

Article

University Experiences of Students in a Gender Minority

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Abstract: Academic and social-emotional experiences during the university years influence students' academic achievement and emotional well-being. However, there is insufficient evidence on how the numerical representation of same-gendered persons affects such experiences in each group. The aim of this research was to analyze university experiences within degree programs where there is a large gender gap in students enrolled. The study is descriptive and cross-sectional and uses a mixed approach. An adaptation of the QVAR (questionnaire on academic experiences-reduced version) was administered to 726 students enrolled in degree programs with a large gender gap. Additionally, ten individual interviews were carried out with students belonging to minority gender groups. The obtained results show that, in these degree programs, students' adaptation and coexistence processes are different, especially in interpersonal relationships between the majority and minority groups. Women in the minority require support from their female classmates in the early years of the degree program. Men in the minority, however, feel like part of the group from the start.

Keywords: higher education; university experiences; underrepresented students; gender differences



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1. Introduction

In the academic year 2021–2022, 56.3% of students enrolled in undergraduate degrees in Spain were women [1], thus indicating an approximate gender balance. However, if enrollment is separated according to discipline, important gender gaps are observed. In the case of engineering and architecture, a high percentage of students were men (73.5%), while in the health sciences, women represented a high percentage (71.8%). In the remaining academic areas, there is a rough balance of men and women, with women representing 60.6% of those enrolled in social and legal sciences, 62.7% in arts and humanities, and 50.8% in natural sciences.

Although there have been social advances toward gender equality in recent years, the numbers mentioned above continue to reflect notable gender differences in the choice of degree program. For this reason, much research has been carried out in recent decades to learn which factors influence the choice of academic degree programs [2–6] and to inform policies and measures that seek to overcome gender inequality in certain fields. These measures fall within the framework of different stages of education, where we find that tendencies and attraction to different occupations begin to take shape in secondary education [7]. Despite the efforts made, however, the gender gap in vocational choice persists [8], and these differences may affect students' university experiences, depending on whether they are part of the minority or majority.

A university student's life experiences in the affective and emotional realm affect their academic performance [9] and whether they ultimately attain a degree [10]. In educational contexts, positive emotions help reinforce personal skills, thus favoring learning. Fredrickson [11] stresses the importance of experiencing positive emotions in order to strengthen

intellectual, psychological, and social resources, among others, and so be able to face times of crisis and the stressful situations that are part of university students' daily lives [12].

One of the aspects that contributes to students' emotional well-being and, accordingly, to academic success, is perceived social support [13]. Perceived social support is defined as the perception of being able to receive care from others and to feel part of a reliable and supportive network [14]. Social support is one of the more important protective factors in facing adverse experiences that take place at university [15]. In fact, initial social and academic experiences at university enable or hinder students' integration and either reinforce or lessen their desire to continue their studies [16].

As occurs with other minority groups when they gain access to universities [17–19], perceived social support and emotional experiences at universities can differ for students of the underrepresented gender.

It is important, therefore, for students to feel that their emotional needs are met and that they are recognized and valued. In this way, they will develop sufficient confidence and security in themselves to face the challenges of university life and attain proper personal growth [20].

By contrast, negative emotions are associated with unpleasant feelings and can negatively affect academic performance [21]. In addition, today's society presents ever more demanding situations that require excellent personal and academic preparation; adequate emotion management is needed for effective coping [22].

Given the importance of these aspects for performance and academic success, the number of research studies on students' emotional experiences in academic contexts is increasing [23,24], though the topic is fairly recent. Further inquiry in the study of emotions during the university years is required [25]. However, considering that these experiences can be affected by the gender ratio in the group, the university experiences of students in the minority gender need to be analyzed. By this, we refer to female students in degree programs where few women are enrolled and male students in programs where there are few men. The aim of this study is therefore to analyze the experiences of students in degree programs with a large gender gap.

2. Materials and Methods

The study is descriptive and cross-sectional, using a mixed approach that combines quantitative and qualitative approaches in order to achieve a more global, integrated interpretation of the information [26]. A survey was conducted in the first phase of the study [27], followed by individual interviews in the second phase [28].

2.1. Participants

The population consisted of undergraduate students in the Basque region of Spain in degree programs where there was a large enrollment gap between men and women, with the minority group comprising less than 20%. In order to identify these degree programs, we analyzed undergraduate enrollment in the Basque region for the academic year 2018–2019 [29], the most recent data available, considering that we collected data during the 2020–2021 academic year.

Table 1 shows the undergraduate degrees where women represented no more than 20% of the total enrollment.

Table 1. Undergraduate degrees in the Basque region (2018–2019) where women were underrepresented.

Undergraduate Degree	Male Enrollment (%)	Female Enrollment (%)	Total Enrollment
Automotive Engineering	76 (95%)	4 (5%)	80
Mechatronics Engineering	70 (90.9%)	7 (9.1%)	77
Electronic Engineering for Communications	19 (90.5%)	2 (9.5%)	21
Marine Engineering	91 (90.1%)	10 (9.9%)	101
Digital Industry	39 (88.6%)	5 (11.4%)	44
Telecommunication Systems Engineering	45 (88.2%)	6 (11.8%)	51
Telecommunication Engineering	34 (87.2%)	5 (12.8%)	39
Engineering For Process and Product Innovation	173 (86.9%)	26 (13.1%)	199
Industrial Electronic Engineering	144 (86.2%)	23 (13.8%)	167
Computer Engineering	178 (86%)	29 (14%)	207
Mechanical Engineering	1791 (83.8%)	347 (16.2%)	2138
Energy Engineering	87 (83.7%)	17 (16.3%)	104
Industrial Electronic and Automation Engineering	1043 (83%)	213 (17%)	1256
Information Processing and Systems Engineering	406 (82.9%)	84 (17.1%)	490

Note. Adapted from [29].

Similarly, Table 2 presents the undergraduate degrees where men have lower representation.

Table 2. Undergraduate degrees in the Basque region (2018–2019) where male students have lower representation.

Undergraduate Degree	Male Enrollment (%)	Female Enrollment (%)	Total Enrollment
Early Childhood Education	253 (11.8%)	1887 (88.2%)	2140
Pedagogy	58 (15.9%)	307 (84.1%)	365
Nursing	246 (16.5%)	1246 (83.5%)	1492
Modern Languages and Administration	29 (17.5%)	137 (82.5%)	166
Translation and Interpreting	51 (19%)	217 (81%)	268
Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property	41 (19.4%)	170 (80.6%)	211

Note. Adapted from [29].

