

FEMINIST ENCOUNTERS

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OF CRITICAL STUDIES
IN CULTURE AND POLITICS

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CHIEF EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

FEMINIST ENCOUNTERS: A JOURNAL OF CRITICAL STUDIES IN CULTURE AND POLITICS

Founded in 2017, *Feminist Encounters* is a journal committed to argument and debate, in the tradition of historical feminist movements.

In the wake of the growing rise of the Right across the world, openly neo-fascist national sentiments, and rising conservative populism, we feminists all over the world are needing to remobilise our energies to protect and advance gender rights.

Feminist Encounters provides a forum for feminist theorists, scholars, and activists to communicate with each other, to better educate ourselves on international issues and thus promote more global understanding, and to enhance our critical tools for fighting for human rights.

Feminism is an intellectual apparatus, a political agenda, and a programme for social change. Critical analysis of how gender discourses produce cultural identities and social practices within diverse lived realities is key to this change. We need to think more sharply in order to strategise well: as the discourses of conservatism renew and invigorate themselves, so we as feminist scholars need to be refining our amazonic swords in order not just to respond effectively but also to innovate our own ideas for equality and social justice.

We are, of course, committed to intersectionality, a vital lens through which to see the contours of race/ethnicity, class, sexuality, age/ability, and explore how gendered scripts get lived, and filtered through these specificities of cultural organisation. Lived experience is never codified in terms of gender alone, and so our research will always be sensitive to the nexus of lived oppressions.

The journal has a large editorial board and journal team, consisting of over forty scholars in twenty countries. This is deliberately inclusive in order that we can promote diversity and engage with different concerns from across the world. Our aim is not to simply talk to ourselves, reconfirming our localised assumptions, but to generate feminist encounters across regions, even if this is sometimes uncomfortable. Globalisation has been a triumph of neoliberalism, but digital technologies have also flattened and reduced the distance between us in dramatic ways, so that now we can talk to each other with unanticipated ease.

This new access to each others' voices has also brought challenges to the way we think and do things, so that being a feminist today might be quite a different prospect to a person living in China, Iran, Norway, South Africa or the UK. Second Wave Feminism used the idea of 'sisterhood' to invoke solidarity between women. I've always rather liked Andrea Dworkin's claim, though, that: "Feminism is a political practice of fighting male supremacy in behalf of women as a class, including all the women you don't like, including all the women you don't want to be around, including all the women who used to be your best friends whom you don't want anything to do with anymore." The notion of sisterhood was challenged by Black feminists in the 1980s as being too conceptually white, thus bell hooks' trenchant critique that: "the idea of 'common oppression' was a false and corrupt platform disguising and mystifying the true nature of women's varied and complex social reality". In the 1990s and 2000s it has been fair to say that feminist theory and Feminist Studies since have engaged more intentionally and deliberately with intersectionality - though Jennifer Baumgardner did caution us that: "Sisterhood was never about everybody agreeing".

For our journal, sisterhood must expand and embrace our transgender allies and our men friends, reminding us that sibling relationships are rarely straightforward or inevitably blessed by golden moments of total affinity. Thus, **Feminist Encounters** welcomes the opportunity for new kinds of international discussions in the spirit of collaboration and critical intellectual enquiry. We hope for productive agreement and disagreement, and the shared struggle of fighting gender oppression, with our minds, hearts, and bodies, as the times demand.

**Sally R Munt, University of Sussex
Founding Editor**

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FEMINIST ENCOUNTERS IN RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

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Editorial¹

Close Encounters of the Feminist Kind with Research and Innovation

Yvonne Benschop^{1*}, Liisa Husu^{2,3*}

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Feminist encounters with research and innovation are often not self-evident. Even though the EU has been addressing the issue of women and gender in science since the 1990s, and has pushed the agenda for responsible research and innovation (RRI) for a decade now, it is still not obvious that this responsibility stretches to include feminist perspectives on research and innovation. Yet, feminist research on research and innovation has been conducted in numerous fields – Gender Studies, Higher Education Studies, History, Management and Organisation, Philosophy, Psychology, Science and Technology Studies, Sociology, and more.

Some scholars praise the accomplishments of decades of feminist scholarly work, celebrating the success of feminism (Walby, 2011) or noting how ‘gender diversity is increasingly the norm in scientific work (...) and a driver of excellence and innovation’ (Nielsen, Bloch, and Schiebinger, 2018). Others are less optimistic, as they point to the ghettoisation of and opposition to feminist knowledge (Harding, Ford, and Fotaki, 2013; Verloo, 2018), the systemic genderedness of ‘research’ and ‘innovation’, and the persistence of intersectional gendered, racialised and classed inequalities in all kinds of research and innovation work. Responding to the Grand Challenges of the 21st century around ecological sustainability, digitalisation and Artificial Intelligence, and intersectional inequalities requires a further strengthening of research and innovation, and this cannot be done properly without incorporating attention to feminist perspectives and feminist knowledge (Benschop, forthcoming).

In this spirit, we situate this special issue in the long tradition of feminist work in different disciplines that critically interrogates the fields of research and innovation, and enriches it with sophisticated conceptualisations, critical methodologies and reflexive modes of situated knowledge production. This special issue of *Feminist Encounters* originated with Gabriele Griffin’s leadership of Nordwit, the Nordic Center of Excellence on women in technology driven careers, and an international workshop ‘Re-thinking Research and Innovation: How Does Gender Matter?’ that she organised in February 25-27, 2020 at Uppsala University, Sweden, co-funded by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond. Teaming up with Liisa Husu and Yvonne Benschop, we broadened the international and interdisciplinary reach of the special issue, casting a wide net for theoretical and empirical papers on the gendered triangle of research, innovation and entrepreneurship. We also made the link to entrepreneurship as in contemporary global capitalism, where the welfare state is receding and marketisation has become increasingly prominent, questions of entrepreneurship and self-employment have become entwined with research and innovation. Moreover, entrepreneurship is not only viewed as a route to employment but also as a source for innovation. We worked with a broad understanding of entrepreneurship, research, and innovation, and were welcoming to divergent feminist perspectives in order to be inclusive of different approaches to the themes.

Thinking about feminist encounters with research, innovation and entrepreneurship opens up an exciting variety of possible research questions, methodologies and ways of knowledge production. As the Call for Papers for this special issue mentioned, research and innovation are fields that have strongly gendered contours and dynamics. They remain fields that are strongly associated with technology, and with men and masculinity (Pecis, 2016). Entrepreneurship, as numerous studies testify, is also strongly associated with men and masculinity (Foss, Henry, Ahl, and Mikalsen, 2019). There is a wealth of previous feminist work that has taken issue with this narrow association, calling attention to different types of innovation such as incremental, process and social innovations,

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for instance, and highlighting that innovations are social and collective accomplishments that involve human agency (Styhre, 2013). Looking at innovation as a gendered phenomenon means asking questions about what constitutes innovation discursively and materially, the places and spaces where innovation takes place, and unpacking who gets to participate in innovation activities as innovator or as recipient of innovations (Alsos, Ljunggren, and Hytti, 2013; Andersson, Berglund, Gunnarsson, and Sundin, 2012).

Another example of widening the debate about innovation can be found under the catchy label of gendered innovations, a project that sets out to employ the creative power of sex, gender and intersectional analysis as a resource to stimulate the development of new knowledge and innovation in all phases of research in multiple disciplines from science, health and medicine, to engineering, environment and economics (Schiebinger, 2021). This work distinguishes three strategic, interrelated approaches to gender equality: Fixing the numbers, fixing the institutions and fixing the knowledge (Nielsen, Block and Schiebinger, 2018). Along these same lines, a lot of work has been done on gender in research, pointing to the importance of the representation of women, men, and non-binary people in research jobs and the reality of different opportunities in all phases of the research career (Murgia and Poggio, 2018), the pressing need for structural transformation of research organizations, to reach equality, diversity and inclusion (Drew and Canavan, 2020; Lansu, Bleijenbergh, and Benschop, 2019; Vinkenburg, 2017), and the feminist critique of the politics of knowledge production processes (Bell, Meriläinen, Taylor, and Tienari, 2020). In addition to research-performing organisations, there is a growing interest in the role of research-funding organisations, specifically those granting external competitive funding, in contributing to the gendering of scientific careers and knowledge (Husu and De Cheveigné, 2010; Husu, 2019). A large stream of research focuses on gender equality interventions in research organisations, gender mainstreaming, and resistance to change (Drew and Canavan, 2020). In the field of entrepreneurship, there are similar developments and a growing number of studies into the lived experiences of women entrepreneurs, the value of entrepreneurial activity for women, and engaging with entrepreneurship as social change (Ahl and Marlow, 2021; Calás, Smircich, and Bourne, 2009; Essers and Tedmanson, 2014).

In general, the gendered politics of knowledge production push research on the gendered triangle of research, innovation and entrepreneurship to the borders of the mainstream R&I debates. Yet, as the papers in this special issue show, there is an urgent need for more feminist encounters with research, innovation and entrepreneurship if we are to realise gender equality, diversity and inclusion in the field of R&I. In the next section, we provide a short discussion of the articles included in this special issue.

OVERVIEW OF THE SPECIAL ISSUE

We received a good response to the call for papers, all in all 21 abstracts. 16 were accepted to be developed to full articles. These were anonymously peer reviewed by international reviewers. Two of the submitted articles were (co-)authored by one of the editors of this special issue, Gabriele Griffin. The reviewing and decision-making process for these were solely dealt with by the other two co-editors, who are also responsible for this introduction.

We grouped the articles into three categories, dealing respectively with feminist knowledge, stretching innovation, and career inequalities in R&I. The first group represents one of the cornerstones of feminist inquiry and engages with feminist knowledge production. A key strength of feminist theories is their alternative ways of knowing by problematising claims to value neutrality and objectivity, and replacing them with social and political positioning and reflexivity (Bell, Meriläinen, Taylor, and Tienari, 2019 and 2020; Harding, 1991). Two articles fall into this category, one a research interview with two inspirational feminists reflecting on the march of feminist studies, the other a review article of the knowledge implications of metaphors on women academics.

