting. Hanna says:

> "(...) or like, you should think it's strange that you don't get a seat at the negotiations you actually get to attend." - Hannah

Hannah continues to say that she did not necessarily see this example as actively being excluded, however it did prohibit her from attending a meeting she was invited to. Further, when asked about her thoughts on representation, in the case of youth participation, another participant Elena talks about how difficult it is for young people to participate at the COP conferences. She thinks the participation of youth organizations in civil society are at a disadvantage, compared to the rest of the participants and organizations of COP as young people "don't have their own money" and even if they had money, the expenses are too large being around 4000-5000 US dollars for funding entry badges, plane tickets and food throughout their stay. Elena goes on to emphasize how this disadvantages the youth representation as they cannot afford to participate:

> "(...) 'ohh you are included, you can participate'. Yes, but I don't have the, the tools and the means to be there. So, it's kind of youth-washing." - Elena

Elena's statement is an example of how youth face greater challenges to participate then other stakeholders who might have greater financial resources or contacts. Another interviewee, Hannah, also spoke about the aspect of being young in an environment that is adult-dominated. She recalls a meeting at the COP28 between young activists and a European chief negotiator, a middle-aged man, who had promised a 40-minute meeting, but who was late to the meeting. The meeting ended up cut to 18 minutes long instead, which was not appreciated by the young activists:

> "(...) 'oh, we're going to talk to young people, it's so important', like that
> feels a bit more like youth-washing sometimes, and, and then you can't
> even give another hour to like ten young people'." - Hannah

She continues to say that the young participants were very upset with the negotiator being late and acted visibly indifferent to what they had to say. The chief negotiator had asked the participants to quickly say the most important things they wanted to put forward so he could answer everything at once, resulting in him avoiding answering Hannah's questions. Additionally, Alessia, a participant of numerous COPs shared her experienced interactions with decision-makers such as policymakers. During her interview, Alessia talked about interactions with policy makers who either were very supportive of the work done by young people, or ones who did not seem to care. She said that some of the policymakers were really interested in hearing what young people had to say and to understand their concerns, whilst other policymakers acted more dismissive:

> "Yeah, but you have this feeling of, kind of superiority from policy-
> makers, you know. You can feel it directly because they're gonna be like,
> you know, thank you for, for, for coming and for saying what you have to
> say. But you know, I have other things to do (...) So we, you know, sorry,
> but we won't be able to do anything for you. Thank you. Let's take a
> picture, though. That's very important to them for our social media." -
> Alessia

Alessia felt that the policymakers that she interacted with had a superior attitude against the young participants. Further, when engaging with decision-makers at COP, one of the participants Elena said that she didn't experience any exclusionary situations or practices herself, however she did recall seeing a situation that she labels as gender-washing:

"(...) it's like a gender washing. I don't know what's the the real word. Yeah, like green washing but for gender." - Elena

When participating at side-events in different pavilions of the conference and while attending the European pavilion, Elena saw a woman who was in charge of the logistics such as handing out brochures with information and arranging the chairs in the meeting room for the side-events, seemingly being put outside of the meeting room to welcome guests. When looking inside the room, Elena only saw men at the meeting which made her think that the woman was put there deliberately. During the interview, Elena says:

"So, there is always a person at the desk in charge (...) and that is always a woman. But that's just like an image because then people who are really important, so to speak, are men. So, it's kind of, it was kind of frustrating and also ridiculous because they kind of try to do their part by putting someone there 'OK, you're in charge of the pavilion and you're a woman. But then that is just an image role, you just do, deal with logistics, you don't have any type of power in there. You're just, yeah, kind of a secretary, so to speak." - Elena

In this example, Elena suggests that the woman is staged outside of the meeting room as a front figure for the meeting, without actually participating herself. Elena continues by describing the group dynamics within her organization. Within the European region in her organization's campaign, there were both women and men, however Elena recalls that only the man was listened to:

"... the coordinator is a, is a male, the young, a young guy and with him there were like 2 campaigners, girls, both girls, and they did an amazing job, but I feel like he was always more listened than them." - Elena

This is further exemplified by Maria, a participant of COP28, who was first asked by an older man in her organization to be in charge of an event with important people and she accepted the task. However, Maria later found out that she had been replaced as the person responsible for the event by another person who was more experienced within the organization, and this information was not communicated to her:

"I told him that I could because those days I was available, or at least I have an agenda more flexible. (...) . So, I told him days prior to that event that I could. But he just, I don't know. He acted like I didn't tell him. (...). And then he told to be in charge of that event to another person that was more experienced in the organization. But he didn't tell me or tell me anything about it. - Maria

When Maria asked the person who asked her to organize the event why she was replaced, the man acted like he did not ask her in the first place. Maria continues to reflect upon her feelings following the denied assignment, stating that she did not know if she was replaced because of her age or because she was younger and therefore less experienced:

"It happened something to me that I don't know if I should categorize it as a gender issue, but it felt like that. Or. It's funny because I think I felt like this happened to me because of my years and inexperience, and again because I'm a woman, I don't know (...) I feel like left behind. And it was a measure that I could totally understand if it was communicated in the good way, but I was not even aware if I'm going to the event or not. So that was, like a very, I don't know, painful day. (...) ". - Maria