In order to be selected for our sample of university degrees, study programs had to meet the following criteria: (1) Representation of the minority sex was equal to or less than 20% of the total enrollment during the academic year 2018–2019; (2) the total number of students enrolled in 2018–2019 was over 300, so that gender differences would be greater and the groups would be large enough to obtain a broad sample of students in the selected degree programs.

According to these two criteria, the study programs with a minority representation of women were: computer engineering, mechanical engineering, electronic engineering and automation, and information processing and systems engineering. On the other hand, the undergraduate degrees with a minority representation of men were: early childhood education, nursing, and pedagogy. The institutions where these programs are taught belong to the Basque Government registry of universities, namely, the University of Deusto (UD), Mondragon University (MU), and the University of the Basque Country (UPV).

The total number of students enrolled in programs with a female minority was 5105 (4285 male and 820 female). The total number of students enrolled in programs with a male minority was 3997 (557 male and 3440 female).

Finally, nine universities participated in the study, encompassing the three Basque territories (Araba, Biscay, and Gipuzkoa) and the three universities (UD, MU, and UPV). There was representation from all the degree programs selected, with the exception of Information Processing and Systems Engineering, which was not offered at any of the schools that agreed to participate.

A total of 726 persons participated in the first research phase (survey), of which 343 (47.2%) were female, 380 (52.3%) were male, and 3 (0.4%) were non-binary. Table 3 shows the distribution of students by their studies and by gender.

Table 3. Sample distribution by student's gender and academic studies.

Academic Studies	Gender			Total
	Female	Male	Non-Binary	
Computer Engineering	33	112	0	145
Mechanical Engineering	53	228	2	283
Industrial Electronic Engineering and Automation	5	0	0	5
Early Childhood Education	96	23	0	119
Pedagogy	52	4	0	56
Nursing	104	13	1	118
TOTAL	343	380	3	726

Table 4 reflects sample distribution by age. Students born between 1999 and 2002 made up 86.9% of the total sample.

Table 4. Sample distribution by age.

Age (Year of Birth)	Students (%)
18–19 years old (2002)	167 (23%)
19–20 years old (2001)	176 (24.2%)
20–21 years old (2000)	198 (27.3%)
21–22 years old (1999)	83 (11.4%)
Older than 22 years	102 (14.1%)

Information on the student's year of studies is included in Table 5. First-, second-, and third-year students made up about 30% of the total in each case. Fourth-year students were the least represented (8.1%).

Table 5. Sample distribution by student's year in school.

Year in School	Students (%)
First year	231 (31.8%)
Second year	224 (30.9%)
Third year	212 (29.2%)
Fourth year	59 (8.1%)

Taking into account gender and membership in the majority or minority for their degree, four groups were established in the study sample (Table 6); Minority-Female (MIF); Minority-Male (MIM); Majority-Female (MAF); Majority-Male (MAM).

Table 6. Groups of participants within the sample.

Group of Participants	N
Minority-Female (MIF)	91
Minority-Male (MIM)	40
Majority-Female (MAF)	252
Majority-Male (MAM)	340

In the second research phase, an individual interview was carried out with 10 students belonging to the minority sex for their degree. Six female students were interviewed: 3 in computer engineering, 2 in mechanical engineering, and 1 in industrial electronic engineering and automation. Four male students were also interviewed: 2 in early childhood education, 1 in nursing, and 1 in pedagogy.

2.2. Instrument

In the first research phase, the academic experiences questionnaire-reduced version [30] was administered to determine the quality of student academic experiences in the university context. The questionnaire contains 60 items along 5 dimensions. The personal dimension assesses perceptions of physical and psychological well-being; the interpersonal dimension assesses significant relationships with persons in the university context; the degree program subscale determines how well the student has adapted to the study program and its vocational purpose; and the institutional dimension determines students' interests with respect to the university as well as their perception of the quality of services offered there.

This research study applied the version translated and adapted by Márquez Rodríguez et al. [31] (QVAr), which showed adequate internal consistency with reliability indices above 0.65 in all dimensions. As for construct validity, the factor structure is similar to that indicated by the original authors, with an explained variance of 40.5%. The Márquez Rodríguez et al. version [31] contains 58 items, organized in the following dimensions: personal and interpersonal dimensions, with 13 items each; degree program, with 11 items; study, with 14 items; and institutional, with 7 items.

Although the questionnaire by Márquez Rodríguez et al. [31] presents five response options, in this study we used a scale from 0 to 10, to allow greater sensitivity in the responses [32]. A response of 0 indicates total disagreement, and 10 means total agreement. Table 7 shows the Cronbach Alpha and McDonald's Omega reliability values for each dimension of the QVAr questionnaire. The Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency values range from 0.75 to 0.92, and McDonald's Omega coefficients are between 0.77–0.93, by which we confirmed that the dimensions reliably assessed the participants' university experiences.

Table 7. Reliability coefficients of the QVAr questionnaire dimensions.

Dimension of the QVAr	Cronbach Alpha	McDonald's Omega
Personal	0.91	0.91
Interpersonal	0.87	0.88
Degree Program	0.81	0.85
Study	0.80	0.82
Institutional	0.75	0.77
Complete questionnaire with 5 dimensions	0.92	0.93

In addition to the QVAr items, participants responded to questions of a sociodemographic or academic nature (gender, year of birth, degree, year in school, etc.), thus allowing us to establish their profile.

The second part of the study consisted of a semi-structured interview [33]. In order to learn about the university experiences of the individuals interviewed; we designed a script with two sets of questions. The first set of questions contained questions for analyzing their experiences as university students, such as their perceptions and initial expectations; the second set inquired more deeply into aspects related to membership in a minority group, for example, support or difficulties experienced throughout their time of enrollment as a student of the minority gender.

2.3. Procedure

First, during the months of January and February 2021, we e-mailed the authorities at the universities that offered the selected undergraduate programs, requesting their availability for a teleconference to provide detailed information about the research study. After a conversation with the pertinent university authorities, we worked with the institutions that agreed to participate, setting up the manner in which the information would be collected.

The questionnaire was applied during the months of February to May 2021 in order to ensure that first-year students had completed a minimum of one semester at the university.

Questionnaires were either completed online in a group session with students connected electronically or by the university sending students the link to the questionnaire. The estimated completion time for the questionnaire is 20 min.

At the end of the questionnaire, anyone interested in participating in the second research phase was asked to indicate their e-mail address. In this manner, we were able to contact the students who would be interviewed by videoconference. These interviews were carried out in June 2021 and had a 30-min duration. With the permission of the interviewees, they were recorded and transcribed, maintaining anonymity through the use of pseudonyms.