The first article is Lea Skewes and Stine Willum Adrian's research interview with feminist professors and activists Rosi Braidotti and Nina Lykke, bringing them into dialogue about their careers, and the institutionalisation and future of Feminist Studies in universities. The interview illustrates how knowledge is personal and situated, how political and historical contexts shape the opportunities and constraints for feminist inquiry and feminist activism in patriarchal university institutions. Celebrating the accomplishments of the feminist community, the interview serves as an important reminder of how 'feminists have redesigned the parameters of knowledge'. At the same time, Braidotti and Lykke express concerns about academic capitalism and the increasing precarity for feminist academics and critical theorists hindering feminist activism today.

The second article by Sofia Moratti is a nuanced review of the 'myth and tale' metaphors on women academics. Moratti offers a critical examination of the knowledge produced by this specific group of metaphors, such as Cinderella, Athena, the holy grail, and the ivory tower. Such metaphors can capture the situation of women academics in compelling images, but they also contribute to othering women. Moratti makes the case for re-inventing metaphors to avoid the normativity and reductionism of the original plots and develop new feminist knowledge to challenge prevailing orthodoxies.

The second group of articles deals with stretching what is understood as innovation. The three articles in this category open up traditional ways of thinking about innovation as the development of new products and services that is heavily infused by technology. They use feminist theories to mobilise alternative conceptualisations of the processes and practices of innovation, effectively stretching what innovation can be.

The article by Karen Berglund and Katarina Pettersson presents a feminist intervention in the male dominated innovation discourse. It foregrounds innovation as ‘pactivity’, as a combination of activity and passivity, that is related to passion and openness, and to reflexivity. Drawing on empirical stories on innovation among rural women and men in Sweden, the authors develop alternative, feminist discourses of innovation, emphasising innovation as a social ‘pactivity’ characterised by not knowing and being passionate.

The article by Magdalena Peterson McIntyre focuses on gender equality consultancies in Sweden through an innovation lens and asks whether this approach means commodification of gender equality. Through an ethnographic study on Swedish gender equality consultants, she examines how commodification is practiced and understood in gender equality consultancy work. McIntyre demonstrates how the innovation discourse is, in this case, open for re-configurations, and argues that the commodification of gender equality simultaneously means opening up possibilities for re-coding and re-appropriating the concept of innovation.

The last article in this group is by Gabriele Griffin on the feminising of innovation in the new academic discipline of Digital Humanities (DH). Debunking the masculine connotation of innovation, Griffin theorises innovation as a feminine gendered concept because it centres on difference, and as feminist because it calls for disruption and transformation of the status quo. Interviews with academics working in DH in Nordic countries are used to analyse the marginalised position of this disciplinary innovation in university structures, the precarious careers of DH practitioners, and the feminisation of this innovation. Griffin sees this as a case of ‘nested newness’, in which innovations are hindered by their encounters with existing gender regimes in institutions.

The final group of articles in this special issue addresses gendered careers in research, innovation and entrepreneurship. They take issue with the persistent under-representation of women in the ICT sector, in relatively new fields such as biotechnology and Digital Humanities, and in the wider R&I field. They show how everyday practices of gender continue to produce gender inequalities in different contexts, and call attention to how such inequalities are obscured and legitimised by normative ideals about gender equality, and postfeminist ideas about individual choice and agency. Four of the five articles in this section address gendered research careers in a Nordic societal context, characterised by high overall gender equality, including generous provisions for childcare and parenting, and demonstrating complex dynamics of inequalities despite relative advances in provisions and policies.

Hilda Corneliussen’s article contributes to the unpacking of the paradox of male domination of research and innovation in the Norwegian context, a country with high societal gender equality. It explores the paradox drawing on five case studies on women and girls in ICT training, education and work. Three forms of argumentation emerge here that explain this paradox: first, the ‘free choice’ argument maintaining that gender equality has been reached in society, thus women’s choices must reflect their individual preferences rather than structural inequalities; second, the ‘affluent society’ argument, claiming that women in such societies do not need to choose high-status professions such as ICT, and third, the ‘nation vs. individual’ argument which fails to recognise the impact of employers and organisations on women’s choices. Corneliussen argues that these types of rhetoric present persistent horizontal gender segregation as the result of women’s free choices, and thus free the relevant actors from responsibility in developing more inclusive cultures in ICT work and education. Moreover, they do not challenge the image of the gender-equal nation.

The article by Gilda Seddighi discusses the situation of full-time working mothers in Norway, who still have a feeling of opting out of ICT careers because these careers cannot be combined with families. A critical interrogation of the work-life balance discourse, the article argues against re-doing gender in a two-track parenthood model still grounded in a strict separation of the public and private spheres. This model constructs an individual responsibility for balance, and sees the family as a private concern, effectively leaving greedy ICT work cultures and the intensification of ICT work intact.

Päivi Korvajärvi’s article analyses how women researchers reflect on ‘doing’ and ‘undoing’ gender at work in the R&I context in Finland, a society characterised by high overall gender equality, drawing on semi-structured interviews inside and outside academia. In general, the interviewees expressed hesitation, downplaying or doubtfulness about the significance of gender at work, and a constant insecurity about whether gender plays a role. However, on the other hand, views that female-dominated workplaces had a ‘bad atmosphere’ were common, arguably itself a way of ‘doing gender’. There were few signs of ‘undoing’ gender in terms of changing the status quo. Gender equality at work was understood by the informants as numerical gender balance, and a specific concern for improving the gender balance in female-dominated work organisations.

The article by Gabriele Griffin and Marja Vehviläinen explores the persistent inequalities in R&I as an employment arena in the Nordic context, and more specifically in Finland, Sweden and Norway, in four career stages from doctoral to professorial level, in relatively new and emerging fields such as biotechnology, health

technology and digital humanities. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with women and men researchers in and outside academia, and Charles Tilly's framework of mechanisms perpetuating inequality (exploitation, opportunity hoarding, emulation and adaptation) they conclude that despite advanced child-care and parental leave provisions, specific and cumulative gendered disadvantages still accompany women's R&I careers across career stages, in particular through unquestioned informal everyday practices.

The article by Lynn Hamilton, Janice Thomas and Stefanie Ruel presents a small-scale exploratory study of engineering and technology entrepreneurs, from an under-researched perspective, focusing on daughter-successors of small and medium-sized family firms. Applying a critical realist perspective and semi-structured interviews they analyse the mechanisms of gender bias that three daughter successors experienced as entrepreneurs. Gender bias was expected to derive from family, family business and broader society. However, the validation the daughters received from their fathers was found to be crucial to counteract gender bias from other sources, enabling the daughters' success as leader-successors.

FUTURE ENCOUNTERS

A special issue on feminist encounters of research and innovation provides only limited space and can only partially address the rich and growing field of feminist and gender research in R&I and knowledge production. As a final comment, we want to highlight some key and emerging topics and issues for future research in this area. Some of them are related to broadening the understanding of gender, others to how research and knowledge production are socially organised, contextual and situated knowledges, and still others to specific emerging research questions and knowledge gaps.

Most articles in this special issue apply a binary approach to gender, and focus mainly on women, their careers and experiences. Besides studies exploring academic masculinities and men as men in research and academia (Hearn, 2020), a broader understanding of gender in research, including non-binary, trans, and queer approaches (Beemyn, 2019; Cipolla, Gupta, Rubin, and Willey, 2017; Pitcher, 2019) has been developing in many fields. Furthermore, to enrich and deepen the understanding of the dynamics of persistent inequalities, we need more intersectional approaches, exploring how gender, ethnicity, nationality, class, sexuality intersect and create opportunity structures and obstacles in research careers and research organisations (Niemann, Gutiérrez y Muhs, and Harris, 2020; Styhre, 2018). One particularly thorny theme here is the inequalities in research organisations that are perpetuated by intersecting forms of sexism, racism, harassment and gender-based violence. More research is needed to understand the dynamics of this violence in its various forms and contexts, the impact on research careers and research cultures, and effective remedies against it.

When it comes to organisational contexts of research, in addition to departments and research institutes, research teams are in many fields playing an increasingly important role for careers and research development. Research teams range from small teams in one university or department to large international teams comprising hundreds of researchers across different national locations. Team science is portrayed as a driver of innovation, but we need more knowledge on the gender, race and class dynamics in different research teams.

Research on gender and research performing organisations has thus far had a strong focus on universities and research institutes, lately to some extent also on research funding organisations. Research on gender relations and careers in industrial R&I has thus far been less developed, despite the fact that in countries investing most in R&I the largest share of research is conducted in the business sector. Questions of centre and periphery in feminist knowledge production on R&I need more attention (Blagojević, 2009) as do theorising and empirical research that draw on de-/postcolonial approaches and indigenous knowledge to challenge and broaden existing notions and understandings (Subramaniam, Foster, Harding, Roy, and TallBear, 2016).

In the field of gender and technology, the question of gendered participation remains vital but another pressing research agenda is addressing issues of technology that have broad societal impact, such as intersectional gender impacts and dynamics of Artificial Intelligence, algorithms, domestic technologies and robotics (Bajorek, 2019; Perez, 2019; UNESCO, 2020). Feminist theories are needed that can question the sociomaterial and affective dimensions of technological artefacts, and interrogate the defining role of social categories in the design, implementation and use of technologies.

Finally, gender equality in science, academia and research is currently on the agenda of key global and regional stakeholders, such as the UN, OECD, UNESCO, EU, as well as many governmental authorities and national research councils. These have been advocating policies and interventions around gender equality for decades. Despite this, a recurring question is: why is the change towards more gender equal, gender aware and gender-sensitive research organisations still so slow? More feminist analyses are called for in the field of mainstream international and national science and research policies, some still seemingly gender-neutral, as well as specific gender equality policies in higher education and research. Here, feminist research focusing on policy implementation, as in feminist implementation studies, opens up new ways to approach and understand this

contradiction (Engeli and Mazur, 2018, Carey, Dickinson and Olney, 2019). All in all, we hope this special issue and the full research agenda illustrate the richness of gender and feminist perspectives on research, innovation and entrepreneurship, and can serve as an inspiration for future scholarship.