The example depicted in Maria's experience highlights the ways younger women might be treated by older, more experienced participants. This was also stated by Julia, who said that she believes the power dynamics between older men and

young women are at play within the climate movement, and at COP. She recalled a capacity-building training exercise where young people and campaigners were invited, and afterwards a young female participant told Julia that an older male campaigner had touched her in inappropriate ways during the evening. Julia was surprised this had happened, referring to the man's position:

> "Like, how does this happen from people who want to see justice in all spaces. (...) There's older men in positions of power who speak to younger state delegates in an uncomfortable situations." - Julia

Additionally, a statement made by Alessia relates to the way she experienced being treated by older men at COP. She talked about the difference in communication within her organization compared to communicating with other stakeholders. She explained that she and her male colleague continuously discussed and evaluated the ways they both engaged at COP as a team, by for example talking about who gets to engage more or who should attend which meeting. She said that her male colleague was very aware of the question of representation and recognized that Alessia, as a woman, should be "given the spot" since there is a lack of female representation, and she considered herself lucky to have this type of communication. She also stated that her colleague's acknowledgment and attention to sharing the space equally was not as visible from other COP participants:

> "But I, I know that it wouldn't be the same with other board members who have this kind of 'I should be speaking like I don't care if you're a woman'. (...) in a lot of the side events that we witness, (...) you can see a lot of male old men talking, interrupting or trying to explain you what is good or what is working, what is not working or how your idea is not really the best or this type of, yeah, discussion..." - Alessia

Here, Alessia highlights how she was treated differently by her colleague who was aware of a gender disparity and therefore wanted to give her more space, and how she was treated and spoken to by older male stakeholders. The latter example led her to not engage or talk too much with people who did not treat her as an equal:

> "But I have also learned to honestly not engage that much when I see that the person is not willing to discuss or is not coming from a place of like being curious and to, to understand our position or to talk about with me. (...) and I won't talk anymore with that person because I I also don't want to get to also have this additional responsibility to explain people about about this stuff where they should at least try to be aware, and especially in these spaces because it's global spaces." - Alessia

Furthermore, Julia also felt that one of her colleagues, an experienced male campaigner took up a lot of space in regard to social interactions, and that he did not know when to step back, be quiet and listen to others. She says that there were complaints launched from people who worked with him, stating that they did not feel comfortable working with him because of how he behaved at some events:

> "... then they say you made the women in, it's a Pacific organization and I think you know this is on the basis of what they say they say in the Pacific, you don't, people are not confrontational. And so, when he was shouting at this woman, she got really intimidated. She didn't wanna work with him anymore. She didn't come to the conference the next day" - Julia

The aftermath of the man's outburst led to Julia's organization having to gather feedback and later evaluate the way the organization works at COP, such as implementing a stricter code of conduct and cultural awareness training.

5.3   Reflections on dress code

This is the third main and final theme: *Reflections on dress code.*

This theme emerged as most of the participants felt that dressing appropriately in business attire was important as this related to how they presented themselves and their organization. Eva explained that she was quite mindful of how she dressed in order to fit in:

> "We tried to dress a bit professionally, to fit in." - Eva

The participant Lily recalled being emailed a 36 paged long official code of conduct that included dress code from the UN before participating at the COP28 in Dubai, which she thought entailed more restrictions for women than for men:

> "... it is more restrictive for women we were told several times before, through all the codes of conduct. (...) Which is like 2,5 pages for dress code, more than half of which was like women can't wear this, this, this, this, and this. (...) he *(editor's note: male colleague)* got to wear shorts if he wanted to when it was 40 degrees. I wasn't allowed to do that." - Lily

Lily expressed her feelings of annoyance about the fact that the female participants were expected to cover up more in the UAE and therefore at the COP, compared to her male colleague, despite the temperatures being high. She continues to say that she thought women were judged more than men if they wore 'the wrong thing'.

Similarly, Julia who attended COP27 in Egypt recalled a situation where a colleague of hers was considered to have dressed inappropriately in a short skirt, not knowing the dress code of formal attire. When the colleague was called to

speak at a panel with ministers and other heads of international organizations, the financial funder of Julia's organization approached Julia to say that wearing a skirt in a high level panel discussion was unsuitable, and that Julia had to tell her colleague to wear more appropriate clothes in the future, so that the funder could take pictures of the panel participants, to post on social media, that weren't considered inappropriate. Julia reflected upon the fact that even though her colleague might be dressed inappropriately, and the easy thing would be to ask her to wear long pants, she felt that the funder, a woman, was not entitled to comment on how her colleague was dressed:

> "And I really respect the funder, they've been with us for a long time and still that really hurts me because I got like they really did something to me. And even, you know, now a year and a half. I'm still thinking about it. I was like, should I tell her to not do this? It's easy for us to just put long pants. Fine. Whatever. Yeah, but I hate the fact that this person who leaves and use activism, who gave us money to go, then tells me off for having a delegate on the panel who's wearing a short skirt. (...) and this was even a woman, you know?