All the people who participated in the study, whether in the first or second phase, received relevant information about the objective and purpose of the research, as well as their rights to voluntary participation, confidential and anonymous transmission of information, and to choose to withdraw from the research at any time. By means of informed consent, we ensured that participants fully understood the characteristics of the research and their acceptance to participate. Approval from the research ethics committee had been previously obtained from the researchers' university.

2.4. Analysis

The analyses were carried out using a mixed approach, thus allowing triangulation of qualitative and quantitative information. The statistical analyses of the questionnaire were performed using SPSS, version 28. Descriptive and reliability analyses were carried out for all dimensions of the questionnaire. In addition, we checked for normality of the variables, and afterward we used simple analysis of variance (ANOVA) to perform comparative studies with more than two independent groups. Post-hoc studies were used to check the magnitude and value of the differences. As a non-parametric alternative to ANOVA, we used the Kruskal–Wallis H test. We used 0.05 as the reference value for significance.

Items formulated inversely were recodified so that a higher score meant a higher level in that dimension. In the comparison of means analyses by gender, students who identified their gender as non-binary ($n = 3$) were excluded due to their minimal representation.

Finally, the information collected from the interviews complemented the information obtained during the first research phase through an in-depth analysis of minority students' perceptions of their own experiences. The interviews were analyzed, considering two large categories that group the dimensions of the questionnaire: academic and social-emotional. The academic category included responses related to the aspects of degree, study, and institutional, and the social-emotional category included responses related to the personal and interpersonal subscales. Each of the two researchers coded the interviews independently. Discrepancies between the two researchers were resolved by consensus. No software was used for categorization. The qualitative information referred only to the minority groups, that is, to MIF and MIM.

3. Results

To begin, we calculated the means and standard deviations for each dimension of the QVAr questionnaire (Table 8). The degree dimension showed the highest mean as well as the lowest standard deviation, indicating that satisfaction with one's chosen degree was the most highly rated aspect. The personal dimension showed the lowest mean, indicating that personal and emotional perceptions were the most deficient in these students.

Table 8. Descriptive statistics of the dimensions of the QVAr questionnaire.

Dimension of the QVAr	M	SD
Personal	5.72	2.00
Interpersonal	7.06	1.51
Degree	7.63	1.21
Study	6.15	1.27
Institutional	7.26	1.51

Note. M: Mean; SD: Standard Deviation.

Next, we checked for fulfillment of normality and homogeneity of variance in the four data groups (MIF, MIM, MAF, and MAM). For this purpose, we applied the Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistical technique when the sample was greater than 50 and the Shapiro-Wilk when it was under 50, as well as Levene statistics. Results showed that certain groups did not meet the normality range. Specifically, the interpersonal dimension and the degree dimension did not meet normality in the MIF group and the two majority groups (MAF and MAM). However, the institutional dimension did not meet normality in the two majority groups (MAF and MAM). In these three dimensions, nonparametric techniques were used.

For the organization of the results, two categories were established for grouping the dimensions of the QVAr questionnaire. The first category, academic experiences, includes the dimensions degree, study, and institutional and refers to experiences related to university training. The second category, social-emotional experiences, includes experiences relating to emotions and relations with others in the university context and incorporates the personal and interpersonal dimensions of the questionnaire. Between-group differences are presented for each category, and for each of the dimensions that it contains; experiences of the minority groups were analyzed in depth.

3.1. Academic Experiences

3.1.1. Between-Group Differences in Academic Experiences

The degree dimension, which measures a student's sense of calling toward their chosen degree and whether they find themselves well suited for it, showed significant differences between the two majority groups (MAF and MAM, $p < 0.001$) and between the two female groups (MIF and MAF, $p < 0.001$), through application of the Kruskal–Wallis H test (Table 9). In both cases, the MAF shows greater vocation and suitability for the degree program. Significant differences were also obtained between the two male groups (MIM and MAM, $p < 0.05$), where MIM showed closer conformity to the vocational line of their chosen degree.

Table 9. Descriptive analyses and Kruskal–Wallis H test for the Degree dimension.

Dimension	Participant Group	M (SD)	H	<i>p</i>
Degree	Minority-Female (MIF) ($n = 91$)	7.39 (1.34)	48.137	0.000 ***
	Minority-Male (MIM) ($n = 40$)	8.00 (1.10)		
	Majority-Female (MAF) ($n = 252$)	7.97 (1.88)		
	Majority-Male (MAM) ($n = 340$)	7.39 (1.13)		

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation *** $p < 0.001$.

The study dimension also showed significant between-group differences (Table 10). HSD Tukey results showed differences between the two majority groups (MAF and MAM, $p < 0.001$) and between the MIF and MAM ($p < 0.001$). The means are higher for both female groups (MAF and MIF) with respect to habits and academic dedication, forethought, and efficacy with high-paced study (for example, in exam periods).

Table 10. Descriptive analyses and ANOVA variance in the study dimension.

Dimension	Participant Group	M (SD)	H	p
Study	Minority-Female (MIF) (<i>n</i> = 91)	6.44 (1.14)	18.616	0.000 ***
	Minority-Male (MIM) (<i>n</i> = 40)	6.17 (1.37)		
	Majority-Female (MAF) (<i>n</i> = 252)	6.52 (1.23)		
	Majority-Male (MAM) (<i>n</i> = 340)	5.8 (1.22)		

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation *** $p < 0.001$.

Finally, using the Kruskal–Wallis H test for the institutional dimension (Table 11), significant differences were obtained between the two minority groups (MIF and MIM, $p < 0.01$) and between the two female groups (MIF and MAM, $p < 0.05$). In both comparisons, MIF obtained significantly higher scores in the perceived quality of university services and structure, as well as interest in the institution.

Table 11. Descriptive analyses and Kruskal–Wallis H test for the institutional dimension.

Dimension	Participant Group	M (SD)	H	p
Institutional	Minority-Female (MIF) (<i>n</i> = 91)	7.65 (1.55)	13.422	0.004 **
	Minority-Male (MIM) (<i>n</i> = 40)	6.77 (1.45)		
	Majority-Female (MAF) (<i>n</i> = 252)	7.12 (1.61)		
	Majority-Male (MAM) (<i>n</i> = 340)	7.33 (1.40)		

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation ** $p < 0.01$.