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The Long March Through the Patriarchal Institutions: A Dialogue Between Rosi Braidotti and Nina Lykke

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ABSTRACT

Doing feminist work from within patriarchal institutions comes with unique challenges. We invited two activists and feminist studies professors, Rosi Braidotti and Nina Lykke, to reflect on feminists' long march through patriarchal university institutions. Concretely, we asked them to reflect upon three themes. Firstly, we asked them to situate themselves and their work – and reflect upon what it takes to do feminist work which troubles mainstream epistemologies. Secondly, we asked them to explore how the conditions for feminist research have changed over time – and what the current neoliberal and right-wing backlash does to feminist research. And finally, we asked how coming of age might have influenced them, and how they looked upon intergenerational exchanges in the feminist movement. The aim of the dialogue was to look back at how the feminist studies movement in academia emerged, while at the same time looking forward to explore which new political and ideological conditions have arisen and how these might affect future possibilities for conducting feminist research within academia.

Keywords: Braidotti, Lykke, patriarchal institutions, feminist studies, feminist revolutions

THE CONTEXT FOR THE DIALOGUE

The dialogue between Rosi Braidotti and Nina Lykke took place at Aarhus University in Denmark in September 2018. The event was organised by the *Gendering in Research Network* and the three editors of the special issue of *Women, Gender and Research* called *Feminist STS at Work*¹ (Adrian, Skewes and Schwennesen, 2018). In this special issue, Lykke featured with an interview about how her academic career had been entangled with her activist intentions of rethinking knowledge production and epistemology (Skewes and Adrian, 2018). We invited yet another inspirational activist and feminist researcher, Braidotti to join in the reflections about her experiences with the long march through the patriarchal institutions.

Braidotti and Lykke have collaborated in multiple ways throughout their careers. Together they edited *Between Monsters, Goddesses and Cyborgs* (1996). They have also been among the driving forces in a multitude of key feminist research and teaching networks in Europe, such as the European feminist curriculum development organisation Athena, which grew into the European Association for Feminist Research and Teaching At Gender (<https://atgender.eu/>), as well as the Noise Summer School (<https://graduategenderstudies.nl/education/noise-summer-school/>), gathering feminist students for summer schools annually since 1994. Furthermore, they have collaborated within the framework of a Marie Curie network for feminist PhD education GENDERGRADUATES. All of these networks and collaborations across disciplines, universities and countries illustrate their passionate desire to establish a solid basis for feminist researchers.

Braidotti and Lykke are close friends. Their academic careers have in different ways been dedicated to the struggle to expand the fragile spaces of academia's interdisciplinary feminist borderlands and included transgression of national borders. Both are openly married lesbians, Lykke widowed since 2014.

Braidotti describes herself as having led a nomadic life—born in Italy, growing up as a migrant in Australia, only to move to Paris in order to complete her PhD and start her academic work in the Paris campus of Columbia

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University at Reid Hall. Braidotti built most of her career in Utrecht in the Netherlands, where she was appointed founding professor of women's studies in 1988 a position she has occupied ever since. This migrant, nomadic and multi-lingual condition has inspired her theoretical thinking (Braidotti, 1994; 2011). Braidotti situates herself as grounded in one discipline namely continental philosophy (with inspirations from Foucault, Irigaray and Deleuze), although she adopts an interdisciplinary feminist approach influenced by literature, media and cultural studies. However, she is neither employed by the discipline of philosophy, nor especially loyal to it. Braidotti has systematically practiced dis-identification from and dis-obedience to any discipline and has written extensively on the 'undutiful daughters' of the academy. In other words, she has invested her intellectual energy in the making of transversal feminist theories.

Lykke has had her academic base in two Scandinavian countries: first approximately 20 years in Denmark, at the University of Southern Denmark, and the following 20 years, at The Unit of Gender Studies at Linköping University in Sweden, where she now is an Emerita Professor. In this sense, Lykke has had two academic platforms, and despite being a Danish citizen, she has felt most at home academically in Sweden where her endeavours to implement feminist agendas in academia has met fewer obstacles than in Denmark. Even though Lykke started out with a degree in literary studies, she considers herself a transdisciplinary scholar, and a key part of her work has been committed to breaking down disciplinary borders in order to achieve new types of trans- and post-disciplinary knowledges which, resonate better with feminist epistemologies.

DIALOGUE

Feminist researchers situated in a historical and political context

BRAIDOTTI: It is like being in dialogue with myself, being in dialogue with Nina, these are parallel, though distinct, lives. I think we need more parallel life stories to account for our generation. I actually co-wrote one experimental parallel text with three of my best Italian friends and it was a phenomenal experience (Braidotti et al., 2003). It is very illuminating to have the personal and professional narratives of several women of the same generation running alongside each other. But I must admit that it is a challenge to look back upon your life, while you are still active. It requires a balancing act between professional assessment, the personal affects and the depersonalised accounts of multiple – and often contradictory – experiences and practices.

One of the hesitations I have in providing my account is that I fear superimposing a retrospective sense of order into a life-itinerary that was anything but linear. Let me give you an example: When I turned 60 in 2014, I was honoured to have a volume of essays collected in my memory (Blaagaard and van der Tuin, 2014). Writing my own contribution to it, was like experiencing yourself as already gone, while you were still alive. That stance required an impersonal or depersonalised look upon my life-work, as if in fact it did not only belong to me.

That sensation allowed me to focus on a set of reflections on death, that I had started writing in 2006 in *Transpositions*. Being a vital new materialist, I do not go into the rhetoric of vulnerability easily, but rather defend an affirmative way of processing pain and fear. Precisely because of that affirmative ethics, however, I am capable of talking openly about death – even the thought of my own death – unsentimentally, but also uncynically. Death being the event that you can only prepare in life, coincides with the project of living an ethically and politically just life. In some respect, that postface is my literary and intellectual testament. Writing as if I had already gone, turned into one of the most extraordinary, fascinating, generative, difficult things to do. While it pained me, it also cheered me up immensely.

My feminist politics, framed by consciousness-raising, affirmative ethics and the politics of location is co-extensive with my intellectual life project. It has led me to foreground the question of subjectivity in both my theoretical work and my institutional practice. The golden rules of my feminist method are: the dis-identification from institutional and disciplinary formations, from socially enforced identities and familiar representations. Dis-identifications enact a critical distance from the power structures at work in the process of becoming subjects. But they also pave the ground for alternative spaces to emerge as experiments in becoming. I remain convinced that the politics of location, based on materially grounded intersectionality, is feminism's greatest theoretical and methodological contribution. It stresses the need to speak from somewhere grounded and accountable and to produce knowledge as an embodied, embedded, affective and relational entity.

To position myself, then: I belong to the generation of the baby boomers and although I am at the tail end of it, I was shaped by the Cold War, and by a technological universe that looks primitive in relation to today's internet-framed world. When I try to situate myself, these two events are the two grand canyons between me and the younger generations: the Cold War and no internet.

This was a Europe composed only of seven countries, in a world ideologically split in two opposing camps, pointing nuclear weapons at each other. Strict borders with visa systems limiting travel dramatically. Without adhering to strict visa regulations, you could not enter the Soviet Empire, which extended across Eastern Europe.

But we all did make a point of crossing that border legally. Going to West Berlin became an act of resistance. But it felt like visiting another planet. The differences were staggering. Of course, I moved to Australia in 1970 and my experience of migration added another, ever sharper dimension, to the sense of mobility and the experience of hard borders. The anti-Vietnam moratorium was even stronger in Melbourne than in my Italian birthplace, as was the sense of a lethal Cold War confrontation. So across multiple sites – Italy, Australia, then again Europe – the world I grew up in, was so other than the globally interlinked contemporary world.

Our collective technological power was laughable – not only did we not have the internet, but we even lacked the most basic phone connections. These limitations were not solely negative, because they allowed us to spend a lot of time with our friends. We functioned in groups, swarms and movements. In some ways we did not suffer as much from stress due to the constant inter-connectivity, the information overload, and the pressure to make consumer-oriented choices and express opinions.

Role-models for feminist practice were few and far between. One of my role models was the existentialist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir – because I fell in love with philosophy as a literary and textual genre very early. Then, growing up in Melbourne, I changed language and also political culture, becoming closer to the English-speaking world. Firstly, I was fortunate enough to have at feminist university supervisors of the calibre of Genevieve Lloyd, who is a life-long influence and role-model and Maurita Harney, a close friend. Secondly, there was the Australian women's movement: I admired Germaine Greer – an incredible woman, quite a contrarian, but unique. I do not agree with her current transphobic position, but her earlier work inspired me. Internationally, Kate Millet mattered to me, because she represented the radical wing, and because she dared to speak up about her multi-directional sexual orientations. Millet was a Rhodes Scholar who did her PhD at Oxford, on a topic that we would later turn into women's studies. Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1970) is one of the first feminist PhDs. In her book she summaries the totality of available feminist knowledge in 1964-66. She covers it all. Her dissertation has chapters on psychology, history, sociology, philosophy, literature – everything! Similarly, when I did my PhD in philosophy at the Sorbonne in the late 1970s, there were three books on feminist philosophy. That part of the research was quickly done. We were just so few then, and yet we knew that there would be strength in numbers.

Compare that situation to today: now there is a mountain of scholarly material – from Millet's *Sexual Politics* to the feminist glossaries, readers, anthologies or the multi-volume Routledge Encyclopaedia of Women's and Gender Studies. I mean, it's incredible to think of what we have produced as a collective community of scholars in 30 to 40 years! Feminist knowledge is one of the greatest epistemological revolutions of the second half of the twentieth century. We have redesigned the parameters of knowledge.

In a sense there was only one way for my generation to go, and that was forward, kicking, fighting and saying no! Civil disobedience! The rebellion was genuine – there was a clear sense that we were both carrying and being carried by history. The conviction that we were a force of progress was overwhelming. Baby boomers are demographically very numerous. And we shared the sense that we *were* what was happening, that we were shaping the future by upsetting the present.

That awareness had implications for the academic work I did. Like many in my peer group, I never had a career plan. I struggled with the academic institutions, contesting, questioning and making things up as I went. I respected the rules of academic work and upheld the highest possible standards, but not without criticism of the lack of inclusive objectivity and the pseudo-universalisms that structured research. We were politicised and accustomed to working together in groups and collectives. Moreover, we were carried by a growing economy, in a world order that was visibly cracking, as the youth rebellion and the anti-colonial movements showed. Retrospectively, I would say that we were also carried by a massive set of crises in the transformation of capitalism from an industrial to a post-industrial society. But we had a sense that we were agents of progressive history: popular culture was on our side, we had the music, we had the technology, we had plenty of ideas about the future. There was a great feeling of excitement and a sense of possibility. Not having career plans left many of us open to the risk of long periods of un- or under-employment. For many of my friends this translated into a marginal social existence. But my role models like de Beauvoir never had a career plan, either.