6 Analysis and discussion

In this section, the results from the interview findings will be analyzed and discussed in relation to the study's theoretical framework and according to the main themes from the interview results, previously stated: *Feeling (un)safe, Engaging with decision-makers,* and *Reflections on dress code.* This following section also aims to answer this study's research question throughout the discussion: How are the experiences of young female climate activists shaped by gendered institutional structures and practices at COP conferences? The final findings are presented in the conclusion.

6.1 Feeling (unsafe)

Presented by Thew et al (2021), the participation of young women at the COP is considered to be an important part of the proceedings of the UNFCCC and youth are emphasised as key stakeholders as their involvement bring new perspectives that contribute to a holistic approach that aims to foster a fair, equitable and inclusive climate movement (Thew et al, 2021). Including the voices and opinions of young people is argued to be part of the democratic practce of our society, which is exercised at the climate conferences of COP (Thew, Middlemiss & Paavola, 2020) and UNFCCC states that the contribution of "young voices" brings new perspectives to conversation of climate change (UNFCCC, 2010). It is therefore important to analyse and discuss on which terms, in what ways and in which spaces these participants are included in, and further, how they experience being part of a global political arena.

To begin, a theme that arose during the interview findings was the participants' reflections on their overall feel of COP in regards to the divison of men and women. By looking at the first sub-theme of *division of gender,* the quotes from Lily and Elena exemplify how the gender division of men and women at both the COP conference venue, and in its host city, the COP might be interpreted: "...even at the conference it was still like 65/35, I would say, for men to women." – Lily and "...I have participated to some, some side-events and they were always like male and elderly people." – Elena. Both quotes suggest that some spaces at COP, and its host city, are male- and adult-dominated, and sometimes they consist of a majority of older men. This sub-theme was placed under the main theme of *Feeling (unsafe)* not because that participants explicitly said that they felt unsafe because there were more men around, but because this experienced gender disparity was brought up when they were asked if they ever felt unsafe when attending COP. Lily said: "(…) And it wasn't an unsafe feeling, but it was strange. TO enter a room and that it was not evenly divided by gender." A male- and adult-dominated space arguably sets the scene for the construction of spaces that these participants are navigating within, and further draws attention to how individuals might experience their time at COP, both when travelling to the conference and moving around the public spaces.

As presented in the following sub-theme of *Navigating in the host city of COP,* the male-dominanted spaces of COP27 in Egypt made some of the interviewees experience unsafe and uncomfortable situations, such as when travelling to and from the conference venue in taxis, in their hotels, or interacting with the security staff at the conference. The exemples presented by Julia and Alessia, who both attended COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh, highlights the ways they as young women felt uncomfortable where there were mainly male taxi drivers, hotel staff, and security staff. Alessia said: "Yeah, I didn't feel like super safe, honestly" and Julia felt similarly: "We felt very uncomfortable in the taxis." The men in the examples indirectly presented different types of either unsafe or intimidating scenarios for the women. Drawing on work of Caiazza (2005), it can be argued that these

perceived uncomfortable, or even unsafe situations/encounters, negatively affect the ways that the women are able to participate at COP. Although some of the situations occurred outside of COP, Caiazza argues that the fear of violence, and especially gender-based violence such as rape, negatively affects the ways women make decisions regarding their political engagements. Here, in their examples, Julia and Alessia both perceive the situations where they could possibly face violence or unsafe situations, which might not have been recognized in the same way if they were men, since they have to account, waste energy, and plan for moving in spaces that are male-dominated, such as travelling to their hotels in groups or being aware of their surroundings. Women have to account for violent threats more than men since women are more likely to have experienced sxual phyiscl assault (Caiazza, 2005). Hence, the threat of precarious encounters, when navigating in the city that hosts COP, could arguably negatively affect the way they are able to participate inside the conference.

This can further be analysed through the work of de Simone et al. (2018) and the notion of recognizing that women's low representation in politics is not always because of lack of interest, but of recognizing the social inequalities that women face and thus affects them when accessing political arenas. By recognizing that women and men perceive situations differently in male-dominated spaces, as in the examples of Julia and Alessia where they state spending time and energy to deal with possible unsafe situations in Egypt, it can further highlight how the social inequalities relating to gender removes the attention from "the responsibility of the system to the responsibilities of the individual woman" (de Simone et al., 2018, 837). What can be drawn from the interpretation is not necessarily a generalisation of the "young female experience" nor the experience of every COP, however the assumption that the host city of COP, thus the country, has an impact on how young women perceive their experience.

The responsibility of the system, or institution, can further be discussed in relation to how the participants experienced being inside of the conference venue. In

contrast to the previous statements, participants Sophia, Hannah and Leah all felt physically safe moving around inside the venue. Worth noting is that their perceived safety seems to be largely based on the perception that there are other people around. For example, Sophia mentioned that she felt safe because of the amount of security guards: "(…) there are a lot of security guards, like at the entrance and who walked around (...) so there were no problems there. Hannah and Leah both said that they felt safe because they were surrounded by other young people or women. Hannah said: "(…) there are so many young people in place, there are many women in place" and Leah agreed: "I actually did feel fine because especially the year the young participants of COP." Their perceived feelings of safety can be interpreted as relating to the spatial boundaries of COP, where they felt safe, noting that their safety relates to being inside the venue and surrounded with other young people or women.