3.1.2. Academic Experiences in the Minority Groups

In general, students of both genders positively valued the knowledge that was transmitted by their teachers, but they occasionally perceived deficiencies in the relationship between theory and practice. They also indicated that, at times, they must study what the teacher indicates and not what the subject matter requires. Lucas and Marta express it this way:

“I feel that some teachers are teaching because they are good in what they teach, but sometimes I cannot relate what I am studying to my future work.” (Lucas, 3rd-year Early Childhood Education, MIM)

“You must understand what the teachers want you to, not what you are studying, so it ends up being a mess. Studying what the teacher wants and not what ought to be studied for its own sake. (Marta, 2nd-year Computer Engineering, MIF)”

Regarding employment opportunities, several participants in both minority groups expressed calm and satisfaction. Comments from Elena and Carlos illustrate this:

“I’m very happy because I have very clear objectives. I don’t feel stressed over what employment opportunities I will have.” (Elena, 3rd-year Mechanical Engineering, MIF)

“I feel satisfied as I look to the future and the job that I may have.” (Carlos, 3rd-year Early Childhood Education, MIM)

Next, we present results regarding the academic experiences of each minority group.

- Academic experiences of female students in the minority

The results showed that female students were satisfied with their choice of studies. Thus Paula and Marta indicate:

“It is a matter of vocation, and I have made the right choice with my degree program, even though it is a tough one, but yes, definitively yes. I wouldn’t change it, I believe.” (Paula, 4th-year Industrial Electronic Engineering and Automation, MIF)

“Yes, I feel content and happy to be studying Engineering. I would not change to a different branch of Engineering.” (Marta, 2nd-year Computer Engineering, MIF)

Elena adds that many of her female friends regret their choice, but she claims to be happy.

“I have a lot of female friends that have chosen other degree programs, and yet they regret (. . .). I am happy with my degree program.” (Elena, 3rd-year Mechanical Engineering, MIF)

The female students note that there are changes from year to year, especially when passing from first to second year. Students progress in their understanding of the meaning and purpose of the degree as they take more specific subjects. This is illustrated in the following remarks by Ana, Andrea, and Marta.

“At the start of the program, the subjects are more generic, but as the years go by the courses are more specific and you start to like more what you are doing.” (Ana, 3rd-year Computer Engineering, MIF)

“The first year I was scared, because I didn’t know how I would do. But later after you finish the first year, in second year you know how it works, (. . .). You know how to organize yourself, because you know what to expect.” (Andrea, 2nd-year Mechanical Engineering, MIF)

“Once you get into their world you are going to understand how things work, you start to understand the technology, the computing, the subject matter . . . you start understanding the purpose of the degree.” (Marta, 2nd-year Computer Engineering, MIF)

Female students also emphasized the importance of the university’s organization in facilitating academic performance. Carmen underscored that the calendar and timetables were well structured.

“The degree program at this university is very well structured in the sense of the calendar, the timetables . . . and I am comfortable with the study program. (. . .) Not only because of what I am studying, but also because of how all of it is structured.” (Carmen, 3rd-year Computer Engineering, MIF)

However, Elena perceived a lack of coordination between the different subjects, compared to what she expected from university training:

“I expected that everything would be more dynamic at university. (. . .) That it wasn’t just a matter of trying to pass. I expected it to be much more manageable. And that the coordination between subjects would be different. (. . .) I have realized that you have a class subject, and it has a syllabus, and the easiest thing is just to follow it. If it is well organized, following a syllabus is super easy.” (Elena, 3rd-year Mechanical Engineering, MIF)

Another institutional aspect in relation to student satisfaction is the feeling that you are heard when there is some kind of conflict with teachers:

“If there are problems with a certain teacher or if complaints are made, it is important to know that something is being done. Students are being taken into account.” (Carmen, 3rd-year Computer Engineering, MIF)

As for treatment from the teachers, minority female students felt that sometimes they were asked more questions. They also admitted that, when carrying out the same exercises as their male counterparts, they were rated higher. Marta and Paula describe it this way:

“What annoys me the most is when a teacher says, “Hey you, you are the only girl, tell us what you think about this.” And your mind goes blank. “You’ve got boys there, there’s no need for me to talk.” The teachers do this a lot.” (Marta, 2nd-year Computer Engineering, MIF)

“Once in a while a teacher has encouraged the girls more, “this girl did it much better, (. . .)” and some male classmate did the exercise the same as me, but (the teacher) gave mine as an example simply because I am a girl.” (Paula, 4th-year Industrial Electronic Engineering and Automation, MIF)

In the same vein, some female students perceived that certain teachers showed favoritism to them because they were in the minority. They were more empathetic, or they even expressed a desire that women attain higher positions of responsibility. Elena and Ana describe these situations:

“Some teachers do show favoritism toward the minority, and there are others who do not. There are some women teachers that you can tell they empathize with us differently . . . The women teachers have their favorites (female students), you can tell and it always happens. In the end, if you are a woman (teacher), you are in an Engineering program, and you have four female students, whether you want to or not, it’s not that you treat them differently, but you have a preference for them. This is in a positive way.” (Elena, 3rd-year Mechanical Engineering, MIF)

“There are teachers that manifest that they want girls to reach high positions, positions of power.” (Ana, 3rd-year Computer Engineering, MIF)

However, one of the girls also pointed out the negative side of being in the minority, receiving “offensive” comments from a teacher:

“In a negative way, you always come across some male teacher with offensive remarks.” (Elena, 3rd-year Mechanical Engineering, MIF)

- Academic experiences of male students in the minority

Regarding personal satisfaction related to their choice of studies, male students in the minority stressed the importance of intellectual curiosity.

“The more knowledge you acquire about what you like, the more satisfied you are. For example, I have always had the desire for knowledge. And the more you know, the more I like to know, and the happier I am with myself.” (Pablo, 1st-year Nursing, MIM)

In the same vein as above, Javier emphasized the importance of internships and the year-by-year academic program in helping you adopt your identity as a future professional, even in contrast to examples considered negative.