Money was not a priority. In fact, we, like the good old socialists, we despised it. It was perfectly okay for my generation to be poor. I spent most of my youth buying second-hand clothes at flea markets. This is before brands took over the market. This is before mobile phones, Instagram, and the coercion of the branded 'body beautiful' culture. The turning point was the punk revolution, which ruled that the way you dressed and looked, expresses not only your politics, but also your world-view. The punk revolution, however, soon became pretty expensive and turned into a brand of its own. Before that, it was fine to be poor. Everybody was, and it did not matter, partly because we did not need advanced technology: no iPhone, no iPad. Our generational relationship with commodification and money needs again to be contextualised. Clearly, by becoming tenured professors – as pioneers in women's and gender studies – some of us ended up building amazing careers, though this was never planned. At heart we remain sceptical about money and capital.

But the historical contradiction of a radical generation that becomes a sort of counter-establishment, is real and I take it very seriously. In this respect, let me add that together with my marriage partner Anneke Smelik, we have made a testament on behalf of Utrecht University (ROSANNA Foundation). We are giving away all of our money to a foundation in the university that will create scholarships for women. It is kind of gesture of coherence that re-asserts our critical distance from money in some respects, while honouring our achievements and social role. It is also a statement of intergenerational solidarity, because we are tenured radicals that made careers out of being radical. That is our historical contradiction.

LYKKE: I did not have a career plan either, and I ended up having three careers or non/careers. I have just entered into my third non/career, which is being retired and enabled by my retirement money to act as an independent researcher, which I really love. The first non/career came, from our being among the post WWII baby boomers. For me, this first non/career was also intertwined with the students' movement of 1968. I happened to study at a department at the University of Copenhagen – the Department for Literary Studies – which was one of the hubs for the students' revolt in Denmark in the early 1970s. Moreover, there was a strong feminist presence at the Department. The (back then) well-known feminist slogan of 'being tired of making tea to the revolution' led us to the feminist movement and gave room for our engagement in feminist socialist activism. In these hubs there was a strong 'do it yourself' ethos. A bit like: 'Disrupt all authoritarian ways of doing Academia! Do it democratically! Do it differently! Do it yourself! Make your own curriculum! Decide what you find important to study from an activist perspective!' I think it was a time where everything was up for grabs, or, at least, we felt that everything was up for grabs.

On the one hand, there was the Cold War, the Vietnam war, apartheid in South Africa, the Israeli occupation of Palestine – there were many fierce political conflicts in the world. And there was an enormous political repression emanating from these conflicts. In this sense everything was certainly neither up for grabs, nor possible. However, I think that the ways in which we, the radical students, actually succeeded in re-making curricula, gave me a very strong sense of the fragility of institutions, a sense of possibilities, a sense of horizons opening up, a feeling that institutions and curricula can be changed! A just-go-out-and-do-it-feeling. If you are a critical mass, you can do it! Because when I was a student, we basically created our own feminist curriculum. Coming from this very untraditional educational background turned me into a post-disciplinary scholar. I cannot say that I have a discipline, even though I have a degree in literary studies. Instead, I am a post-disciplinary feminist scholar, and I have been that since I started doing feminist research at the Department of Literary Studies at the University of Copenhagen in 1970's. Already back then, I thought that research problems ought not to emerge from narrow disciplinary niches but grow out of questions raised in activism.

I have brought the knowledge about the possibility of change in Academia – which came out of these experiences from the intersections of the students' and feminist movement – with me ever since. It has been crucial for my work to build up feminist studies throughout my second non/career. I really took the lesson back then that curricula can be changed from below – this shaped my whole academic career, which definitely was not a career in the more traditional sense of the word. I was, even hesitant about whether it was worthwhile to finish my MA degree in literary studies. It was only because my life partner Mette Bryld told me that she thought it would be better for my future possibilities for doing feminist research (which was what I passionately desired to do), that I actually completed the degree. Similarly, with my PhD, or rather my old Danish doctoral degree of Dr. Phil., which consisted of 10 years work of independent research on feminism, psychoanalysis and queer subjectivities (Lykke, 1989). I never thought of it as something that would end up as a doctoral degree. I saw it as a strong political, epistemological, feminist revolutionary, theoretical, and epistemological work, which I needed to do. It was only in retrospect that I realised that I could also hand it in as a dissertation and obtain the back then very prestigious Dr. Phil. degree. But of course, it helped me in my second non/career that I did hand it in, again prompted by Mette who persuaded me by saying that it would contribute to the recognition of the emerging field of feminist studies.

If my activist non/career was the first one, my second one has been dedicated to the long march through the institutions. From the beginning of the 1980s, I took part in building up women's studies, as we called it back then. However, I personally preferred the name feminist studies, emphasising a link to feminist epistemology, and activism, rather than to the object of study: women or gender. My second career was really what the German student movement leader Rudi Dutschke labelled 'the long march through the institutions of power' (Dutschke, 1980); that is, transforming society radically by working from inside its institutions. This is what I have done since the beginning of the 1980's until my third non/career started, when I retired and became a professor emerita in 2016.

Throughout this second non/career, I was trying to create spaces for feminist studies at universities – first 20 years in Denmark, followed by 20 years in Sweden. The reason I moved from Denmark to Sweden in 1999 was that there was so much resistance and backlash in Denmark. In the 1990s, it was more or less impossible to

implement feminist research and teaching agendas in Danish universities. I experienced that going across Øresund (the strait between Denmark and Sweden) – changing jobs from being an associate professor of gender studies in Denmark, to becoming a professor of gender studies in Sweden – was like going from being absolutely *no-one* in terms of how I was looked upon in academia, to becoming a recognised expert.

Doing feminist research and teaching in Denmark was considered old-fashioned and boring. ‘Why the hell do you do it?’ That was how I was met. Even though I had written this 700-page doctoral dissertation on feminism, psychoanalysis and queer subjectivities, and considered myself an expert on gendered and queer subjectivities. I was not praised for my work in Denmark. However, when I moved to Sweden, I became a celebrated expert overnight! I was the same person – my knowledge and skills were the same – but how I was met in academia (outside of feminist circles) and in the general public was radically different in the two countries. The conditions in Sweden were just so much better! Together with colleagues, I got the possibility to set up a PhD Program in Interdisciplinary Gender Studies at Tema Genus, the Gender Studies Unit at Linköping University, where I have been employed since 1999. Today, 20 years later, we have awarded 29 PhD degrees in Interdisciplinary Gender Studies, and our first PhD, Cecilia Åsberg, is now professor in the Unit.

We have also set up an International Excellence Centre for Feminist Research (in collaboration with Gender Studies at Örebro University and Karlstad University) which, over the years, has hosted over 200 feminist researchers from all over the world through periods of residence. Tema Genus currently has four professors in gender studies; one in postcolonial feminisms, one in gender and neuroscience, one in gender and society, and one in gender, nature and culture. Compared to the two tiny offices we had for the Gender Studies Centre at the University of Southern Denmark, the contrast has been immense. So, if the lesson learnt from my first activist non/career was about the fragility of the institutions, the one I took from my second non/career and the work to institutionalise feminist studies in academia, was how big a role the social context plays. Denmark was definitely not the right place to do feminist research in the 1990s and 2000s, but Sweden was! Therefore, do not despair when the country you are in is totally [raises her middle finger]. Try instead to go for a job elsewhere.

Now, jumping quickly to my third non/career. In Sweden you have to retire when you turn 67. You get an official letter from the university telling you that you have to send in your letter of resignation. They send you this letter three months before you turn 67. My colleague, Professor of Gender and Knowledge Production, Margrit Shildrick asked me, ‘What happens if we do not retire?’ We posed that question to the HR department, and were told that then we would probably be fired for lack of cooperation! So, indeed, it was an offer we could not refuse! All the Swedish emerita/emeritus-professors knew this, it was only non-Swedes such as Margrit and I, who had not understood that you had to resign yourself, because otherwise it would qualify as ageism, which is illegal in Sweden. Nevertheless, now I am enjoying being an independent researcher who can do, write and say whatever I like. I do not have to send in applications to get money from neoliberal funding agencies. I do not have to subscribe to the *cruel optimism* about topics I am not totally fond of, but which may attract funding to my department. I do not have to spin applications in order to get money out of funding agencies. Now, I can write poetry and dedicate myself to dig deep into the research I really care for without doing admin-work, I can delve into crip, queer, feminist, de-colonial, and posthuman studies. I can do whatever I like. I am very happy about this third non/career.

Changes in Conditions – Threats to Feminist Research and Methodologies

BRAIDOTTI: My generation challenged the political ideal of equality and highlighted the difference that feminist activists and philosophers can make to actual academic practice. Most of us actually left philosophy as an institutional site and settled for new interdisciplinary fields (Braidotti and Butler, 2010); I never held a job in philosophy, nor felt accepted or respected by academic philosophy. The institutional friction between my generation of feminists and philosophy departments was never resolved. I still love the archive of that discipline, though, and keep re-reading core texts.

My academic career started as a pioneer in women’s studies in Utrecht in 1988. It was a challenge to steer a professional course as the founding professor of women’s studies at Utrecht University in the midst of the end of the Cold War era. Although I had great role models in some of the American women’s studies leaders, such as Kate Stimpson, Nancy Miller and Joan Scott, in the European context I and my allies had no set paths to follow. The previous generation of feminists, who came of age in Europe in the 1950s and 1960s like de Beauvoir, had settled into an ambiguous relationship to the academic world by identifying with masculine universalistic intellectual positions. This older generation dialogued more readily with the great male philosophers of the past, than with living women, let alone forging alliances with their own peer-group. Working together for the institutionalisation of women’s studies allowed us to change that. I believe that gestures of feminist solidarity within institutional work was the transformative moment. It allowed the students to enjoy the institutional presence of supportive feminist teachers and supervisors, who would train them rigorously, while supporting their radical projects. We started using the scholarly apparatus as a tool to consolidate feminist theories and knowledge claims.

