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The female advantage in team dynamics: The role of genuine emotional displays☆

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ABSTRACT

While the "female advantage" is a well-studied phenomenon, its incidence and effects remain a focus of much debate. In particular, with the growing relevance of teamwork and genuine affective exchange processes in team dynamics, a better understanding of multilevel effects of gender in team processes and outcomes is needed. Drawing from research in team configurations and dynamics explaining how inputs (e.g., team composition) can influence team processes (e.g., emotional exchange) that subsequently affect team outcomes (e.g., performance), we examine mediating effects of deep acting as a gendered group emotional mechanism, assuming it is more prevalent in female-dominated teams. 437 employees working in 92 teams responded to measures of emotional labor and performance. Employees were nested in teams, and data were analyzed using multilevel structural equation modelling. Mediation analyses showed that proportions of women are associated with higher team-level deep acting and subsequent team performance. Findings are discussed in terms of how organization theories could be strengthened by making visible gendered dynamics of shared emotional exchange processes and their effects in team performance, liberating genuine emotional responses among all team members.

There is general agreement that management and organization theories need to be extended by making visible the many contributions of women (Ramos et al., 2022; Sperber et al., 2021). Responding to this challenge, "female advantage" proposals often underscore the benefits of having women at work, pointing to women's communal stereotypical feminine role of emotional acknowledgment and caring as a potential resource for performance (Gartzia & Baniandres, 2019; Eagly, 1987; Stewart & McDermott, 2004). However, the notion of a "female advantage" is overly broad and requires examination within the context of specific work processes to accurately assess its validity and implications. In particular, one unexplored area in which women's communal orientations can benefit firm outcomes is in the dynamics and processes of team functioning. Because teamwork is intrinsically an interpersonal process whereby team members work together in complex challenges that require collaboration, mutual trust and genuine emotional displays to enhance performance (Ashkanasy, 2003; Gabriel et al., 2015; Mathieu et al., 2008; Stewart, 2006), the unique communal orientations and processes of emotion sharing generated in teams dominated by women can be critical for team emotional dynamics and performance.

Proportions of women represent a fundamental factor to understand processes that shape emotional dynamics in a team because women are socialized with communal traits that involve being sensitive, caring about others, and attending to feelings (Ali & Konrad, 2017; Shields, 2002; Stewart & McDermott, 2004). Although these associations between gender and communion have been widely addressed by scholars in different fields (Eagly, 1987; Singh et al., 2023), they have not been sufficiently elaborated in the context of group dynamics. The prevailing framework addressing gender in organizational dynamics and particularly emotional responses has generally theorized and empirically addressed gender effects at the individual level (e.g., single-level gender differences in emotion). In some cases, it has been discussed how mixed-gender groups may exhibit higher social sensitivity compared to single-gender groups, pointing to demographic composition of groups

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as a potential influence in the extent to which members engage in emotion regulation (Menges & Kilduff, 2015). However, analyses of gender in group outcomes are less common and specific multilevel analyses of gender composition in emotional group dynamics remain scarce. Although some studies have provided valuable insights into emotional expressions and gender stereotypes (e.g., Brescoll, 2016; Brody & Hall, 2000; Hopkins & Bilimoria, 2008), they do not directly analyze the role of gender in emotional dynamics within these multilevel frameworks.

Studies in the team dynamics literature have also generally addressed emotional processes without a critical acknowledgment of gender effects (e.g., Barsade & Knight, 2015; Grandey & Melloy, 2017; Van Kleef, 2016). For instance, The Input-Process-Outcome (IPO) model (Ilgen et al., 2005; McGrath, 1984) and Van Kleef's (2009) Emotions as Social Information (EASI) model underscore how emotions expressed within a team serve as social cues that can influence others' behaviors and perceptions through affective reactions and inferential processes, but these cues have not been elaborated from a gender lens. Also, although the topic of emotional labor or "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (Hochschild, 1983, p. 7) is receiving closer attention in the context of teamwork (Ashkanasy, 2003; Van Kleef, 2009), the influence of gender in these emotional group dynamics has not been scrutinized. There is general agreement that individually women often engage more in strategies of deep acting, which implies that inner feelings are modified to match a group required display (Cottingham et al., 2015; Grandey, 2000; Johnson & Spector, 2007), but the specific occurrence at the team level is insufficiently addressed. This is an important limitation because emotional strategies of deep acting are particularly relevant for effectiveness (Bono & Vey, 2005; Gabriel et al., 2015; Hülsheger & Schewe, 2011; Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013; Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012) and the relative numbers of women in a work unit of analysis may have several unique effects on outcomes – including emotional displays – compared to the effects of particular female members acting separately (Blau, 1977; Joshi & Roh, 2009).