Further, as presented by Condon, Lieber and Maillochon (2007), when women perceive that their presence is "legitimate" and "allowed", they feel more "authorised" to be in that place - a notion that could be interpreted as "safe" in the examples above. To contextualise their participation, and as previously stated, all of the interviewees were invited to the COP through their organisations, with an observer status, which grants an official invitation and thus an "legally" allowed presence. Their presence, and experience of a safe space, might be further "allowed" in relation to other "safe" people, here exemplified as other young people and women. This draws attention to how the participants might have experienced the spaces of COP if there were not as many young people, women or security guards around.

Furthermore, to further discuss the participants' experience, the 'lens' of feminist institutionalism highlights the subleties of why Sophia, Hannah and Leah all said that they felt completely safe when navigating in the conference venue. By drawing on the work of Chappell (2006); Mackkay & Murtagh (2019) and Krook & Mackay (2011) who all discuss the notion of institutional logics, the

"sensemaking" framework that showcases the links between institutional rules, norms and practices within institutions. Here, the participants feelings of safety exemplifies the concept of gendered logic of approriateness as it reflects the ways and under what circumstances women can and are allowed to feel safe in. The earlier quotes suggests that there are "accepted" norms for how women should behave or feel in order to feel safe, here echoed as the presence of other people in the same position as them, or security guards, which reflects the notion that women's (perceived) safety is restrictive and contexual. Women have to consider their personal safety in ways that men generally don't. The conditional notions of feeling safe reflects how women in society often feel safer if there are other women around, and seeing how men's percieved (un)safety does argubly not affect their political engagement in the same ways as for women (Caiazza, 2005), both feelings of unsafety outside of the COP venue, and feeling safe(r) inside the venue suggests that young women are navigating spaces that are not inherently safe for them.

The quote from Leah: "Some, you know, things, girls, women think about which men would never do" exemplifies how women and men move in this world on different terms. Similarly, a quote from Sandra further illuminated the statement further, in regards to how safety or more specifically, psychologically safety[1], can impact a person's experience. An extract from Sandra's quote reads: "you got these dirty looks in the corridors (...) it wasn't like I felt that it was like a threat to my personal safety. (…) there's men sitting from the other corner and they're just kind of staring at you, and you're like 'okay, they're sending very clear signals that they don't want us here' (…) But it's a very hierarchical environment." Her statement stood out compared to the others and she was the only one who explicitly expressed feeling uncomfortable and possibly distressed during her time at COP. Sandra's example highlights how the men in the meeting room's

behaviours, such as giving dirty looks, staring in uncomfortable ways that are intepreted as hostile, sending unfriendly signals of unwelcomeness, sends subtle forms of intimidating actions, highlighting a hierarchal gender order. Within the hegemonic gender order in politics, presented by de Simone et al. (2018), unequal gender relations are uncovered by, for example, examining how women's access to "places of real power" is continuesly hindered by a system that favours a masculine context (de Simone et al. 2018). Through the lens of a hegemonic gender order, Sandra's experience showcases a significant example of how an institutional environment can reinforce a gendered hierarchal structure through the behaviours of men. By indirectly, through uncomfortable stares and other actions, making Sandra feel unwelcome, pshycologically unsafe, and further excluded, highlights how a dominant male setting can reinforce gendered hierarchial structures, which suggest that women are further marginalized from accessing power.

6.2   Engaging with decision-makers

As Nkrumah (2021) and Thew et al. (2021) have argued, youth groups face more obstacles than other stakeholder groups in attending COP. This view was shared by most of the interviewees: Hannah and Elena, in particular, pointed out that youth groups are particularly disadvantaged with respect to issues such as restricted funding, certain amount of entry badges and personal contacts to set up meetings, or political recognition, as adult who are more likely to have greater resources as state delegates or senior members of their organisation. These observations draw attention to the relative disadvantage and power imbalance of youth versus adult participants, a sentiment echoed by Nkrumah (2021), who

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[1] The term psychologically safety, or emotional safety, refers to when a person feels psychologically safe in relation to other people and social contexts.

argues that young citizens who are invited to adult political settings, often face limitations when participating in their political setting since they are not viewed as "fully human (beings) yet".

Moreoever, the sense of *being youthwashed* at the COP was felt by Hannah and Elena, as both talked about situations where they were invited to participate and be included in meetings with decision-makers, yet they both express feelings of frustration when they feel disadvantaged for being young and "not worthy" of the same treatment as fellow adult participants. In relation to previous research (Thew et al. 2021), both women were well informed on the concept of youthwashing, and even used the word to describe their example: "So, it's kind of youthwashing." - Elena. Moreover, Hannah recalled a chief negotiator at COP being late to a meeting with young participants, who cuts the meeting short, and acts arguably nonchalant when he asks the participants to summarise their main points in order to him to swiftly answer, an act Hannah sees as dismissive and avoidant: "'oh, we're going to talk to young people, it's so important', like that feels a bit more like youth-washing sometimes." - Hannah. The examples of Elena and Hannah implies that young people are tokenized at the COPs, as their presence creates an appearance of diversification of more young people, however it does not necessarily mean that young people are being included or given any real power.