Teaching is the ideal way to transmit the feminist genealogical capital and to empower the critical independence of minds of younger generations. After setting up BA and MA teaching programmes, by 1995 we established the first PhD training programmes in Utrecht, which required official certification by the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences. Getting that recognition was a breaking point, which allowed us to start the Netherlands Research School of Women's Studies and produced dozens of PhD dissertations. The inter-generational impact is huge, just consider that, two of my former PhD students – Sandra Ponzanesi and Iris van der Tuin – went on to become full professors in Utrecht themselves. That is true feminist genealogies at work!

The international context after the end of apartheid, was dominated in my world by the twin phenomena of the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the enlargement of the European Union. It was also punctuated by a new wave of wars: the first Gulf war, the Falklands war, and the Yugoslav and Balkans war had a major impact on the development of continental and transnational feminism. My work as director of women's studies was trans-European from the start. Together with dear colleagues like Nina, we set up the Erasmus teaching network NOISE in 1993 with funds from the European commission. It is still going today as a self-funded network. Building on that success, we were asked to advise the commission on matters of gender equality in education, which led to the creation of the Socrates Thematic Network ATHENA in 1996, of which I became the founding director. In 2010 it received the Erasmus Prize from the European Commission. And then came the first 'Gender Graduates', Marie Curie Early Stage Training consortium in 2005 to 2006. There's no under-estimating the quality and the quantity of the work I and my colleagues did to network feminist Europe. We were pioneers in this kind of transnational education.

My institutional practice echoed the nomadic theoretical project as a critique of Eurocentrism from within, and a way of activating the centre away from inertia and self-replication. I undertook the European feminist project as a critique of Eurocentric whiteness and a rejection of methodological nationalism (Beck, 2007), thus joining in a planetary debate which black, anti-racists, post-colonial and other critical thinkers put on the map.

Therefore, the fact that I never made a career plan does not mean that I did not think seriously about what practice would best suit my political passions and intellectual talents. Migration has shaped my life, with immense shifts first from Italy to Australia, then back to Europe in Paris and finally into the Netherlands. This non-linear path is crucial, as it implies a series of creative disconnections – it wrote internationalism into my personal and professional script from the beginning.

The Rise of Cognitive Capitalism

BRAIDOTTI: A lot changed with the new world order in 1989, the so-called triumph of capitalism and the 'end of history' (Fukuyama, 1992) with the rise of neo-liberal economics. These mutations challenged, the Hegelian-Marxist axiom that history had its own teleological logic, which confronted its contradictions of capitalism in a dialectical mode in the pursuit of breaking points. This axiom was central to the feminist socialist and radical projects as well. It rested on the assumption that capitalism could not continue to sustain such flagrant injustices and that it would eventually break. This idea was rejected by my philosophical teachers: Foucault like Deleuze, and Derrida to a certain extent, called into question the logic of dialectics and the inevitability of the breakdown of capitalism. They drew the consequences of the relative failure of the students' revolution of '68, which was a great cultural revolution, but less successful as a political one.

That generation of French thinkers, which included major feminists like Irigaray and Cixous, as well as Francophone Arab feminists like the Moroccan Fatima Mernisi and Assja Djebar - who was Algerian and a member of the Académie Française - drew the consequences of this, calling the Hegelian and Marxist political position to accountability.

This resulted in a change of paradigm that had a big impact on my work. I strove to move towards corporeal new materialism, closer to Spinoza's insight about vital matter and non-essentialistic naturalism. These ideas were central to the post-structuralist philosophies. The problem is that their political punch was lost in translation, when the Americans repackaged them as 'French theory', focusing almost exclusively on the linguistic turn of Lacan and Derrida. This created the American school of 'French Theory', centred on semiotics, psychoanalysis and deconstruction (Redfield, 2016).

What was left out, in the creation of 'French theory' was all the neo-materialist line of thinking, which entails the critique of dialectics and hence proposes a different reading of capitalism and of resistance to it. A true change of paradigm towards what Deleuze and Guattari (1972) called 'capitalism as schizophrenia', that is to say a system that shows the adaptable capacity to sustain even the most strident contradictions without breaking. Why? Because capital – as well as the resistance to it – are not transcendental notions, but rather radically immanent ones. That means we are part of the very problems we are critiquing. Oppositional consciousness does not extract or exonerate us from the conditions we are against – we are part of one, common matter, which is environmental social and affective and these multiple ecologies of belonging also structure the work of critique. This relocation of the function of the negative is the defining trait of radical Spinozism. It intersects perfectly with radical feminism,

when it argues that the personal is the political, that locations are grounded, embodied and embedded, and that solidarity is critical to compose subject formations as transversal alliances. That is the groundwork of my research.

What matters here for the status of the university is the analysis of the mutation of capitalism. As early as 1979, Pierre Macherey wrote about the paradigmatic switch from Hegel to Spinoza. For me, to be able to detect these changes in the system and assess how they impacted upon the practice of radical epistemologies like feminism became a priority. So, where does this mutation leave the long feminist march through the institutions? If the contemporary university has become co-extensive with cognitive capitalism, it must admit that knowledge nowadays is produced everywhere: in corporate locations like Google labs, Apple campuses, Netflix studios, and Amazon franchises, in the art world, in activist organisations like citizens' science. This means that we do not need to be in a university to produce knowledge or initiate scientific research. To deal with this, we need new cartographies of power, to account for new modes of knowledge production and what kind of subjects we are in the process of becoming. And my perennial concern is: how are we reproducing hierarchies of power? Are we reproducing the very system that we are trying to fight? The university reacted to the rise of neoliberalism by reconstructing itself through a double move. On the one hand the academic star system, which really starts in the 1990s, and on the other the precariousness of the teaching labour force, thus creating a pyramidal structure. The diversification of the once classical professorships into a range of different kinds of professors over the last ten years is indicative of this shift.

But you see massive transformations everywhere, for instance the blatant marketing of neoliberal feminism – making it into a corporate issue on individual empowerment and financial success. That happens just as the equal opportunities policies switch to gender mainstreaming, taking the radical edge out of feminist practice and making it compatible with the re-organisation of the economy. Today we have the whole 'diversity' mantra to deal with. It is necessary to a certain extent, but is it transformative enough?

LYKKE: Well, on one hand, you are right; that the students' revolt of 1968 failed, or rather I would say that its results were co-opted by neoliberalism. But on the other hand, I think that '68 really made an impact, I would say that the feminist branch of '68 of which we were part, had an impact on academia in an everyday utopian sense. But it also made some strange alliances with neoliberalism. Seen from a neoliberal point of view, I think that what the students' movement of '68 did was to wipe out an outdated academic system – the old academic hierarchy with professors in charge of all decision-making, having absolute power and authority to keep up often very old-fashioned and outdated curricula instead of reorganising the university in terms of being useful to society. This agenda about being useful to society, 'research for the people, not for profit' was what we demonstrated for in the 1970s. And I think our activist work gave impetus to new critical research agendas – feminist, queer, postcolonial, anti-racist, post-human, crip and post-socialist research agendas – the agendas of all the radical studies that emerged from the institutional arenas, and made the changes happening in the 1970s in the wake of '68 possible.

However, unfortunately, the new agendas were also co-opted and twisted by neoliberalism, so 'useful for society and the people' ended up meaning 'useful for neoliberal capital', and this was, of course *not* what we intended when we demonstrated for university reforms and new critical curricula in the 1970s. But strange alliances emerged along the way. Some European countries, among others in Eastern and Southern Europe, kept up the old system with massively long degrees instead of shorter stream-lined modules, which eventually became the neoliberal mantra for effective academic education. And, in the universities which kept up the old-fashioned, hierarchical system with long degrees and a lot of professorial power, it has been much more difficult to implement gender studies. Therefore, paradoxically, in the countries where neoliberalism actually has been more advanced in universities, such as Sweden for instance, it has been easier for gender studies to enter the academic scene. Ideology did not matter so much there. If you could attract 500 students for each module in the neoliberal university, then everything was fine. 'If students or external funds pay what you are doing, great, then just go ahead and do it!' was what we were told by neoliberal university managers. No focus on ideology here. In the old system, by contrast, you were rejected, because feminist and radical anti-capitalist epistemologies were not accepted.

I am caricaturing a bit, but what I am saying is that in the new, neoliberal system it was numbers that counted rather than ideologies, and paradoxically, this made it easier to bring in gender studies. We had the big European Athena Network (in the 1990s and 2000s) that Rosi successfully coordinated for many years, and which at some point included over 100 universities running Gender Studies Programs all over Europe. In the context of this network, we developed the idea about twisting the neoliberal agenda from feminist perspectives. You may say that in one way neoliberal academic organisations used us, but in another way, we also used the university: we went in and twisted the neoliberal agendas, using them for critical feminist purposes. We talked about speaking EU language but doing it with a feminist twist. I myself invented the slogan of doing 'feminist hit and run interventions' into the neoliberal university, when we set up summer schools, journals, courses in feminist epistemology, feminist theory, and other radical things – basically initiating learning processes that heavily criticised neoliberalism from feminist points of view.

There was a strange alliance with neoliberalism. I have been writing about this process (Lykke, 2017b), trying to come to terms with the dilemmas and the contradictions through the lens of two notions; on the one hand, Lauren Berlant's notion of cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011), implying that you produce an optimism that only exists at the surface, to which you are attracted, while erasing the underlying problems. I think we became very good at navigating in the messy waters between performing cruel optimism, and on the other hand, twisting and turning neoliberal agendas, making space for the unfolding of everyday utopianism – an important notion coined by Davina Cooper (2014). I think there were spaces where we succeeded at twisting the neoliberal agenda and doing things critically and differently – I think that all the very radical and critical feminist PhD theses which came out of the institutionalisation of PhD degrees in feminist studies testify to this. And I think what you [pointing to Lea Skewes who founded Gendering in Research at Aarhus University] have been doing here in Aarhus is also that sort of twisting the neoliberal agenda. So, I think we need to think about the long march through the institutions of power as this messy mix of cruel neoliberal optimism and critical feminist twisting of agendas, creating everyday utopianism. This is for me 'feminist hit and run interventions' into the neoliberal university.

