

# Changing gender perspectives

*A research on changing gender perspectives resulting from interactions between volunteer tourists and host community residents.*

Master Thesis

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## **Abstract**

This thesis aimed to analyze the impact of intercultural exchanges between volunteer tourists and host communities in order to understand the changing dynamics of gender relations in development aid, specifically highlighting reciprocal influences. To achieve this a qualitative research design of in depth semi-structured interviews was used. The research found that the attitudes of volunteers towards gender remained unchanged or even became more hardened after interacting with the host community. In contrast, the residents of the host community showed signs of slowly shifting their views on gender due to their interactions with volunteers. The study also revealed that ideas on neocolonialism were still subtly present in the relationship between volunteers and the host community. However, it is important to note that there was a mutual exchange of knowledge on not gender-related topics, indicating a sense of cosmopolitanism. These research findings contribute to the academic understanding of the role of gender in volunteer tourism. This information is valuable for all individuals involved, as a more in-depth understanding of the subject encourages them to reflect on their own participation and responsibilities in these experiences.

## **Preface**

Hereby I present my Master thesis ‘Changing gender perspectives’ in which I explored the changing gender perspectives resulting from interactions between volunteer tourists and host community residents. This thesis was written to fulfil the Master program on Human Geography: Conflict, Territories and Identities at the Radboud University in Nijmegen.

In this preface, I would like to express my gratitude to those who have supported me throughout this process. Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Dr. Ir. Mathijs van Leeuwen, who has supported me throughout the entire academic year during the research process. Thanks to his guidance and support, I was able to get the most out of this research.

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I am also grateful to the participants who took the time to collaborate on this research. Without their contributions and enthusiasm, I would not have been able to complete this study.

Lastly, I want to thank my family and friends who have each played a role in the completion of this thesis in their own ways.

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## 1. Introduction

In 2018 I took a gap year after high school and went to South-East Asia for a year to do volunteer work. With a passion for the world around me and with a heart full of good intentions for development work, I went to say goodbye to home. In this year I learned a lot about many new countries, cultures, and it boosted my personal development. However, I do sometimes question the work that I did if it was indeed only doing good or that it might have had less positive consequences. Since then, and with my increasing knowledge about voluntourism, my questions on this type of development work have only increased.

Volunteer tourism aims to provide small-scale experiences that allow tourists to interact with visited communities in a reciprocal and a mutually beneficial way (Crossley, 2019). It is often promoted as an opportunity for individuals in the Global North to show they care about people, places, and issues in the Global South through everyday volunteer activities (Mostafanezhad, 2013). This has led to a resurgence of critiques, like putting vulnerable people at risk, perpetuating neo-colonialism, and reinforcing a ‘white saviour’ complex (McLennan, 2023; Mostafanezhad, 2015). Which called the industry to take criticisms on board reassess the role and impact of volunteering, and to take the opportunity to rethink the practice of volunteer tourism (McLennan & Thomas-Maude, 2023). This means that on one hand, researchers like Mostafanezhad (2015) criticize voluntourism, but on the other hand, other researchers like McLennan & Thomas-Maud (2023) emphasize the positive outcomes of it. They argue that it provides a unique and pure form of globalization in which individuals can immerse themselves in an alien environment, where many new exchanges can take place. One of the options proposed for reconfiguring voluntourism is to emphasize cultural exchange (McLennan & Thomas-Maude, 2023). It is important to look at the social interactions that occur in volunteering work. In addition to the exchange of material or non-material goods, the social encounters that transpire during this process must also be considered. The framing of volunteering as an exchange, where both the volunteers and recipients can benefit and learn from each other gives a new dimension to this concept (McLennan & Thomas-Maude, 2023). The element of an ‘exchange’ shows the interactive experience that gives access to cultural and transformative learning (Wearing, Young & Everingham, 2017). Such an approach emphasizes the relationships, mutual understanding, and the sharing and respect for different cultures (McLennan & Thomas-Maude, 2023). And this is an exchange that goes both ways, the volunteer as well as the host communities will bring their own beliefs and values to the interaction. Even though opinions on this way of development work varies, it does become a growing sector over the past year which is why it is important to keep doing research in this field (Wearing, 2001).

So, some literature assumes that through voluntourism, an exchange of beliefs and values can occur, with the hope that this could have a positive contribution. This research focuses on this potential positive exchange, specifically looking at the role of change in beliefs and value systems related to gender. This is because most volunteer tourists are white, young, middle-class women from the Global North, with a four to one ratio of women to men (Mostafanezhad, 2013). Additionally, mostly in the Global North there is a growing critical examination of gender norms and roles due to the rising feminist movements. This critical lens is also extending to the types of volunteer projects, as there has been a noticeable increase in girl empowerment projects in recent years. And as gender inequality stems from disparities in

power, whether it be economic, physical, social, or otherwise, and since foreign aid inherently intersects with power dynamics by helping in the form of 'good', it is impossible to engage in foreign aid without addressing and potentially impacting gendered power relations (Richey, 2000). These gendered power relations operate in both directions, also impacting how gender is perceived and expressed in volunteer projects through power dynamics.

Ultimately, more research is needed to fill the gap of knowledge on volunteer work and gender. This thesis uses the terms of voluntourist, volunteer, participant, and volunteer tourist interchangeable as synonyms to describe people that are involved in volunteer tourism. Furthermore, in this thesis, the term host community is systematically used. This is a pragmatic choice as I was looking for a good term to label the counterpart of the voluntourist. While there may be problems with this term, the intention was to move away from using a term like "local," which tends to imply individuals in small villages, and I also found the terminology colonial. Therefore, by choosing the term host community, it recognizes them as the hosts of the voluntourist and sees their role as the counterparts in this relationship.

The aim of this thesis is to gain a deeper understanding of the changing gender perspectives of voluntourists and host communities resulting from their interactions. The side of the voluntourist as well as of the of host community will be researched. Therefore, the research question is as follows: *How do encounters between volunteer tourists and host community residents mutually influence their perspectives on gender?*

## 2. Relevance

### 2.1 Societal relevance

This research adds to the debate of the interface of volunteers and host communities, and what this interface can tell us about gender and identity and how this changes and reforms. In addition to contributing to the ongoing debate, it is crucial to generate further awareness about one's positionality on gender related beliefs in the context of development work, in order to prevent inadvertently doing harm rather than good. This research will contribute to this by acquiring more knowledge on conscious and unconscious attitudes towards gender-related issues, leading to potential changes in beliefs and perspectives. The findings can inform adaptations in volunteer and preparation programs. Previous research has also argued that if volunteer tourism programmes are not carefully managed, they may lead to cross-cultural misunderstanding and the reinforcement of cultural stereotypes (Raymond & Hall, 2008). It is important to have this awareness to be able to self-reflect during the experience which can positively change the stereotypes and subjectivities and Global South power dynamics and inequalities (Kipp et al., 2020).

This research will not only look at the perspective of the voluntourists, but also at the perceptions of the host communities. Including the perspectives of the host community is not only very important for understanding this two-way exchange, but is also not researched often (Dillette et al., 2016). Having the perception of the host community helps the volunteer to create a more complete picture of the situation in order to make a considered decision about joining the volunteer program. And when deciding to join the program they can come better prepared and know more on what to expect, and therefore increase the satisfaction of the volunteers (Coghlan, 2005). This also works vice versa for the host communities. They will receive volunteers that have put in a lot of thought into coming and are better prepared, which will also make their experience more satisfactory. Furthermore, the study may also contribute to empowering host communities to make a better decision on whether or how to participate in volunteer projects.

This thesis also holds a societal relevance on a larger scale. Because even though this research focuses on a smaller scale example, the interaction between volunteers and a host community, it can also be used when looking at other intercultural interactions. For example, in other forms of development cooperation or foreign aid, there is also an intercultural exchange taking place. The findings of this research may not be fully representative as the settings of the situations are quite different. Consider, for instance, the differences in the goals of the interaction, the type of contact, the professionalism, the preparation, and the type of relationship. However, the results of this research can help to better understand the intercultural interactions and provide insights, ideas, or advice on how to improve this interaction.

### 2.2 Scientific relevance

In existing research, the debate surrounding volunteer tourism predominantly revolves around the potential problems it may cause and its impact on global inequalities. It is critiqued on putting vulnerable people at risk, perpetuating neo-colonialism, and reinforcing a 'white savior' complex (McLennan, 2023; Mostafanezhad, 2015). In response to this more and more researchers like Grabowski (2022) are shifting away from the focus on 'helping' and

'development', to emphasize global citizenship and cultural exchange. It highlights the potential of these encounters to increase mutual understanding and respect (McLennan, 2023; Grabowski et al., 2022). This is an interesting new perspective on volunteer tourism, which should be further explored. This research will do so, by also including the host community's perspective, which is often overlooked (Dillette et al., 2016). This debate is in need of more empirical insights on the hosts perspectives as volunteer tourists are currently the most commonly analyzed subjects (Almela & Calvet, 2021; Mostafanezhad, 2015; McGehee & Wearing, 2013). Perceived benefit for the community and personal gain are factors driving the parties involved (Guttentag, 2009; Dillette et al., 2016). Which is why it is extremely important to understand perceptions of the host community when embarking on a volunteer tourism project (Dillette et al., 2016).

Secondly, as shown by the studies of Almela and Calvet (2021), the literature on solely volunteer tourism or gender separately has grown in the last ten years. But the gap that was found was on the nexus of these two subjects. The present literature aims to forward that volunteer tourism should be studied from perspectives other than touristic and economic fields, such as gender studies and anthropology. By doing this you will recognize the participant as a co-producer of knowledge which can inform a real transformation in volunteer experiences (Almela & Calvet, 2021). Also, Bandyopadhyay and Patil (2017) call for more additional critical research on gender and voluntourism because of the feminization of the sector. Most research done on this nexus focuses on the gendered experiences of the volunteers and how this influences their voluntary work (Kipp et al., 2020; Cadesky et al., 2019). For example, that female volunteers have to do mostly care related volunteer work and conform to the stereotypical ideas or that they have to be more careful during their volunteer stay. But this study examines a theme that has been overlooked so far regarding gender and voluntourism, namely how voluntourism may play a role in changing perspectives.

This research will add to this debate on voluntourism and feminism and how they interact with each other. It will gain insights into the changing dynamics of gender relations and how the (unique) interface between the volunteer and the host community is contributing to this.

### 3. Research objective and research question

This research is about the intercultural encounter that happens between the volunteer and the host community during development work. This encounter might have significant effects on gender norms and conventions, as the volunteering exchange can give access to cultural and transformative learning (Wearing, Young & Everingham, 2017). But recent literature on this started to question if this interaction always results in a cross-cultural understanding or that it might also lead to misunderstanding (Raymond & Hall, 2008). It might occur that the process of ‘othering’ takes place, in which the dichotomies of an ‘us’ and a ‘them’ can deepen and stereotypes might reinforce (Simpson, 2004). It is the question whether the norms around gender will adhere more strongly to the conventions they are accustomed to, or if it will result in a shift in notions and ideas surrounding gender. As a result of the review of the defined problem and literature the following research objective is developed.

Research objective:

*To analyze the impact of intercultural exchanges between volunteer tourists and host communities in order to understand the changing dynamics of gender relations in development aid, as well as global inequalities in this relationship.*

For this research a specific case study of volunteer tourism is examined. This specific case study is chosen because it allows for a unique encounter in the world of development aid. The volunteers going on this experience are mostly not trained for this, which is why it creates a unique interface of host communities and volunteers. It is also a more informal encounter through which certain cultural and personal norms and values can be exchanged, which can possibly cause differences in normativity’s and perspectives for both the volunteer and the host communities. Which translates into the following research question.

Research question

*How do encounters between volunteer tourists and host community residents mutually influence their perspectives on gender?*

In order to answer the research question, a set of sub-questions is created.

*1) What gender-related differences are there in the lifeworlds of the volunteer and the host community notably how they see their own gender identity, which gendered values they hold, and what gender power relations look like in their society.*

The first sub-question is to provide a better understanding of the two different life worlds of the volunteer and the host community.

*2) How do the different lifeworlds meet at the interface between volunteers and host community residents?*

The second sub-question is about the cross-cultural encounter, from now on also called the interface. It is to understand what happens at this interface regarding gender related topics.

*3) How are gender perspectives changing as a result of the interaction between the two different life worlds?*

The third and last sub-question is about the result of this interface and how this might have changed the gender perspectives of the volunteer and of the host community.