Their symbolic presence is arguably an indirect discrimination, since young people and their contribution is officially seen as valuable (UNFCCC, 2022) yet, the previous statements indicate that young actors' time or opinions do not matter as much as other stakeholders at COP. Based on the notion of being young, the participants might be viewed more as passive and incapable recipients who are not equal partners to adults, and therefore not "worthy" of being listened to which suggests a form of tokenistic participation (Nkrumah, 2021). Youthwashing may be viewed as a form of tokenism in which the participation of young people at an event or meeting is praised as a form of diversification, whilst not actually be

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listened to or and acting on what they have to say (PUSH Sweden, 2019; Sloan Morgan et al., 2024; Thew et al., 2021).

When looking at tokenism of youth as an indirect discrimination, the concept can be further nuanced by viewing multiple aspects of the identity of the interviewees. Both statements from Elena and Hannah can be seen as forms of tokenism, as presented by Mackay, Parlee and Kaarsgard (2020) and Nkrumah (2021) and Elena further exemplifies a nuanced aspect of tokenism by depicting a situation where a woman was being used as the front figure of some of the events in the pavilion whilst not actually participating in the events themselves. Elena describes the woman as a front figure of the pavilion, a secretary, and not a person who is a part of the meetings/negotiations inside of the pavilion, e.g. within the discussions of decision-making, and therefore illuminates the gender inequality: "But then that is just an image role, you just do, deal with logistics, you don't have any type of power in there." – Elena.

By utilising the lens of cultural perspective of tokenism, this example draws attention to the importance of looking at who is being used as the face/front figure for these types of events during COP and who is participating in the negotiation rooms, as in holding the power to discuss, change the climate work that is done at COP. If young women are kept outside of the meeting rooms, are their voices actually being included in the discussions? To Elena, it first looks like the woman is a part of the meeting/negotiations, however she is seconds later viewed as an outsider as Elena realises that the woman is only put there as an image, a front figure of the meeting whose presence creates a form of inclusive illusion, as there are only men speaking inside of the meeting later. In the work or Drenten et al. (2022) and Johnson & Schulman (1989), role entrapment speaks to how women can only exist within masculine dominant spaces as gender stereotypes, as secretaries in Elena's example. Through the lens of feminist institutionalism, the depiction of the woman in Elena's example highlights how women are forced into stereotypical roles in masculine-dominated spaces.

By applying the concept of gendered tokenism, we can view the woman within the structural dynamics between the dominant group (men inside the meeting) and the excluded group (women outside of meeting) and how her token presence speaks to the power dynamics at play because her presence is only symbolic, promoting a gender diverse meeting, whilst not actually changing anything. The woman's presence, and lack of actual power at the meeting, sheds light on how she is viewed as the "token woman." Her position and presence clearly presents an illusion of inclusivity, since she plays by rules set by the dominant group, however she is not invited in to the meeting. This sheds lights on the questions of whose voice are dominant and whose is marginalized? The example reflects a hegemonic gender order of subordinate women and powerful men, since the power is only shared with those inside the meeting, the men, and how excluded women are kept outside, away from decision-making meetings or actual power. Even though this is one example, and not generalizable, the gendered practice still speaks to the perpetuation of men holding the political power.

To further discuss the power dynamics at play at COP, the examples depicted by Elena, Maria, Alessia, and Julia all convey statements that speak to how men and men's voices are favoured: "(…) but I feel like he was always more listened than them." – Elena; "(…) board members who have this kind of 'I should be speaking like I don't care if you're a woman'. – Alessia; "… then he told to be in charge of that event to another person that was more experienced in the organization." – Maria; "There's older men in positions of power who speak to younger state delegates in an uncomfortable situations." – Julia. These quotes all speak to relationship between older participants, who are sometimes men, and younger women. What is drawn from the quotes is that the participants' experienced significant situations where older men in positions of power appointed themselves in a more surperior position by for example interupting conversations, trying to "mansplain" situations or conversations, or disgregard decided plans. By utilising the 'lens' of feminist institutionalism and previous research (de Simone et al.,

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2018; Flicker, 2013; Lowndes, 2019), these examples of asserting a type of authorative dominance over the younger women implies that the "masculine logic" or behaviors that are associated with masculinity, undermines women's voices and contribution, thus the participation of women in political arenas such as COP. Dominant groups and their actions, here exampled as men in power positions, perform and reinforce a hegemonic gender order by "asserting their dominant position" in the form of acting according to the set norms. The norms here being that men authorative and in control, and women being subordinate and unheard. These norms reinforces that men's voices should be heard, and women's should be weakened.