Extending these frameworks, the current paper contributes to the advancement of team dynamics theory by offering an enhanced understanding of multilevel emotional processes from a gender perspective. Drawing from the literature on team composition and team dynamics of emotional transfer (Barsade et al., 2018; Becker & Cropanzano, 2014; McGrath, 1984; Ilgen et al., 2005; Van Kleef, 2009), we underscore the relevance of team-level gender structures and in particular proportion of women as a social input through which emotional processes of genuine emotional labor can occur and translate into team performance above and beyond individual gender. The IPO model (McGrath, 1984; see also Ilgen et al., 2005) serves as a suitable conceptual approach to understand these effects as it conceptualizes the impact of information within social interactions and group dynamics outlining how inputs (e.g., team composition) influence processes (e.g., communication) that subsequently affect outcomes (e.g., performance). As such, it is particularly relevant to understand gendered emotional dynamics.

By integrating this literature addressing team inputs, processes and outcomes (Ilgen et al., 2005; McGrath, 1984; Van Kleef, 2009) with research pointing to gender as a critical factor in group and emotional dynamics (Ali & Konrad, 2017; Eagly, 1987; Singh et al., 2023; Stewart & McDermott, 2004), we argue that inferential and social relational processes that occur in groups with high proportions of women are more likely to promote genuine modifications of members' inner feelings to make them consistent with the desired emotions of others at the team-level, which subsequently leads to greater team effectiveness. Such gender approach grounded in the team processes literature contributes to a deeper understanding of the female advantage at the team level, which represents a relevant unexplored facet of how gender can influence team outcomes and emotional labor responses in teams. Indeed, while prior research has explored the general impacts of emotional expression on team processes and outcomes, and has occasionally touched upon gender dynamics, there remains a significant gap in addressing how gender influences these pathways with multilevel analyses.

1. The growing relevance of emotion at work

In organizational behavior research, emotion and interpersonal relations have gained increasing attention (Barsade et al., 2018; Nesher Shoshan & Venz, 2022). This focus is rooted in emotion theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), highlighting how employees react emotionally to social and organizational events that happen to them at work and influence performance (Ashkanasy & Dorris, 2017; Barsade, 2002; Humphrey et al., 2008). For example, leaders' emotionality affects follower outcomes, such as performance and creativity (McColl-Kennedy & Anderson, 2002; Zhou & George, 2003), and shapes group outcomes like emotional climate (Humphrey, 2002; Ozcelik, Langton, & Aldrich, 2008). While evidence links emotions to performance, there is need to better understand the underlying processes that operate at the team level, as well as their gendered nature.

Group-level affective processes often start with individual-level components, such as dispositional affect and moods (Kelly & Barsade, 2001), which members bring with them into the group interaction. Barsade's (2002) emotional contagion theory has examined these components by looking at how group members' moods can be easily transferred and influence work group dynamics. Similarly, teamwork research distinguishes between compositional effects, reflecting the sum of members' responses, and compilational effects, which emerge from members' interactions (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000; Kozlowski et al., 2016). A relevant theoretical framework to understand these compounding effects of emotions in teams is Van Kleef's (2009) EASI model, which explains how affective behavior informs observers about feelings, attitudes, and intentions, shaping their responses—a principle aligned with emotional contagion and situational emotion regulation (Diefendorff et al., 2006; Shields, 2005).

In emotional labor research, meta-analyses show its strong link to performance at the between-person level, although it is also receiving growing attention in the context of teamwork. Nesher, Shoshan and Venz (2022) found that deep acting toward coworkers leads to emotional and task support. In relation to performance, Becker and Cropanzano (2015) showed that members engaged in teams were able to comply with display rules in the group by genuinely changing their inner feelings, especially under the presence of a deep actor leading to group convergence, which resulted in more individual performance of these members. At the within-person level, surface acting is linked to anxiety, exhaustion, and stress (Judge et al., 2009; Matta et al., 2014). These studies consistently highlight the benefits of deep acting over surface acting in individual outcomes.

Building on these studies and assuming theoretical homology (Chen et al., 2005) between genuine emotional labor and performance across levels of analysis, we argue that team-level deep acting enhances team performance. We focus on team-level deep acting as a particularly relevant set of emotional dynamics in teams and argue that social processes of mutual emotional influence that lead team members to behave similarly and genuine emotion displays will drive group performance. Individual-level research has repeatedly linked deep acting to reduced negative effects at work (Bono & Vey, 2005; Hülsheger & Schewe, 2011; Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013; Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012), and so extending these findings it is proposed that.

Hypothesis 1. As group deep acting increases, team performance will be higher.

2. Genuine emotional displays in groups: a team-level "female advantage"?

Display norms about emotions are strongly gendered in most contexts (Hopkins & Bilimoria, 2008). In general, women are socialized to be warm and friendly as well as to express interpersonally oriented emotions (Brody & Hall, 2000; LaFrance & Banaji, 1992; Shields, 2002). This aligns with "female advantage" theories, which link women's communal orientations to performance (Eagly et al., 2012). Stereotypes about femininity and emotionality (Brody & Hall, 2000; Hopkins & Bilimoria, 2008) make women be more likely to genuinely express socially desirable emotions rather than fake them (Cottingham et al., 2015; Grandey, 2000; Johnson & Spector, 2007). Since emotional expression is more often prescribed for women and associated with femininity (Hopkins & Bilimoria, 2008; Shields, 2002), inferential processes associated with affective behavior of women are also likely to be transferred to social dynamics in teams with high proportions of women and generate interpersonal efforts of mutual adaptation, emotional regulation and understanding that are consistent with the prevailing gendered norms in the group.