However, I think it is also important to be aware that a new situation is emerging today, where the growing right-wing seems to be changing the agendas, and ideologies are coming back. While the neoliberal managers basically do not care about ideologies as long as you can prove that you earn money, the raising right-wing is different, and I think it is very important to be aware of this difference. Viktor Orban threatened to put a ban on gender studies teaching in Hungary – the two gender studies programmes in that country are targeted specifically. In Sweden, the right-wing party, the Sweden Democrats, is arguing along similar lines. The party has specifically targeted gender studies and anti-racist studies. The Sweden Democrats got 17 per cent of the votes in the last Swedish parliamentary election, September 2018. Fortunately, it seems as if all other political parties in Sweden are so far bent on keeping an arms-length to the Sweden Democrats.

I have recently, together with colleagues in Sweden, replied to an attack on Swedish gender research by two researchers from the University of Umeå (Lykke, 2018). These researchers have in a pseudo-scientific-objective way argued that the Swedish Research Council has given far too many resources to gender studies in recent decades (Madison and Söderlund 2018). To argue this, they collected a database of gender studies publications and other publications on gender/sex from the period from 2000-2011, coming to about 12,000 items. They then selected small samples from the database, trying, in different ways, to bibliometrically 'prove that gender studies publications represent bad science and low-quality research. The articles by the two anti-feminist researchers from the University of Umeå are published in a well-established, international bibliometric journal called *Scientometrics*, even though the methods and results are biased and invalid due to their disrespect for differences between quantitative and qualitative research. These kinds of pseudo-scientific attacks on gender studies are not specific for Sweden, and not new, but I think that they coupled with right-wing ideological attacks indicate a new situation, which it is important to take into account. The fight against the rising right-wing is different from the one we have been fighting for years against neoliberal agendas.

BRAIDOTTI: I completely agree that the regression of nativism is massive. It is extraordinary that it should come up North – in the second world war this was the anti-fascist region – apparently not anymore. We need to make anti-fascist alliances and study the contemporary form of an old virus. But I want to take up the issue about the attack on the scientific quality of our work, which is part of a larger attack on the humanities and the social sciences. This is partly one of the sub-effects of neoliberalism, which by foregrounding big data, introduces methodological coercion to a flat form of empiricism. I have always argued that feminist philosophy with politics of location, and the idea that the personal is political, is an enlightened or enchanted version of empiricism. Think for instance of Irigaray's sensible transcendental, or Deleuze's empirical transcendental. If there is anything that is empirical, it is the complexity of the embodied and embedded. The methodological frontline is there. Unfortunately, neoliberalism itself has decided that humanities and social sciences are useless. And the cut-backs on this date back a few decades. But for me it is part of a broader attack on the foundation of feminist studies. We have succeeded in the Humanities and Social Sciences. If you look across the spectrum of the new environmental, digital and medical humanities – all established branches of the contemporary post-humanities – you will see that they hardly include feminist epistemologies, race and postcolonial theories. This is not the case of course with the feminist post-humanities.

We now have a new generation of feminist scholars – a lot of them coming in through the Sciences and encountering gender issues. But the gender issues are disconnected from their scientific work. What the feminist post-humanities can offer is transversal methodologies, based on immanence, the politics of locations and the determination to negotiate with neo-liberal governance in the academic world. You cannot easily do the same feminist epistemologies that we developed over the last decades – we need to transpose them into new research frameworks, collaborative scientific ways of knowing and new forms of empiricism. The way to handle these issues is to start from the project of composing a 'we' that is grounded, accountable and active. In the midst of our

technologically mediated social relations and in response to the paranoid rhetoric of our post-truth democratic leaders, how can we labour together to construct affirmative ethical and political practices? ‘We’ need to re-radicalise ourselves.

Hit and Stay Interventions

LYKKE: It was a radical move when we as feminists moved inside university institutions to change them, and today, as well, I think it is worthwhile to try to work with activist agendas from within neoliberal and otherwise oppressive institutions. I have argued for many years that the links between theory and activism are extremely important, and that feminist theory, and feminist epistemology are dependent on a constant anchorage and dialogue with activism. But additionally, I think the link to professional use of critical knowledges is crucial. I am teaching a module at our Linköping master programme in *Gender Studies – Intersectionality and Change*, where we discuss how theory/activism-links can be used as inspirations for professionally transformative work in workplaces (Lykke, 2017a). This relates to the changing of institutions, which we have been discussing today under the label of ‘the long march through the institutions of power’. In my generation, to establish professorships, PhD programmes, and master programmes in feminist studies was a major challenge. This work was really about ‘the long march through the institutions’ in terms of actually changing workplaces, changing university institutions, changing the doings of institutions, changing the doing of epistemologies in institutions, and the doing of teaching. I see institutions as fragile, but they are at the same time solid, which makes change difficult, painful and full of dilemmas.

One of the skills, discussed a lot in the aftermath of 1968, was critical social fantasy (Lykke, 2017a). I think that this skill can be generated through feminist studies, by building up theories which are interlinked with activism, but I also think that this skill can be used to do transformative work in institutions, inside and outside of academia. Instead of leaving it to conventional people to manage institutions, it is important that people with skills in using critical social fantasy take responsibility for transformative work. But of course, one needs to be careful, which is why I am stressing the need to navigate between the cruel optimism of neoliberal agendas, and feminist everyday utopianism. While doing activist work, you need to be aware of dilemmas and traps, and have communities around you to collectively discuss how to handle these.

In the module which I have been teaching and developing in our master programme in Linköping – we among others use collective models from revolutionary theatre (Boal, 2008) to try out discussions around the problems arising when one tries to grapple with transformative work in institutions and organisations.

BRAIDOTTI: I come to the same conclusions from a different angle: immanence. We are immanent to the very conditions we are trying to change – this is not the Hegelian-Marxist dialectics. When you are against, you are not outside the problem: that would be too easy. Advanced capitalism works because it works for us! Because we cannot do without an iPhone, and it has to be an Apple doesn’t it? Because we don’t go down to town to keep the shops going, we order it on Amazon. It is us! So, I think being immanent to the conditions you are trying to overturn – this is feminist politics of locations, and this is radical immanence, with Deleuze and critical Spinozism. The question is what kind of margins we can negotiate through alliances but also through our own process of dis-identification with the practices that we are engaged in. Ethics is detoxing from negativity. When I take in the world I also take in the poison, the pain of the world. Spinoza speaks about poison – the poison of violence and vulgarity – which for us now is the neo-fascists, the populists, the nativists. So, we are part of this system, which we strongly oppose. How far can we detox? How far can we disengage?

We need to speak from potential and strive to make a change in the world. I think it is those negotiations that require communities, they require alliances, and the allies are in the most absurd places. What would be the feminist intervention in a corporate feminist world with Lagarde and stars like Emma Watson and He-for-She at UNESCO? We have Pussy Riot and the pink pussy hats. We have the LGBTQ+ movement, #MeToo and Black Lives Matter. We have the Women’s Movement in India and South Africa. The allies may not be in the places you expect them to be. So, I think we need to enlarge our relational capacity, the affective barometer assessing who we can draw on. We should not think in us versus them, but transversally and collaboratively. The market may be a stronger ally at this point in time than we may think, especially when compared to the conservative nationalism of so many humanities faculties across Europe.

Making Feminist History

LYKKE: It is important to note that 1970 by the widely proliferating anti-capitalist and anti-establishment feminist movement was announced as the year zero of feminism (Delphy, 1970). However, I did a project together with my partner Mette Bryld and several other feminist colleagues (Bryld et al, 1982) on the period of 1880-1920 in Europe and the broad feminist, socialist and queer (*avant la lettre*) movements at that time. A lot of feminist theorising and writing did take place back then but then vanished due to lack of archiving. In the 1970s when I

started to do feminist studies, like you, Rosi, I also read Kate Millet and Germaine Greer, and we had a list of about 10 books in total on the reading list for our women's studies courses back then – that was it. However, I later found out that there were large numbers of important books from the period 1880-1920 which were just not accessible, not archived properly, nowhere to be found unless you dug really deep.

BRAIDOTTI: In the long march through the institutions it was understood that the universities are archives – what we today call databanks – a place where knowledge is canonised, institutionalised, and preserved. There was this sense of bringing back the women and the LGBTQ+ people. The first thing we did was women's and gay history courses; *her* story. We wrote the women back in. We have always been there. But we have always been deleted. The hope was that through the institutional processes at least some bits of it would be preserved. I think my generation has a political responsibility to archive our papers and put them safely away for future generations to consult, analyse and be inspired by. Therefore, I work closely with the International Archive of the Women's Movement in Amsterdam, to archive both institutional and personal material. How do we secure what we have done in the institutions? How do we make sure it stays in the institutions? As for my private archive I have agreed that when I die they will come and take it. I have a life-long diary, which is sort of my second life on paper.

As much as I love the university as institution – what is knowledge production today? Digital artisans? It is time to develop a critical theory for anti-fascist citizenship, although that may not get you a research grant. Speaking truth to power, from within!

LYKKE: I am worried about the precarious conditions of people in academia today, and that it is getting increasingly worse – especially for academics who are pursuing careers in critical studies such as feminist studies and researching issues that are controversial. Rosi, you took the discussion to a broader reflection about the humanities and the social sciences, and this is important, too, but I think that when you are doing things on the margins of the humanities and the social sciences – doing controversial issues such as feminist studies – you are in an even more precarious position than when you are doing conventional stuff. Academic precarity is taking on new forms today. In the 1970s and 1980s, people simply left academia, eventually to get other kinds of jobs, if they did not get a permanent position in academia, which very few people doing controversial work did. What is happening now, is that the neoliberal system with short-term contracts produces a lot of cruel optimism, which somehow keeps people aspiring to get a job in academia: 'I will just submit one more application, and this time, I will get the money'. People are encouraged to stay on, even though it is difficult to get the short-term contracts. The system makes people stay; it produces this attachment to apply and re-apply – which we with Lauren Berlant's term (2011) can call cruelly optimistic. This means that universities and other research organisations – cognitive capitalism – get an enormous creative, labour force reserve who have all kinds of critical social fantasy skills, and who are well versed in doing all kinds of things that are extremely needed, but which cognitive capitalism does not want to pay a permanent, full-time wage for. Instead universities take people in on short-term contracts, and when people keep running after those contracts, the wheels of the system keeps running. I am writing at least three recommendations for people per month for scholarships and positions. I take seriously my responsibility as feminist professor acting as a gate-opener rather than a gate-keeper. It is important to do all the things that we as feminist professors can do to support the next generation of feminist researchers in their endeavours. But I also think that the way in which neoliberal universities profit from this enormous academic labour force reserve is very problematic. Yet, going back to the fragility of the institutions and back to thinking along the lines of '68, I am still optimistic, because many students are protesting all over the world. Students' movements have not been so powerful in Denmark in recent years, though, but I think that in many other places there are powerful students' movements. I think what is needed is critical mass, and I hope to see powerful intersectional movements protesting against neoliberal conditions. We cannot do it effectively in a small group, but if we have a critical mass, it has an effect. I think that 1968 with all its limitations demonstrated this.