## 4. Literature review and conceptual framework

### 4.1 Gender

Gender must not be confused with someone's sex, which refers to categories of the biologically observable human body (Jule, 2014). The concept of gender was introduced by West and Zimmerman (1987), who emphasized it as something that is created by interactions, relations, and processes, and that the differences for women and men are created by 'doing'. It is an ever-changing and evolving social construct, which means that gender is dependent on a specific context and can shift over time (Wahl et al., 2011). This makes that perspectives on gender and gender norms are prone to change and adaptation dependent of the context in which they are constructed. The previously discussed exchanges and encounters between different cultures can also be viewed specifically from a gender lens. Gender plays a significant role in creating norms and values, which makes gender an important tool into shaping society and power relations (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). It also encompasses what is perceived as feminine and masculine in a setting, which is important into understanding gender-based normativity's and certain gender roles. The known gendered power relations and roles will differ between voluntourists and the host community residents due to differences in culture and upbringing (Francis, 2004). But when there is an interaction in this area between the two actors, the ideas about existing power relations may be challenged. Assuming that gender is a social construct, we can expect that gender relations may significantly change when two different ways of life come into close contact with each other.

Literature on gender at the intersection of voluntourists and host community residents demonstrates that voluntourists often adapt to local gender dynamics. When looking at the gender roles, it is seen that the division of labour in volunteer tourism is mediated by, as for the voluntourists seen, 'traditional' gender norms, especially related to care work (Almela & Calvet, 2021). Volunteer activities such as taking care of children and teaching reflect how women's roles in society are reflected, as these are seen as typically women's work (Mostafanezhad, 2013). And by placing women in these activities, gender roles and norms are reproduced. This will mainly serve as a confirmation for the host residents that everyone should work within traditional gender norms. For volunteers coming from countries where gender roles are different, this may feel like a step back. Kipp et al. (2020) found that as a response to this, some participants adjusted their gender performance regarding care work, in order to comply with perceived local norms. While other participants rejected these norms in an act of resistance, thus showing their privilege (Almela & Calvet, 2021).

Female volunteers also tend to experience a gendered vulnerability and inequality during their stay. The unwanted attention of local men and the feelings of unsafety and fear influenced their decisions. For example, they adapted in their choice of clothing, the activities they choose to participate in or avoid and their mode of transportation (Cook, 2007). These circumstances showcase the existing unequal gender relations within the community, specifically impacting women. This has led female volunteers to recognize and become more conscious of their gender identity and the associated challenges. (Almela & Calvet, 2021).

The exchange can also have a gendered influence on the host communities. Research has shown that forms of tourism can contribute to the empowerment of women (Scheyvens, 2000; Su et al., 2023). The cultural exchanges that happen during these encounters can influence

the social and psychological empowerment of the host communities. It can contribute to an ideological shift in which the local women become more integrated with the outside world and a reconsideration of gender role stereotypes can happen (Scheyvens, 2000).

#### 4.2 Analysing gender perspectives and relations

The above examples show that using a gender lens on the cultural exchanges that arise in voluntourism is very important, as these can play a role in people's changing perspective and possible changes in normativity's. Researchers have attempted to formulate changes in perspectives concisely. They have done this by designing analytical models to capture gender relations in society in words and categories. In the literature, I have tried to flesh out the models that accurately describe gender in society. Initially, I came across a complex framework developed by the CGIAR Research program. This framework gives insight into the multiple factors playing a role in the transformation surrounding gender (Platform CGI, 2023). They call this the gender transformative approach which seeks to actively examine, challenge and gender norms and power relations (Rottach et al, 2009). By doing so, it seeks to eliminate systemic form of gender-based discrimination. (Platform CGI, 2023) At the core of measuring transformative change is the understanding that discriminatory social institutions and unequal power relations need to change, and that these forms of power are linked to individual and collective agency which are at the heart of the empowerment process (van Eerdewijk et al., 2017). So, the gender transformative change can be measured by the following key dimensions: agency / power relations / social institutions.

The agency dimension is about the ability that someone has to define their own goals and act upon them. Building agency is about creating more consciousness and confidence as well as improving knowledge and capabilities (Platform CGI, 2023). To enhance critical consciousness involves the ‘process of changing the way people see and experience their worlds that can raise awareness of inequalities, stimulate indignation about injustice and generate the impetus to act together to change society’ (Cornwall, 2016, p.344).

The power relations dimension it is about challenging unequal power relations. Unequal gender relations are the expression of unfair power relations and are considered the underlying cause of disempowerment of women and girls (van Eerdewijk et al., 2017). Gender relations are embedded in patriarchal societies, where the voices of women and girls are constrained by unequal power relations (Platform CGI, 2023). In order to challenge these unequal power relations, we have to move away from ‘power over’ relationships towards a more ‘power within’, ‘power to’ and ‘power with’ relationship.

The social institutions dimension is about informal and formal rules and norms that are made and remade through people's practices and that can change over time (Platform CGI, 2023). Formal institutions are things like policies and laws, and rights and regulations that are imposed by authorities. While informal institutions comprise things like the unwritten social norms, values and traditions (Platform CGI, 2023).

In sum, gender transformative change involved building agency, challenging unequal power relations and making informal and formal social institutions more equitable (Platform CGI, 2023). The three dimensions also interact with each other and are mutually reinforcing. For example, changes in social institutions can create space for developing agency which can lead to changes in power relations among individuals, groups and organizations.

In this framework for measuring gender transformative change, it was determined that change can occur in three dimensions, namely in agency, power relations and social institutions. Gender can influence social and power relations at different levels which is why it is important to measure gender transformative change across different levels (micro, meso and macro). The framework by CGIAR Research Program identifies 5 spheres where these transformative changes can be measured. They use the individual (micro), household (meso), community (meso), organization (meso) and macroenvironmental (macro) spheres. The framework that includes the different spheres of influence and the key dimensions is shown below in figure 1.

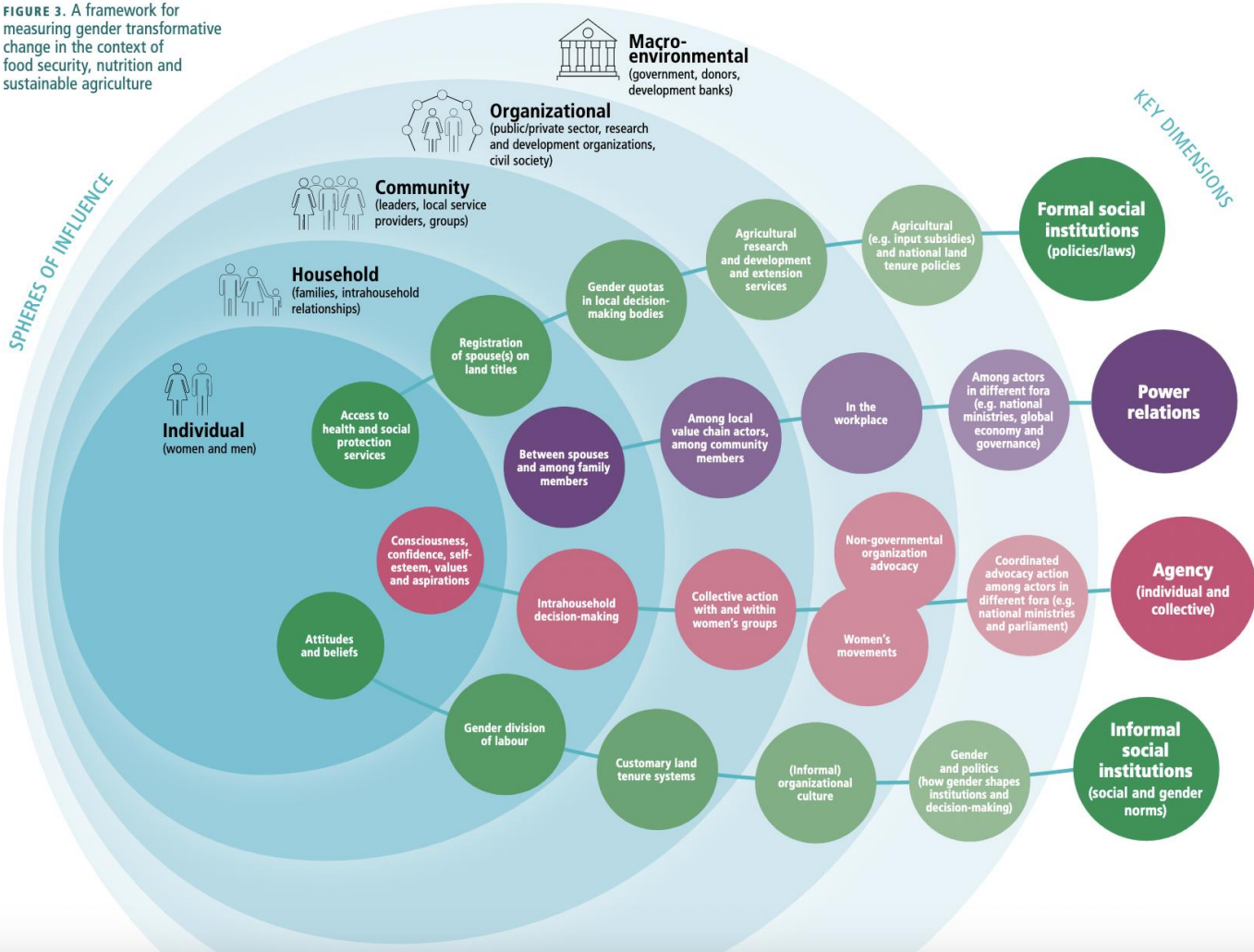


Figure 1: Framework for measuring gender transformative change by CGIAR Research Program (Platform CGI, 2023).

This model by the CGIAR Research Program looks at 5 levels across 3 different dimensions, making it a comprehensive model for mapping change. However, due to the scope of this thesis it is not possible to research all these different levels, which is why the focus will be only on the individual level. Furthermore, I am interested in what happens when two completely different lifeworlds interact, and not only what is changing but also how change takes place. For this, it is an interesting framework but the notion of interface analysis by Norman Long

(1999) is more helpful. Norman Long's interface analysis maps out this interaction between the two different social worlds. It will help understanding cultural diversity and social difference in processes of development intervention. These interfaces occur at points where different lifeworlds intersect in social situations in which interactions become oriented around problems of bridging, segregating, interacting, or contesting social and cognitive standpoints (Long, 1999). Interface analysis aims to clarify the social types and sources present in such situations and to identify the means of reproducing or transforming them (Long, 1999).

In order to make this interface analysis on gender relations it is important to map the lifeworlds of the volunteer and host community, these lifeworlds will be used in this research as starting points in order to analyze the social life of people, and in particular the way they look at gender. These lifeworlds are analyzed through three components which are quite similar to the three dimensions of the CGIAR's framework, namely those of relationships of power, personal characteristics, and their worldview.

#### 4.2.1 Lifeworlds

The examination of lived experiences of actors through their lifeworlds allows to understand the mechanics behind the actors' decisions and actions. The multiplicity of actors' lived experiences is called lifeworlds which forms the basis of the interaction between actors (Parashar et al., 2021). Long (2001) argues that lifeworlds should be seen as a fluid process in which an individual is constantly re-evaluating his or her relationships and experiences, and thereby determining the composition of their lifeworld. Which means that it is a dynamic process that can be traced back to various aspects in someone's life. Parashar proposes that lifeworlds are constituted by a couple of elements, namely the knowledge and power relations in society, personal characteristics, and worldview (Parashar et al., 2021). These lifeworlds will be used in this research as building blocks in order to analyze the social life of people, and in particular the way they look at gender.

Firstly, the relationships of power. This element of someone's lifeworld has to do with social positions. It is important to know what kind of power relations are played out and if the partners are equal. This has to do with how they view themselves in position to the other, in the case of this research it has to do with the gendered power relations. This could be connected to the views and beliefs people have with regards to the concepts of colonialism and cosmopolitanism. Important characteristic elements for this category are social positions or status, hierarchy, and relations of class and what is of critical importance for my research, gender (Parashar et al., 2021).

Secondly, the personal characteristics. These characteristics has to do with someone's identity and previous experiences in life. This creates someone in a unique way and will have an influence in how he or she will understand and behave in certain situations. In the case of this research, it has to do with personal experiences with gender identity and expectations. For example, someone's gender-related experiences in their own society and how this might have empowered or disempowered them. Important characteristic elements for this category are identity, motivation, individual interests, recognition, previous experiences, situations in personal lives and understanding (Parashar et al., 2021)

Thirdly, the social/cultural/ideological worldviews. This category is important to understand someone's values and beliefs. This influences how they look at certain situations and the world around them. In the case of this research, it has to do with the gendered norms and expectations. Beliefs about gender also influence an individual's worldview through cultural norms and values. Important characteristic elements for this category are values, norms, beliefs, religious views, moral standing, and culture.

However, it is important to clarify here that these categories and elements within these categories are not mutually exclusive, overlap in some constructs and influence each other (Parashar et al., 2021). These three dimensions of lifeworlds are shown below in table 1.