Contrasting these approaches, previous studies have argued that gender is not such a relevant demographic factor predicting positive outcomes within teams (e.g., Hope Pelled et al., 1999; Ilgen et al., 2005; Riordan, 2000). This could be due to the fact that meta-analytical reviews on team diversity often examine general relationships between "any of the team diversity variables and performance" (Horwitz & Horwitz, 2007, p. 998), overlooking the specific gender composition of groups and mediating mechanisms. Studies addressing gender diversity largely focus on management and boards (Moreno-Gómez et al., 2018), neglecting gendered emotional dynamics in regular teams. Despite gender differences in emotion management and expression, regular analyses of emotional labor processes often yield inconsistent findings (Cheung & Tang, 2009; Grandey & Melloy, 2017), in part because group levels dynamics – such as those involved in emotion – are distinct from dynamics that occur at individual levels (Goodman & Haisley, 2007; Kanter, 1977). Most prior research examines gender, emotions and group functioning separately at individual levels, without exploring their interconnected, multilevel relationships.

These gaps also help to explain why effects of individual sex on emotional labor are unclear (Cheung & Tang, 2009; Grandey & Melloy, 2017), with meta-analytical evidence that employees' self-reported individual gender has a close to zero effect on frequency of surface or deep acting (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012). Consistent with social role theory (Eagly, 1987), gender stereotypes influence inferences about interpersonal and emotional responses, prescribing communal and emotional orientations for women (Gartzia, 2022; Stewart & McDermott, 2004). These gendered affective inputs may be shared within teams, creating interconnected emotional dynamics of mutual influence in female-dominated groups. Studies on group dynamics highlight the importance of women's proportional representation, with evidence showing that women's presence in teams significantly influences group processes and outcomes (Gartzia & van Knippenberg, 2016; Joshi & Roh, 2009). Thus, number of women should influence emotional team dynamics.

Gender analyses in research on team dynamics is scarce but this field increasingly recognizes complexities in social group dynamics, paying more attention to mediating processes (such as emotional dynamics) that link group inputs to group dynamics and outcomes. The IPO framework (Ilgen et al., 2005; McGrath, 1984) explains how inputs (e.g., team composition) impact subsequent outcomes (e.g., performance) in groups, outlining how these mediating processes often involve affective states. Emotional labor, inherently a social emotional process, likely varies with team composition and characteristics of a given work unit. Thus, teams with different proportions of women and men may vary in how they genuinely adapt to the desired emotion at the group level. When women exceed a critical proportion can they overcome tokenism and drive better team performance (Blau, 1977; Joshi & Roh, 2009), so gender proportions are clearly relevant to understand these group-level processes and outcomes.

Integrating the IPO model with social role theory (Eagly, 1987; Eagly, 2012), we propose that female-dominated team structures (team composition variable) can be taken as the input that trigger a team level genuine emotional process and translate into a better outcome (i.e., higher performance). This aligns with individual level research suggesting that women are more likely to use deep acting strategies (Cottingham et al., 2015; Grandey, 2000; Johnson & Spector, 2007). By aggregating these emotional processes and examining mediating effects at the team level, we provide a clearer framework for understanding gendered emotional dynamics within teams. Accordingly, we propose and test the direct and indirect connections between gender, deep acting, and performance across levels of analyses, as illustrated in Fig. 1. We suggest:

Hypothesis 2. As proportions of women increase, group deep acting will be higher.

Hypothesis 3. Group deep acting will mediate the relation between proportions of women in the group and group performance.

3. Method

3.1. Sample and procedure

Teams were recruited through meetings with HR practitioners and managers from Spanish organizations collaborating with the university for research purposes. In exchange, organizations received a summary of the main research findings. Recruitment followed recommendations from prior research (West, 1994), focusing on medium or large teams with at least 4 members and 50% participation. We contacted a wide range of industries, including healthcare, manufacturing, banking, education, public administration, retail, transportation, or consulting. Before data collection, participants attended a short explanatory meeting. Questionnaires were administered both online and on-site, following organizational consent. Invitations included a cover letter explaining the study, ensuring anonymity, and confirming voluntary participation. Inclusion criteria required teams to: belong to an organization with team-based work, have been working together for at least six months, share group goals, include at least four members (including the leader), engage in face-to-face interaction, and coordinate tasks as a team. Most teams (81.72%, n = 76) belonged to sectors with high client, student, or patient interaction, while 18.28% (n = 17) worked primarily with coworkers, superiors, and suppliers. To avoid overrepresentation, the majority of teams (91.3%) came from different organizations, except for four large firms contributing two non-interacting teams from separate departments. We obtained valid responses from 437 team members (239 men, 198 women) across 92 work groups. The mean age of participants was 42.64 years (SD = 10.74), with an average organizational tenure of 13.40 years (SD = 12.88) and team tenure of 5.04 years (SD = 6.21).