BRAIDOTTI: It has changed the world, but a lot of feminist scholars today are not located in gender, feminist or queer studies programmes.

LYKKE: A lot of these students' risings that we have seen all over the world more recently in e.g. Chile and South Africa have effects. Things are still alive and kicking. The ultimate lesson I will draw from my feminist engagement in the '68 movement, is that a critical mass and movements are extremely important. Not authoritarian structured movements, but intersectional movements which take internal difference and transversal politics seriously. I think the failure of communism showed how hierarchical movements with one blueprint for the future is a no-go. But '68 was different – in particular, because the feminist '68s forcefully opted out of and criticised all hierarchical and authoritarian gestures of the movements. We need intersectional movements, committed to transversal politics, and here I think it is interesting that Patricia Hill Collins (2017) in her recent work on Black

Lives Matter has shown how intersectionality and transversal politics are really influential, making the movement very strong. I think a way forward is to build on and take internal differences seriously, and create critically-affirmative, non-hierarchical mass movements.

BRAIDOTTI: But would you still apply for a university job today if you were 30, Nina?

LYKKE: Mmm...

BRAIDOTTI: Should I answer my own question? I would truly hesitate to enter the university today. If I were to start again, I would be outside doing negotiations looking in. Solidly planted in cognitive capitalism and looking in, because cognitive capitalism does knowledge production better than the university, though it is obsessed with profit. And then the negotiations can start. I would be answering Steven Bannon with another foundation – finding the allies, the money. There is progressive money out there. We need to practice activism in terms and conditions that repurpose both our collective inscription in and resistance to cognitive capitalism.

LYKKE: I think that I would rather once more commit myself to activism, in particular arts activism, than apply for a job at a university, but I also know it is easy to say this, when I have my retirement money.

BRAIDOTTI: I have two other desires; I want my own foundation and my own satellite. It would make me able to beam out our feminist knowledge. I want a progressive satellite, and a foundation that can counteract right wingers, and force the universities to take a stand against rising liberal forces. I want them to speak up and say that this nativist fascism is not worthy of The Netherlands, Sweden, and Denmark – the great democracy of the North. Why can't we have vice-chancellors who say that?! Until that happens, I am very sceptical that the university still exists as an independent entity devoted to democratic criticism and the construction of discerning citizens.

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Contemporary Fairy Tales: Narrating Women Academics Through Metaphors

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ABSTRACT

This article contributes to the feminist literature that explores the vast landscape of metaphors on the professional experiences and identities of women academics found in scholarly works. In their now classic studies on the semantic content of these tropes, feminist scholars have identified one large cluster of metaphors that allude to structural barriers or natural phenomena (e.g., ‘glass ceiling’ and ‘chilly climate’), criticised for overlooking human agency. This paper is novel in that identifies (and problematises) another ample cluster of shared meanings: ‘tale and myth’ metaphors drawing from *fairy tales, legends, sagas, folklore, mythology and religious imagery*. I argue that many such metaphors aim to capture the lower *status* of women academics (e.g., ‘Cinderella’), and are characterised by: *liminality*, as they open up possible-worlds and untested social arrangements (e.g., ‘Alice in Wonderland’); *ambivalence*, as they portray women as either monsters, or prodigies, or both (e.g., ‘intellectual Frankenstein’); *reductionism*, in that they implicitly seek to subsume complex social phenomena under familiar fictional plots; and (relatedly) *normativity*, in that they create expectations as to the likely development of a situation and implicitly suggest a course of action. Particularly the latter two characteristics constitute significant limitations of ‘tale and myth’ metaphors: nonetheless, can there still be merit in their use? In the paper, I advance a suggestion.

Keywords: gender, discourse, higher education, organisations, metaphors

INTRODUCTION. METAPHORS, MYTHS AND TALES

Organisations are gendered (Kanter, 1977; Acker, 1990; Gherardi, 1995; Benschop and Dooreward, 1998; Benschop and Verloo, 2006; Kvande, 2007) and academia is no exception (Husu, 2000; Bagilhole and Goode, 2001; Van den Brink and Benschop, 2012; Thornton, 2013). The language we use reveals that. This paper is a meta-reflection problematising the literary and symbolic images, or *metaphors*, used in white papers, in the scholarly literature and the media to refer to the professional lives and experiences of women academics (Amery et al., 2015; Moratti, 2018). I situate my investigation within the gender, work and organisations scholarship discussing metaphors on women in organisations (Bendl and Schmidt, 2010; Smith et al., 2012; Kemp, 2016). The imagery we invoke brings in implicit meaning (Goatly, 2007; Zinken and Mulsolff, 2009) and conveys a particular interpretation of the nature of the professional hindrances that women encounter. The question has been discussed in the feminist literature with highly interdisciplinary and original approaches, following the ‘linguistic turn’ in feminist studies (Tolmach-Lakoff, 1973; Spender, 1980) and drawing on the seminal works by linguist George Lakoff (*Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*, 1987) and business theorist Gareth Morgan (*Images of Organizations*, 1986). Feminist scholars have produced an impressive body of knowledge and the use of metaphors on women in work organisations is now an important topic in feminism, but surprisingly not (yet) a core one. Key texts such as the *Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory* (2016) and the *Oxford Handbook of Gender in Organizations* (2014) do not include a dedicated chapter on metaphor use. Even more remarkably, the word ‘metaphor’ is not listed in the index of either handbook. The indexes go into a considerable level of detail and respectively include ‘men’s rights movement’ and ‘merit’, the latter encompassing as many as nine sub-entries (Kumra et al., 2014; Disch and Hawkesworth, 2018). However, the investigation of metaphor use is fertile intellectual terrain affording exceptional opportunities for creative and methodologically original inquiry leading to theoretical insights. It is foundational to feminist

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organisational studies rather than a mere line of investigation (Leonard, 2002). As a scholarly topic, it remains as timely as ever.

In their meta-reflection on metaphor use, feminist scholars have discussed the semantic content of these figurative expressions and identified patterns of meaning. Contributions that have now become foundational to the study of metaphors on women academics have pointed out that many such tropes hint to rigid exclusionary structures or natural hazards and draw from the terminology of engineering and architecture and the natural world. These expressions fail to capture agency. They conceptualise women as passive and they cloud the responsibility of fellow academics in creating and maintaining gender inequity (Husu, 2001; Benschop and Brouns, 2003). Examples are 'black hole' and 'leaking pipeline', alluding to the large proportion of women academics whose careers end before reaching tenure. 'Glass ceiling', 'sticky floor' and 'slippery paths' symbolise insidious impediments to professional advancement. 'Glass cliff' means that women get access to leadership roles in higher education (such as Department Head) as these jobs 'decline in status', 'become more time-consuming and harder to combine with a successful scholarly career' and entail a higher 'risk of failure' and 'interpersonal conflict' (Peterson, 2014: 41). 'Chilly climate' describes the atmosphere of ostracism and the isolation that women academics can experience in their daily work environment. However, gender inequity is not about floors and ceilings: it is about people. Women academics are not water drops dripping from a broken pipe, nor particles disappearing into a region of spacetime: they are persons with plans, opinions and strategies. Unwelcoming attitudes towards women colleagues have nothing to do with the weather conditions. Rather than 'paths', people's behaviour can be 'slippery' particularly when their own privilege is threatened by the advancement of historically marginalised groups. In essence, contrary to what nature- and engineering-inspired metaphors on women in academia seem to suggest, we are not trapped in gendered structures and much can be done to achieve change, as pointed out by the scholars who first identified and problematised this particular cluster of figurative expressions (Husu, 2001).

The goal of this article is drawing attention to another major pattern in the vast landscape of metaphors on women and academia, one that has been there for a long time, but has so far not yet been adequately analysed in the literature. There is a large set of tropes that seem to draw directly from fairy tales and fantasy, legends and sagas, folklore, classical mythology and religious imagery. This is perhaps the largest cluster of metaphors on women academics, along with the above discussed expressions derived from the world of architecture, engineering and the natural world. This article offers a discussion of some 'myth and tale' metaphors and their conceptual implications, presenting original arguments. I contend that (1) 'myth and tale' metaphors aim to depict the unequal *status* of women in academia and are characterised by (2) *liminality* as they open up the possibility to move beyond a limited and familiar world and to imagine and explore alternative possible-worlds; (3) *ambivalence* in that they often conceptualise women as either monsters, or prodigies, or both, to capture their 'otherness' in traditionally men-dominated professions; (4) *reductionism*, as they evoke a limited number of familiar fictional plots and assume that those can reflect the complexity of social reality; (5) *normativity*, in that they trigger expectations as to the likely outcome of a situation and dictate a proper course of action. The latter two features constitute a limitation of 'myth and tale' metaphors, that is almost as big as the limits that have already been pointed out for nature and engineering inspired metaphors. The article ends with considerations on the possible role of 'myth and tale' metaphors in the debate, notwithstanding their limitations. I argue that the value of a feminist metaphor for purposes of social change is proportional to its capacity to unsettle, disrupt and question the taken for granted.