“During the university years you begin to see what you are like and where you want to get to. And you make comparisons, this guy studies the same thing I do, but I don’t want to be like him, no way. Or in internships: this guy has studied the same as me, but I don’t want to be like that. For me, the internships have helped me know what I don’t want to be like and what I do want to be like.” (Javier, 4th-year Pedagogy, MIM)

Regarding the comparison between previous expectations of undergraduate study vs. current experience, the male students claimed to be more motivated than in earlier stages of education due to studying what they like:

“It’s going as I expected. (. . .) You don’t study for a grade, as I used to do in secondary education, in order to be admitted here, so, the motivation is not the same. And now I am studying because I want to be a teacher. (. . .) I feel that I study less, but what I study is more important. I feel that I make better use of time.” (Lucas, 3rd-year Early Childhood Education, MIM)

At the same time, despite having positive expectations of what university life would be like, the male students were aware of the work that is involved at university, and they noted the difficulty that some people had in taking this on:

“The first thing that one teacher told us was that not everybody is cut out to be a teacher. You arrive at the university with your dreams and your fantasy, going out for drinks on Thursdays, and suddenly “wham”. (. . .) It takes work. For me it has been positive, but many of my (female) classmates have dropped out.” (Carlos, 3rd-year Early Childhood Education, MIM)

In this regard, certain class subjects were easier to pass but were more boring compared to those that contributed knowledge to one’s undergraduate training:

“[It’s] easy to pass “filler” subjects, but not easy to pass the hours in these filler subjects, so it is a contradiction. When they put a “passed” sticker on your forehead, it’s all very well, but when you have to swallow 8 h a week of that subject, “passed” is not so easy after all. An easy subject is one that gets your interest, it makes you happy. (. . .) And that’s what college subjects ought to be. But not all subjects are always like that for every person.” (Javier, 4th-year Pedagogy, MIM)

The male students were aware that, on occasion, a gender gap in one’s undergraduate studies can positively affect job opportunities:

“The fact that there are so few guys who do this undergraduate program has an impact for employment, there is greater demand for us in order to achieve equality.” (Carlos, 3rd-year Early Childhood Education, MIM)

Regarding their perception of treatment from teachers, the male students claimed they felt no difference in comparison to their female classmates. They described no feeling of favoritism on account of being in the minority:

“The teachers treat me exactly the same as the others. Sometimes they make a joke, girls’ jokes, and they say something to me, but it’s always joking.” (Lucas, 3rd-year Early Childhood Education, MIM)

“I don’t think that teachers in my degree program are biased because there are more women than men. I think that it’s all the same to them, makes no difference at all, they remark that there are few men, but this does not influence the teacher-pupil relationship (. . .).” (Pablo, 1st-year Nursing, MIM)

“That they notice you are the only guy, and that you stand out, it happens, but it happens unconsciously. I don’t think I have been a favorite on account of being a guy, but because of the way I am, how I convey things, how I say what I think.” (Javier, 4th-year Pedagogy, MIM)

Nonetheless, some male students considered that they had received higher grades than their female classmates on account of being in the class minority. Carlos mentioned this on two occasions: when referring to the academic part and when he spoke of choosing his degree program.

“In my case it has happened that I get higher marks than a female classmate for doing the same thing.” (Carlos, 3rd-year Early Childhood Education, MIM)

“Instead of questioning me, (teachers) give me more credit for choosing this degree than is due. Lots of comments, “how bold, a fellow in early childhood education, it reflects well on you, we also need male examples, children need to see some of everything”.” (Carlos, 3rd-year Early Childhood Education, MIM)

For his part, Javier underscored the positive sensations he perceived in the first years of his degree with regard to his intelligence:

“I remember in my classes in the first years, I would tell about something and I felt they were thinking: “this guy is intelligent, he’s a smart guy”.” (Javier, 4th-year Pedagogy, MIM)

Carlos, in addition to describing positive aspects of being in the minority, such as the closeness shown to him by teachers, said he has received comments that he does not like:

“Some teachers show more closeness to me for no reason, to be honest, I act no different and I even ask fewer questions than my female classmates. Also, when giving examples, (the teacher) gives a general one for all the girls, and gives me a specific one. Also certain comments that I didn’t like them and I have had to put up with them. Attention (to minority groups) is not all positive. There is a little bit of both.” (Carlos, 3rd-year Early Childhood Education, MIM)

In summary, the results obtained indicate that the men in the minority seemed more satisfied with their choice of studies than did the women in the minority. For their part, the women in the minority showed better adaptation to the institution. The women in both groups (minority and majority) surpassed the men in study habits and planning. The men in the minority indicated higher motivation than in their earlier stages of education. Both women and men in minority groups highlighted getting higher grades from their teachers on account of belonging to the minority group.

3.2. Social-Emotional Experiences

3.2.1. Between-Group Differences in Social-Emotional Experiences

In the personal dimension, which assesses physical and psychological well-being, the ANOVA results confirmed significant between-group differences (Table 12). The Tukey HSD test indicated differences between the two majority groups (MAF and MAM, $p < 0.001$), with men obtaining higher scores, thus reflecting greater well-being. There were also significant differences between the MIM and MAF participants ($p < 0.05$), where the former obtained more positive results in perceived well-being than did the women in the majority groups. In these two comparisons, therefore, the men showed significantly higher levels of emotional well-being than the women, even when the men belonged to a minority group.

Table 12. Descriptive analyses and ANOVA variance in the personal dimension.

Dimension	Participant Group	M (SD)	H	p
Personal	Minority-Female (MIF) ($n = 91$)	5.52 (2.17)	9.183	0.000 ***
	Minority-Male (MIM) ($n = 40$)	6.28 (2.05)		
	Majority-Female (MAF) ($n = 252$)	5.25 (2.01)		
	Majority-Male (MAM) ($n = 340$)	6.05 (1.88)		

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation *** $p < 0.001$

The interpersonal dimension, analyzed using the Kruskal–Wallis H test, showed no significant between-group differences (Table 13). In other words, there were no differences perceived in relationships within the university context (feeling part of the group, having stable friendships, being able to spend time together outside the university, etc.). It should be noted that the mean of this dimension is very high in all groups (around 7 with scores between 6.94 and 7.28 in a range of 0 to 10); the students in general claimed to enjoy good companionship and friendship at university.

Table 13. Descriptive analyses and Kruskal–Wallis H test for the Interpersonal dimension.