6.3   Reflections on dress code

Furthermore, the final sub-theme of *Thoughts on dress code* presented depictions from the interviewees when they discussed norms and expectations in relation to clothing at the COP. Both Eva and Lily state that there is a certain standard of dressing professionally expected at COP, and Eva said: "*We tried to dress a bit professionally, to fit in.*" Eva's quote implies that the expectation and assumption is to dress professionally, which is similarly stated by Lily, who further highlights the gendered expectations of professional attire. Lily said that the official code of conduct that included a dress code, requires women to dress more restrictive whilst men are allowed to wear more casual clothes: "*(...) he (editor's note: male colleague) got to wear shorts if he wanted to when it was 40 degrees. I wasn't allowed to do that.*" These examples highlight the gendered expectations related to dressing a certain way, and how women are required to conform to a stricter dress code than their male colleagues, which reinforces traditional gender norms that gender-specific clothes or even more conservative clothing relates to a more professional look, regardless of the context, for example in Lily's case where the weather was scorching. This expectation implies that women must dress a certain

way to be seen as "professional" or "adult-enough" to participate at COP which restricts their personal choices of styling or comfort.

As described previously, the gendered dress code is an example of the gendered logic of appropriateness within the institutional structures of COP. As presented by Mackay and Murtagh (2019), the gendered logic of appropriateness refers to a "common-sense" of institutional rules and norms. These formal rules, such as a dress code, or informal rules, such as having to adhere to the dress code to not be judged or reprimanded either socially or having to leave the conference, highlights that the structures of COP are not neutral, in the sense of being ingrained with gendered values of masculinity and a masculine look being the "appropriate" common-sense. This finding is consistent with the work of Flicker (2013) who highlights the double-bind that women face at the COP. In Lily's quote: "men are allowed to wear more casual clothes (...) I wasn't allowed to do that", she confirms a double-standard for women, by saying that her male colleague was allowed to wear more casual clothes whilst she was not allowed. The double-bind visualisation of women highlights how if women perform and dress in a feminine way, they are perceived as inferior actors in the field of politics (Flicker, 2013, 201) whilst refusing to submit to a masculinist dress code can attract unwanted attention, promoting how women are viewed as "the other", the exception to the rule (Flicker, 2013, 202).

Another significant interview finding relating to how women are judged unequally to men is presented by Julia, who recalled a situation where the financial funder of her organisation, a woman holding financial power, commented negatively about Julia's colleague choice of clothing. Julia said: *"Yeah, but I hate the fact that this person (...), who gave us money to go, then tells me off for having a delegate on the panel who's wearing a short skirt. (...) and this was even a woman, you know?"* highlighting how internalised misogyny can show a gender bias that favours a masculine environment. Even though Julia was not the target of the comment, it made her feel uncomfortable that an older woman, who holds power

in the form of being the main funder and whose sponsorship allowed Julia and her colleagues to attend COP, judged the young woman for wearing clothes that did not fit into the expected norm, subsequently perpetuating the gendered expecation of wearing feminine, but not too feminine, clothes.

Julia's example also reflects the societal norms that we share worldwide, regardless of where COP is held, and further decides what women can or cannot wear, arguably reinforcing gender inequalities through a hegemonic gender order. de Simone et al. (2018) points out some of the ways that a dominant gender order undermines women in masculine contexts where masculinity is favoured. By highlighting the gendered expectation of women's clothing within institutions, relation to the examples of Eva, Lily, and Julia, it can be argued that the hegemonic gender order both shapes and perpetuates "appropriate" clothing for women by enforcing informal norms that confirms gender inequality.

Further, drawing on Lowndes' (2019) and Thomson's (2019) argument, we can view the behaviour of both female and male political actors within COP as shaping the power relations that exist within. The microfoundations of COP rely on the "rules of the game", understood as interaction between actors and rules to see what is prohibited or permitted (Lowndes, 2019; Thomson, 2019). Here, the "rules" regarding dress code are clearly gendered as the assumed "logic" is to adhere to the established expectations of work attire, or face the reprecussions as exemplified by Julia who was reprimanded by a superior.

7 Conclusion

To conclude this study, this final section will answer the study's research question by presenting the findings of the analysis: How are the experiences of young female participants in the climate movement shaped by gendered institutional structures and practices at COP conferences?

This study has researched experiences of young women who participated at the COP conferences. By examining the stories told by the participants through the lens of feminist institutionalism, this research sheds light on the multifaceted and rather complex impacts of gendered structures and practices at the institution of COP. The participation of young women is officially and outwards displayed as important and vital to the climate discussion. However, as demonstrated throughout the research, young women participants are affected by gendered barriers and exclusionary practices which affects their participation and further reinforces dominant gendered power structures. The first theme showed how young women at COP navigate in spaces that are not inherently safe, as male-dominated societal practices affect the way that they are able to participate. The second theme showed how young women experienced two types of tokenization, on the accounts of both being young and female, by either experiencing or viewing gendered practices that rather furthers the gender gap by perpetuating a male position of power than gender equality. The third theme showed how formal and informal gendered norms regarding the dress code at COP can reinforce broader societal norms that women have to dress a certain way in order to be taken seriously. By researching the subjective experiences and perceptions of the participants, this research has provided a further understanding of how young women in the climate movement participate in multilateral climate negotiations.