3.2. Measures

Emotional Labor. Emotional labor was measured with an Emotional Labor Scale (ELS ; Brotheridge & Lee, 2003) consisting of three items capturing the Deep Acting subscale (example item: "I make an effort to actually feel the emotions that I need to display to others"). Participants rated these items on 5-point Likert-scales ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (completely). Appropriate reliability indexes were observed for this dimension of emotional labor (α = .74).

Proportion of Women. To capture gender composition, we used the percentage of women in the team. Participants broadly self-

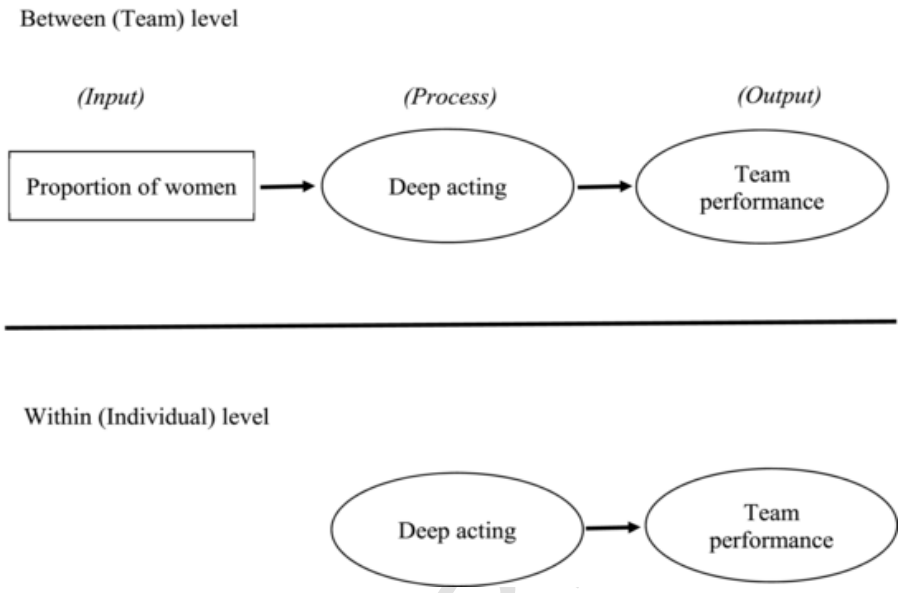

Fig. 1. Conceptual model predicting effects of proportion of women on deep acting and team performance based on the input-process-outcome model.

defined as either woman ("mujer") or man ("hombre") without explicitly referring to biological/anatomical features. Thus, following previous research (Gartzia, 2024) we refer to these labels as gender rather than sex proportions.

Group Performance. Group performance was measured with the Work Team Effectiveness scale (Aubé & Rousseau, 2005) and in particular the 3-item scale of Team Performance asking participants to assess their team performance, measured on 7-point Likert-scales ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (completely). An example item is "The members of my team achieved the assigned performance objectives". An appropriate internal validity score was observed for this dimension (α = .85).

Control variables. We controlled for age and organizational tenure, as both are linked to increased work experience and performance (Cohen, 1991). Since surface acting is an ineffective emotion regulation strategy negatively associated with performance (Hülsheger & Schewe, 2011), and also because women in male-dominated environments may engage in more surface acting to adapt to demands consistent with role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), we included three items from the Surface Acting subscale (Brotheridge & Lee, 2003) as a control. Thus, our analyses controlled for age, tenure, and gender at the individual level, as well as surface acting (controlled at both the individual and team levels).

3.3. Statistical analyses

To test our hypotheses, multilevel structural equation modelling (MSEM) analyses were carried out. Since the sample was divided into work teams, the independence of the observations was not assured (an overestimation of the statistical significance may occur). Therefore, multilevel analyses entail an advantage over single-level analyses, given that they allow bias correction, in addition to obtaining more precise estimates when separating the total variance into 'within' (individual) and 'between' (team) levels (Diez-Roux, 2000). The choice of MSEM analysis was based on allowing the analysis of more complex models (Goldstein, 1987). Following the general model by Muthén and Asparouhov (2008) we propose one measurement model and two structural models (a "within-cluster" or individual -level model, and a "between-cluster" or team-level model; Preacher et al., 2010). Mplus allows to obtain the traditional fit indicators, including chi-squared tests, comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), and the root mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA). In order to check the measurement model fit, a multilevel confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was carried out.

Given that the women rate has a level 2 value, and the other variables (assessed through individual answers of participants in each team) have a value corresponding to level 1, we used the MSEM 2-1-1 model for the analyses (Preacher et al., 2010). In addition, to test the proposed mediation, we used the Bayes estimator (iterations = 10000), applying a similar procedure to Bootstrapping (Zyphur & Oswald, 2015) for the calculation of the indirect effect. Intraclass correlations (ICCs) were calculated aimed at assuring enough between-groups variance (Preacher et al., 2010). Regarding ICCs, ICC(1) can be considered as the level at which individual scores depend on team membership (equivalent to an effect size), and ICC(2) allows obtaining the estimated reliability of the aggregated assessments at the team level (LeBreton & Senter, 2008). For ICC(1), we consider a value of .01 = ''small'' effect, a value of .10 = ''medium'' effect, and a value of .25 = ''large'' effect (Murphy & Myors, 1998), whereas for ICC(2), values below .40 are considered poor, between .40 and .75 adequate, and above .75 excellent (Fleiss, 1986).

