Brenda Trenowden Feminist Analysis Essay Prize

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About the authors

Ruth Otim is an undergraduate student pursuing an undergraduate degree in Politics at the Department of Political Economy.

Lisa Lefebvre-Risso is an undergraduate student pursuing an undergraduate degree in Politics at the Department of Political Economy.

Qianqian Li is a Masters student studying an MA in Digital Culture and Society at the Department of Digital Humanities.

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The Feminist Analysis Essay Prize honours the pioneering work of Brenda Trenowden (1967-2022).

Brenda Trenowden was an exemplar of inclusive leadership. She used her intellect, kindness, passion and energy to bring people together to help make the world a better place. She had a stellar career that was driven by purpose. Brenda was a tireless advocate for gender equality. In tandem with a successful career in financial services in Hong Kong, Singapore, India, Bangladesh and the UK, she spearheaded efforts to improve diversity and advance feminism not just in business and sport, but across the range of charities and interests in which she was involved.

As Chair, first of the City Women's Network and then of the 30% Club, she oversaw the achievement of the goal of 30 per cent female representation on FTSE 100 corporate boards. She established a new goal of 30 per cent representation of women on FTSE 350 boards as well as an increased focus on broader diversity goals, such as LGBT inclusion, and the launch of 30% Club sister organisations in countries including the US, Australia and in southern Africa.

Her support for diversity initiatives went well beyond the world of UK plc. Born in Nova Scotia, Canada, she was the first generation of her family to go to university, and she campaigned throughout her career for greater access to opportunity for the less privileged. She was a trustee of the EY Foundation, helping young people into employment, the senior independent director of the England and Wales Cricket Board, improving access to the game and advancing all its work, and a trustee at the Royal Marsden Cancer Charity. Her interests ranged more broadly, from literature, to art, to politics and music. She maintained strong links to her homeland, and was awarded an honorary degree by her alma mater, Queen's University Canada, as well as a CBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List in 2018, for services to the financial sector and gender equality.

The Brenda Trenowden Feminist Analysis Essay Prize, organised by the Global Institute for Women's Leadership, in collaboration with the Gender Studies Network and Feminist Perspectives, encourages students at King's College London to explore and apply feminist perspectives within their academic work. This prize celebrates students, from any degree programme, who demonstrate how feminist analysis can deepen understanding across their field/s of study.

This initiative aims not only to promote academic excellence but also foster a community dedicated to advancing gender equality and social justice through innovative research.

This year, we are proud to celebrate winners Ruth Otim, Lisa Lefebvre-Risso and Qianqian Li.

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Participation (FLPL) best explained by differences in welfare state defamiliarisation policies?

Ruth Otim

I. Introduction

This essay will argue that cross-national variation in female labor force participation (FLFP) is best explained by differences in welfare state regimes, specifically their defamilialization policies. This paper's hypothesis, following this, is that the stronger the welfare state's commitment to defamilialization policies, the higher the rates of FLFP. Defamilialization, coined by Lister (1994) and articulated by Kleider (2015, 508), is "the extent to which a welfare state helps women seek paid employment and achieve financial independence from their partners." This paper will compare two case studies: Mexico and Chile, as both an act of decentering Europe from defamilialization literature, as well as approaching the empirical puzzle: do the trends seen in FLFP and defamilialization literature extend themselves into non-European countries? This will be achieved by, first, conducting a focused literature review on two key directions of defamilialization approaches. Second, I present my methodology, results, and analysis to test my hypothesis. The findings of the research will support this paper's hypothesis by using three operationalized indicators of defamilialization policy from the

Organization of Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) and data from the U.S. Government: Social Security Programs Throughout the World: The Americas (SSPW). These two sources of data and information will demonstrate that there is a discernible relationship between defamilialization policies, that particularly target substantive benefits, and FLFP. Welfare state investment into the family presents a positive correlation with FLFP that suggests that substantive benefits are vital in women's pursuit of economic independence.

II. Literature Review

I take inspiration from Fuwa and Cohen's (2006, 513) usage of Chang's (2000, 1663) two classifications between social policies towards women's labor: equality of access and substantive benefits. These categories outline the two key directions that defamilialization literature takes to FLFP. Equality of access refers to the elimination of gender discrimination in the enhancement of women's financial independence through the labor force such as "equal pay and anti-discrimination laws." Substantive benefits address how the state may intervene in "the provision of services for working mothers that facilitate the combination of work and motherhood." I acknowledge the vast literature that explains cross-national variation through other theories such as the Varieties of Capitalism (VoC) through Estévez-Abe (2006), Soskice (2005), etc. and cultural explanations such as Clark, Ramsbey, and Adler (1991). However, I insist on focusing on the already copious and productive literature that analyzes the relationship between defamilialization and the female labor force. The present scholarship will aid in contextualizing my findings.

The first direction in defamilailization literature approaches equality of access. Orloff (1993, 309) arguably sets the stage for FLFP and defamilialization when she affirms that the "productive and reproductive labor and access to civil and political rights" influences how women can equally uphold their rights as citizens. Whether in the workplace or the home, Orloff asserts that women's "claims as workers" must be supported by a state that compensates them for limiting roles they may also face as "members of families." Concerning household labor, Dotti Sani's (2017, 190) distinctive analysis of work-family arrangements in Europe shows that couples' reactions to economic crises freeze the gendered division of household labor, exhibiting the pervasiveness of traditional gender norms, even in the face of changing economic conditions. Especially considering couples where women have lower levels of education, this further impedes women's commodification of their labor. Equality of access, however, does not begin when women assume their gendered roles as caretakers, wives, etc., De Henau, Meulders, and O'Dorchai (2001, 45) remind us that access is initiated by education following in Dotti Sani's remarks. They argue that employment penalties that women may face are greatly determined by the mother's educational level. They engage with other academics such as Maria Gutierrez-Domenech (2005) who also affirm that "education has a key impact on the probability of post-birth employment." Therefore, defamilialization does not begin when women assume traditional "caregiver responsibilities", but rather how the welfare state, which Kleider emphasizes is a "precondition for women to seek participation in the labor market", ensures the rights of the women, e.g. through education, before ensuring the rights of the mother.

The second direction covers substantive benefits. The literature grows with academics such as Chevalier and Viitanen (2002, 917) who illustrate how substantive benefits also extend into childcare facilities, wherein younger children's enhanced access to childcare, increases FLFP. It is important to note

that they do not find a feedback effect between this causal relationship, implying that women's increased participation in the labor force does not predict nor cause changes in childcare availability. This is important because it suggests that women's labor force participation may not affect how the welfare state influences defamilialization policy, instead, possible demands women may have for increased defamilialization through childcare and other policies may be unmet. Furthermore, Sainsbury (1996, 34) makes the crucial point that the welfare state, in its approaches to defamilialize women, frames women "in terms of dependency and social control" as "'policy takers' or recipients." This is imperative for understanding FLFP and relates to the lack of a feedback loop in Chevalier and Viitanen's paper. This suggests that substantive benefits that women receive such as childcare and maternal leave are placed upon women without necessarily the input of women. Another substantive benefit covered within defamilialization literature is maternal leave. Jaumotte (2004, 64) notes that the benefits of parental leave on women's increased employment are a balancing scale. That is, there is an optimal amount of time that both facilitates women "to reconcile work and family life" as well as secures their job security by not harming their "labor market skills and [...] future career paths and earnings. She adds that, according to OECD countries, "childcare subsidies do increase female labor supply."

A common trend I intended to highlight was the location of most of these studies: Europe. Cross-national differences in the literature are arguably only European-continental differences that must be expanded upon. This is by far the greatest critique of the present literature; the comparative case studies of Mexico and Chile intend to decenter Europe from the subject of analysis of the welfare state and women's labor. This critique highlights this paper's central empirical puzzle: if what we know about defamilialization and women's employment in Europe holds true in non-European countries.