<b>Broad dimensions of Lifeworlds</b>			
<b>Categories</b>	<b>Relationships of Power</b>	<b>Personal Characteristics</b>	<b>Worldviews</b>
<b>Elements</b>	Gender power relations, social positions, hierarchy	gender identity, individual interests, previous experiences situations in personal lives and understanding	gendered norms, values, beliefs, expectations, moral standing and culture

Table 1: *Broad dimensions of lifeworlds inspired by Parashar et al. (2021)*

#### 4.2.2 Interface: analyzing change where lifeworlds encounter each other

The interface is the part where the different lifeworlds can meet and interact with each other. According to Long (2001), these interfaces occur at points where different lifeworlds or social fields intersect. Actor interfaces are thus shaped by similar, intersecting, or differing lifeworlds of the actors and are constituted by multiple elements. And it is at these interfaces where power struggles such as domination, collaboration, resistance, or negotiation amongst actors happen, which can lead to a change in the course of action or way of thinking (Parashar et al., 2021). Using this interface analysis can help clarify the social types and sources present in such situations and to identify the means of reproducing or transforming them, so it can help to understand social transformations better (Long, 1999). For this research, it is important to examine the dynamics and characteristics of this interface, so that it becomes clear how the interactions between the actors can consciously or unconsciously influence each other's ideas and perspectives.

#### 4.2.3 Attitudes versus norms

Given the focus of this research on attitudes and perspectives, it is important to specify what is meant by this. This will be done by contrasting and comparing them against social norms, as these two share similarities but are not same.

Social norms are unwritten rules that guide group behavior, shaped by interactions with others (Stewart et al., 2021). Individuals internalize these rules early in life. Social norms dictate the expected behavior of men and women, often perpetuating gender stereotypes. Norms have an external meaning, where cultural practices are seen as external to the individual (I conform to the norms), while values have a more internal meaning, reflecting what a person personally values (I live my values) (Frese, 2015). As such, it is attitudes and values that underlie the social

gender norms discussed above. This research will focus on changes in attitudes, as these informal changes are the basis for subsequent changes in social norms, and attitudes are easier to measure than norms. This thesis uses the terms attitudes and perspectives interchangeable as synonyms.

### 4.3 Changes in attitudes

Jewkes and colleagues (2015) conducted a study on changing participants' attitudes on gender stereotypes and norms. They based it on the theory of change and found that increasing participants' knowledge and awareness of gender stereotypes and norms eventually led to changes in behavior. Their work demonstrates that acquiring more knowledge, such as through interactions with different cultures and their perspectives on gender, can bring about change. Informal interactions can therefore cause a shift in attitudes. However, research by the Overseas Development Institute (2015) shows that this change can go in two directions. It can either result in the hardening of attitudes and them becoming potentially more discriminatory, or it can lead to the relaxation of existing attitudes and norms, ultimately giving rise to new practices.

#### 4.3.1 Neocolonialism and cosmopolitanism

The concepts of neocolonialism and cosmopolitanism are used in this thesis to provide an explanation on how the learning at the interface takes place, to qualify the nature of the interface and how this influences learning. If this is a mutual way of learning or if it is one-sided. Below, I will further elaborate on neocolonialism and cosmopolitanism.

The concept of neo-colonialism is useful in understanding how the norms and interaction between the host communities and the volunteers can be rooted in the colonial power dynamics. Power relations play an important role, not only the power relations within the lifeworlds as described before, but also the power relations between the volunteer and host community. These power relations can be described as colonial. It is about the dependent relationship the Global South has with the global North in which volunteer tourism breathes new life into (Cowden, 2020). The interference of volunteers can keep the cycle of countries being dependent going. Even though this all could be inadvertently, it can still reinforce power inequalities (McBride et al., 2006). For example, when voluntourists might take on a roll of 'expert' or 'teacher' regardless of their experience, this might be seen as a neo-colonial construction of a Westerner being culturally superior (Raymond & Hall, 2008). Or how Kirillova et al. (2015) explained how voluntourists might be viewing local cultures as inferior by saying things such as "they just don't know any better". This can also perpetuate the belief that one's values and norms are superior, leading to an unequal dynamic in this relationship. Which is why it is important to keep a critical look at the power relations that might be unintendedly present. It can reinforce the othering process and keep the cultural stereotypes alive (Hammersley, 2014).

Cosmopolitanism a philosophical movement that someone belongs to a universal or global world in which a person adheres to norms and values that go beyond the state (Dower, 2003). It is promoted as an educational mode of travel and the development of a more global worldview that is often referred as global citizenship (Crossley, 2019). This also translates into learning from each other, which goes both ways. It is about being able to enter in conversations with one another to understand and learn the differences between each other, and not to

presuppose that one value is better or worse than the other (Appiah, 2006). Creating more cosmopolitan sensibilities is particularly the case for voluntourism. Because the links between consumption and distant people and places become tangible and enacted through travel, and where global citizenship and development is promoted as one of its aims (Crossley, 2019). To see if there are cosmopolitan influences taking place, one can for example look at personal development through cross-cultural learning, as well as the awareness being raised about other parts of the world. Research has shown that this cultural awareness of volunteers is not only towards the host community, but it can also increase their sensitivity towards their own culture and bring their learnings back to their own communities (Koskinen & Tossavainen, 2004).

This thesis explores to what extent the concepts of neocolonialism, in which the host community primarily learns from voluntourists, and cosmopolitanism, in which mutual learning takes place, can explain how eventually the interface can cause a hardening or relaxing change in the way of thinking about gender.

4.4 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework below shows the graphic explanation of the previously described theories and elements. It will be used will be used in the analysis as the theoretical lens through which the results will be viewed.

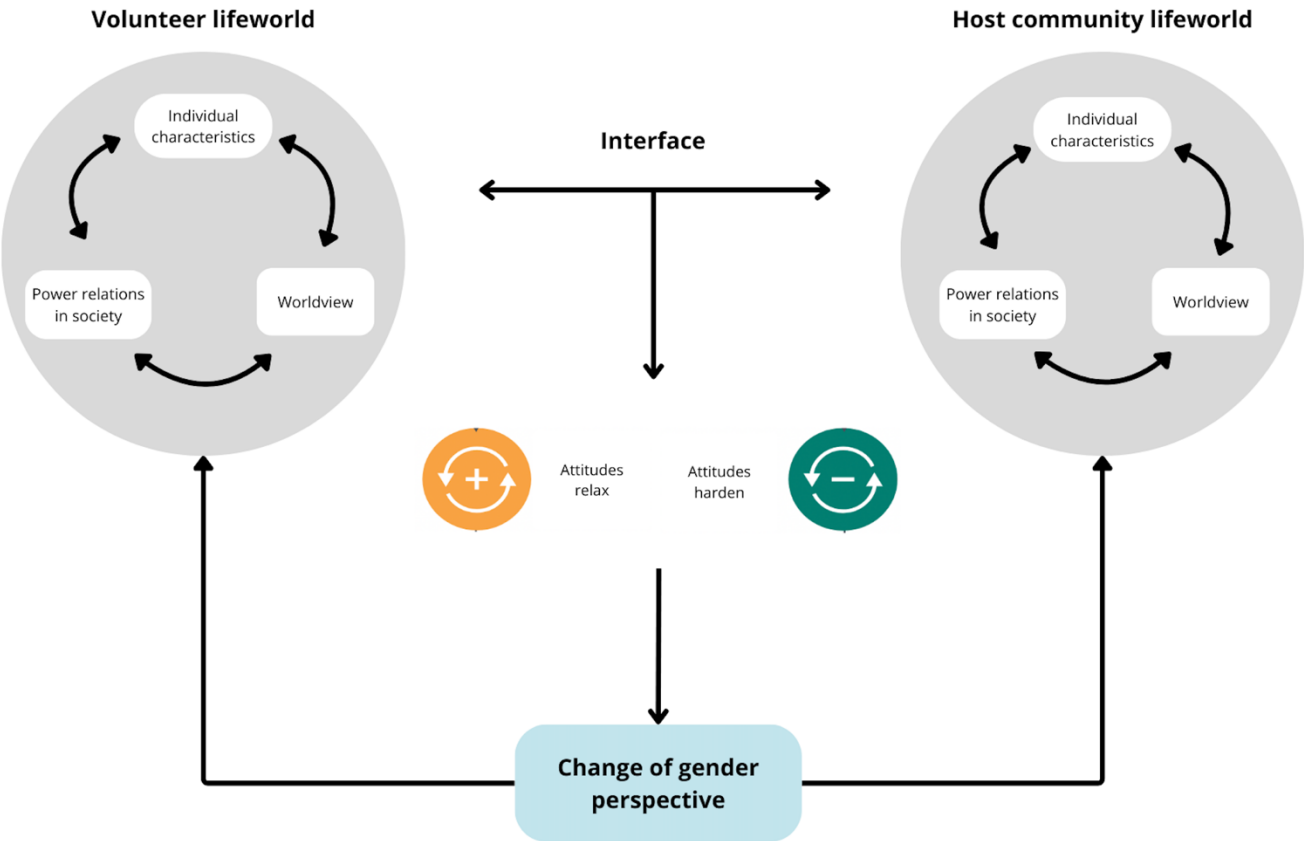


Figure 2: Conceptual framework

In the conceptual framework, the three components of the lifeworlds are represented together, as these categories and elements within these categories overlap and sometimes influence each other, they are placed together in a circle. Furthermore, it is about the interface between these two lifeworlds, hence the arrow pointing both ways as they can both influence each other. Then an arrow points down to the boxes if the attitudes of both research groups relax or harden and how this eventually changes their perspectives on gender. And finally, these new perspectives will influence their lifeworlds again, which is why an arrow is pointed back to the starting point, the lifeworlds.

## 5 Methodology

The upcoming chapter will outline the methodology used in this research. It is crucial to address the ‘what’, ‘why’, ‘who’, and ‘how’ questions in order to understand the research findings. The methods will be initially explained in this chapter, and why these methods are fitted for this specific research. Subsequently, there will be a discussion on how the data collection process unfolded, the goals that were set beforehand, and the outcomes achieved. Following that, the ultimately examined group, the sampling, will be objectively discussed. Then, the analysis of the collected data will be addressed. Finally, there will be a section on the positionality and ethics of the research and the researcher.

### 5.1 Method and argumentation

In this research the main method of qualitative research was used, more specifically semi-structured in-depth interviews. Qualitative researchers study social and cultural problems through collecting in-depth data in the form of talking directly to people (Creswell, 2007). And this specific qualitative method provides insight into personal experiences, feelings, motivations, and beliefs (Hennink et al., 2005). By using this method, it allows the researcher to delve deeper into people's perceptions and understand why they make the decisions they do. As this research aims to uncover the changing attitudes of individuals, it was crucial to get more insight into the drivers behind these changes. Prior to the interviews, an "interview guide" was prepared, providing some guidance during the interview. The pre-prepared questions based on the lifeworlds, and interface analysis ensured that all points were discussed, but that there was still room for an open conversation (Vennix, 2016). This way the interviewee could give more context to their answers and there were still possibilities to gain new insights and topics that the interviewer might not have thought of beforehand. The topics that were be discussed in the interviews were about the components of the theoretical framework. Below is an outline of the key topics for each sub-question for the interviews. It is essential to note that while some topics were prepared in advance, thorough probing was necessary to ensure a meaningful discussion. Another important note is that with each topic it was important to ask for examples because the examples provided a clearer picture of the situation. The specific and final used interview guide based on this outline can be found in appendix 1.

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#### Topics to be discussed to answer sub question 1 on **lifeworlds**:

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##### 1. Personal characteristics

Broad and open question for someone to tell something about themselves/identify themselves. How do their lives look like?

To what extent do they experience gender as a part of their identity that offers them possibilities or limits them? Have they experienced that their gender was a hindrance to being able to do or be allowed to do things?

Motivations on engagement with volunteer tourism. Some experiences or understandings that led to this?

##### 2. Worldviews

What are their norms/values/beliefs surrounding gender?

How is this influenced by culture or religious views?

### 3. Relationships of Power

How do gender relationships in their own society look like, in terms of social positions and gender roles (certain normativity's)? And how do they look at this, what are their feelings and opinions towards these gender relationships?

Topics to be discussed to answer sub question 2 on the **interface**:

---

#### 1. Interface

Finding out how forms of gender (roles) are made clear and discussed at the interface, and how these views could possibly clash.

Questions on how the interactions looked like. For example, in what settings it took place, what was said and done and how everyone behaved. Asking for multiple examples and the differences between these examples.

Questions on what this person felt during the interactions (for example on comfortability or not), and what the reasons were for these feelings.

How did stereotypical images play a role in the perception of the other and influenced the relationship of the interface?

What were the power relations at this interface? So, questions on possible notions of the need to assist people in the community (savior complex).

Asking about the differences they faced, and if there were forms or feelings of inequality involved in this (probe to understand possible colonial relationship).

Situations in which feelings of equality and learning from the other happened.

Topics to be discussed to answer sub question 3 on the **changing gender perspectives**:

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Finding out how gender perspectives might have changed through the interaction with the other actor.