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive statistics

Means, standard deviations, and correlations among the variables of the study (at the item level), corresponding to both individual level and team level, are presented in Table 1.

4.2. Data aggregation and measurement model

As shown in Table 2, ICC(1) and ICC(2) values were .23 and .59 for the measurement of deep acting, .16 and .47 for surface acting, and .17 and .50 for team performance. ICC(1) values indicated average effect sizes in the three cases; and ICC(2) indicated adequate levels of estimated reliability of the aggregated assessments at the team level. Regarding the composite reliability (measured through the ω coefficient), adequate values for both individual and team levels were obtained. Taking into account the previous results, it is worth considering the in-

Table 1
Means, standard deviations, and correlations among the study variables (at the item level).

Variables	M	SD	Individual level								
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Deep acting											
Deep acting item 1 (1)	3.21	1.09	–								
Deep acting item 2 (2)	2.89	.92	.49***	–							
Deep acting item 3 (3)	3.53	1.01	.44***	.53***	–						
Surface acting											
Surface acting item 1 (4)	2.80	1.01	.16**	.06	.06	–					
Surface acting item 2 (5)	1.96	.99	.07	.05	.03	.64***	–				
Surface acting item 3 (6)	3.26	1.12	.23***	.15**	.18**	.44***	.48***	–			
Team performance											
Performance item 1 (7)	3.99	.77	.05	.04	.07	−.05	−.07	−.07	–		
Performance item 2 (8)	4.18	.76	.07	.05	.10*	−.07	−.09*	−.18***	.66***	–	
Performance item 3	4.09	.76	.04	.08	.05	−.01	−.06	−.11*	.64***	.67***	
			Team level								
Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Proportion of women (1)	46.65	33.10	–								
Deep acting											
Deep acting item 1 (2)	3.21	.44	.22	–							
Deep acting item 2 (3)	3.54	.37	.38*	.87***	–						
Deep acting item 3 (4)	3.27	.38	.19	.92***	.80***	–					
Surface acting											
Surface acting item 1 (5)	2.89	.29	−.08	.53*	.40	.27	–				
Surface acting item 2 (6)	2.80	.35	−.22	.46*	.22	.21	.96***	–			
Surface acting item 3 (7)	1.97	.36	.09	.70***	.43*	.50**	.89***	.91***	–		
Team performance											
Performance item 1 (8)	3.99	.28	.42*	.37	.46	.45*	−.10	−.18	.06	–	
Performance item 2 (9)	4.18	.28	.27	.53*	.54	.65*	−.32	−.40*	−.12	.73***	–
Performance item 3	4.09	.30	.17	.45	.52	.47	−.11	−.21	−.04	.85***	.87***

*$p < .05$; *$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$; Given that we tested our measurement models through CFAs, and to improve transparency and allow the potential replication of the analyses based on the covariances included in the table, we provide item-level information.

Table 2
Reliability information.

	ω	ω_{L1}	ω_{L2}	ICC1	ICC2
Deep acting	.740	.695	.961	.229	.585
Surface acting	.797	.773	.972	.158	.472
Team performance	.850	.834	.949	.174	.501

Note. ω: omega coefficient of model-based composite reliability estimated from a single level model; ω_{L1}: omega coefficient of model-based composite reliability estimated at level 1 (individual) from a multilevel model; ω_{L2}: omega coefficient of model-based composite reliability estimated at level 2 (team) from a multilevel model; ICC1: Intraclass correlation; ICC2: Reliability of unit-level aggregations.

dividual assessments of deep acting, surface acting, and team performance levels within each team in an aggregate manner.

Next, we carried out a multilevel CFA to check if the measurement model fitted adequately and to determine the degree in which our measures loaded in their factors (Thompson, 2000). The results are shown in the upper part of Table 3. First, we discarded the potential common method bias (CMB) through the Harman's single-factor test, verifying that the one factor measurement model did not fit to data. Second, using a single level correlated factors (CFA) model, an adequate fit level was reached, discarding measurement problems from the beginning. Finally, we checked the fit to data of the final measurement model including all constructs, also achieving optimal fit values to data ($\chi^2 = 99.01$; df = 55; $p < .01$; CFI = .97; TLI = .96; RMSEA = .04).

Table 3
Goodness-of-fit statistics of the global measurement and predictive models.

Description	χ^2 (df)	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
Global model				
Single level CFA (one factor)	666.790 (27)	.405	.207	.233
Single level CFA	51.959* (24)	.974	.961	.052
Multilevel CFA	99.007* (55)	.969	.959	.043
Predictive models				
Multilevel predictive (full mediation)	145.76* (76)	.949	.934	.047
Multilevel predictive (partial mediation)	146.16* (77)	.950	.936	.046

Note. *$p < .01$; χ^2: robust chi-square test of exact fit; *df*: degrees of freedom; CFI: comparative fit index; TLI: Tucker-Lewis index; RMSEA: root mean square error of approximation.