III. Methodology

This comparative case study seeks to test the hypothesis: the stronger the welfare state's commitment to defamilialization policies, the higher the rates of FLFP. Commitment and defamilialization are key aspects of the hypothesis and the research design that seeks clarification and operationalization. To clarify, commitment is the extent to which the welfare state invests and expands defamilialization policy. To operationalize defamilialization, I will use three policy indicators provided by the OECD. They include the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), Family Benefits Public Spending (FBPS), and Maternity Leave in weeks. The choice of three indicators to make defamilialization policy into a measurable observation takes from Kleider's remark that single policies may be a "poor indicator of the overall welfare state effort." These three indicators also encompass the two approaches of defamilialization as presented in the literature: equality of access and substantive benefits. SIGI measures discrimination from 0 = no discrimination to 100 = absolute discrimination. The index provides a holistic marker of equality of access in demonstrating where a welfare state lies in its overall dedication to gender equality. FBPS and Maternity Leave represent substantive benefits: focused approaches to defamilialization and the removal of barriers to women's employment. To clarify, FBPS according to the OECD can range from "center-based facilities and home help [to] financial support for families provided through the tax system."

The case studies I will use are Mexico and Chile; they are also components of this paper's empirical puzzle: do the arguments made in the mainstream literature extend into the non-Western world? This paper's independent variable (IV) is defamilialization policy via the three previously listed indicators. The dependent variable (DV) is the rate of FLFP. The control variables accompany the design of this paper which uses the most similar systems design (MSSD). This paper

controls overall inequality levels and labor institutions. First, Mexico and Chile have quite similar Gini coefficients, an income inequality indicator, at 44.6 and 47.0 respectively in 2020, since 2019 coefficients were unavailable according to the World Bank. This ensures that gender inequality is isolated through SIGI and not affected by economic inequality. Second, they are both Hierarchical Market Economies (HMEs) which are still obscure in the literature. Isolating for HMEs both adds to the originality of the paper, due to its obscurity, and follows the recommendation of the literature wherein Rubery (2009, 192) emphasizes that the distinctions within FLFP are discernible within a single market economy rather than between different ones.

The data compiled for this comparative case study all comes from the OECD. The OECD was selected because of its effective indicators, reliable and available data. Supplemental data is also taken into consideration through SSPW. The data for FBPS and Maternity leave will range from 2000-2019 for consistent data for both Mexico and Chile. The end mark of 2019 was specifically chosen as well because the SIGI indicator is only released every few years by the OECD, therefore it could not be analyzed with each year of the corresponding data. However, its most recent publishing was in 2019 which will hopefully establish both Mexico and Chile's welfare state's cumulative approaches to women's ability to achieve financial independence. To support my findings, I will also run a correlational test between FBPS and FLFP to see the correlational strength of the variables.

IV. Results and Analysis

This paper's select indicators: Maternity leave in weeks, FBPS, and SIGI, provide a nuanced account of cross-national variation of defamilialization and FLFP in Mexico and Chile, wherein Chile presents a higher rate of FLFP as seen in Figure 1 by the end of 2019. FBPS appears to be the sole indicator that supports this paper's hypothesis. First, maternity leave in both Mexico and Chile has been consistent from 2000 to 2019. Mexico provides 12 weeks whereas Chile provides 18 weeks, both programs ensure 100% of the "insured's last monthly covered earnings" according to the SSPW 2019. Although Mexico had a slightly higher FLFP from the beginning to the late 2000s, Chile's faster rate of growth and greater marginal difference to Mexico by 2019 is crucial to analyze.

Figure 1: Female Labor Force Participation (FLFP) in Mexico and Chile from 2000-2019
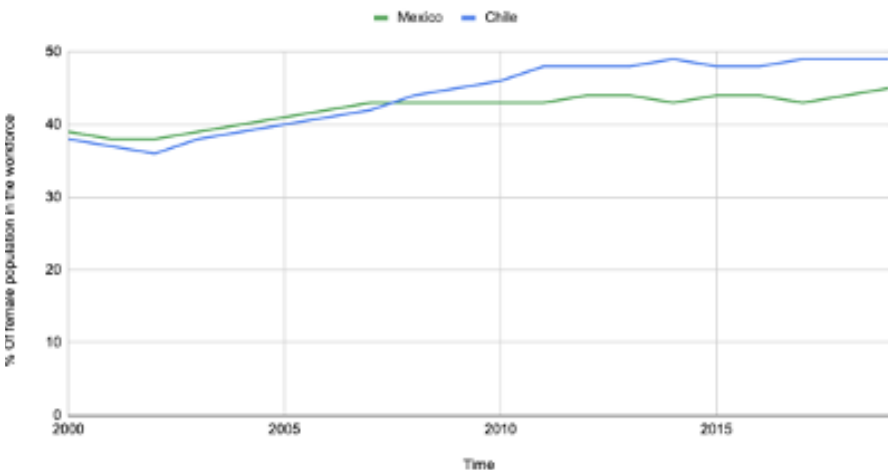
Their clear differences, seen in Figure 1, cannot only be analyzed by empirical maternity leave data since maternity is stagnant while FLFP is not: SSPW provides insightful contextual information. Chile's commitment to defamilialization is emphasized by their expansion of Subsidio Maternal, or Maternity benefits for either the mother or father to claim. Additionally, the father can claim Permiso Paterno Pagado, or Paternity benefit. This benefit covers 100% of his "[insured] last monthly earnings [..] paid for five days in the 30-day period after the childbirth." The benefit was introduced in 2013 wherein the percentage of women's employment increased to its highest at 49% and remained, except for the outlier 48% in 2016, until 2019. Mexico, conversely, does not have the same substantive benefit and has seen a slower increase, with a cap of 45% by 2019. However, the relationship between maternity and FLFP is ambiguous since Chile was already on a fast-paced trajectory toward increasing FLFP even before 2013 as seen in Figure 1. Therefore it is inconclusive whether heightened maternity leave nor the addition of paternity leave left a significant impact on FLFP.

Family benefits public spending appears to have the greatest impact on female employment as seen in Figures 2 and 3. Mexico's FBPS as a total percentage of GDP by 2019 was 0.626% whereas Chile spent 1.74%, Chile thereby allocating 2.83x more than Mexico. Chile's higher investment in FBPS can be seen in Table 1.

Additionally, I calculated the correlation coefficient for FBPS and FLFP in Mexico and Chile and found positive correlations. Mexico had a weaker, but still a significant positive value of 0.524 (3sf) to Chile's 0.805. Nevertheless, this demonstrates how the welfare state's investment in alleviating the family burden and provisions of family care positively benefit women in entering the labor force. Furthermore, Chile presents a stronger positive correlation suggesting that the

Table 1: FBPS as a total % of GDP		
Years	Mexico	Chile
2000	0.601	1.33
2001	0.64	1.004
2002	0.738	1.014
2003	0.932	0.985
2004	0.818	0.987
2005	0.898	0.841
2006	0.911	0.824
2007	0.914	0.954
2008	1.1018	1.15
2009	0.989	1.683

Table 1: FBPS as a total % of GDP		
Years	Mexico	Chile
2010	1.04	1.49
2011	1.001	1.31
2012	0.989	1.367
2013	0.988	1.415
2014	0.968	1.533
2015	1.028	1.712
2016	1.029	1.794
2017	0.877	1.776
2018	0.814	1.74
2019	0.626	1.744

greater the welfare state's investment in defamilialization, the greater the rates of women's participation in paid employment. The trend lines presented in Figures 2 and 3 demonstrate a positive linear correlation between FLFP and FBPS in both Mexico and Chile.