What did they learn from the other actor, especially regarding to gender. These new insights can be 'positive' and 'negative'.

In which ways did the interaction change their way of doing or thinking on topics or normativity's of gender (roles)?

Were the interactions and possible perspective changes something they expected prior to the interface?

Through these topics the potential changes in gender perspectives were explored.

## 5.2 Data collection

The data collection process started with thinking about what the ideal situation would be to conduct the interviews. The goal of conducting interviews is to achieve saturation to ensure validity so that statements can be made with more certainty (Rahimi, 2024). For this research, this would apply to both the group of volunteers and the host community group. It is difficult to predict when saturation will occur beforehand but given the scope of this research and the time constraints, the goal was to conduct between 15 and 20 interviews of half an hour each. Ideally, the distribution of interviews would be roughly equal between volunteers and

residents of the host community so that both perspectives would be well represented. Additionally, I would have liked to examine the volunteer perspective before and after volunteering, so that interviews could be conducted before and after the interaction to note any differences. However, finding this specific situation proved difficult as the organization where I was interning was not very large and did not send volunteers every day, and the fact that this research was also limited in time. Furthermore, it would have been ideal if I could have conducted fieldwork at the location itself in the host communities in African countries. This way, as a researcher, I could have had more control over who I could interview. But, from a distance I was still dependent on others and contacts through connections. And I would also have had a better understanding of the situation since I would be present as an interviewer. This would also allow for face-to-face interviews to be conducted. Conducting interviews face-to-face has the advantage that if a question is unclear, it can be explained in more detail (Babbie, 2011). Additionally, it is more personal and body language can be read better. Another advantage of conducting fieldwork on location is that observations could be made during interactions between groups, in order to add objective data to this research. Using multiple sources of data can enhance the internal validity in addition to conducting in-depth interviews as the primary method.

As mentioned before, these interview circumstances would have been the ideal situation to collect the data for this research, but due to constraints mainly related to time and money, this was not possible in this way. In the end, 17 interviews were conducted with a duration of around 30 minutes each. This depended on the respondent and how much time they had or how much they had to share. 9 volunteers, 4 residents of the host community, and 4 key informants were interviewed. Further information about the group of participants will be explained in the section 5.3 sampling. The interviews were ultimately not conducted on location, but through an online video call platform. This was due to the distance and costs associated with traveling.

The interviews have all been recorded using the online tool QuickTime player with requested consent. These recordings were used to transcribe the interviews for further data analysis. This brings me to the next point on safety and confidentiality. It is important to consider the potential risks for the participants involved in the research. Given the topic of this study, this will not pose a direct threat to the research population. However, it is important to handle the information provided by the respondents in a confidential manner. This was done by ensuring the anonymity of the participants using different names. Additionally, at the start of each interview, the voluntary nature of participation was emphasized, and participants were told to indicate if they felt uncomfortable with certain terms or questions and that they could leave at any time. Fortunately, this did not happen in any of the interviews.

Finally, as a researcher, it can be difficult to offer participants something in return as a thank you for their time and effort. I also found this challenging, especially since the interviews took place online from a distance. In addition to the verbal appreciation I expressed before and after the interviews, I also offered to send the final report of the research. Whether it is because participants may enjoy reading it or find it useful themselves. Especially key informants leading the projects may be able to use the results in the future development of their project, considering gender issues.

### 5.3 Sampling

In this study, a total of 17 interviews were conducted across 3 different groups. The first group consisted of volunteers, with a total of 9 volunteers interviewed, 8 of whom were from the Netherlands and 1 from Canada. Therefore, the voluntourists were mainly Dutch informants, as I did my internship at a Dutch organization that primarily sent Dutch volunteers to the projects. This made it easier to connect with Dutch voluntourists, as we also shared the same native language. However, the fact that this group was predominantly Dutch had implications for the data, as it brought a specific Northern perspective on gender relations. The Netherlands has its own unique culture that is not representative for the entire 'West'. Dutch people are known to be assertive and direct, and having religion play a small role in society. If the research had been conducted with, for example, Spanish volunteers, their characteristics and perspectives would likely have been different. The second group were the residents of the host community and consisted of 4 participants. The participants in this group were people from African countries. This was because my internship organization is focused on Africa and has no contacts with volunteer projects outside this continent. This also gives a certain bias to the research, as it did not consider multiple continents with different cultures and ideas about gender. Initially, the goal was only to talk to these two research groups, but during the collection of interviews with this group, another group emerged, namely the key informants. It was not a target group that I consciously sought out to interview, but they came onto my path because of the connections from my internship. This group consisted of 4 participants who grew up in 'Western' countries but now lived in African countries. Most of them had been living in Africa for over 10 years. Despite not being a group that I had thought of myself, they were a very interesting group to speak to. They had witnessed the interactions between volunteers and the host community for several years and had seen them change. As a result, they had a lot of knowledge about the perspectives of both the volunteer and the host community, as they had conversations with both groups about it and had also experienced any changes over time. Additionally, they had their own unique experiences due to their intercultural marriages and new learning experiences in terms of gender which they still experience daily.

To reach out to the population, I used the network of my internship at Travel Unique. Travel Unique serves as the contact person for both volunteers and the host communities in various African countries. Initially, I planned to use my own personal network due to my experiences in this field, but I eventually decided against it in order to maintain objectivity in my role as a researcher and not influence the tone of the interviews. Through the contacts provided by Travel Unique, I was able to connect with more respondents using the snowball sampling method. There were no restrictions in age or gender, as they are not variables in this research, and it was valuable to have conversations with individuals varying of ages and gender. The goal was to have an equal number of participants from the volunteer group and the host community group.

Ultimately, relatively more volunteers were interviewed since this was also the target group that was easier to connect with. This could possibly be due to the language, the enthusiasm to talk about their volunteer experience, or our common connection through our experience as volunteers. Overall, I found the willingness to participate in my research to be great. I think this could be related to the type of people who are volunteers or work in this field, as they generally want to do good and help others. Also, coming from the African culture where

the philosophy of ubuntu and the sense of helping each other is strong. However, it was more challenging to connect with the host community research group. This could be due to limited opportunities for online video calls. To connect with this target group, it would have been best to go to the location itself and speak to people in the community. Because now from a distance, I had to rely on my contacts, and the contacts I had through my internship were with the project itself. This had the consequence that I mostly connected with the key informants' group as they were a lot of the times the contact persons for the volunteer projects. While I found it interesting to interview this group, I regret not having had the opportunity to gather additional insights from the residents of the host community. Because the interviews with this group brought up interesting results that I had not expected beforehand and would have liked to investigate further. Due to time constraints and limitations in connecting with this group, this was not possible.

### Volunteers

<i>Name</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Volunteering country</i>
Nica	F	50	Dutch	Zimbabwe, Namibia, Malawi
Marit	F	20	Dutch	Madagascar
Suus	F	19	Dutch	Tanzania
Sara	F	24	Dutch	Tanzania
Amy	F	25	Dutch	Ghana
Sem	M	22	Dutch	Uganda
Ellen	F	27	Dutch	Namibia
Dylan	M	30	Canadian	Namibia
Ivy	F	19	Dutch	South-Africa

### Residents host communities

<i>Name</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Nationality</i>
Essie	F	23	Namibian
Sisse	M	33	Swazi
Colinda	F	48	Namibian
Charlotte	F	35	South-African

### Key Informants

<i>Name</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>New home country</i>
Lisa	F	50	Canadian	Uganda (19 years)
Josephine	F	29	British	Ghana (9 years)
Tamar	F	38	German	Namibia (10 years)
Paula	F	45	Dutch	Ghana (15 years)

These 3 tables provide an overview of the participants in the three different research groups. The names of the participants are made up to ensure anonymity. Table 1 provides an overview of the volunteer research group, which consists of a total of 9 participants, including 2 men and 7 women. The participants' ages ranged from 19 to 50 years old, with the majority in their 20s. Most volunteers had a Dutch background, but 1 volunteer, Dylan, had a Canadian background and had been living in the Netherlands for more than 10 years. Furthermore, the countries where the volunteers had done their volunteer work were quite diverse. Three volunteers had been to Namibia, two to Tanzania, one to Malawi, one to Madagascar, one to Ghana, and one to Uganda. Additionally, there was only one volunteer who had done volunteer work in multiple countries. Table 2 provides an overview of the research group "residents from the host community." In this research group, 4 people were interviewed, including one man. The age range in this group was between 23 and 48. Two participants were from Namibia, one from Swaziland, and one from South Africa. All participants worked for a volunteer organization and therefore encountered volunteers frequently. Finally, Table 3 provides an overview of the research group "key informants." In this research group, 4 women were interviewed. The age range in this group was slightly higher, between 29 and 50 years old. All participants had been living in their new home country for more than 9 years.

#### 5.4 Data analysis

In this study, thematic analysis was used. Braun & Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within data, providing a well-organized description of the dataset. This analysis ensures that various topics of the research can be interpreted. The article by Braun and Clarke (2006) also presented an overview of all the phases of thematic analysis. In phase one, the researcher familiarizes themselves with the data by transcribing and reading the collected data. In the second phase, the researcher generates initial codes by systematically coding the dataset. When coding, labels are assigned to text segments of the transcripts based on theoretical relevance (Mortelmans, 2007). Initially, an open coding strategy was used, where codes were assigned to text segments of the transcripts without a predefined code scheme, allowing codes to emerge during transcript reading. Subsequently, axial coding took place, where previously assigned codes were compared and merged into one or more overarching themes (Scriptium, 2021). This is phase three of thematic analysis, where the researcher identifies themes in the codes by collecting codes relevant to a specific theme. In this study, themes primarily emerged based on the predefined sub-questions.

In phase four, the researcher evaluates and verifies the themes in relation to the entire dataset. Phase five involves creating clear definitions and names for each theme, and in the final phase, the themes and codes are used to write a scientific report (Braun & Clarke, 2006) (Vingerhoets, 2013). An important program used in conducting thematic analysis is the data analysis program Atlas.ti. In this computer program, transcripts were uploaded to carry out phases two to five of Braun & Clarke's method. A codebook was created from the final codes and themes, added as appendix 2.

## 5.5 Positionality

*“Research is always carried out by an individual with [...] a personality, social context, and various personal and practical challenges and conflicts, all of which affect the research, from the choice of a research question or topic, through the method used to the reporting of the project's outcome”* (Bentz and Shapiro, 1998, p.4).

In terms of this research, it is important to emphasize the issues of potential influences or biases due to my positionality. As a researcher you bring your own set of beliefs, worldviews, and paradigms into a project and these can have an impact on the conducting and writing of the research (Creswell & Poth, 2016) A person's positionality can relate to gender, personal ideologies, culture, and religion (Coerts, 2017). Especially in a research that is focused on gendered subjectivities, it is crucial to be aware of your own identity. I am a white woman, university educated, and I have my own beliefs on gender and equal rights. Regarding this research, I have a better picture of the situation due to my own volunteering experiences, which can provide understanding especially among the volunteers. It is easier for me to feel affinity with this group because I share my lifeworld with them. But this affinity can also cause a form of bias. I have had experiences in this area myself and therefore have my own standpoint and opinion on it. It was important that this did not play a role and that I, as a researcher, asked questions as objectively as possible and listened to the interviews as objectively as possible. For example, I have done this by formulating the questions based on theory and not based on personal experiences and opinions. In addition, I let the participants speak for themselves and did not put words in their mouths or steer their answers.

Furthermore, I have fewer similarities with the 'host community' research group. Differences in culture and life experiences can influence the research, as I may be seen as different or an 'outsider'. It is possible that this could have caused the participants to be less open in the interview. To mitigate this as much as possible, I tried to create an environment where the participants felt safe to be open. For example, I emphasized anonymity and confidentiality before the interview. Additionally, I engaged in an informal conversation before each interview, sharing information about myself in an open manner. An indicator of the success of this approach is that all participants agreed to the use of their own name in the research, showing a level of trust. However, I have also occasionally experienced this cultural difference as something challenging. During the preparation and the conducting of the interviews, I found it sometimes difficult in which way I could approach certain gender-related issues. I did not want to be disrespectful towards their culture or unintentionally make assumptions. I tried to prevent this as much as possible by researching beforehand, asking the participants questions about it,

and showing interest during the conversation. Additionally, it was important to 'read' the person I was speaking with. Some participants were very open from the start, while others were more reserved. By asking questions in a polite manner and trying to understand who I was talking to, I tried to create a balance by not offending anyone but still digging deeper into what I wanted to know. I am ultimately satisfied with the answers I received, so in that sense, it was successful. Furthermore, I hope the participants received it the way I intended it, as I cannot speak for them, but fortunately I did not receive any negative feedback during or after the interviews.

I believe that these parts of my identity and experiences can all play a role and influence the data and my views on this research. Of course, some parts I cannot change, but it is important that I remain aware of this and deal with the research as objectively as possible.