Dimension	Participant Group	M (SD)	H	p
Interpersonal	Minority-Female (MIF) ($n = 91$)	6.94 (1.73)	7.058	0.07
	Minority-Male (MIM) ($n = 40$)	7.28 (1.30)		
	Majority-Female (MAF) ($n = 252$)	7.16 (1.70)		
	Majority-Male (MAM) ($n = 340$)	6.99 (1.31)		

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation

3.2.2. Social-Emotional Experiences in the Minority Groups

Students in both minority groups described the first year as the period when they began to form relationships, which were reinforced in the following years, generating bonds of trust:

“In the first year everything was new, I didn’t know anyone, the first days I didn’t join anyone for a bite to eat because I didn’t know anyone, at that time it was go to class, see new things, and that’s it. In second year, and later on in the first year, it was more interacting with people and starting to form a group of friends.” (Lucas, 3rd-year Early Childhood Education, MIM)

“In cases like my own, when you start a degree program without knowing anybody, you have those first years to get to know people (. . .) and later as you get toward the end of the degree you have certain bonds of trust with your group.” (Paula, 4th-year Industrial Electronic Engineering and Automation, MIF)

The results underscore the importance of friendships in the university context. In this regard, Javier made a comparison to pre-university schooling:

“The important thing at university is to stick together, it’s vital. If you are alone, everything’s an uphill climb, and boring. The nice thing about university is seeing that you are learning, but the social part is what makes you look forward to it. When you have shitty subjects your motivation goes down a bit, but I compare the desire I had to go to my school, with my desire to go to the university, and I enjoy it because I talk to my classmates, we go to the bar, we miss a class . . . things you do in university life. That’s how I see it.” (Javier, 4th-year Pedagogy, MIM)

Fear of losing your relationships is a factor in wanting to stay in college. Carmen states it this way:

“By third year you have the feeling of wanting to finish, so you can disconnect a little. But since I feel so comfortable with the people, I don’t want university to be over, either.” (Carmen, 3rd-year Computer Engineering, MIF)

Next, we present results pertaining to specific social-emotional experiences in each of the minority groups.

- Social-emotional experiences of female students in the minority

Female students expressed being comfortable when there was someone else of their same gender in class, as a way of overcoming a feeling of aloneness:

“The first day two of us (girls) arrived. And we both asked each other: are you in Computer Engineering? and both of us: Yes!!! Whew, thank goodness, because if you weren’t . . . ” (Ana, 3rd-year Computer Engineering, MIF)

“When I first entered the program I thought I might even be the only girl. (. . .) When it comes to choosing this degree, the guys have an easier go of it.” (Carmen, 3rd-year Computer Engineering, MIF)

“We girls, the first thing we did upon arriving was not to think “let’s make some friends”. It was the thought: “let’s see if we get one other girl that we can be with and at least one, and later on you get to know the rest of the people”. (. . .) The guys have never had that feeling of “let’s see if there’s one other guy, because if not I am going to be alone.” (Ana, 3rd-year Computer Engineering, MIF)

Similarly, they underscored the importance of forming a group between them in order to not feel lonely as the only women. In fact, during the first year they asked their questions of each other, instead of going to the teacher:

“On the second day we girls created a WhatsApp group, to get to know each other and not feel that loneliness.” (Carmen, 3rd-year Computer Engineering, MIF)

“At first, all of us girls stuck together, and instead of asking the teacher we asked each other, among ourselves.” (Carmen, 3rd-year Computer Engineering, MIF)

In this regard, Ana felt that it can create suspicion in class if a girl approaches a group of boys instead of the other girls:

“If I, as a girl, approach a group of boys on the first day, it can cause talk. By contrast, if I approach a girl, not so.” (Ana, 3rd-year Computer Engineering, MIF)

Marta pointed out that at the university there is the same pattern of relationships by sex as you find in society in general, with women on one side and men on the other:

“Among the girls I notice that we help each other more, like the boys do among themselves.” (Marta, 2nd-year Computer Engineering, MIF)

“Girls hang out with girls, boys hang out with boys, society goes like that. For example, in the other class there is one girl, and we are together on the project. In other words, the only two girls in the program are together for the project.” (Marta, 2nd-year Computer Engineering, MIF)

Carmen confirmed the support that exists among persons of the same gender when they are in the minority, by her own experience:

“I have been giving some talks to the first-year students. And speaking, especially in front of so many guys, was hard for me. (. . .) To stand in front of so many people and that there were so many guys judging me. (. . .) I tended to look at a girl, and think “OK, there I have one point of trust.” (Carmen, 3rd-year Computer Engineering, MIF)

In the matter of coexisting with the male majority, they admit that at first they saw difficulties in interacting, on account of there being so many boys:

“I thought I was not going to relate to others with much trust. A class-based relationship, yes, but nothing further. Because I thought: “with so many boys it’s going to be harder for me.” But later on it wasn’t so. We are all the same.” (Andrea, 2nd-year Mechanical Engineering, MIF)

Once the initial fear wore off, they felt well integrated:

“80 of us started the degree program, it’s a large group, later little groups start to form, and I have good relations with quite a few classmates and feel integrated in class.” (Carmen, 3rd-year Computer Engineering, MIF)

“When I have had to talk with them about anything, it’s fine, or doing joint assignments or whatever, always fine. For example, just today, a (male) classmate who I have been with told me that they have planned to meet for lunch on Thursday, and if I want to go . . . I am part of the group.” (Paula, 4th-year Industrial Electronic Engineering and Automation, MIF)

However, they recognized that the level of trust with the guys was less than their trust with the girls:

“I don’t like to say this, but the trust that you feel with guys and with girls is different, it’s not just the trust, it’s knowing that you can count on someone. In the end you spend many hours in class with your classmates. And in fact, my seat is surrounded by guys. And I get along really well with them, I tell them things, but it isn’t the same as between two girls in the class, we are tight-knit, it’s different.” (Elena, 3rd-year Mechanical Engineering, MIF)

In another perspective on this matter, Ana thought that conflicts might arise if there were too many girls:

“Sharing life with a lot of girls can lead to trouble. When you have a guy friend, or several of them, you have the sense that they are not going to double-cross

you. And that makes it easier to live together. Because girls, it seems to me, are always going behind, not saying things up front. So, when there are few girls in class, you have to stick together and that's it. You can't do anything else. With guy friends there will always be fewer hard feelings than with girl friends, in general." (Ana, 3rd-year Computer Engineering, MIF)

As for the opinion that girls in the minority had about the boys in the majority, Elena thought that the guys felt protected; being in the majority gave them better chances of finding people to make friends with.

"Being in the majority always makes you feel more supported. (. . .) You are more likely to find someone similar to you in that larger group." (Elena, 3rd-year Mechanical Engineering, MIF)

The female minority students thought that their male classmates felt good about being in the majority because this situation gave them more freedom to talk about the girls:

"I think the guys are happy with not having girls in this degree program. That way they can talk about girls without anyone finding out, because I overhear all kinds of senseless stuff about girls in class . . . Yes, the boys are happy, they live in their own little world." (Marta, 2nd-year Computer Engineering, MIF)

In addition, the girls thought that the boys in the majority have a different university experience than they do because they do things together outside the university:

"The boys end up having a different experience, because outside the university they do more things together. In short, they have more of a relationship and the experience is different." (Marta, 2nd-year Computer Engineering, MIF)

However, they felt that the absence of a female point of view can alter certain aspects of reality.