Figure 2: Relationship between Family Benefits Public Spending and Female Labor Force Participation (FLFP) in Mexico from 2000-2019
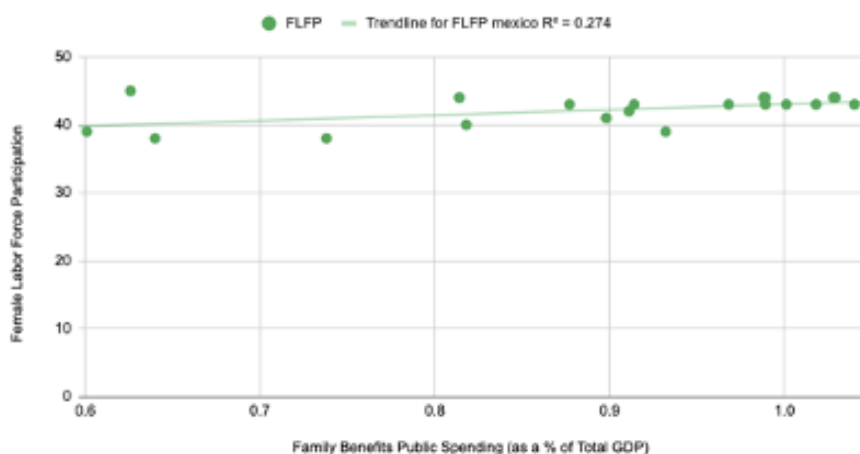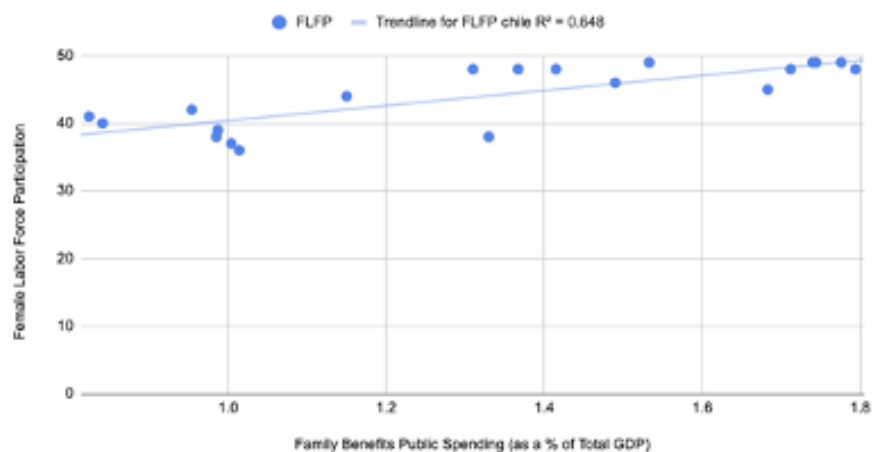

Figure 3: Relationship between Family Benefits Public Spending and Female Labor Force Participation (FLFP) in Chile from 2000-2019

While Mexico's slope and percentage of FLFP are lower than Chile's, the data does present a positive relationship between FLFP and FBPS in both countries. This correlation, however, is challenged by the R^2 values in both figures. The data from Mexico has a low R^2 value of 0.274, whereas Chile has a far higher value of 0.648. Although the trends in the data support the hypothesis, the reliability of the data is challenged by such skewed findings. Returning to the hypothesis, the findings presented are crucial. It suggests that the greater commitment a welfare state puts into investing in defamilialization policy, the more women will participate in the labor force. In turn, the suboptimal investment into defamilialization via investment in the family in Mexico presents two findings. First, low investment suggests that FBPS will not have the intended substantial effects on women's employment. Second, ulterior contextual information and theories about how substantive benefits remove barriers to women's entry into the labor force, must be applied to fully understand Mexico's case. The facilities and financial support indicated through FBPS, therefore, appear to be substantive benefits that have a significant positive correlation with FLFP. Nevertheless, FBPS does support this paper's hypothesis even though the accuracy of the results is a significant limiting point to the study.

The last indicator: the Social Institutions and Gender Index provides a holistic gauge of the dedication of the welfare states in Mexico and Chile. Interestingly, as demonstrated by **Table 2**, by 2019 Mexico had a lower SIGI index of 29 when compared to Chile's 36.1.

Table 2: Comparative differences between Mexico and Chile through the OECD indicators and Female Labor Force Participation, 2019		
	Mexico	Chile
(IV) Maternity Leave in Weeks	12	18
(IV) Family Benefits Public Spending (as a total % Total of GDP)	0.626%	1.74%
(IV) Social Institutions and Gender Index	29	36.1
(DV) Female Labor Force Participation (% of female population in the workforce)	45%	49%

Although other indicators appear to suggest Chile's commitment to defamilaization and gender equality through FBPS for instance, it has a higher gendered discrimination score. For Maternity Leave and FBPS, Chile has a difference of 1.5x and 2.83x respectively to Mexico. However, the percentage difference in SIGI between Mexico and Chile at 21.8% truly challenges the Chilean welfare state's commitment to overall equality of access even with a higher FLFP rate. Mexico, while having lower rates of FLFP than Chile, does challenge the hypothesis since Mexico has greater gender equality than Chile. Through the inconclusive and contradictory results of Maternity Leave and SIGI, the paper can only support its hypothesis through FBPS.

V. Conclusion

This paper's findings support the hypothesis: the stronger the welfare state's commitment to defamilialization policies, the higher the rates of FLFP. The literature review keenly focused on defamilialization literature and FLFP, exhibiting a great amount of scholarship assessing and advocating for the state's

influence in removing the barriers to women's employment. Two of the chosen operationalizations of defamilialization policy: Maternity Leave in weeks and Social Institutions and Gender Index present inconclusive and contradictory results. However, FBPS demonstrates a positive linear correlation between it and FLFP, thereby supporting the hypothesis while providing a level of nuance that suggests substantive benefits directed toward familial investment propels greater rates of FLFP. The empirical puzzle I originally set out to solve was also answered: the extension of trends in Eurocentric defamiliarization literature is limited to primarily substantive benefits, such as FBPS, in the non-Western world.

Evaluation

Although this paper does support its hypothesis, there are two important limitations to the study that must be emphasized. First, the sole indicator, FBPS, that supported my study had quite inaccurate data that jeopardized the reliability of this investigation. Following this, I would suggest using numerous data sources to make the findings more robust, and possibly a variety of indicators to support the integrity of future studies. Second, due to the constraints of the paper, the vast amount of alternative explanations could not be considered when approaching the literature review and the research design. Cultural theories, for instance, could have contextualized and answered the areas that defamilialization literature could not explain such as why does maternal and paternal leave not seem to have such a great impact on women's employment in non-western countries, as seen through Mexico and Chile. Could the extended family or other community connections under cultural conditions make this indicator ineffective in analyzing FLFP?

Which factor(s) can explain women's political representation?

Lisa Lefebvre-Risso

I. Introduction

With women in most countries having gained the right to vote and to hold elected positions less than a century ago, their political representation remains unevenly addressed by mainstream parties and institutions. Women's political representation can be twofold: descriptive, 'standing for' women in which women should be represented by female representatives who resembles them, and substantive representation, 'acting for' women, which entails acting in women's interests regardless of gender (Pitkin, 1972, pp.92-209). This essay will focus on women's substantive representation, through the promotion of feminist policies, as elaborated later. Substantive representation is twofold; it comprises 'speaking for women' during parliamentary debates for instance, and 'acting for women', which involves the enactment of feminist laws and policies (Franceschet and Piscopo, 2008, p.395).

The literature discusses various factors influencing women's substantive representation, including the presence of women as party leader. This assertion establishes a link between descriptive and substantive representation, where women in leadership positions would advocate for women's interests by

introducing more feminist policies (Celis and Childs, 2012, p.213). To test this claim, I will focus on women leaders in traditionally conservative parties on social issues; far-right populist parties. The existing literature on women leaders of farright populist parties pays little attention to the substance of their policies and rather examines their leadership style (Griffini and Montecchio, 2023, p.2). With an increasing number of farright populist parties being led by women, it is imperative to examine whether their leadership results in a change in the party stances and promotion of feminist policies, and improved women's substantive representation. This essay will thus address the following question: Do women becoming party leaders of far-right populist parties lead to improved substantive representation of women through the advocacy of feminist policies?