## 6 Results

In the upcoming results chapter, the results will be discussed in relation to the 3 sub questions. First, differences in lifeworlds of the research groups will be examined. Next, the interface will be discussed and provide a clearer picture of the interaction. Lastly, the way in which this interaction has led to learning moments on gender perspectives that have changed will be explored.

### 6.1 Lifeworlds

The first sub-question of the research is as follows: What different lifeworlds that relate to gender of the volunteer and the host community exist, regarding their individual characteristics, worldview, and power relationship in society? The aim of this sub-question was to map out the various lifeworlds of the two research groups in order to understand how they interact during their interaction. The lifeworlds discussed by Long (2001) are fluid processes in which an individual is constantly re-evaluating his or her relationship and experiences, and thereby determining the composition of their lifeworld. These lifeworlds are used as building blocks to analyze the social life of the volunteers and host communities, and in particular in the way they look at gender. The two different lifeworlds will each be discussed through the three dimensions of personal characteristics, relationships of power in society and worldviews. I tried to describe the lifeworlds in an objective manner, but during the research I realized that the way people talk about their own lifeworld is related and reflected to the other lifeworld. Therefore, I had to leave the objective analysis while analyzing this question, and what I will describe below is a collection of reflections in which the informants make a systematic comparison between their own lifeworld and that of others.

#### *Personal characteristics*

The personal characteristics dimension has to do with someone's identity and previous experiences in life, as this creates someone in a unique way and will have an influence on how he or she understands and behaves in situations (Parashar et al., 2021). An important initial characteristic of the personal qualities of the volunteers was that they valued equality highly and considered it important to strive for by wanting to do good. Volunteer Dylan expressed that he wanted to think of himself as an equal progressive and equal world opportunity person. Volunteer Marit specifically mentioned that her focus was on equality in all aspects, not only in terms of gender but also in terms of race. She emphasized that we don't all have to be the same, but we should be equal. This partly explains why this group of volunteers chose to do volunteer work as a way to contribute to making the world more equal and better in their view. For example, volunteer Nica mentioned that she was aware of the unequal distribution of resources in the world and wanted to contribute meaningfully to address this issue, as well as Marit did.

*Volunteer Marit: 'I care a lot about equality and just respect and love for everything around you. I just want to do good and help people.'*

Another personal characteristic that the host community residents mentioned was that they thought the volunteers had a Western mentality, where planning, straightforwardness, and individualism plays a bigger role. Host community resident Sisse mentioned that he admired the volunteers for their respect for time and that he had learned a lot from them. Key informant Paula agreed, observing that her fellow board members became more punctual over the 20 years as they had been working within her Western-style system. Additionally, the volunteers noticed that the host community residents also had certain character traits. One of them was that the volunteers believed the host community residents were very resilient and resourceful, that despite life not always being easy there, they tried to be very happy. Another characteristic was that they were very respectful and polite towards others.

Lastly, the topic of religion when discussed with the volunteers, they indicated that they did not adhere to any particular faith. This demonstrates that, in the volunteers' lives, religion plays a minor or nonexistent role. But all 3 groups did mention that religion plays a significant role in the cultures of the host communities, making it a topic that needed to be approached with care and respect.

*Key informant Josephine: 'The only thing we tell volunteers not to talk much on is religion. People are very religious here, only topic that you will never really get. There is no in-between, so we just tell volunteers just be very respectful that people are.'*

#### *Power relationships in society*

The dimension of power relationships in society revolves around how individuals perceive their position in relation to others, particularly in terms of gendered power dynamics (Parashar et al., 2021). The volunteers mainly expressed that they no longer view power relations in the Netherlands as traditionally rooted in gender roles. The notion that women should stay at home and cook was no longer seen as part of Dutch society by many volunteers, who viewed this shift as a positive development.

*Volunteer Ellen: 'For example, it is not standard for the man to decide, that is also not the case at all in our household. Within our household, everything is just completely equal and as I want it to be. And my husband feels exactly the same way, and in the Netherlands, it is generally in the culture that no one has more authority or respect because of their gender.'*

On the other hand, the volunteers indicated that women are still marginalized in Dutch society, despite the fact that this gap is slowly closing. For example, volunteer Nica talked about the wage gap between men and women, and the volunteers Marit and Sem gave examples of the safety issues for women. According to the volunteers, many steps have already been taken towards equality in power relations between men and women, but there is still a long way to go.

*Volunteer Sem: 'I think that women are systematically disadvantaged in our society. And that is a gap that has been filled but only partially, we are not there yet.'*

The following quote from Sisse effectively captures the main takeaway of this dimension for the host community.

*Host community resident Sisse: 'It is our culture that girls are undermined. Society imposes certain norms and expectations regarding gender.'*

The three groups all mentioned that the gender roles in the host communities are still quite traditional, with women primarily responsible for cooking and managing the household, while men are seen as the breadwinners. In all 3 groups it was noted that in these communities, there is a stereotype that women take care of domestic responsibilities and men provide financially. Furthermore, not only women, but also young girls are expected to assist with household chores from an early age.

*Key informant Josephine: 'Because the expectation is that boys can do what they want, and girls help cook and clean. It is normal for girls to go home and to do the washing, cleaning, and looking after their siblings.'*

Many of the volunteers saw this division of roles as conservative or traditional, often comparing it to the Netherlands a few decades ago. Volunteer Ivy, for example, felt that South Africa resembled how the Netherlands used to be, with the man working and the woman taking care of the children and cooking. Host community resident Charlotte, living in South Africa, confirmed this view, stating that although she sees the relationship differently, South Africa is still very gender divided, with men and women having specific roles and responsibilities ingrained in their culture. Volunteer Dylan also mentioned that the gender roles he witnessed in Namibia were similar to those of his parents and grandparents, so it wasn't something new to him, although it differed from how he operates with his wife. Key informant Tamar experienced this shift towards a more traditional culture firsthand due to her intercultural marriage, as she suddenly found herself expected to fulfill different roles within the household, mainly by her in-laws.

In addition to social positions within the household, participants of the host community research group mentioned that these social positions also exist in the workforce. Colinda pointed out that the gender split is still very present, especially in the under skilled workforce. She mentioned that women are more commonly found in hospitality roles, while men are typically seen fixing fences, working on the farm, and checking vehicles. But, as we move towards the skilled workforce, the gender divide becomes less pronounced. However, there is an important side note, as women working in these highly skilled roles are sometimes viewed as a threat and are unable to earn more than men according to the volunteers Sara and Sem. Host community resident Essie added that women often have to work harder to reach the same level as men, even if they have the same qualifications.

However, these traditional gender roles were not always perceived as negative. Key informant Lisa mentioned that just because men spend their days at work doesn't mean they don't value their family. She believes that men and women are naturally wired differently, and she takes pleasure in fulfilling her tasks as a woman. Essie shares the same sentiment.

*Host community resident Essie: 'And generally, I believe that females should always be able to stand on their own feet. But I also feel that when I am home, I'm going to want to be the female of the house. I don't want the guy's role of building and that kind of stuff, but more the feminine and maternal side of things. So, I think when it comes to politics and employment I am all for it, but when it comes to household I'd like to be the female in the house'*

One final topic that was discussed regarding social issues was domestic violence. Volunteers Sara and Sem expressed their shock at how often children were being physically abused and how casually it was being treated. Key informants Lisa and Tamar also spoke about the high rate of gender-based violence. However, as Lisa further explained, women do come together in women's groups to discuss these issues and support each other.

### *Worldview*

Worldviews are the unique perspectives through which individuals interpret situations and the world around them. Understanding someone's worldview is crucial for understanding their values and beliefs (Parashar et al., 2021). To continue the aforementioned traditional perspectives, in all 3 groups the participants also frequently mentioned that worldviews of the host communities in other aspects were still very traditional. According to the residents of the host community Essie and Sisse, this is because they are still deeply rooted in culture and heavily influenced by conservative religious beliefs. Examples of these traditional and conservative worldviews included the idea that certain clothing choices should be more modest, as well as no sex before marriage and avoiding discussions on taboo topics such as sexual health, teenage pregnancy, or issues concerning girls. Key informant Josephine and volunteer Sem explained that there is still a great deal of ignorance surrounding these topics. However, when attempts were made to discuss them, teachers refused to educate about safe sex, condoms, or contraceptive pills, because they felt like it was wrong because of their religion.

But these traditional worldviews are slowly changing. As host community residents Sisse and Colinda noted, more and more women are getting stronger careers. More female staff members get higher manager positions and are starting to think more about their rights, their right to work and earn their own income.

*Host community resident Sisse: 'I view gender identity as a spectrum rather than a binary concept. Whereas the society impose certain norms and expectations regarding gender. I believe in challenging both stereotypes and promoting more inclusive and accepting and being in an acceptive environment. I am committed into promoting positive change and breaking down barriers that are on individuals gender identity.'*

Another topic that was mentioned by the volunteers was the perspectives surrounding the LGBTQ+ community, which according to the participants were also linked to religious beliefs. Volunteer Sem mentioned that when he went to Uganda, he took out his earring to prevent misconceptions about this. When he showed photos of himself with a male friend of him, he was often asked if he was attracted to men. He indicated that it is seen as something very wrong. Volunteers Amy and Sara could also confirm this, as they mentioned that there were also bills being drafted in which homosexuality would be made punishable by law. In the interviews with

the volunteers, it became apparent that they valued the importance of providing equal opportunities for women and prioritizing gender equality. For example, volunteer Sem mentioned the increasing number of women in the medical field as a positive development, while volunteer Ivy appreciated the accessibility of abortion services in the Netherlands and the support available. The topic of LGBTQ+ rights was also frequently discussed, with participants emphasizing the significance of freedom to express oneself and voice their opinions.

*Volunteer Sara: 'I am very grateful that in addition to freedom of speech, we also realize that it does not have to be the standard man-woman type that you are attracted to.'*

One of the main reasons for having this worldview according to the volunteers, had to do with the environment in which you were raised. Volunteer Sem, for example, mentioned that he has always had strong and powerful female figures in his life, which has led him to have a great respect for women and not feel intimidated by them, causing him to have progressive thoughts on these topics.

Another worldview discussed by the participants in all 3 groups was the perspective they have on the relationship between men and women. Key informant Lisa explained that men and women cannot be friends. So, if you were really friendly with somebody, they will think that you mean more with this. Men also don't talk to women directly, but they approach the guy that is with her. And as volunteer Ivy and host community resident Sisse mentioned is the topic of polygamy. Where the men can have as many wives as he wants, and the raising of the children is mostly the responsibility of the women, also when the man decides to leave.

*Host community resident Sisse: 'A men can have as many wives as he can. That is culture to us, whenever we tell volunteers that, some of them will be shocked like is this real?'*

Finally, the last worldview, has to do with the philosophy of Ubuntu and taking care of each other. Volunteer Marit told she found it touching that everybody was so involved with each other, looking out for on another and always willing to help someone. Key informant Lisa explained that this had to do with the underlying cultural value of Ubuntu, where culturally tolerance, modesty and the feeling of community are important.

## 6.2 Interface

The previously discussed lifeworlds intersect together at the interface. The second sub-question is related to this interaction and goes as follows: How do the different lifeworlds meet at the interface between volunteers and host community residents? According to Long (2001) the interfaces are thus shaped by similar, intersecting, or differing lifeworlds of the actors and are constituted by multiple elements. Using this interface analysis can help clarify the social types and sources present in such situations and to identify the means of reproducing or transforming them, so it can help to understand social transformations better (Long, 1999). The examination of the dynamics and characteristics of this interface can help into understanding how the interaction can consciously or unconsciously influence each other's ideas and perspectives. The

following three interface topics will be elaborated upon: relationship and interaction, new experiences, and the importance of context, in order to paint a picture of what occurred at the interface and how the different lifeworlds came together.

### 6.2.1 Relationship and interaction

The first topic on the interface will further explore the relationship and interaction that volunteers and the host community had with each other during the interface.

An important theme that often emerged in the interviews with the volunteers was the feeling of being at home and the many friendships that were formed during their time together. The volunteers frequently emphasized that they always felt very welcome and comfortable. Despite being far from home, they felt very much at home. Respectful, kind, and helpful were the words commonly used to describe the host community and the interactions with them. Additionally, some participants even mentioned that they had formed lasting friendships and remained in contact with them.

*Volunteer Suus: 'We all had respect for each other, listened well to each other, and as a result, we could have a lot of fun together.'*

When zooming in on interactions in terms of gender, differences between the volunteers and host community emerged. Especially in how men and women relate to each other, with men always being more dominant, resulting in women having less to say. For example, key informant Lisa mentioned that in many African countries, men and women cannot be friends as there will always be more expectations. This is why the locals would always talk to the male volunteer out of respect. This is something volunteer Sem's story can confirm, as he noted that when he was with his female fellow volunteers, locals would always approach him. When he was not around, the female volunteers would often be harassed by men, but this did not happen when he was present. Volunteer Sara can also confirm this, as she had an unpleasant experience on the bus when she was alone, with men sitting next to her harassing and touching her.