4.3. Predictive model

The MSEM results for the predictive models are presented in Table 3 (bottom section). The mediation model for Hypothesis 3 demonstrated a good fit ($\chi^2 = 145.76$; df = 76; $p < .01$; CFI = .95; TLI = .93; RMSEA = .05). At the individual level (Table 4, top section), controlling for employee sex, tenure, and surface acting, deep acting was not significantly related to team performance. At the team level (Table 4, bottom section), deep acting showed a positive, significant relationship with team performance, confirming Hypothesis 1. Surface acting, controlled for in the model, had a significant negative relationship with team performance. Confirming Hypothesis 2, we found a positive, significant relationship between the proportion of women and levels of deep acting. Supporting Hypothesis 3, deep acting mediated the relationship between the proportion of women in teams and team performance, with an indirect effect (β = .002; posterior SD = .001; $p < .01$; 95% CI [.001–.005]). The model accounted for 12% of the variance in deep acting and 64% of the variance in team performance. Alternative models testing participant gender as a moderator at the individual level yielded non-significant interactions.

In further inspection of the data, we tested an alternative partially mediated model linking proportion of women directly to team performance. This model also demonstrated an optimal fit to data, but was not significantly different from the fully mediated model $\Delta\chi^2(1) = .4$, $p > .05$, ($\chi^2 = 146.16$; df = 77; $p < .01$; CFI = .95; TLI = .94; RMSEA = .05). The direct path from proportion of women to performance

Table 4
Standardized estimates, posterior standard deviation, and credibility for the multilevel structural equation modeling model (total mediation).

	Estimate	Post SD	*p*	95% CI	
				Lower	Upper
Within					
Control variables					
Sex → Team performance	.026	.019	.404	−.188	.241
Tenure → Team performance	.000	.000	.160	−.001	.000
Sex → Deep acting	.040	.095	.339	−.146	.225
Tenure → Deep acting	.001	.000	.083	.000	.001
Sex → Surface acting	−.138	.119	.120	−.371	.089
Tenure → Surface acting	.000	.000	.171	−.001	.000
Surface acting → Team performance	−.062	.064	.167	−.190	.065
Direct effects					
Deep acting → Team performance	−.020	.089	.408	−.195	.153
Between					
Control variables					
Surface acting → Team performance	−.487	.329	.035	−1.297	.043
Direct effects					
Proportion of women → Deep acting	.003	.001	.009	.001	.006
Deep acting → Team performance	.803	.284	.000	.343	1.437
Indirect effect					
Proportion of women → Deep acting → Team performance	.002	.001	.009	.001	.005

Note. Post SD = posterior standard deviation; CI = credible intervals.

was not significant. Thus, we selected the fully mediated model, following the principle that simpler models with fewer estimated parameters are preferable, especially when they align with the theoretical framework (Bentler & Mooijaart, 1989).

5. Discussion

Contributing to open "female advantage" debates about whether or not gender is a critical determinant of performance in organizations across different levels (Dobija et al., 2022; Eagly et al., 2012; Gartzia & Baniandres, 2019; Ilgen et al., 2005; Sperber et al., 2023), we argued that gendered structures in groups are likely to modify dynamics of emotional labor in a team and influence team performance. In particular, following the conceptual pathways described by the IPO (Ilgen et al., 2005; McGrath, 1984) and EASI (Van Kleef, 2009) models, we analyzed how high proportions of women influence teams by examining genuine emotional group dynamics as a key mediator between gender composition and team-level outcomes. Supporting our predictions and advancing current debates, we found a positive relationship between the proportion of women and two critical team-level variables – deep acting and group performance. Specifically, teams with more women showed greater genuine emotional labor and achieved better performance compared to teams dominated by men. This approach enhances understanding of team-level dynamics and organizational effects of emotion (Barsade et al., 2018; Barsade & Knight, 2015; Grandey & Melloy, 2017; Van Kleef, 2016), areas that have often overlooked the interplay of gender and emotional factors across levels of analysis.

5.1. Theoretical implications

Our results overall suggest that proportions of women can be a critical factor to understand genuine emotional dynamics in teams and subsequent performance. These findings extend approaches of emotional dynamics as social information (Van Kleef, 2009) as well as the IPO model of group dynamics (Ilgen et al., 2005; McGrath, 1984) showing that gendered group inputs (e.g., proportions of women) influence team processes (e.g., deep acting) and, in turn, team performance. They also align with the concept of group convergence, where team members adopt similar emotional dynamics (Becker & Cropanzano, 2011, 2015). Because emotions are generally managed in response to display rules that are consistent with organizational norms and job demands (Ekman & Friesen, 1975; Goffman, 1959; Hochschild, 1983), the specific emotional display rules adopted by male and female employees in their immediate teamwork context is a key issue.