I will conduct an in-depth qualitative case study of Marine Le Pen's (MLP) leadership within the National Rally (*Rassemblement National*), formerly known as National Front (*Front National*). The National Rally (NR), entrenched in the familial personalization of the Le Pen family, renders it a compelling case study to assess the impact of her leadership on the party's stances on feminist issues and policies (Geva, 2020, p.10). While her tenure has been extensively researched, most of the literature overlooks the substance of her policies towards women and feminist policies. Standard measurements have emerged to operationalize women's substantive representation, including bill sponsorship, voting behaviours and content analysis of parliamentary speeches. This paper thus looks at some of these measures by reviewing numerous original sources, including the National Rally's electoral manifestos for the French presidency from 2002 to 2022 and press interviews given by Marine Le Pen after 2011. It conducted a content analysis of the Congress debates from 2022 to 2024, specifically focusing on sessions deliberating the incorporation of abortion rights into the French constitution. The analysis examined the speeches, voting records and proposed amendments put forth by members of her party and MLP herself. These sources, directly translated

from French, provide a nuanced understanding of her and her party's positions on feminist policies by examining the original wording.

The National Rally, founded in 1972 by Marine Le Pen's father's, Jean-Marie Le Pen (JMLP), stands as one of the most conservative far-right populist parties in Western Europe (Akkerman, 2015, p.46). Although MLP resigned from the party's presidency in 2022, she remains president of the parliamentary group in the National Assembly. While acknowledging that she has been active in the party since the 2000s and due to her family connections, must have been able to advise JMLP on certain policy issues, I will consider 2011 as the year marking her official start as party leader and her unprecedented influence in shaping the party's policies (Geva, 2020, p.10).

This paper contends that contrary to what the literature argues, women becoming party leaders, especially of far-right populist party, do not necessarily lead to a better substantive representation of women and promotion of feminist policies. It will argue that MLP's leadership did not result in her advocating for more feminist policies. While the party's rhetoric has toned down compared to what her father championed, it is only to portray it as a mainstream party rather than an active feminist stance. Firstly, this paper will provide a brief overview of the literature on women's political representation, to then delve into the different theories on women as party leaders, linking descriptive and substantive representation. Subsequently, it will analyse whether MLP 'speaks for' women and pushes for feminist policies, looking at her stances and policies regarding traditional gender roles and equal employment, as well as her mentions of women in her manifestos since 2011. The second part of this essay will address whether she 'acts for women', focusing on one specific feminist policy: abortion liberalization, most specifically analysing her and the NR's voting records and debates on legislation to

liberalize abortion and guarantee this right in the French Constitution from 2022 to 2024.

II. Literature review

The literature surrounding women's substantive representation outlines various factors contributing to its enhancement; amongst which the role of different actors, including critical actors, critical mass and feminist movements, and formal institutions such as political parties and feminist agencies (Beckwith, 2007, p.30).

Indeed, women's substantive representation has been propelled by several actors. Critical actors, those who initiate policy proposals on women's issues, have been instrumental in advocating for feminist policies and enhancing women's representation. Left-wing parties have notably played a significant role (Childs and Krook, 2009, p.140). The critical mass theory posits that once a certain threshold of female representation in political institutions is achieved, it catalyses shifts in political discourse, policy agendas, and institutions towards greater introduction of feminist policies (Beckwith, 2007, p.28). This theory links descriptive representation to substantive one, arguing that the presence of women not only fosters advocacy for feminist policies but also influences their male colleagues to do the same. Historically, feminists and feminist movements have been pivotal in placing women's representation on the policy agenda, spanning from the suffragette movement in the 19th century to contemporary movements against sexual harassment and violence against women (Forester et al., 2022, p.1).

Formal institutions also play a crucial role in advancing women's substantive representation. The presence of women's agencies provides effective avenues for advancing women's representation, facilitating the mainstreaming of gender

policies, and inclusion of feminist policies on the agenda (Lovenduski, 2019, p.27; Weldon, 2002, p.1155). Moreover, political parties wield significant influence by implementing gender quotas in electoral lists and establishing intra-party women's groups to bolster female representation within party structures (Norris and Lovenduski, 1995, p.95; Lovenduski, 2019, p.26).

III. Theory

The debate on women's issues and their substantive representation underscores the challenge of defining those terms. Women are not an heterogenous group, their interests are varied and cannot be seen as one bloc, as much as men are represented by diverse groups of men and parties (Celis and Childs, 2020, p.19). Women's issues, as defined by Phillips (1995, p.68), constitute issues that affect women more than men, for example abortion or gender-based violence. To operationalize policies that address women's issues, I will focus on feminist policies, which according to Mazur (2002, p.30) should meet at least three of the following conditions: "1) The improvement of women's rights, status and situation, 2) The reduction of gender-based hierarchies, 3) A focus on both the public and private spheres, 4) A focus on both men and women and 5) Ideas that can be associated with a recognized feminist group". Such policies encompass equal employment, violence against women and reproductive rights (Mazur, 2002, p.30).

This essay delves into the 'women in politics' and women leadership literature, which establish a link between descriptive and substantive representation. Substantive representation can be understood as both a process and an outcome. The former entails the introduction of women's issues and feminist policies on the policy agenda and debate, 'speaking for women', while the latter focuses on

passing feminist legislation, 'acting for women' (Franceschet and Piscopo, 2008, p.395). Building on the critical mass theory and the pivotal role party play, these theories posit that women party leaders, owing to their shared experiences, are more inclined to advocate for and champion feminist policies, thereby better representing women's interests (Child, 2004, p.10). Celis and Childs (2012, p.213) summarise this hypothesis by arguing that women in politics: 1) better represent women's interests and 2) introduce more feminist policies. This theory thus posits that women becoming party leaders would improve women's substantive representation through advocating for feminist policies.

The literature on far-right populist parties and gender contends that these parties are ideologically conservative, champion a heteronormative family structure, and reinforce traditional gender roles (Akerman, 2015, p.38). Central to their platform is the promotion of the heteronormative family as a cornerstone institution, perpetuating the notion of women as primarily housewives and mothers (Akerman, 2015, p.38). While some parties adopt a more liberal stance, promoting women's participation in the labour market, most far-right populist parties remain conservatives on social gender issues (Akerman, 2015, p.38). Abortion liberalization presents an intriguing dynamic within the context of far-right populist parties, as these parties typically oppose its liberalisation and legalization. Indeed, abortion liberalisation clashes with their traditional understanding of gender roles of women as mothers and impedes on their nationalist and nativist agendas. Nativism, closely entangled with racism, xenophobia, and nationalism, posits that nations should be inhabited solely by the "native" population and see non-natives as a threat to the nation (Griffini and Montecchio, 2023, pp.3-4). Within this framework, women have a "duty" to "preserve" the nation from non-natives through giving birth to "native" babies to counter immigration. Far-right-populist parties thus tend to support abortion bans and offer family allowances to incentivise a higher birth rate, aligning with pro-nativist policies (Givens,

2004, p.30). Abortion liberalisation is thus at the intersection of far-right populist parties' ideology and feminist policy, which is why the latter part of this essay will focus on this issue in the French context.

IV. Analysis

A. 'Speaking for women'

Firstly, I will analyse whether MLP 'speaks for women' by looking at her policies on traditional gender roles and women's participation in the labour market as well as her mentions of women in her manifestos.