"There are many groups in class that are only guys, and not having another point of view (from the viewpoint of the other gender) affects the university experience. I think it influences them to not consider things or to think certain things are normal when they are not." (Carmen, 3rd-year Computer Engineering, MIF)

For her part, Andrea felt that the boys were more secure than the girls, for example, when doing an exam.

"I see the guys as more sure of themselves. For example, I perceive that they feel sure they are going to do well on a test. And not me, I am not sure that I am going to do well. I feel that the girls are more insecure." (Andrea, 2nd-year Mechanical Engineering, MIF)

- Social-emotional experiences of male students in the minority

At the start of their studies, the male students thought that being in the minority was going to affect them. However, as Lucas commented, it was not like that, and he felt like any other student.

"When I walked in and saw it was all girls . . . I wondered, what's this going to be like? But in the end, very good . . . At first I thought it was going to affect me (being in the minority) because I always hang out with guys, but it has not affected me in any way. (. . .) At the university it's all girls, and I have lunch with them, go out to party with them and talk with them and whatever." (Lucas, 3rd-year Early Childhood Education, MIM)

In the same way, Pablo claimed to feel comfortable in class and at the university. He said he did not feel rejection on account of being male in a context of so many women.

"I walk into class and I feel comfortable. I go to class and I notice that I am well-perceived, I can give my opinion, I can talk to different people without feeling

rejection (. . .). In the university environment I do not feel that my presence is questioned.” (Pablo, 1st-year Nursing, MIM)

As an exception, Javier gave an example where boys are not invited:

“Aside from extracurricular things that take place in the university environment, like for example girls who hold a feminist gathering where boys are not invited, aside from that, I am not treated differently.” (Javier, 4th-year Pedagogy, MIM)

As for how the male and female students get along, Javier recognized that, for a first contact, he prefers male students, justifying this by saying that he has more in common with them.

“Instinctively I am drawn to the guys. (. . .) Because there will be things that I feel more comfortable about with them, and not with the girls. (. . .) I acknowledge that my first approach is with the guys.” (Javier, 4th-year Pedagogy, MIM)

Along these lines, Carlos argued that in other classes, the guys only relate to each other:

“For example, in the other class there are two guys and they are always hanging out together. My case is not like this, but in other classes it is.” (Carlos, 3rd-year Early Childhood Education, MIM)

By contrast, we should note Javier’s perception about groups that form in classes; according to him, if there is a balance of genders in a class, two large groups tend to form, the girls’ group and the boys’ group. However, if there are few boys, this difference does not occur.

“In a balanced group, where there are guys and girls, you usually have the guys’ team and the girls’ team, then, with just 3 guys, this doesn’t happen. When it is even, you notice the difference by sex, toward one side and toward the other, something that doesn’t happen when there only a few of us.” (Javier, 4th-year Pedagogy, MIM)

Concerning the opinion that boys in the minority have of girls in the majority, Pablo believed that the girls preferred to relate to girls, so, in this case, as the majority, they have better university experiences than the boys.

“The females socialize with girls, there is always a preference for this, to choose a group of females. That’s why I think that, due to the gender bias, in the university setting, they have better experiences than the men do, because they are in the majority.” (Pablo, 1st-year Nursing, MIM)

However, according to Javier, it is necessary to consider the participation of the other sexes in educational experiences:

“If I were a girl I would be lacking more representation from boys. During one stage in my life, I was only with guys (in elementary), then when I started with guys and with girls, I realized what I had been missing during my school years, the participation of the other sex.” (Javier, 4th-year Pedagogy, MIM)

Pablo stressed that the girls valued having a male friend, even more than a female friend:

“Sometimes they value having a male friend more highly. I don’t know why, but I notice this. In relationships I notice that the girls get along well with each other and they have a lot of females to relate with, but they put more value on having a friend that is male.” (Pablo, 1st-year Nursing, MIM)

Despite the fact that girls are in the majority, it is curious that they prefer that a boy represent them:

“There are still male empowerment roles, despite there being a female majority. For example, when I was on the school council as a delegate. (. . .) In other words, two guys representing a group of 120 girls. The majority are girls, but even so they often give the leading voice to the guys, and that is a curious matter. It’s something that I try to fight against.” (Javier, 4th-year Pedagogy, MIM)

In summary, the results showed that the male students in both groups (minority and majority) had higher levels of well-being. Concerning personal relationships, the women found safety in having female classmates, especially at the start of the degree program, while the men, despite being in the minority, felt well-integrated from the start. Both minority groups noted the fact that gender-differentiated groups form in the classroom, emphasizing, however, the advantage of mixed groups in order to obtain both points of view in any field, whether for academic or social activities.

4. Discussion

The aim of this study was to learn about the university experiences of students who pursue degree programs with a gender gap. There are few studies that have analyzed this aspect in university programs [34] and fewer still that have considered gender distribution [35]. On this account, the present study seeks to shed light on the university experiences of both groups and better understand their needs.

Use of a mixed methodology allowed us first to learn about experiences across the 5 dimensions of the QVA_r (personal, interpersonal, degree, study, and institutional) and the between-group differences by representation and gender. Next, the information gathered from the individual interviews with minority students allowed us to look more deeply into these students’ perceptions of different aspects of university life, both academic and social-emotional.

On the academic side, the Degree dimension assessed satisfaction with the studies chosen and with the professional field, and its highest levels were found in the majority-female and minority-male groups. These are the students enrolled in the degree programs in nursing, pedagogy, and early childhood education. These results reflect the persistence of the female stereotype in choosing professions related to care and education [36,37]. In the case of men, research studies indicate that the choice of these professions is determined by intrinsic motivation [38–40] and an altruistic desire to help people [41,42]. This is also common among reasons given by the female gender [43]. Men who are inclined toward education, nursing, or social work place less value on work remuneration [44], thus demonstrating the importance of vocation in the choice of these academic pursuits. Most students interviewed claimed to be satisfied with the studies chosen. Satisfaction with studies depends on many personal and environmental factors, learned factors, and innate factors [45].

Regarding results from the Study dimension, which measures competencies related to organization and study habits, the women obtained higher values than the men, regardless of their condition as majority or minority. These results concur with existing literature on academic achievement in a school and university population, where women attained better academic achievement [46,47].