*Host community resident Sisse: 'A man is always dominant if I could put it like that.'*

However, all 3 groups mentioned that within the volunteer projects themselves, there was often no hierarchy, with men and women being given the same tasks and sometimes even wearing the same unisex uniforms. All groups told me that there was a lot of respect for everyone and that no one was marginalized based on age, gender, or race. The volunteers did mention, however, that certain tasks were sometimes more suitable for men because they required a lot of strength, so it would be less efficient if a woman were to do it with her strength. But both volunteer Ivy and host community resident Essie also mentioned that women sometimes did not agree with this and indicated that they could do it themselves.

*Key informant Tamar: 'In our volunteer program we include everyone in the same way, does not matter what gender, age, or country. They are put into groups and will help with whatever they can.'*

Only volunteer Sara mentioned that in the initial period of her internship at the hospital, she was mainly assigned to cleaning tasks because the women working at the hospital were also doing this. After a while, she asked why she had to do this and the answer she got was that it was a task for a woman. Then she spoke up, stating that she had come as a nurse and not as a cleaner. However, not all volunteers were speaking up if they did not agree with something. Many volunteers admitted that when it came to a cultural difference that went against their own values and beliefs, they did not say anything about it. The volunteers mentioned that they felt it was not their place to speak up about it. Sometimes, the volunteers had the urge to say something, but then realized they were guests and did not want to come across as judgmental or disrespectful. Additionally, some volunteers mentioned that they saw no point in speaking up, as they did not believe they could change anything.

*Volunteer Dylan: 'I don't rather like to get myself and my views tangled in in what they are thinking. There is nothing less interesting to me than to try and convince somebody that is very near and dear to their heart, like some norm or value. What my position is, I couldn't care less, I would like people to do their own thing and I will do the same.'*

*Key informant Josephine: 'But I am a foreigner, not from here so I have to learn about the culture before I can like step on anyone's toes. Because I have to understand why that is the norm.'*

### 6.2.2 New experiences

These differences in cultures and ideas on certain topics could result in new experiences for every participant. First, this part will delve deeper into the new experiences of the volunteers through their interactions with the host community. Then, it will further explore the new experiences for the host community through the interactions they have had with the volunteers.

*Host community resident Charlotte: 'It is different to them, so they are trying to embrace the culture but obviously you are going to have your own thoughts.'*

A new experience that many volunteers talked about was the strong sense of community they felt in the villages. The volunteers shared that the sense of connection with the entire community was very strong, as they do everything together and take care of each other. Volunteer Marit mentioned that the house where she stayed at didn't really have doors, people lived together and trusted each other. She admitted that this was not something she was used to coming from the Netherlands, where individualism plays a major role and people do not trust each other and where every door needs to be locked. The volunteers also mentioned that they had to get used to the different sense of time management, as in many African cultures they were not used to planning and were always late. And finally, many of the new experiences of the volunteers were related to the traditional and conservative values that many cultures in Africa still follow. Examples were given regarding the LGBTQ+ community, with the volunteers shocked by the strict laws and regulations surrounding it. And even in the small things traditional roles were evident, as volunteer Ellen shared how she was judged for her husband wearing a wrinkled shirt at the project, as she was expected to have ironed it.

The participants of the host community also shared some of their new experiences through the interactions they have had with many volunteers. They initially expressed that it was an exciting and rewarding experience to be able to interact with a diverse group of international volunteers. Host community resident Essie mentioned that with all the different personalities, every day was different, and she always looked forward to what the day would bring. Host community resident Sisse said that through exposure to so many new cultures and people, he learned a lot and reflected on his own culture.

*Host community resident Sisse: 'It is this rewarding experience, because it is like me traveling to their countries while I stay here in eSwatini, cause I get to learn about their culture and how they think about you know other stuff and how actually do things back home. And to be honest with you I am grateful that I am seeing the other side about my culture. If maybe I was not exposed to volunteers maybe the way I think it would not be the same as now.'*

Furthermore, the participants of the host community research group mentioned that they also had some prejudices about the volunteers. They saw them as wealthy white Westerners who did not have to work hard. However, through interacting with the volunteers and working together, they saw that this was not always the case. Key informant Lisa mentioned that when people from the host community saw people from the other side of the world picking up a shovel and working alongside them, they felt a sense of equality. Additionally, when it came to gender roles, the host community residents saw new things like male volunteers washing dishes and female volunteers taking on roles as doctors.

*Host community resident Charlotte: 'That is such a woman's job. You can see the way they look at them when they for example help to wash dishes for instance. You can see especially the lady who leads it almost gets uncomfortable. Because on a day-to-day basis she would never have a male wash dishes.'*

This was maybe sometimes a bit unusual to them but also gave a new perspective on how things could also run differently in a society. Key informant Josephine gave the example of the kids having a bit of a role model that can inspire them. She explained that sometimes the worlds of the kids can be so small because they don't have the same opportunities and only see what is immediately around them. But she hopes that by seeing and hearing the volunteers it would inspire them to have dreams and realize them. Host community resident Colinda also gave an example that the local work force who meet the volunteers and work with them see how empowered Western women are. She explained that especially for the women staff who do the housekeeping it is an eye-opening experience.

*Host community resident Colinda: 'They were raised in cultures where men are dominant. But with the volunteers they see it does not need to be like that, where as long as you mutually respect each other, that women can have their power.'*

### 6.2.3 Importance of context

*Key informant Josephine: 'I think for every community, culture or country it is different.'*

An important point that was frequently mentioned in the interviews with all 3 groups was the importance of considering the different contexts in which the interactions took place. These differences in context influenced how certain interactions occurred. The five contextual topics that were raised were the type of project a volunteer was involved in, the amount of time a volunteer spent doing volunteer work, the personality of an individual, familiarity with the volunteers and other cultures, and finally, the difference between the location or place of the interaction.

The first contextual topic that the volunteers mentioned was that it mattered in which type of project a volunteer was involved. As volunteer projects can vary from social projects to wildlife projects. The volunteers said that in both types of projects, you will be in contact with the host population, but the level of interaction may differ. Working in schools or hospitals, for example, will allow you to have more contact with the host community but with wildlife projects this would be less. For example, volunteers Ellen, Dylan, and Marit mentioned that because they volunteered on projects related to animals and conservation, they had little interaction with the residents of the host community. Whereas volunteers Sem and Sara, who helped in hospitals, or Amy, who taught classes, had more interactions with the residents of the host community.

The second contextual topic mentioned by the key informants and residents of the host community was that it mattered how long time a volunteer was doing volunteering work. Host community resident Charlotte mentioned that volunteers who remained longer at the volunteer project had built better relationships and thus felt more comfortable opening up to ask difficult questions about culture, family, and other topics. This is also because there is simply more time to discuss aspects of their world, traditions, and beliefs. While Charlotte spoke in terms of months, key informant Lisa brought up the perspective of years. She believed that volunteers do not stay long enough to internalize certain cultural aspects, stating that it takes years of living there to truly understand and embody them.

The third contextual topic that the participants addressed was that individuality of someone's personality, which varies from person to person. According to host community resident Charlotte and volunteer Sem, it depended on how open-minded and curious someone is. The more someone possesses these qualities, the more open they are to have deep connections and learning opportunities.

The fourth contextual topic that was frequently mentioned by all 3 groups in the interviews was that the residents of host community that interacted more often with volunteers also became more accustomed to them, and even created an international culture within the projects themselves.

*Volunteer Dylan: 'But also you are there with Danish, Dutch, British, Americans whatever so you also have this kind of international culture in itself that is developing there.'*

The participants said that this could lead to the emergence of an international bubble within the volunteer projects, as there were proportionally many people from all over the world, sometimes even more Western volunteers than staff members. According to volunteer Ellen

and key informant Tamar, this made the projects not a true representation of the country. Due to the large number of international volunteers, there also became a sense of familiarity within the host community, who interacted frequently with the volunteers. Tamar pointed out that the host community residents were more accepting of volunteers because they have become accustomed to them, but they would not accept the same behavior from someone within their own community. This topic was brought up in 7 interviews, highlighting their awareness many of having their interactions with a specific group within the host community.

*Volunteer Nica: 'I think that there is a very clear difference in Africa between people who are used to interacting with other volunteers. They treat people differently than the local residents who are not used to that.'*

Finally, the residents of the host community mentioned that the location where the interaction took place also mattered. Each country in Africa has its own culture, with host community resident Sisse for example pointing out that Swaziland is one of the countries in Africa that is the most deeply rooted in culture. However, not only are there differences between countries, but also within a country. Host community resident Colinda mentioned that there are multiple tribal cultures, with some being more traditional than others. And some volunteers also noted that the location, whether in the countryside or in the city, also made a difference.

### 6.3 Changing perspectives

The following section will look at how the interfaces have led to a change in the course of action or way of thinking (Parashar et al., 2021). Which has to do with the sub-question number three: How are gender perspectives changing as a result of the interaction between the two different life worlds?

#### 6.3.1 Learning moments volunteers

When the volunteers discussed their learning moments from their period of volunteering, they initially mentioned having learned a lot of practical and knowledge-related things. However, they also gained a better understanding of how the host communities live. They learned about different communities and cultural groups and began to understand how and why things are done within these communities. They also gained insight into different values and traditions, and observed the differences in how things are done. Volunteers Paula and Nica explained that this helped breaking down certain stereotypes, showing that not everyone in Africa is poor and miserable.

Furthermore, the volunteers were inspired by the way people in the host communities lived their lives. As mentioned before, involvement, caring, and togetherness are highly valued in the lifeworlds of these communities. The volunteers found it very enlightening to experience this firsthand. Volunteer Sara mentioned how beautiful it was to see how important family is, and how family is 24/7 present in the hospital and helping with the care. Key informant Lisa shared that the saying 'it takes a village to raise a child' is true there. Volunteer Ivy mentioned learning to take a step back, take things slower, and not stress so much. That it is about observing and noticing instead of being quick to criticize. In short, the volunteers were able

learn a bit of the philosophy of ubuntu, learning how to be more humane, and the importance of slowing down to truly appreciate life.

However, in addition to learning from the other culture, the volunteers also expressed a feeling of gratitude upon returning home. They appreciated how fortunate they are in the Netherlands and the privilege of living there, especially as women. They mentioned the rights and opportunities available to women in the Netherlands. For example, volunteer Ivy realized how well-regulated abortion services are in the country, along with the multiple organizations providing support. She also mentioned the freedom that individuals have in terms of sexuality and self-expression within the LGBTQ+ community. Volunteer Sem acknowledged that the Netherlands is far from perfect, as issues like homophobia and misogyny still exist, but that he is grateful for the society he gets to be a part of compared to the challenges faced by the host communities.

*Volunteer Ellen: 'Yes, you know you should always respect everything, but I am glad that I do not have it that way myself. I wouldn't want it like that myself.'*

### 6.3.2 Learning moments host community

When discussing the learning moments with the participants of the host community they also mentioned that when talking with the volunteers about their culture and ways of doing they also gained a better understanding on how things go differently in other parts of the world. Key informant Josephine gave the example that a lot of the time the elderly from the host community have these preconceived ideas on what they think foreigners do at home or that they believe they all just have loads of money or were given houses. But by interacting with the volunteers and asking them questions they get a better understanding of how different places in the world are. Similarly on the topics on gender. By interacting and spending time with volunteers who have different ideas and values regarding gender, the host community sees that there are alternative ways for society to function in this area. Host community resident Colinda explained that they see how empowered Western women are and that because of this the local staff, men and women, have realized that women can have a lot more power than they ever thought they could have.

Men:

*Host community resident Colinda: 'If that man I told you about was still living in that tribal village he would still view women is beneath him, absolutely. But because he is exposed to international volunteers and international ways of thinking, his view changed. The local work force who normally see men up here and women down there don't see it that way anymore.'*

And women:

*Host community resident Colinda: 'And they've become more confident, and they've become more outspoken because of it. And they talk to men now in a more dominant way than they ever did before, knowing that they also have rights, because they see it from the Western world that the men and women are on the same level, and they see this every day. And they realize like hey this is how it can be, we can be equal, gender does not have to play a role.'*

Host community resident Essie also added that she started to see this equality as the norm, and that there was nothing men could do that she couldn't. And lastly host community resident Sisse explained that he was very grateful for gaining new perspective and questioning how things are done in his culture. He gave the example of polygamy, in which the volunteers raised their points on the spread of diseases. These were the kind of insights and perspectives that he believed could be very helpful. So Sisse was very grateful for being exposed to many volunteers and cultures through which he learned different sides about his culture which transformed him into the person that he is today.