Far-right populist parties' policies traditionally encourage women to have multiple children and stay in the household, in nationalist parties such as the NR, pro-nativist policies are also tied to the preservation of the "civilisation" (Griffini and Montecchio, 2023, p.8). These policies have been promoted by JMLP, who contended that women's bodies belonged to the nation, he pledged to provide family allowances and a 'maternal income' to encourage women to commit to full time motherhood and "promote the French birth rate" (Front National, 2002, p.2; Scrinzi, 2017, p.92). This presents a stark contrast with MLP's personal situation; she prides herself in being a "twice-divorced mother of three and professional career woman", embodying a more modern version of womanhood that contradicts her parties' traditional stances (Shields, 2013, p.190). Under her leadership, the NR endeavours to address working women, drawing on her own experience of juggling between her career and motherhood as outlined in her autobiography (Scrinzi, 2017, p.94). Despite these seemingly progressive stances, MLP's policies maintain continuity with her father's pro-nativist policies, while toning down her father's discourse on women as housewives and servitors of the

nation. She does not advocate for policies encouraging women's participation in the labour market and instead promotes what is now termed 'parental revenue' instead of a 'maternal income', alongside contingent family allowances (Front National, 2012, p.11). She explicitly calls for a higher birth rate to "perpetuate the French civilisation", framing it as a choice between nativity or immigration (Rassemblement National, 2022, pp.6-7). Despite her attempts to appeal to working women to broaden her electoral base, MLP's policies still predominantly 'speak for' women as mothers and homemakers, entangling pro-nativist policies with nationalism (Griffini and Montecchio, 2023, pp.3-4). This highlights that even though MLP prides herself in being a working woman, she does not speak for women's participation in the labour market and continues policies that perpetuate traditional gender roles.

Indeed, it cannot be said that MLP 'speaks' for women as women are almost absent from her electoral manifestos and policies. The NR has historically failed to mention women or women's rights, as illustrated by their absence from her father's 2002 and 2007 manifestos, despite addressing family issues in the first pages (Scrinzi, 2017, p.98). In her 2017 manifesto, out of 144 proposals, only one directly mentioned women's rights: "Defend women's rights: fight against Islamism which rolls back their fundamental freedoms; implement a national plan for equal pay for women and men and fight against professional and social insecurity" (Front National, 2017, p.4). While she briefly mentions addressing the gender pay gap, it mainly focuses on instrumentalizing women's rights to feed her antiimmigration and anti-Islam policies (McAuley, 2017, p.1). Her program fails to have any entry on women or gender equality, contrary to most of her opponents in the presidential race (Scrinzi, 2017, p.92). Out of her sixteen booklets for the 2022 presidential election, MLP mentioned women twice: in the 'family' booklet and in the 'security' one. The latter portrays women as victims of street harassment, which is according to her closely tied to immigration (Front National,

2002). Moreover, out of her 22 main proposals for the 2022 election, none referred to women or women's rights (Rassemblement National, 2022).

Although MLP has softened the party's rhetoric on traditional gender roles and attempted to appeal to working women, her policies remain unchanged. Indeed, she fails to 'speak' for women and advocate for feminist policies, therefore not advancing women's substantive representation.

B. 'Acting for women'

I will analyse whether MPL 'acts for women' by examining her party's and her own voting records, debates, and proposed amendments concerning the incorporation of abortion rights into the French constitution from 2022 to 2024, along with her policies towards abortion liberalisation.

Firstly, it is crucial to consider the unique context of abortion in France, where it was decriminalized in 1975 by the Veil Act, with most of the population supporting its liberalisation. This context shapes the antiabortion debate in France, rendering it less hostile and explicit compared to other European countries like Hungary. Under JMLP's tenure, the NR has prided itself in being an antiabortion party. JMLP consistently proposed the abrogation of the Veil Act in his manifestos, going as far as proposing an amendment to the constitution to include the right to life 'from conception, to be protected by the law", therefore planning to enshrine the abrogation in the constitution (Scrinzi, 2017, p.92; Front National, 2002, p.2).

 MLP's rhetoric on abortion diverge from her father's reactionary comments. While she has avoided explicitly condemning or supporting abortion liberalisation, she subtlety references arguments commonly used by antiabortion movements. In

her presidential manifestos, she frames abortion as a lack of choice, asserting that most women feel compelled to undergo abortion due to socio-economic issues and inadequate state support (Front National, 2012, p.11). Rather than advocating for abortion liberalisation or the abrogation of the Veil Act, she aims to empower "women to be free not to abort" (Scrinzi, 2017, p.97). Before 2017, although not explicitly outlined in her manifestos, MLP proposed halting reimbursement for abortions by the national health system, rather than repealing it (Scrinzi, 2017, p.95). In the 2022 election, she suggested a moratorium on societal issues within her first three years in office, later specifying this would include existing legislation on abortion, without specifying if it would regard its abrogation, or its liberalisation (Rassemblement National, 2022, p.15).

In March 2024, the French Congress convened to vote on a proposition to enshrine abortion rights in the constitution. Out of the 88 NR representatives, 46 voted in favour, including MLP herself, while 11 voted against and 20 abstained (Assemblée Nationale, 2024). While MLP and a slight majority of representatives supported the bill, these results show a lack of coherence within the party. During the session, MLP asserted that no party in France was calling abortion rights into question and emphasised that each NR representative would vote based on their convictions (Assemblée Nationale, 2024). This absence of a clear party stance shows that MLP does not 'act' for women and feminist policies, as she seeks to balance the mainstreaming of the party while maintaining support from her more conservative antiabortion electorate (Brigaudeau, 2012). Despite criticism from opposition deputies regarding her lack of clarity, MLP did not explicitly state whether her party supported abortion rights and their liberalisation (Assemblée Nationale, 2022). During debates on the same law in November 2022, NR deputies introduced 36 different amendments, most of which focused on unrelated constitutional modifications, such as requiring elected officials to be French citizens to stand for office (Assemblée Nationale, 2022). This attempt to obstruct

the passing of the law, while publicly affirming to be in favour of it, reflects a disregard for abortion rights and women's right.

In 2020, when the EU Parliament sought to adopt a resolution condemning the abortion ban in Poland, the NR deputies voted against it, revealing the party's lack of commitment to women's rights (Deroeux et al., 2022). This starkly contrasts with the party's voting record regarding abortion legislation in the National Assembly, the European deputies' voting records receiving less scrutiny compared to the highly publicized votes in the National Assembly might explain this contrast. This discrepancy underscores that not only MLP and the National Rally fail to act for women, but that they oppose feminist policies when they are not under public scrutiny. The change in the party's rhetoric might thus be explained by the acknowledgement of a public support for abortion rights in France rather than MLP's personal leadership. This is in line with her strategy of de-demonisation (*dédiabllolisation*), aimed at broadening her electoral base and presenting the NR as a mainstream party (Akkerman, 2015, p.2015).

Indeed, while refraining from condemning abortion as her father did, MLP falls short of acting for women and actively championing abortion liberalisation. Her vote in favour of incorporating abortion rights into the constitution appears to be more of a strategic move to mainstream the party rather than a genuine commitment to feminist policies, she thus does not advance women's substantive representation.

V. Conclusion

To summarise this essay delved into the factors explaining women's political representation, focusing on substantive representation. Drawing up on the women in politics literature, it conducted a case study of Marine Le Pen's leadership within the National Rally and whether her leadership changed the party's stances and policies to promote more feminist policies and improved women's substantive representation. It firstly looked at whether MLP's spoke for women and feminist policies, focusing on her mentions of women in her electoral manifestos and her policies on traditional gender roles and women's participation in the labour market. It then analysed whether MLP acted for women, looking at abortion liberalization through her and her party's stances on abortion liberalization, voting records and debates on the incorporation of abortion rights in the French constitution.

This paper argued that women becoming leaders of far-right populist parties does not necessarily lead to enhanced political representation of women and championing of feminist policies. Indeed, while MLP appealed to working women and voted in favour of the incorporation of abortion rights in the constitution, this served her strategy to broaden her electorate, a closer look at her policies showed they remained similar to her father's. This paper thus stands in contrast with what the main literature on women party leaders would argue, showing far-right populist parties constitute a deviant case. This paper added to the literature by examining the role of women as leaders of far-right populist parties in shaping their party's stances on feminist policies, which has been overlooked by the literature emphasising their portrayal in the media and their leaderships tyle rather than the substance of their policies.