The female advantage approach is often based on women's greater emotional abilities, which appears to be demonstrated in managerial domains with evidence that women and communion – namely, stereotypically feminine traits such as empathy, warmth or being concerned about others – are generally better predictors of leadership effectiveness than being male and stereotypically masculine (Eagly et al., 2012; Gartzia & Baniandres, 2019). Yet, it is crucial to more exhaustively examine the many various dimensions and levels of analysis (e.g., individual, group) through which it can operate, including emotional exchange processes at the team level. Assuming that gender constructs operate similarly across individual, team, and organizational levels in gender analyses within organizations oversimplifies the complexity and variability of gender dynamics, potentially leading to inaccurate conclusions and ineffective interventions. Note also that, contrasting the traditional focus of research on emotional labor restricted to service-providing functions in service roles who interact with customers, clients, or patients outside the organization (Hochschild, 1983; Wharton, 1993), the current focus was on deep level emotional responses occurring in the context of teamwork.

This specific analysis of team-based emotional labor has only recently been initiated and it has been highlighted as a fruitful and necessary area for future research (Becker & Cropanzano, 2011; Grandey & Melloy, 2017). During the last decades, a good amount of research attention has been devoted to understanding the management of emotions as part of one's immediate work role (i.e., emotional labor; Hochschild, 1983), and some studies have explicitly examined the specific effects of deep acting on performance (e.g., Goodwin et al., 2011; Grandey & Sayre, 2019; Wang & Seibert, 2015). A growing number of studies have emphasized the need to pay closer attention to emotions at the team level (Kelly & Barsade, 2001; Tse et al., 2008), but the emotional labor research "has been conducted almost exclusively at the individual level of analysis" (Becker & Cropanzano, 2011, p. 213; for recent calls to further analyze the nested nature of emotional labor in teams, see Zhao et al., 2020; see also Yang & Chen, 2021, for a recent literature review about emotional labor showing how "team-related moderators are the least common in the emotional labor literature compared to individual and organizational variables", p. 486). This study addresses these gaps by systematically investigating the direct effects of gendered structures and emotional dynamics of deep acting at team levels, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of team dynamics and emotional processing.

Our finding that women can produce better effects in teams because of the unique emotional dynamics they can generate as team members also provides a better understanding of the underlying mechanisms and connections between group structures and work outcomes. Explicitly conscious processes and emotional displays driven by teams with higher proportions of women may include various forms of interpersonally oriented behavior, such as display rules of attention to other's emotions, the deliberate expression of emotional experiences of group members, or more conscious processes of emotion sharing that include team members actively attempting to influence the effect of other members (Kelly & Barsade, 2001). Other more implicit, unconscious processes of genuine emotional labor may also include automatic affective transfer processes like feeling affect vicariously, overtly expressing emotions, or genuine expressions of emotion that lead to emotional contagion and the spread of individual-level mood regulation to other group members, translating into more effective team responses and performance. These specific processes need to be further explored.

5.2. Practical implications

Our findings underscore the relevance of genuine emotional displays at group levels, so they should stimulate leaders and decision-making bodies in organizations to reflect on how emotional competences can be developed not only at individual but also in interpersonal exchange processes of affect. Previous studies have suggested that group emotional competences can be trained and developed (e.g. Druskat & Wolff, 2001), and our findings suggest that conscious modifications of feelings to express the desired emotion should be addressed at shared levels to actually produce the expected positive exchange effects. This should be positive for these team members' well-being in light of the less stressful nature of deep acting compared to other emotional displays (e.g., surface acting) and the relevance of genuine emotional reactions in groups (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Some team members may be able to influence the emotional climate of their group by, for instance, creating a publicly observable and accepted emotional display in the team that increases genuine group solidarity, emotion expression and creates more open, shared emotional experiences. Team members could learn to use these emotional resources in synchrony to help them better deal with the emotional challenges that are unavoidable in organizations and in particular in teams (Barsade, 2002; Bartel & Saavedra, 2000; Kelly & Barsade, 2001).

Our findings highlight the gendered nature of emotional processes, emphasizing the importance of addressing gender stereotypes and roles in promoting and training emotional competencies in teams. Gender equality actions, often underutilized, can enhance emotional dynamics across levels, benefiting both women's experiences and organizational functioning. Team leaders and HR practitioners should consider team gender composition and its influence on emotional dynamics as social structures. Additionally, gender equality initiatives should raise awareness of stereotypes and how emotional restrictions, particularly those affecting stereotypical men, hinder emotional development and expression critical to performance (Brescoll, 2016; Brody & Hall, 2000; Gartzia & van Knippenberg, 2016). This can include training to overcome biases and foster genuine emotional processes in male-dominated groups. Encouraging individuals to express emotions authentically, beyond gender stereotypes (Eagly, 1987; Gartzia et al., 2018; Gartzia & van Knippenberg, 2015; Stewart & McDermott, 2004), would enable diverse teams to use deep acting more effectively, being more genuinely attentive to and respond to emotional reactions of the other team members.