But with this being said, Sisse also pointed out that not every value or critical point from the volunteers would fit his culture. He said he did not want volunteers to impose their own view to his culture, but that his community could learn from the volunteers while not losing their identity. It is about deciding what to implement and then combining it with your own culture. Key informants Tamar and Lisa shared a similar viewpoint, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a critical perspective on influences from the Western world. They said that Europeans tend to push their way of doing onto others and feel like that is the right way to do it, but maybe that way does not fit with another culture. Which is why it is important for society to not just adapt anything that has been done somewhere else, but to stay critical.

*Key informant Lisa: 'Once as the volunteer has taken the time to humble themselves and build the relationship. They will listen and then will pick and choose what works, that I think has never changed. The underlying cultural value is tolerance, so we are open to every viewpoint. And then we get to do with it as we see fit.'*

### 6.3.3 Times are changing

There are still inequalities between men and women, but the participants of all 3 groups did mention that times are slowly changing. For example, the participants of the host community mentioned that women are beginning to take on higher positions in the workforce more often. Host community resident Essie shared that when she started as a coordinator, she was the only woman in a group of men, but now she has many female colleagues. Host community resident Colinda also noted that more women in her surroundings are becoming strong career women, and they are no longer expected to only stay at home. She mentioned that this was very different from her upbringing in Namibia, where women were expected to stay home for the children while men were the breadwinners. Key informant Tamar agrees with this, but also stated that it is still more difficult for women to reach those positions.

*Key informant Tamar: 'For example when I started, I was told that my work can only be done by an older man. And now I am doing all that work together with our vet which is also a female. It shows and proves to people that things are able to change. But I do think women still earn way less money than men. It is also quite a struggle to prove yourself that you can do it, but it became better.'*

Volunteer Sem noted during his exchange with AIESEC in Uganda that the national board consisted entirely of women. He found this to be a positive sign, given AIESEC's importance as a large organization in Uganda. He viewed it as a positive trend, one that he had not seen

happening 20 years ago. Small changes like this are happening, as volunteer Amy shared that more girls were now allowed to play football on her project, whereas it was previously not accepted. These changes may not happen overnight, but as people become more open-minded, more possibilities emerge, no matter how small. Key informant Josephine explained that as the older generation becomes more open-minded, it allows younger people to be more inquisitive and kind of free. As a founder, she sees more girls attending her projects every day.

*Key informant Josephine: 'Girls are turning up every day, they are bringing their friends, parents are allowing them to come which means they agree to the fact that girls can now do those things and don't need to come home and do chores of which parents can do themselves or someone else in the house. Girls are being allowed to play sports, girls are being allowed to go to school and continue to stay in school until they are 16/17/18. It is easier for the boys just of the way the system works here. But we will get there, slowly.'*

And this is where the volunteers are playing a role, she thinks that when the older generation sees the kids having conversations with the volunteers, they could see that it is not so bad to talk about it. Josephine further explained seeing a ripple effect. More parents get a better understanding because they see the positive benefits and the impact that it is having on some of their kids, which is why more, and younger girls are allowed to come. She hopes that this will finally snowball into something bigger, where these girls eventually become parents and that they will remember the fact that it felt good when her mom was open with her and let her play sports, so that she is going to do that with her kids as well. So that with starting with this generation today it will have an impact on a bigger scale for the generation after them. Host community residents Colinda and Charlotte also talked about this generation effect, that hopefully the changes will be passed on to the next generation so that more women are getting better rights and opportunities.

*Host community resident Charlotte: 'I do feel that maybe in ten fifteen years when the kids have grown up and have children the changes will happen. I already see that the children that used to be young are having children and I can see the change in the children because their parents are more educated and open minded.'*

So, values and perspectives on gender are relaxing over time, but it goes slowly. Host community resident Sisse even thinks that it might take some decades until full equality is reached in his country Swaziland. He said that it is something that needs more explanation, not only from volunteers but also from the locals when they engage with the community to try and explain why everyone should be treated equally. It is not as easy with a volunteer saying please treat everyone equally then that will happen. It takes time and engagement from the inside of the community.

#### 6.3.4 Something global

As a side note, some participants in all 3 groups also considered it important to mention that these inequalities and traditional values are not only present in the Global South, but still occur to a certain extent worldwide. Key informant Paula shared that even in the Global North, society

is predominantly made for white men. She said that there is a perception that women in African countries are greatly disadvantaged, but even in a country like the Netherlands, salaries are not equal and most household chores still fall on women.

*Key informant Paula: 'I think the problem is there. But still, I do not think it does not differ so much from the West, it's just emphasized much more.'*

Additionally, host community resident Colinda believed that the empowerment of women is more of a global trend rather than a divide between the Global North and Global South. She sees it as a current global shift where women's rights are becoming increasingly important worldwide. And that this shift is also hitting Africa, even though she believes that Africa always tends to be a bit slower keeping up with global trends.

### 6.3.5 Having open conversations

The final thing that came up during the conversations with the participants in all 3 groups was the importance of having open conversations with compassion and understanding. They said that in gatherings of different lifeworlds and cultures, it was essential that discussions take place respectfully and that people listen carefully. Key informant Josephine emphasized the importance of recognizing and respecting differences in upbringing and cultural practices. She stressed the need for both parties to approach conversations with empathy and openness in order to learn from each other. Similarly, host community resident Charlotte highlighted that by openly discussing one's culture and perspectives, a deeper understanding can be achieved, leading to mutual respect and potential learning opportunities. Key informant Paula, who has lived in Ghana for over 15 years, shared experiences of meaningful dialogues on this topic, noting that successful communication requires effort from both sides and expressing concern about the tendency for directness and quick judgments in Dutch culture. It is the approach to these dialogues that ultimately shapes their outcome.

*Host community resident Sisse: 'So I think our community and the volunteers as well, if we could have like a proper conversation in which we leave racism aside, we leave gender inequality aside, just to have a proper conversation in which you come with an open eye and ear. In which you hear both sides and are not quick to judge.'*

The outcome of these conversations can lead to understanding and learning from each other. According to key informant Tamar, it's okay that things are done differently in various parts of the world, but what's important is to create mutual understanding.

*Key informant Tamar: 'I think it is a very important skill, to be able to understand that other cultures do things different and there is no better or worse way just a different way.'*

## 7 Discussion

This chapter will begin by discussing the key findings of the study, answering the sub-questions and main research question while linking them to the theory. Next, the relevance of these findings for academic and societal contributions will be examined, followed by recommendations for future research. And finally, a reflection on the research process and any limitations encountered will conclude the chapter.

### 7.1 Findings

This thesis started from the observation that there is a gap in academic literature in understanding potential changing attitudes through intercultural exchange. Therefore, this thesis set out to understand how encounters between volunteer tourists and host community residents mutually influence their perspectives on gender. The data was collected based on 3 sub-questions and 1 main research question. The key findings from these questions will be explained below.

*Sub-question 1) What gender-related differences are there in the lifeworlds of the volunteer and the host community, in how they see their own gender identity, which gendered values they hold, and what gender power relations look like in their society.*

This first sub-question was to create a better understanding of the two different life worlds of the volunteer and the host community. To do so, I used the operationalization of the three components of 'lifeworlds' as proposed by Parashar et al (2021). The following discussion will delve into the ways in which these three components - individual characteristics, power relations in society, and worldview - differed between the volunteers and the host community. I have reconstructed these lifeworlds by examining how both parties viewed their own lifeworld in relation to the other.

The first component was the individual characteristics. This dimension had to do with someone's identity and how they perceive and act in various situations (Parashar et al., 2021). What mainly emerged in the discussions was the comparison between Western and African mentalities. The Western mentality emphasizes planning, directness, and individualism, while the African mentality prioritizes a caring community spirit, resourcefulness, resilience, and politeness. What stood out was that these traits were often attributed to the other with a sense of admiration. Lastly, the topic of religion was frequently addressed. It became clear that the volunteers did not adhere strongly to any religion, but that religion did play a significant role in the lives of the host community residents. Both the key informants, volunteers, and host community residents emphasized that religion plays an important role in African societies and should be approached cautiously and respectfully.

The second component was the power relations in society. This dimension revolved around how individuals perceive their position in relation to others, particularly in terms of gendered power dynamics (Parashar et al., 2021). When the volunteers talked about the power relations in their own Dutch society, they noted that traditional gender roles, such as women staying at home to cook, were no longer seen as the norm. Many viewed this shift positively, seeing this as a progress towards gender equality. However, they also recognized that women were still marginalized in Dutch society, though steps were being taken to address this

inequality. On the other hand, when discussing power dynamics in the African societies where they volunteered, the volunteers observed a more traditional and conservative structure where men were typically seen as superior to women. The key informants and community members did agree with this that there were still certain social positions in the household and workforce. Interestingly, these traditional divisions were not always seen as something negative, with some viewing them as a right balance between men and women.

The third and last component was about the worldview which was about the unique perspectives through which individuals interpret situations and the world around them. Understanding someone's worldview was crucial for understanding their values and beliefs (Parashar et al., 2021). During the description of the worldviews of the host communities, all three interviewed groups mentioned aspects related to the Ubuntu philosophy. This philosophy emphasizes the sense of togetherness and community, which was seen as a positive aspect by all participants. Additionally, when discussing the worldviews of the host communities, the traditional aspect also emerged. This included the belief that men and women could not be friends, as well as the strict rules surrounding taboo topics and LGBTQ+ rights. The volunteers expressed disagreement with these beliefs and stated that they were more progressive and open-minded when it came to discussing taboo topics and LGBTQ+ rights.

In short, the gender-related differences in lifeworlds mainly revolved around the different ideas about the roles of men and women in society. These differences in ideas were often rooted in varying religious beliefs, which either supported a more traditional or a more progressive view on the positions of men and women in society.

*Sub-question 2) How do the different lifeworlds meet at the interface between volunteers and host community residents?*

The second sub-question was about how these different lifeworlds met and were reshaped at the interface between the volunteers and host community residents. Initially, all participants emphasized that they always experienced the interaction with the other group as respectful and positive. But when zooming in on the interactions in terms of gender, differences between the volunteers and host community emerged. Especially in how men and women relate to each other, with males being more dominant and being able to say and do what he wants in the host communities. This also resulted in the fact that the males were always the ones that were approached on the street instead of the female.

The differences in lifeworlds also led to new experiences for every participant. The volunteers mostly mentioned new experiences that related to the sense of community and the traditional values that many cultures in Africa still follow. On the other hand, members of the host community primarily found new experiences in understanding how volunteers do things back in their home countries and seeing male volunteers doing female-related work. As a result, they gained a fresh and critical perspective on how things can be done in a different way.

Finally, the importance of context in the interaction was highlighted. It was pointed out that the type of volunteer project the volunteer was involved in mattered. For example, working on social projects like in schools or hospitals allowed for more contact between the groups, while wildlife projects had less interactions. Additionally, the time a volunteer spent on a project was important. Having simply more time allowed for more discussion and time to build a better relationship, leading to more comfort in opening up. It was also mentioned that a

person's personality played a role, as someone who was more open-minded and curious got deeper connections and more learning opportunities. The context of an international culture within the projects themselves was also brought up. When there were many international volunteers on a project, the contacts were more with other volunteers than with the community. And host community members often accepted more from the volunteers because they became accustomed to them. Lastly, the location of the interaction mattered. For example, each country in Africa has its own culture, but also within each country there are multiple cultures, so that influenced the interaction as well.

In short, the differences between lifeworlds have led to new experiences for each participant, as interacting with someone with different gender views brought different insights and new moments. However, the context of the interaction was found to have a significant impact on the experiences.

*Sub-question 3) How are gender perspectives changing as a result of the interaction between the two different life worlds?*

The third and last sub-question was about the result of this interface and how this changed the gender perspectives of the volunteer and of the host community.

Looking at the volunteers, it became clear that their perspectives on gender had not changed as a result of the interaction, but rather had hardened. This was because their interactions with the host community led to an increased appreciation for the rules and norms surrounding gender back in their own country. Despite this, they did learn other valuable lessons. For example, they learned practical skills, gained insights into different values and traditions, and discovered how things are done in various cultures. Additionally, they were inspired by the strong sense of community found in African cultures. They were able to learn about the philosophy of Ubuntu, learning how to be more humane, and the importance of slowing down to truly appreciate life.

When looking at the host community residents, it became clear that their perspectives on gender were slowly changing due to their interaction with the volunteers. Their perspectives on gender became more relaxed as they gained new insights from the volunteers on alternative ways of how a society could also function. This served as inspiration for them to come up with different ideas on how to approach things differently in their community. However, the participants from the host community also mentioned that they remained critical on how and which specific aspects they would incorporate into their own lives. They also noted that times were already changing slowly, with more opportunities being accepted for girls and women. They emphasized the generational effect, hoping that these changes would be passed on to the next generation so that more women would have access to better rights and opportunities.

Finally, it was mentioned as a side note that the changes in perspectives were not only influenced by the interaction with volunteers, but also by global trends regarding the empowerment of women. It was also emphasized that it is okay for certain issues to be different in various parts of the world, but that it remained important to continue having open conversations in order to create mutual understanding and learn from each other.