Mobile menstruation recording application used by Chinese women

Qianqian Li

This essay addresses the question of digital health and well-being. The first part draws on one article by Nafus and Sherman (2014) concerning the Quantified Self movement and one by Ajana (2017) about concerns surrounding self-tracking apps from the module's reading list, as well as one article found through independent research by Novotny and Hutchinson (2019) concerning fertility and period-tracking apps. Moving to the second part, I will examine one Chinese period-tracking app, MeetYou. I argue that although this app can help users with searching related information on menstruation cycles and enabling peer support, it can be detrimental to users with regards to simplifying women's complex life experience, reproducing patriarchal expectations around women as reproductive subjects, and misleading users to believe a universal or normal period.

I. Literature Review

Nafus and Sherman (2014) focus on the Quantified Self (QS) movement and explore how dominant forms of data practices are negotiated within this community. The movement pertains to the use of wearable digital devices and sensors to monitor individuals' everyday activities and provide feedback for further improvement. To begin with, they situate this movement within debates

on the role big data played in the management of populations and provide a brief history of this movement, explaining how it works in terms of the international extension and regular gatherings of local groups. They then explain how they conduct ethnography within the movement by attending QS meetups and workshops, as well as collecting online material from websites related to QS.

One notable finding of their research is the mixing of technical, commercial, community and personwork within Qsers'practices. Given that most of the participants have an education background from technical or medical spheres, the movement restrains the topic discussed in meetups on individual reflection of self-quantification experiments for the sake of avoiding them speaking about product pitches, which makes it possible not talking about data as a resource to be abstracted and commodified. In this way, the subtle approach to data practised by QSers emerges. One argument proposed by Nafus and Sherman is that these self-trackers refuse the fixed normative understanding of healthiness displayed through frames built into mobile devices. This rejection manifests in their diverging practices of repurposing the design of tracking tools for their own needs in a way that cannot be meaningfully assembled by the categories built into tracking devices. Such continuously evolving tracking practices are understood as 'soft resistance (Nafus and Sherman, 2014, p. 1790)', which, while partly entrenched in the same social logic they seek to escape, also serves to resist the dominant mode of working with data advanced by big data businesses by dismantling established categories. Instead of a crowd to be sourced and disciplined as imagined by institutional data collectors, the QS participants are considered agentive sense-makers featuring a multitude of analytics.

While this article provides insights on the multiplicity of the composition of QS communities and QSers' rebellious understanding of institutional scientific knowledge displayed through categories built into mobile devices, it may be

limited in terms of not linking the analysis of soft resistance with a discussion of the neoliberal ideology of self-governance. It is true that some self-trackers are not subject to the supposed authority of sensor data. However, such an attentive way of regulating and managing our own bodies, accompanied by the explosion of measurement technologies, is reflective of the neoliberal ethos of self-governance.

Different from Nafus' and Sherman's (2014) techno-utopian understanding of the greater control asserted by self-trackers over the meaning of their data than data collectors, Novotny and Hutchinson (2019) present a different perspective. They argue that the process of tracking in fact often engages in unfair oppression and disempowerment of users. Specifically, their article interrogates the emerging market of femtech in the domain of digital health by focusing on the fertility and menstruation tracker, Glow. Although such applications often promise to improve fertility literacies and hence empower female users by increasing subjective agency and control over their fertility, they find that this process fails to achieve its promise due to its opaque collection and use of users' data.

To understand how agency and empowerment are operationalised in Glow, they begin by describing how the app is marketed as an alternative to costly consultation with fertility specialists and how users are allowed to engage with this app step by step. With a walkthrough of this app, they found that this application is deficient in transparency regarding the collection and utilisation of personal data. For instance, the app embeds Terms of Service (ToS) and Privacy Policy(PP) in the process of downloading without inviting users to read and express agreement or disagreement, which means consent is enforced upon users automatically when they download this app. Another concern raised is the lack of transparency regarding how users' data will be utilised for commercial aims. As a response to the call to integrate feminist critical analysis with efforts towards inclusivity, Novotny and Hutchinson provide several action-oriented solutions at

the end of the article. One recommendation they offer to Glow and similar health management applications relates to redesigning the interfaces and their technical documents concerning service and privacy policy. They advocate for these platforms to function more supportively and ethically for users by obtaining fully informed consent and accounting for agency throughout the interaction between users and technologies.

While this article does not explicitly address the notion of data philanthropy, it aligns with Ajana's (2017) interpretation of the philanthropic discourses promoted by tech companies. These philanthropic narratives often justify the collection and sharing of personal data from a utilitarian stance instead of prioritising a human-centred ethic that accounts for the rights and desires of the users. Although this article could benefit from a more comprehensive analysis of cultural values around gender and sexuality reflected in the app's design, it still provides an effective basis for future analysis of femtech applications and contributes to the discussion on data ownership and privacy by proposing specific solutions.

The final article by Ajana (2017) begins with an examination of the QS movement and the ideologies underlying the QS practices. She situates practices of self-tracking within the framework of biopower, which relates to normalisation and control in the guise of free choice rather than explicit coercive discipline and manifests in subjecting human bodies and health to regimes of data-driven knowledge production. She then shifts her focus from the individualised form of self-tracking practices to the communal and biosocial phenomenon of data sharing within the QS community and the larger society. By doing this, She unveils the tensions among discourses of data philanthropy, privacy concerns, and the evolving landscape of healthcare responsibility sparked by the proliferation of self-quantification and the culture of data-sharing.

The main contribution of this article is threefold. Firstly, this article provides a synthesised literature on different understandings of the philosophy of the Quantified Self, engaging with scholarship on Foucauldian concepts of biopower and biopolitics and data philanthropy. Secondly, she clearly explains the linkage between the ideology of data philanthropy and practices of data sharing in the context of an ever-expanding data collection over our bodies and activities by unpacking the changing attitudes towards privacy. She highlights that the notion of privacy increasingly comes under threat as being depicted as the opposite of collective good by the philanthropic discourses promoted by big corporates, as exemplified in the example of Patients Like Me, which is an online network that allows members to enter and compare data of health conditions and treatments, as well as donate data to help with advancement on new pharmaceuticals. She points out that the focus on the solidaristic dimension of data sharing for the public good ignores the social function of privacy that helps to limit the governmental powers and commercial companies and maintain the group welfare of overall society.

Ultimately, Ajana (2017) also contributes to alerting readers of the issues of data security, privacy and shifted responsibilities stimulated by the vision of participatory and preventative health model advanced by a coalesce of multiple actors, including government organisations, pharmaceutical companies, healthcare suppliers, employer companies, and developers of tracking devices. However, this article fails to provide potential solutions to deal with data-driven categories and the shrinking of traditional healthcare providers in terms of policy, regulation and the data literacy of the general public.

In summary, the three texts chosen share recurring themes on the quantification of health, including the notions of biopower, control and data concerns. However, the texts by Nafush and Sherman (2014) and Novotny and Hutchinson(2019) diverge on whether the self-trackers will be able to be empowered in the process

of tracking and analysing their health data. Nafus and Sherman (2014) argue that QS participants develop their own idiosyncratic data analytics and notions of health, which represent their efforts to resist prevailing methods of data aggregation and predetermined categories created by the health technology industry, thus enabling them to partially escape from normative biopower. Novotny and Hutchinson(2019) propose that Glow failed to achieve its promise of empowering women, given its untransparent data infrastructure. However, it is worth pointing out that while period and fertility tracking is partly different from fitness tracking in terms of the former's more observational nature, in contrast to the latter's optimisation-oriented goal, they all belong to the growing trend of self-quantification and are implicated in its data politics. Ajana (2017) concurs with them that self-tracking devices contribute to the processes of biopolitical categorisations. She underscores the discourses of data sharing promoted by technology corporations, drawing attention to concerns regarding privacy and inequitable responsibilities in the management of personal health. However, it is noticeable that all three articles focus on western contexts, particularly the US, UK and Canada. Therefore, future research on the development of digital health technologies in non-western contexts is still needed.