As for satisfaction with and attachment to the institution, the minority women reflected significantly higher scores than the rest of the groups. In addition, in the interviews, the women indicated positive aspects of the university (good organization, a feeling that the students’ voice is heard, etc.). The fact that a minority group rates the university’s resources most positively might indicate that they receive more individualized attention on account of belonging to this group. Research studies indicate the importance of the university structure in students’ well-being, given that it can improve relations between the different agents (university personnel, male and female classmates, and teachers) [48], especially in gender minority groups.

Elsewhere, when comparing the dimensions of social-emotional experiences, the lowest scores are found in the personal dimension, which measures physical and emotional

well-being. In this regard, one must take into account that university life is affected by numerous factors (academic demands, new personal relationships, etc.), which in turn may affect students' psychological and physical well-being [49,50]. The university years are indeed a time when students experience important changes in their personal, social, and academic surroundings [51]. The results of this research show that men, compared to women, feel a higher level of well-being. Previous research confirms women's higher ratings of academic pressure, which generates high levels of academic stress [52]. This can explain the difference in level of well-being favoring the male gender.

With regard to the interpersonal dimension, the results do not show between-group differences; furthermore, the values obtained are very high, indicating that the participating students felt integrated into the group and had quality relationships in the university context. The interviews confirmed that both women and men in minority groups continued to strengthen their bonds of trust with male and female classmates year by year, and these relationships increased their motivation at university. In this regard, the literature distinguishes two types of student relationships [53]: assistance networks, targeting the exchange of knowledge; and friendship networks, associated with emotional support. It is evident that students with greater social support networks are better adapted to the university context [54]. It has also been observed that if social support is increased, academic stress decreases [55]. Interaction spaces at university are necessary for fostering long-lasting personal relationships and also increasing well-being levels.

Through the interviews, female minority women showed that they feel reassured when they are not the only woman in the group, as a means of not feeling lonely. In this regard, studies in the field of health indicate that loneliness may be more prevalent in women than in men [56]. Similarly, in a university population, feelings of loneliness are more frequent among women [57]. By contrast, male students in the minority did not express such a need, beyond the initial uncertainty of not knowing their male and female classmates. This difference between men and women may be related to levels of security and self-esteem [58]. In comparison to women, men reflect higher values in self-esteem [59–61]. In fact, minority women in this study perceived their male counterparts as more secure, which might indicate feelings of inferiority in participants of the female gender.

The female students interviewed needed to form a women-only group in their first years at university to offer support to each other. In this regard, the literature finds that perceived social support from friendships is higher in female students than in male students [62–65]. This situation might be due to support networks becoming protective agents against unwanted interactions [66]. In other words, in this case, undesirable interactions would be those involving bonds with classmates of the majority gender. In the same way, the reason why these networks are more customary in women than in men might be explained by women's greater facility for expressing emotions [67,68], and their greater ability than men in interpersonal skills, since they recognize the emotions of others better [69]. Consequently, in a university context where they are in the minority, female companionship is a source of support and trust.

Both minority groups emphasized the tendency to form groups with persons of the same gender, even in later years of the degree program. These behaviors may reflect a social tendency, such as, for example, the traditional sexual differentiation in sports contexts [70]. Notwithstanding, students are aware of the need to consider the viewpoint of the other sex in order to obtain a full perception of reality. Likewise, relationships between students have a unique impact on the development of one's personal identity and on present and future relationships [71], so universities should create strategies to achieve interrelationships between both genders.

Minority males felt that, although the women students usually interact with their female classmates, they valued having a male friend. The existing literature on friendship indicates that for female adolescents, the number of friendships with people of the opposite sex is important [72], as a way of improving the socialization process [73]. On the other

hand, the minority males continued to act as class delegates, that is, they represented the larger majority of women. Traditionally, leadership has been associated with the male gender, with its attributed roles of oversight and authority [74]. In this regard, studies of social skills in pre-university academic environments show girls as more oriented towards collaboration and cooperation and boys as having a task-oriented disposition that relates success to competition [75]. These attitudes seem to be perpetuated into adulthood, being evident in university settings, even among female majority groups.

Limitations

A descriptive, cross-sectional study was carried out with a single timepoint of measurement. It would be interesting to carry out research with longitudinal data to assess changes in the academic and social-emotional experiences of gender-minority students throughout their university years. In relation to the sample participating in the study, it should be noted that the university degrees chosen had a minimum of 300 students enrolled, so it would be interesting to include university degrees with smaller groups, with different male/female ratios, since the experiences of minorities may be affected by the total number of students. Along the same lines, we have not performed statistical analyses using the variable “year in the degree program,” because our sample was not sufficient for each of the academic years. Such analyses could help us compare experiences as a function of advancement towards one’s degree. Indeed, based on information from the individual interviews, one can conclude that their experiences evolved progressively over the years.

In future research, it would be interesting to include personal variables, such as interpersonal relationship skills, gender stereotypes, and so on, which might affect university experiences. In this way, we could better understand the differences in university experiences between gender majorities and minorities in degrees with a gender gap, taking into account personal factors in addition to their belonging to a degree where groups are clearly defined by gender representation.

5. Conclusions

Few studies have sought to understand the kind of support that is needed for students of both genders to achieve a positive transition to university [76]. Nevertheless, there is growing research on university adaptation, with prospects of preventing college dropout [77–80]. Recent studies focus on the psychoemotional climate when studying attrition in higher education, considering it one of the quality indicators that determine academic success [81]. However, very few make this analysis with consideration for the gender perspective and the degree of the gender gap in undergraduate degree programs.

The ability to adapt to different situations in the university context varies according to the year of studies, leading to the conclusion that the development of support networks is important as a fundamental aspect of well-being in the university context [82]. It is therefore necessary to continue the investigation of adaptation and support processes in gender minority groups of the university population in order to facilitate socialization and learning processes at the university.

The present study has presented the academic and social-emotional experiences of students in degree programs with a large gender gap. The academic results reveal, on the one hand, greater satisfaction with the study program and with the profession on the part of students in historically female degrees. On the other hand, better organization and study habits are confirmed in female students compared to male students. Regarding the social-emotional aspect, the results generally reflect satisfactory relationships in the university context in all groups, although differences are seen in the minority groups, especially feelings of loneliness in female minority students during their first years at university.

In short, this research contributes toward improving the university orientation process in order to encourage students’ adaptation, taking into account the specific needs of gender, especially in those programs with unequal numerical representation of men and women.

In addition, knowledge about the experiences of students in the minority or majority may also affect potential students' desire to enroll in certain degree programs.

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