5.3. Limitations and future research

A strength of our study lies in its use of data from multiple team members to comprehensively capture group dynamics and the robust group-level effects observed. However, its cross-sectional design presents a limitation, as it restricts the ability to establish causal relationships. Additionally, the study was conducted within a Spanish sample. Although confirming our theoretical predictions in the European country of Spain can be a strength and a proof of external validity given that these theoretical foundations were mostly developed in other cultural contexts (see Gartzia & Lopez-Zafra, 2014; see also Ferrary, 2024; Sperber et al., 2023), we suggest that future research be conducted across other cultures and types of organizations. Importantly, the way norms about emotional expression are communicated vary across contexts and occupations (Hochschild, 1983), which is likely to be gendered too. Also, team members are constrained by "top-down" factors in the group's affective context (e.g., cultural, organizational and group norms, the group's emotional history) that may generate an affective tone on the group and influence the ways in which a group experiences and/or expresses emotion.

It is also important to examine how emotional labor varies across industries and sectors (Kotluk et al., 2023) to identify contexts in which these genuine emotional processes can flourish. Gendered emotional norms, often internalized during early socialization (Brody & Hall, 2000; Hopkins & Bilimoria, 2008), are reinforced subtly through team interactions and shaped by gender role models or organizational values (e.g., Gartzia & van Knippenberg, 2015). These dynamics can influence how teams align their emotional responses with organizational norms and expectations. More than 80% of teams in our study operated in service-oriented contexts, but effects may differ in other sectors with more stereotypically masculine norms. Because emotion norms are especially salient in-service settings, gendered emotional team norms may be differently enforced. In service-providing jobs where employees are told to act friendly or smile to customers and clients, such as flight attendants, waiters/waitresses or organizational roles involving interpersonal interaction (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Leidner, 1993), some of these norms are explicitly transmitted through formal instructions. Such norms may shape how male and female employees engage in emotional processes, influencing team dynamics to align with desired organizational outcomes.

Our findings reveal that gendered group composition, rather than individual gender, is a key driver of genuine emotional responses and team outcomes due to the interplay of group-level factors and how team members interpret and respond to each other's gendered emotional expressions and demands. Consistent with theories of homology in organizational behavior (Chen et al., 2005), future research should interpret study findings at the specific level at which they have been addressed, accounting for the distinct ways in which gender dynamics play out. This approach underscoring how gender constructs do not operate uniformly can also be crucial when addressing phenomena such as the "female advantage" in leadership and teamwork (Eagly et al., 2012). Token effects (Goodman & Haisley, 2007; Kanter, 1977) may emerge in gender-diverse teams, impacting emotional dynamics. For instance, men in female-dominated teams may adopt higher levels of deep acting, aligning with the group's emotional tone. In contrast, deep acting may decrease in female-dominated teams if men serve as influential models for surface acting. Future studies should acknowledge these complexities and be aware that team composition in terms of gender diversity can significantly affect team processes and outcomes in ways that differ from individual-level gender.

There is also a greater need of empirical tests that explicitly explore potential differences in organizational and group dynamics across gender dimensions beyond binary gender identities. In our study, we only addressed effects of proportions of "women" and "men" in a group, but researchers could further examine whether multiple components of the gender variable (e.g., with variations of gender cognition, behaviour and emotion as well as non-binary and LGBTQ representation; see Gartzia, 2024) also represent an advantage in group dynamics compared to stereotypical male-dominated groups. Examining how these varied dimensions of gender diversity interact with other team characteristics using indices like Blau or Shannon (e.g., Campbell & Mínguez-Vera, 2008) could illuminate thresholds at which different gender components enhance or diminish group emotional and performance outcomes. Evidence suggests emotional labor also varies in racially diverse teams, where minority members may face unique challenges (Kim et al., 2013). Thus, further studies could investigate the interplay between gender and other forms of diversity (e.g., race, age). Finally, research could also explore how gendered emotional processes differ in virtual versus face-to-face teams, where unique emotional challenges may arise (Ayoko et al., 2012; Martins et al., 2004).

6. Conclusion

Despite the above-mentioned limitations and remaining questions for research, our study makes several relevant contributions to multilevel organizational theory and research. We extend female advantage approaches to group levels of analysis by demonstrating that higher

proportions of women in teams enhance team performance and highlighting the underlying influence of genuine emotional group dynamics. As our findings illustrate, it is the sharing exchange processes of deep acting, and their socially shared gendered nature linked to the resulting affective context, which can explain how and why gender can have a meaningful effect on teams' outcomes. We suggest that there is a key theoretical question of whether the gendered nature of emotional dynamics can be characterized at the individual level in group settings. We contend that team-level gender proportions represent a critical complex structure to influence group emotional dynamics and outcomes beyond individual identities and thus merit further consideration. We hope that these findings will enrich the field and stimulate more multilevel gender research in organizational behavior and teamwork studies.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Leire Gartzia: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Supervision, Investigation, Conceptualization. **Nekane Aramburu:** Visualization, Resources, Project administration, Conceptualization. **M. Pilar Berrios:** Resources, Project administration, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization. **Manuel Pulido-Martos:** Software, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Funding acquisition, Writing – review & editing.

Note: declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work the authors used ChatGPT primarily to improve the English language, focusing on proofreading, grammar, and stylistic refinement. After using this tool/service, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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