II. How do apps relate to individuals' health and wellbeing?

In this section, I will focus on MeetYou(*meiyou*), a Chinese fertility and period tracking application. This essay argues that it acts as a new biopolitical form of technology as it attempts to simplify women's life experience, replicate patriarchal understandings of menstruation, and homogenise menstruation experience, as well as mislead women to prioritise data over their own sense of bodies through fostering an in-app data-sharing community. Before examining the app, this essay will introduce discussions on neoliberal discourses of self-care and appified

menstruation and fertility. Moving on to the walkthrough of MeetYou, this essay seeks to situate discussions of digital health and appified menstruation and fertility in Chinese context.

III. Neoliberal ethos of self-care

A plethora of applications (apps) have increasingly become a necessary part of our daily lives out of technological developments and considerations of convenience and enjoyment. In the domain of health and wellness, apps designed to assist users with monitoring and understanding bodily functions are on the rise, such as MapMy Run and MyFitnessPal. The idea of understanding one's body through data as a form of self-knowledge that is given authoritative status also resonates with the spirit of the Quantified Self (QS) movement, namely, the voluntary collection of information about individual bodies resorting to digital devices.

The history of everyday metering is not new. Athletes in the past usually record their nutrition intake and activities every day to understand their bodily performance. It is undeniable that the digitisation and personalisation of mobile technologies make them more accessible to the general public with regard to their smaller sizes and lower prices. For instance, Crawford et al. (2015) identify the transition from professional use in the doctor's office to the habitual one in the form of current wrist-worn fitness trackers in terms of measuring weight. Also, Kent (2021) holds that such digital health tracking practices exemplify the neoliberal imperatives of self-government and individualisation of health management, noticeable in the shift of responsibility of managing public health from the shoulder of the welfare state towards the hands of private institutions and individual selves.

However, some concerns related to the growing quantification of personal health have been raised. Lupton (2015) describes such voluntary self-examination and self-reflection as a part of participatory surveillance, which is self-imposed and directed at accomplishing personal goals, as well as promoted by neoliberal discourses emphasising positive influences for users whilst neglecting their patriarchal disciplinary consequences. Cederström and André (2015) criticise the unfair responsibilities upon individuals in managing health. What recurs among discussions concerning individualised practices of self-tracking is whether these tools of data capture can be used to improve health or just another trap situated at the intersection of datafication, automatisation and responsibilisation (Ajana, 2017; Kent, 2021; Rose, 2007). Recently, mobile tracking apps directed at menstruation and fertility have gained momentum worldwide as part of the growing industry. In the following part, I will explain how the pursuit of understanding one's body resonates in femtech, particularly period-tracking and fertility apps.

IV. Appified menstruation and fertility

Femtech depicts technology companies and products focusing on women's healthcare concerns (D' Incerti, 2023). According to Kemble et al. (2022), the market size of FemTech is estimated to range from $500 million to $1 billion. Femtech is mainly complimented by cultural critics for its role in rectifying the male-dominated medical and tech industries, with services largely marketed as empowering for women through self-knowledge (Kressbach, 2021). Although Femtech encompasses various types of products and services, menstruation trackers are a significant part of this growing industry. These apps normally allow users to log daily qualitative data like physical symptoms and thus provide a trackable history and standard criteria for comparison over time. Here the

framework of big data and the promise of understanding their own bodies better based on scientific standards are noticeable.

While some mention that menstrual cycle apps could help to disrupt shame associated with menstrual abjection and assist with achieving pregnancy and contraception(Khidekel, 2018; Newton, 2016), some critics examine the gendered design and their restricted understanding of sexuality (Healy, 2021). In addition, some scholars focus on the personal analytics of these apps (Kressbach, 2021; Stenström, 2023). Specifically, Kressbach(2021) examines the euphemistic humour and animation embedded in the interface of Flo and Clue and their analytics sections, finding that such apps may risk strengthening entrenched stereotypes and stigmas around menstruation because the visual abstraction of physiological experience may stimulate the continued discomfort of talking about daily menstrual process and promote a singular biological understanding of separating the body from the self.

In addition, data collected from these apps may be used for commercial purposes. Scholars from critical data studies have discussed privacy issues and data security associated with the ever-expanding collection and redistribution of users' data by monopolised corporations or states (Ajana, 2017; Cukier & Mayer-Schoenberger, 2013; Kennedy, 2018). This discussion is also applicable to analyse period-tracking and fertility apps. For example, Flo has been found selling user data to Facebook(Schechner & Mark, 2019; Privacy International, 2020). Two forms of data insecurity related to period-trackers are frequently discussed: the promise of measuring and taming bodies with quantification and datafied prediction, and data ownership associated with the ambiguities of dataflows, privacy and surveillance (Amelang, 2022; Lupton, 2015; Novotny & Hutchinson, 2019). Particularly, Amelang's (2022) article approaches these concerns by interviewing

period-trackers to comprehend their negotiation with uncertainties of data-driven knowledge production and untransparent dataflows.

Case study: a walkthrough of MeetYou (Meiyou)

In this section, I will examine MeetYou(*meiyou*) in terms of its content, functions and uses. According to Statista (2023), MeetYou ranked third after Flo and The Period Calendar app among the most popular period trackers for global users in 2023, with over 823 thousand downloads. Although increasing in popularity and usage, MeetYou has yet to be critically explored. Informed by the walkthrough method advocated by Light et al. (2018), I begin to assess the expected use of users' interactions with MeetYou by mimicking everyday use of this app, which may help to enact a more critical approach to apps as sociotechnical artefacts. As Light et al. (2018) summarise, the core of the walkthrough method incorporates identifying and discerning an app's vision, operating model and modes of governance, which refers to the app's intended usage, cultural values engaged within technological mechanism. However, they also realise that this method could be supplemented with other data, such as news articles and online user discussions, to gain a holistic understanding of user engagements.

I start examining MeetYou's tagline and self-representation of its online website to understand its vision. For instance, MeetYou (2024) advertises that its mission is to make Chinese women more beautiful and healthier, alongside a photo of a young woman whose left hand is holding a phone and right hand making a fist to show empowerment achieved by technologies, followed by four key blocks explaining its service on intelligent period-tracking, scientific fertility prediction, pregnancy knowledge encyclopedia, parenting knowledge for caring infants. This is in accordance with its four modes of use provided by the app, targeted towards

different groups of female user bases: the period-tracking mode for users who want to be alerted and prepared for the next period (Figure 1.), the pregnancy preparation mode for users who want to concept (Figure 2.), the pregnancy mode for users who already are pregnant (Figure 3.), and the parenting mode for gaining more parenting knowledge (Figure 4.). As can be seen from the screenshots below, empowering discourses of encouraging users to monitor their bodies in terms of menstruation and fertility to achieve preventive self-care and a sense of self-control are obvious (Lupton, 2015). For example, languages such as 'accurate menstrual period prediction', 'prediction of ovulation' and 'probability of pregnancy' are used to entice women to constantly know more details about their inner bodies to improve their health and act as reproductive subjects.