In short, the gender perspectives of the volunteers did not change but instead became more hardened as a result of the interaction. However, the gender perspectives of the host community were slowly starting to change and became more relaxed due to the interaction.

And finally, the answering of the main research question: *How do encounters between volunteer tourists and host community residents mutually influence their perspectives on gender?*

The research found that the attitudes of volunteers towards gender remained unchanged or even became more hardened after interacting with the host community. In contrast, the residents of the host community showed signs of slowly shifting their views on gender due to their interactions with volunteers. In order to get a deeper understanding on this, I will make use of the concepts of neocolonialism and cosmopolitanism, as explained in the theoretical framework.

The concept of neocolonialism refers to certain colonial power structures that continue to play a role to this day. It involves the power relationship between the volunteer and the host community, in which there are still underlying ideas that the host community has something to learn from the volunteer. This results in a one-sided learning process where the volunteer is seen as the 'teacher', regardless of their experience (Raymond & Hall, 2008). These neocolonial ideas were subtly evident in the discussions with the participants about gender. It became clear that the volunteers did not believe they could learn anything from the host community in this area, but rather thought that the host community could learn from them. They often labeled the ideas about gender in the host community as conservative, while viewing their own ideas as progressive and better. However, the opposite was true for the host community residents, as they did indicate that they had learned from the interaction with the volunteers on the subjects of gender. Although they stated that they would not blindly adopt all ideas, but would remain critical, they did mention that they used certain perspectives as inspiration to come up with different ideas on how to address things differently in their own communities. Therefore, the ideas of the host community residents on gender became more relaxed. In this aspect of gender learning, certain elements of neocolonialism were still subtly present in the assumptions of both parties. As there was no mutual learning taking place, but rather the host community members learning from the volunteers.

Interestingly enough, while gender perspectives only change to a certain extent and in one direction in interactions, this is different on topics not related to gender. Both groups for example, expressed learning practical matters and cultural differences from each other. They learned about social norms and other ways of living from each other. The volunteers learned to live in the moment, having a sense of community, and to be happy with less from the host community. In return, the host community residents learned about time management and making plans from the volunteers. It became clear that, outside of gender discussions, there was mutual learning present that could be considered as cosmopolitanism which emphasizes a worldview that involves mutual learning and understanding from one another (Crossley, 2019).

## 7.2 Relevance of the findings

### 7.2.1 Societal relevance

As for the societal relevance this research contributes to individuals' understanding of the gender exchange topic and how their subjectivities on this are shaped by everyday interactions. And to encourage individuals currently involved or interested in volunteer tourism to critically assess and reflect on their roles in these experiences, and to continue having open conversations

with others around them. I hope that these conversations will also lead to a greater awareness of the still potentially neocolonial nature of the encounters that take place. While this may not always be immediately apparent, it is important to acknowledge and address the fact that it continues to impact interactions.

Furthermore, previous research has argued that if volunteer tourism programs are not carefully managed, they may lead to cross-cultural misunderstandings and reinforce cultural stereotypes (Raymond & Hall, 2008). Therefore, proactive measures must be taken beforehand to address these issues. It is essential for volunteers to receive proper preparation and education on the potential cultural differences and the inherent risk of neo-colonialism in such interactions. In the interviews, the host community residents and key informants indicated that it was okay for volunteers to not always agree with how things were going at the host community, but that it was important how this was communicated. The sending organization can play a significant role in this process, by informing and preparing the volunteers beforehand for situations that may challenge their values and principles, and how to handle this respectfully. The recommendation would be to include gender related themes and possible situations in the preparation program and provide volunteers with tools for self-reflection during such experiences. By being well-prepared and informed before joining the program, volunteers will have a better idea of what to expect, leading to increased satisfaction (Coghlan, 2005). This preparation also benefits the host communities, as they will receive volunteers who are better equipped and prepared, enhancing their overall experience as well.

Additionally, I hope that this research contributes to empowering host communities to make better decisions about whether and how to participate in volunteer projects. It is important for them to be aware of the neocolonial nature of these encounters and to be more critical in their approach. An important takeaway mentioned by host community participants is the importance of being open to what the volunteers have to say, but to also maintain a critical perspective on this. Additionally, it would be advisable for local partner organizations to appoint a designated person whom both parties can approach in case of any issues that arise, for open discussion. This trust person can act as a mediator for safe and open dialogues. The importance of these open conversations to create understanding was a recurring theme in the interviews.

Finally, I hope that this research has also demonstrated that many wonderful things can stem from the intercultural interactions between volunteers and host community members. Both parties expressed having learned a lot from each other and dispelled stereotypes because of their interaction.

### 7.2.2 Scientific relevance

This research contributes to the academic understanding of the role of gender in volunteer tourism. It adds to the scholarly conversation by helping to fill in 3 identified gaps in the literature. The first gap found in the literature was the call to include the host community's perspective more, because this side is often overlooked (Almela & Calvet, 2021; Dilette et al., 2016; Mostafanezhad, 2015; McGehee & Wearing, 2013). There is limited literature on the host community perceptions and the impact that the volunteer exchanges had on those perceptions. This study addressed this gap by including the host community perspectives. The findings showed that residents of the host community felt that having an external perspective contributed

to a change in their views on gender. This research has contributed to filling this research gap. And, new insights have been gained in these interviews, providing a solid foundation for future research. This will be further discussed in section 7.3, recommendations for further research.

The second gap found in the literature was on the nexus between voluntourism and gender. Bandyopadhyay and Patil (2017) and Almela and Calvet (2021) called for more additional critical research on gender and voluntourism because of the growing interest on these two subjects separately and the feminization of the sector. But most research that was done on this nexus focused on the gendered experiences of the volunteers and how this influenced their voluntary work (Kipp et al., 2020; Cadesky et al., 2019). Less attention was given to the ways in which voluntourism can also be transformative for both parties in terms of how they view gender. In this research it stood out especially that only the residents of the host community experienced changes in perspective due to the interaction, while the volunteers did not experience any changes in perspective but rather had their existing beliefs confirmed.

Finally, the literature discussion showed that the focus of the encounters was on increasing mutual understanding and respect (McLennan, 2023; Grabowski et al., 2022). The emphasis was on learning to be mutual, so that this truly happens on both sides. The expectation was therefore that the cross-cultural encounter would lead to change on both sides, but it turned out that volunteers became more convinced of their worldviews, while only the host community residents underwent this change in perspectives. This is a striking finding as it shows that cross-cultural encounters do not necessarily result in change. It is important to note that this only happened on the topics surrounding gender, as mutual learning from each other did occur in other areas such as practical matters and cultural differences.

### 7.3 Recommendations for further research

This research has shown that changing ideas about one's own subjectivities and cross-cultural exchange are important elements of volunteer tourism that need further exploration, specifically from a gender perspective.

Upon reflection of the literature review and the use of the CGIAR Research Program model and interface analysis, several findings have emerged that may prove valuable for future research. The CGIAR model proved to be a valuable tool in identifying the various areas where gender changes can occur. In this study, the local level and interpersonal interactions within this model were specifically examined. But it became clear that isolating a specific level and theme was challenging due to the importance of context and the interconnectedness of levels and themes. In future research, it is essential to explore other levels and themes together to fully understand changes and allow for a more comprehensive analysis. Furthermore, the use of this model in its entirety in future research is beneficial as it provides a more systematic analysis of the role of different levels. The focus of this research has been primarily on the interface and mutual influences, with little attention given to how this relates to changes occurring within those lifeworlds and individual societies. It is possible that the changes I observed may not only result from interactions, but also from for example their increased knowledge of power dynamics in their society or structural changes at the national level. Therefore, it is important for future research to consider not only the interaction, but also other factors that may influence changes. On the other hand, is the objective of the CGIAR model different. The aim of this model is to map out the various changes that are taking place, but it is less useful in

understanding how these changes occur. In my experience, the interface analysis has helped in this regard. The interface analysis provided tools and structure to make the process of change measurable. It became clear which topics to inquire about and investigate in order to understand how interaction can lead to change. Therefore, I believe that these two models, when used in their entirety, can complement each other very well. Where the CGIAR model is good at mapping and clarifying what we need to consider regarding gender relations and how they are changing. Is the interface analysis helpful in understanding how these changes occur.

What also came out of this research was the significant impact the context had on the outcome of the interaction. For example, during the interviews I found that cultural patterns played a significant role in shaping how the volunteer and host community resident interacted with each other. This makes it difficult to make a definitive statement as it is influenced by many context-based factors. One way to address this limitation is to consider one of these context-dependent factors as a variable in future research and explore it further in depth. For example, it would be beneficial to investigate how the duration of a volunteer's stay affects their learning outcomes. Similarly, exploring the importance of location could provide insights into variations among volunteers from different countries or between urban and rural areas. This approach could enhance the understanding of the subject.

Finally, the research found that the generational effect may play a role in the slow changes in perspectives on gender. It was for example noticed that especially the younger generation was allowed to do more and more. Therefore, it could be an idea for future research to examine differences between generations, and perhaps also how attitudes are evolving within each generation and how this in turn influences new generations.

#### 7.4 Reflection and limitations

After many hours of literature research, brainstorming, and writing, the proposal was ready, and I could start with conducting the research. Although I wanted to conduct this research as solid as possible, each research comes with its limitations. As mentioned earlier in section 5.2 of the data collection process, there were certain ideal conditions for gathering the data that could not fully be met. I am aware that this has led to limitations in the research. These limitations that have impacted the quality of the data, will be further explained.

The biggest limitation in this research was the online barrier. It was not possible to speak with the participants face-to-face, which meant the interviews had to be conducted online. Conducting interviews online had the advantage of being time efficient and allowed me to connect with people from all over the world to discuss this topic. However, online interviews also had limitations as they missed out on the benefits of conducting interviews face-to-face. Babbie's (2011) research suggests that in-person interviews are more personal, allowing for the reading of body language and easier clarification of unclear questions. When discussing personal topics, it is more challenging to gather insightful information from a distance. Additionally, observations could have been made during fieldwork if I had been physically present during the interactions. Without being able to make observations, I had to rely on spoken accounts of the interactions, which may not be completely objective. This resulted in having only one source of data instead of multiple sources that could have potentially enhanced the internal validity of the study.

Another barrier that mainly played a role during the interviews with the residents of the host community and key informants was the language barrier. While the interviews with volunteers could be conducted in their native language, it was not possible when interviewing the host communities and key informants, as English was used during these interviews. Surprisingly, the English of the participants was good, possibly due to the country's historical colonial ties to England and their interactions with international volunteers in the past. However, since English was not the participants' mother tongue, there was a possibility that they may not have been able to express themselves as they would have liked, potentially influencing the data and causing bias.

It is also important to take the sampling into account. As mentioned earlier, the participants of the volunteer group were almost all Dutch, while those of the host community group were all residents from African countries. It turned out afterwards that this indeed distorted the results, as topics such as religion and characteristics like directness often emerged. This could have been very different if the research had been conducted with, for example, Spanish volunteers volunteering in Asia. Therefore, the findings may be only specifically applicable to this particular group. That is why it is suggested that future research takes different cultural groups into account. Another limitation in the sampling was the number of participants, particularly the representativeness of the host community. The number of participants in this research group was lower than expected, making it more challenging to generalize statements about this target group. Especially because the responses did not lead to saturation but instead kept providing new insights. This means that there are certainly interesting findings for potential further research, but due to the lack of saturation it is difficult to provide a generalizable answer.

One last limitation is that there is always the possibility that the participants provided socially desirable answers, did not share all their experiences, left things out, adjusted their answers, overlooked certain things or nuanced their answers. This may have caused some bias in the data. But by creating a safe environment and always asking participants if they wanted to add anything to their answers at the end, I have attempted to minimize this. Additionally, while this was something beyond my control, it is crucial to acknowledge that it could have potentially influenced the data.

These limitations show that the findings are highly dependent on the context and may not be completely unbiased. It is therefore risky to draw generalizable conclusions from this study. In hindsight, I realized that more could have been achieved due to these shortcomings. However, I do believe that first steps have been taken in this unexplored area, leading to valuable insights that could serve as a basis for further research.

Finally, I have found the process of conducting this research to be enriching both in terms of theoretical knowledge and personal growth. Looking back, I see it as a period of great learning and development in various ways. In addition to learning a lot about the theoretical debate on this topic and the process of conducting research, I found it very interesting to listen to the stories and perspectives of the participants. The assumptions I had as a researcher with a volunteer background were confirmed in the conversations with the volunteers, but what I found fascinating was what the host community residents had to say. Their open (but critical) attitude towards the gender perspectives of the volunteers brought interesting new findings that are worth researching further. Overall, despite being critical, I have confidence in the results and conclusions, and I view the completion of this research as a successful achievement.

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