7.1 Future research

To conclude this study, there are a few examples of intersectional themes that arose during the interview findings, yet did not fit within the scope of this particular thesis. Here, even though intersectionality as a concept within feminist institutionalism has been removed from this study due to the study's limitations, there were certain intersectional issues that arose that are worth mentioning. As previously mentioned, an intersectional lens provides a way of analysing how multiple parts of one's identity can shape the experience of power, privilege and oppression within political institutions which is important in order to understand its complexity (Krook & Mackay, 2011). The aspect of an intersectional lens might have nuanced this study even further, however it is instead framed as future research. By drawing on the case study of COP and adding the intersectional lens, I believe research could be developed by digging deeper into how different parts of the participants' identity, not only gender, shapes the way they experience COP conferences.

An example for future research is exploring the experience and voices of queer people. As exemplified by Hannah, who participated at COP28 in Dubai, spoke in her interview about how she and her colleague prepared for the conference by downloading apps like Signal in order to communicate safely. She mentioned that they were advised by previous attendees to delete dating apps if their settings were set to dating people of the same sex, since homosexuality is outlawed by both civil and sharia law in the UAE, and the penalty could be jail. Hannah does not say if she herself dates people of the same sex, but still thinks that it's unsettling:

> "So I found it very unpleasant (...), it was even at that level that, since homosexuality is forbidden, it might be an idea to delete dating apps if you

have it set on the opposite sex. (...), I thought it was, mostly unpleasant, just in terms of safety." - Hannah

Another, unexpected, topic that arose in the interview findings was a quote made by Sophia. When we spoke about her experience of perceived safety, she recalls attending multiple COPs in different countries and she depicts experiencing a difference in safety when visiting several countries:

"I would say, it might be a little different from place to place. (...) maybe a little less safe, like in Poland there in Katowice, yeah more Eastern European like feels a little more, yeah unsafe, compared to like very, how should I say, civilised, developed countries. More compared to the other countries, such as Spain, Germany, Great Britain which are more similar."
- Sophia

Drawing on this quote, the notion of colonialist attitudes arose which relates to an intersectional aspect of the interview findings. Even though the interviewees are well knowledgeable within the politics of climate change and seemingly politically aware in other areas, this statement might contribute to the relevance of researching how deeply embedded colonial attitudes may lie even within politically aware individuals. To develop future research, I suggest applying a postcolonial theory or concept. A few final aspects that drew the attention to an intersectional aspect of the interview findings were depicted by Alessia and Lily who both spoke about being part of minority groups. Alessia is, and presents herself as, a muslim woman and talked about being a minority at COP:

"I don't know if I was sometimes, like, misconsidered in these spaces because I was a woman or because I was representing young people. It can be both. And I also know sometimes the people are maybe surprised to see me because they're also Muslim women, like visible Muslim women. So

they're like, OK, you're representing the European youth like, yes, that's me." - Alessia

Alessia's quote draw attention and awareness to the stereotype of a European youth activist or COP participant. The aspect of being Muslim at COP, or similar religious affiliations could further be explored by an intersectional approach to research the intertwined dimensions of being young, a woman and of religious minority at COP. In addition, Lily spoke about how being from the indigenous group of Sámi people gave her the opportunity to attend a meeting since she could tick a box that asked if she belonged to en ethnic minority. Even if she stated that she does not represent the voices or opinions of Sámi people at the COP, she believed it gave her an advantage and helped her secure a spot at the meeting:

"... and where she said that it was meritorious if you were, partly if you were a woman and also me, my mother is Sámi, and there was a little drop down menu where you could choose 'do you belong to an ethnic minority.' It gave you plus points for participating because it looked way better. Optics I suspect. (...) Or maybe I'm cynical, maybe it's genuine in order to give people opportunities? I don't represent Sámi interests at the conference (...). But I checked that box because I wanted to get into the meetings." - Lily

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9 Appendix 1. Interview guide

Introduction:

I'm writing my Master's thesis on the topic of youth activism at the COP conferences and specifically researching the experiences of young female activists. So today we'll have an open conversation about your time at the COP and your experiences, and the interview will be approximately 1 hour long. We can take a break at any time and if there is a question you don't want to answer, please let me know and we can skip it. And if there is anything you would like to add, please do so. This is your time and I want to hear your opinion and thoughts.

This interview will be audio recorded and then manually transcribed, only heard and viewed by me and you will be anonymous/anonymized in the thesis. Both the audio recording and transcribed material will be deleted after I've received a passing grade.

Consent form:

I've emailed you a consent form that explains more in detail the personal data that will be collected, if you haven't already signed it and sent it back, please do so as soon as possible. If you have any additional information or questions after the interview, please let me know as well. In the beginning of the interview, I will also ask for verbal consent.