Figure 1. Screenshot of period-tracking mode

Figure 2. Screenshot of pregnancy preparation mode

Figure 3. Screenshot of pregnancy mode

Figure 4. Screenshot of parenting mode

What remains the same in the four modes is the fertile window floating on the home page above posts shared by users, which displays a prediction of the daily chance of achieving pregnancy (Figure 5.). As MeetYou (2024) states, 'MeetYou will assist women at every stage in their life, allowing users to switch from the four modes'. Here, the complex life stages of women are simplified into four stages based on a limited understanding of the imagined female user as a reproductive subject who pursues stable menstrual periods for being prepared to conceive, followed by ensuing processes of childbearing and childrearing. As Lupton (2015) emphasises, while apps can be seen as novel digital assistants, they are also embedded within socio-cultural contexts, reflecting pre-established ideologies and

knowledge. Light et al (2018) also recognise the mutually shaping relationship between technology and culture. This consistent nudge towards conception, as Healy (2021, p. 429) describes as 'undertones of coercive patriarchy', throughout this app's multiple functions reflects prevailing societal perceptions pertaining to the link between fertility and period. As Lupton (2016) points out, social expectations around a period never separate it from the eventual pregnancy. Reproducing this exclusionary value through the interface of the app may cause harm to users who are infertile and only use this app for recording period.

Figure 5. Screenshot of MeetYou's fertile window

In the basic period-tracking mode, it requires the user to log information on several menstrual and ovulation indicators, such as the flow and colour of menstruation, dysmenorrhea, and measures taken during sex, bodily temperature, weight, and mood, as well as other symptoms(Figure 6.). Such registration of information about menstruation is shared among similar period-tracking apps (Gambier-Ross et al., 2018). These small data collected by users every day will then be compared with standard menstruation cycles based on big data, which refers to large sets of aggregated data, generating a personalised analysis informing and predicting lay people (Swan, 2012).

In this case, the app provides users subscribing to MeetYou Premium with detailed analytics of comparion of the personal record of health with aggregated data from other users. For example, as its preview of a premium service shows, '160, 197 peers recorded their period on February 6, with 36 per cent reporting lower back soreness. Your flow rate and colour pattern of the menstrual period are very similar to those of your peers.' However, such a comparison reflects the app's assumed homogeneity of menstruation experiences, which ignores the heterogeneous period experiences of females. As Hamper (2020) describes, users who find themselves deviating from the supposedly 'normal' period patterns experience feelings of continuous failure and perplexity during their pursuit of increased clarity concerning their bodies in the process of knowledge construction. This app may then mislead healthy female users to think of their 'abnormal' status as requiring correction.

Such conversion of qualitative experiences of one's body and states into quantifiable calculations, predictions and comparisons comply with what Mayor-Schonberger and Cukier (2013) refer to as the datafication of health. In this respect, women's understanding of bodies is experienced through the predicted date of future period, an everyday fertile window displaying the optimal condition

of conceiving, and periodic 'health tips' about various aspects of women's well-being (Gambier-Ross et al., 2018; MeetYou, 2024). As Frost and Haas (2017, p. 96) underscore, fertility technologies are often lauded without critical examination as progressive technologies, which actually entice women to enter a culture with the expectation that women should resort to technologies outside of their bodies to confirm what is happening inside their bodies.

Empirically, Amelang(2022) interviews users of period-tracking applications and finds that they often deem data provided by the trackers more reliable and objective than their own self-perception of the bodies. Such assumed security and credibility of increasing users' self-knowledge concerning the perceived chaotic bodily functions with the help of intelligent technologies again is reflective of the utopian fantasy in big data and datafication (Boyd & Crawford, 2012). Furthermore, as Crawford et al. (2015, p. 495) highlight, although these tools can increase users' self-knowledgable through data, they also make users more knowable and inferrable to a group of data collectors who salivate. With regards to personal analysis based on a comparison of personal data with a database, this app suggests that objective technology is suited as a source of knowledge rather than unruly female bodies.
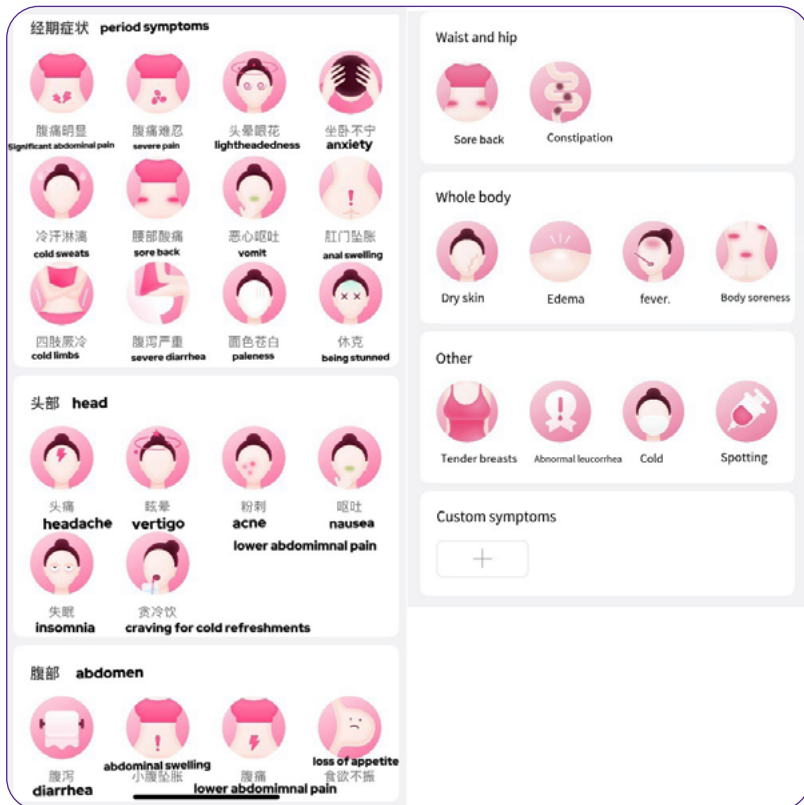
Figure 6. Selection of symptoms for logging during menstruation.

As to the various involvement through the app, MeetYou also exemplifies the feature of convergence. In addition to allowing users to track and monitor their menstruation periods and fertility, this app also curates a vibrant community among users. According to (Liu, 2013), MeetYou began as a simple period-tracking app and expanded into a quasi-social media network with over 300 million users. This brings the community function of MeetYou into the spotlight.

Tataquan means 'her network', which refers to a venue for private and concealed communication among women. As MeetYou (2024) explains on its website, 'ask questions here, girlfriends can work together to solve it and help you.' In the community, users discuss various issues ranging from sexual and reproductive activities, symptoms of gynaecological diseases, and contraception issues to disrupted menstrual cycles and look for peer support. For example, one user shared her data on the frequency of contractions, which was recorded by herself using the conception mode by clicking on the counter when she felt it start and end (Figure 7.). In addition to congratulatory messages, other users share their experience of episiotomy, cesarean births, and natural births.

As Lupton (2015) asserts, the datafication of sexual and reproductive activities enabled by these apps also renders sensual experiences and contradictory reproductive capacities sharable. The communal aspect of sharing individuals' self-tracking data is also discussed by Ajana (2017), who proposes two main rationales for explaining such sharing behaviours: one relates to appropriate gamified experience of tracking to motivate themselves, and the other associates

Figure 5. Screenshot of MeetYou's fertile window

with information-exchanging in which self-trackers can draw on the wisdom of the community. In this regard, the sharing of menstruation data in Tataquan aligns with the latter rationale. Here, this app functions as a 'social venue' where self-tracking practice can be discussed safely (Kent, 2018, p. 73). Also, this reflects the 'girlfriend culture' suggested by Winch (2013, p.2), which differentiates from other women's cultures by its combination of intimate friendliness with an emphasis on controlling and managing the individual body that is framed by entrepreneurial and empowering discourses.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, although fertility and menstrual-tracking apps may provide useful health information and fun way of recording women's bodily changes, they may inhabit political roles in terms of exhibiting patriarchal expectations of women acting as reproductive subjects through neoliberal discourses of increasing self-knowledge. This article took one fertility and period-tracking app as an entry point for exploring seemingly mundane app-related practices. As socio-technical artefacts, apps should be examined critically in case of restricted understandings of life being reproduced in a digital way. Further research could be conducted to explore how adjustments to existing app design and data collection policies could be made to create more inclusive practices and knowledge around gender and health.

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