Structure of interview:

So first I'll ask some practical questions about you and your organisation, then I'll ask some questions about the formalities about the COP you attended, and then we'll get into the questions about your experience. Okay, let's go

Interview questions:

- Do you consent to this interview being audio recorded?
- What is your name? How old are you?
- Where do you live? Where are you from?
- What is your occupation?
- What is your level of education?
- Who inspires you in the climate movement? Do you have a role model?
- What organization do you work/volunteer for and for how long have you done that?
- Can you tell me a little of the work that your organisation does?
- What kind of work do you do there?
- Which COP meeting did you attend?
    - Why did you attend this particular COP? What was your motivation for attending?
    - What was your role/work assignment?
    - How long did you stay at the COP?
    - How did you/colleagues/organization plan the trip?
    - Did you go alone or with more people from your organization? How many went?
    - What kind of funding/sponsorship did you have?
    - How did you travel to the conference? How did you travel to/from the COP?
    - Where did you stay? What did you think about your accommodation?
    - How did you experience your personal safety/security, both in regards to when you travelled to the COP, in between the COP and your accommodation, and during the conference itself?
    - What did you think about the work division between you and your colleagues from your organization?

- How did you experience the group dynamic? Was everyone listened to the same?

- How did you experience the mental workload (checking in the well-being of colleagues)? Was this done by everyone in the group?

- Was there someone in your group who was 'the leader'?

  - Took up the most space? Voiced their opinion the most?

  - What were your expectations of the conference before going?

- How did you experience your role as a young female activist/participant?

  - Did you experience, during the conference, occasions when you felt empowered, eg. speaking up in a meeting, attending a protest, holding a workshop?

- Were there times when you felt that you were treated differently from your male colleagues, or that you were excluded in any way? In that case, from older/more experienced participants/decision-makers?

- Were you hesitant/discouraged to raise your voice/opinion, or that you couldn't be honest in meetings, personal interactions, or such?

  - Was this something you observed in others or other groups at COP?

- Did you feel like your voice/work of your organization was valued as important and that you could make a difference/influence?

- Did you experience pressure to perform in a certain way at the COP?

- Do you think there are stereotypes of young activists in the climate change movement?

  - If so, do you think there are stereotypes of young female activists? Is this something you experienced?

  - Did you experience a sense of community with the other youth activists?

- Did you experience support from the other participants/activists/older activists?

- How did you report back to your organization after COP?

- Would you attend again?

- If so, is there something you would do differently?
- How did you feel being interviewed about this topic/these questions?

10 Appendix 2. Consent form

Consent to Participate in a Master Thesis at the Faculty of Social Science

I agree to participate in *The experiences of female youth activists at the COP.*
This is a student project and the collected data will be used to understand how young female activists in the global climate change movement and specifically at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP).

Information on the processing of personal data
The following personal data will be processed:

- Your name and contact information such as email or telephone number.
- Data such as age, level of education, current occupation, geographical location, previous and current organisational affiliation.
- The audio recording from the interview.

Personal data will be processed in the following ways:
The interviews will be audio recorded and the collected personal data will be treated confidentially. The data collected will be stored on an encrypted external evice until the thesis has been examined and received a passing grade, then this will be deleted. You will be anonymized in the thesis.
We do not share your personal data with third parties.
Lund University, Box 117, 221 00 Lund, Sweden, with organisation number 202100-3211 is the controller. You can find Lund University's privacy policy at www.lu.se/integritet
You have the right to receive information about the personal data we process about you. You also have the right to have inaccurate personal data about you corrected. If you have a complaint about our processing of your personal data, you

can contact our Data Protection Officer at dataskyddsombud@lu.se. You also have the right to lodge a complaint with the supervisory authority (the Data Protection Authority, IMY) if you believe that we are processing your personal data incorrectly.

11 Appendix 3. Interview list

Interview 1, female youth activist

Participated at COP28

Date: 29/3/2024

Location: Zoom

Time: 16:00-16:52

Interview 2, female youth activist

Participated at COP27, COP28

Date: 1/4/2024

Location: Zoom

Time: 20:00-21:18

Interview 3, female youth activist

Participated at COP26, COP27, COP28

Date: 2/4/2024

Location: Zoom

Time: 15:00-15:50

Interview 4, female youth activist

Participated at COP21, COP23, COP26, COP27, COP28

Date: 3/4/2024

Location: Zoom

Time: 14:00-14:58

Interview 5, female youth activist

Participated at SB48

Date: 4/4/2024

Location: Zoom

Time: 09:00-09:49

Interview 6, female youth activist

Participated at SB58, COP28

Date: 9/4/2024

Location: Zoom

Time: 10:00-10:56

Interview 7, female youth activist

Participated at COP23, COP24, COP25, COP26

Date: 9/4/2024

Location: Zoom

Time: 19:00-19:55

Interview 8, female youth activist

Participated at SB48, SB50, COP24

Date: 12/4/2024

Location: In person

Time: 13:00-14:00

Interview 9, female youth activist

Participated at COP28

Date: 14/4/2024

Location: Zoom

Time: 16:00-16:52

Interview 10, female youth activist

Participated at COP28