METHODS

What follows is a brief account of how the idea for this research came about, and the methods I have used. I started to discern a 'myth and tale' semantic pattern by serendipity, while researching metaphors on women academics (Moratti, 2018) and by reading scholarly material for a set of empirical studies on gender and tenure (Moratti, 2020a, 2020b). As my intuition gradually took shape, I further investigated the matter through internet-mediated qualitative content analysis (Hewson et al., 2016). I opted for qualitative text mining using Google Scholar, currently the most comprehensive academic search engine (Gusenbauer, 2019). Based on an understanding of 'social reality as conceptually mediated', I aimed to shed light on the 'relations between discourse and other social elements (power relations, ideologies, institutions, social identities)' through critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2012: 9). I searched Google Scholar for 'metaphors women academia'. I ordered results by relevance and without setting a beginning or end date. I browsed the first twenty pages, comprising about 200 entries. Among my results, I retained and read comprehensive reviews of metaphors on women academics (such as Amery et al., 2015) as well as anthologies discussing the topic (such as Black and Garvis, 2018). In addition, I retained and read the papers that displayed striking, powerful metaphors already in their titles or abstracts (including Gallant and Cross, 1993; Harris et al., 2013). Taking these as a starting point in my investigation, I began to collect my metaphors into a list and saw my intuition confirmed: there was indeed a major stream of metaphors based on fairy tales. At that point I also took notice of the many figurative expressions referencing sagas, legends,

folklore, classical myths and religious imagery. In a nutshell, I opted for theoretical sampling: ‘a process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyses ... data and decides which data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop ... theory *as it emerges*’ (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 45, my italics).

The five interpretive categories I use in my analysis: ‘status’, ‘liminality’, ‘ambivalence’, ‘reductionism’ and ‘normativity’, unfolded gradually and inductively as my data collection progressed in ‘an evolving process guided by the emerging theory’ whereby ‘analysis occurs *simultaneously* when identifying the sample and collecting the data’ (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016: 99, my italics). It first struck me that several of my metaphors instantiated the *gender as status* theory (presented below) by encapsulating it into a literary image. Thereafter, I became aware of their *semantic duality* reflected in what seem to me two clearly distinct characteristics: ‘liminality’ as the state of being in-between reality and possible worlds, and ‘ambivalence’ as the quality of simultaneously capturing two extremes, the prodigious and the monstrous. Finally, I reflected on the relationship between reality and ‘tale and myth’ metaphors, and the ‘reductionism’ and ‘normativity’ that can derive from using long-established plots as descriptors for real-life situations. In naming my interpretive categories, I did not seek to draw from the literature but rather chose the names that seemed most appropriate, based on my theoretical intuitions. I aimed for novelty and originality and avoided ‘borrowed classification schemes’ that could ‘create a bias in the data analysis’ (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016: 212) and ‘hinder the generation of new categories’ (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 37).

I enriched my list of metaphors by perusing articles referenced in the papers I had read, playing with the ‘cited by’ function in Google Scholar, and directly querying Scholar for tales or myths evoked by analogy (for example, after finding references to Cinderella, I searched ‘Snow White women academia’). Once my catalogue of metaphors was compiled based on the procedure described above, further multiple queries of Google Scholar for related strings (such as ‘metaphors women academia fairy tales’ or ‘metaphors women higher education myths’) added nothing to my analysis and only a few entries to the catalogue, reported at the bottom of this paper (Table 1). I interpreted this as data saturation. I make no claims to completeness. This paper is not a comprehensive review or an analysis of the frequency of metaphors use in the literature (understood as a linguistic corpus). It is qualitative research and as such it does not ascribe meaning through counting. The thematic focus of this study rests on metaphors of women in higher education, with occasional mentions of figurative expressions used for women in other types of organisations where pertinent. The relevant metaphors are presented discursively, as examples to illustrate each interpretive category.

ANALYSIS

In my discussion of each interpretive category (presented below), I drew inspiration from a highly multi-disciplinary body of literature in Gender Studies, Sociology, Organisation Studies, Literary Studies and Psychology. No attempts are made in this paper to police the boundaries between fields of study: on the contrary, I deliberately create bridges, aiming for originality.

Status

Men have dominated academia ever since universities were established as independent institutions. In many countries and disciplinary areas, the upper echelons of academia are still predominantly men: the higher up in the hierarchy, the more male dominated it becomes. This situation reflects that of other high-status professions. One of the most intriguing explanations for this state of affairs is based on the theory of *gender as status*. People gender-categorise one another automatically and unconsciously, and associate gender with desirable characteristics including competence, very relevant in academia where evidence of expertise can be ambiguous and open to interpretation. This categorisation is based on conscious and unconscious assumptions that result from socialisation and reflect historical segregation. These socially diffuse beliefs create, legitimise and reinforce relations of hierarchy and inequality (Mackay et al., 2010; Ridgeway, 2011; Calas et al., 2014). Organisations (including higher education institutions) have a gender regime operating through a daily interplay of deeply held beliefs, patterns and routines that influence decision making in invisible ways, because they are so deeply entrenched and taken for granted that they have come to be regarded as the norm, as the natural state of affairs (Kanter, 1977; Cockburn, 1991; Connell, 2002; Acker, 2006; Van de Brink and Benschop, 2012; Grada et al., 2015; Nielsen, 2016; O’Connor, 2020). ‘Tale and myth’ metaphors often capture well the status inequality that historically exists between genders, particularly in the professional sphere. In the present section, I will offer some examples of such metaphors.

Some scholars have evoked one of the most classical fairy tale characters: Cinderella, to allude to unfair job tasks allocation in academia linked to the lower status of women. Cinderellas keep their Departments running by taking care of routine work, while being excluded from the most prestigious and rewarding opportunities (Dowling, 1981; Yoder, 1991; Tripp-Knowles, 1995). Some contributions introduce other characters from Perrault’s tale as well. Occasionally, Cinderella is fortunate enough to encounter her ‘fairy godmother’, an experienced female

mentor who helps her to navigate ‘the kingdom’ of academia (Harris et al., 2013). Cinderella echoes other popular metaphors on female academics, such as ‘housekeeper’ and ‘housewife’ (Delamont, 1989; Suspitsina, 2000; Bagilhole, 2002; Fitzgerald, 2014; Amery et al., 2015). Interestingly, I found that the Cinderella metaphor is used also in academic medicine for under-researched, under-diagnosed and under-treated diseases and low-status branches of medical science: unsurprisingly, these encompass female sexual dysfunctions, and family and community medicine where women are well-represented. The use of this metaphor is becoming so frequent that some medical scholars ironically refer to the phenomenon as ‘cinderology’ (Hazelton and Hickey, 2004; Cameron, 2005). Next to the fairy godmother, another central element in Cinderella’s story are her magical glass slippers that would only fit her foot and no one else’s. In management and diversity studies and in contributions discussing women in the legal profession, a ‘glass slippers’ metaphor has been introduced to refer to the intersection between occupational and gender identity. Particular jobs and tasks – typically of low status – are socially perceived as ‘natural’ for women, which reinforces occupational segregation by gender (Skordaki, 1996; Ashcraft, 2013). While not directly used as a metaphor, Cinderella’s glass slippers have been hinted at in the literature on gender inequality in academia (Harris et al., 2013). Glass, in various declinations, keeps recurring in the metaphors that seek to describe women’s situation in academia by alluding to unequal status. The association between women and glass is time-honoured; glass is invisible and fragile: ‘women and glass are always in danger’, so goes a well-known old English proverb.

Poor Cinderella will ultimately become the Prince’s wife. Royalty, the epitome of status inequality, features prominently in fairy tales and in metaphors on academics, for once including also men. The ‘princess’ advances professionally thanks to a male protector (Williams, 2005). The ‘crown prince’ is chosen by influential men for an upcoming professorship or a leadership role, through a covert institutional pre-selection process; his induction is an open secret (Still, 1989; Pullan and Abendstern, 2018).

In essence, I believe ‘myth and tale’ metaphors offer powerful depictions of the low-visibility gender regime that governs higher education institutions, ultimately founded on a conceptual understanding of gender as *status*. I will now proceed to discuss other equally striking features of such metaphors.

Liminality

Unlike metaphors that draw from the natural world or from terminology of engineering and architecture, ‘myth and tale’ metaphors typically do not imply that women are imprisoned in rigid, unchangeable structures. Myths and tales often open up a liminal, transformational space where ‘characters... imagine and construct alternative possibilities from existing precedents’ (Nowlin, 2006: 49). Cinderella went from rags to riches, through perils and uncertainty. In the realm of *liminality*, the ‘middle space’ between reality and possible-worlds, ‘the possibility exists of standing aside... from one’s own social position... and of formulating a potentially unlimited series of alternative social arrangements’ (Turner, 1974: 14). Lord and Robb (2010) spoke of ‘The Canterbury Tales’ to designate women academics’ first-hand accounts of a traditionally male-dominated field at the University of Canterbury, UK. The *Canterbury Tales* is a collection of fictional stories, written by Geoffrey Chaucer in the 14th century. Most are fables, centring around discovery, pilgrimage, encounters with fabulous creatures and other liminal, transformational experiences. Academia itself has been described as a ‘candied cottage’ that lures ‘Hansel and Gretel’ (Barnard, 2019); an ‘ivory tower’ where the privileged prosper (Benschop and Brouns 2003; Eveline, 2004; Fitzgerald, 2012; Harris et al., 2013); a ‘pyramid’ (Morley, 1994); a ‘maze’ (European Commission, 2008) or ‘labyrinth’ (Gonzales et al., 2013) where the rules for career progression are not clear, particularly for women. For women, having a tenured academic position and a family is the ‘holy grail’ (Harris et al., 2013): a sacred, elusive treasure that brings about eternal abundance and happiness. Some of these images are psychological archetypes with a strong symbolic significance, and portals to the dimension of the sacred. ‘Ivory tower’ is one of the attributes of Mary since the 1587 *Litany of the Blessed Virgin*. In Egyptian culture, the pyramid is a symbol of creation and resurrection, connecting Earth with the Otherworld. The ‘holy’ grail sought after by the knights in the Arthurian saga is a reference to Jesus’ cup at the Last Supper. The labyrinth evokes the ancient Greek myth of Theseus who found his way in the maze and killed the monstrous Minotaur: some feminist contributions on gendered violence and race actually go as far as using ‘minotaur’ as a metaphor (Dinnerstein, 1976; Martin, 2014). In several religions, maze emblems are used in meditation and prayer; in psychology, the maze represents the human learning experience, the tortuous but meaningful journey to one’s spiritual centre and back into the world. The biblical myth of the Creation is evoked as some contributions refer to historically all-female higher education institutions as ‘Adamless Eden’ (Palmieri, 1995) and others liken women academics to ‘Eve’ who was ‘punished for having an appetite for knowledge’ (Robbins et al., 2008: 50). God’s apple is tempting yet dangerous: eating it can only be a transformative experience. Female students who embrace higher education, and particularly Women’s Studies, are ‘kissing the frog’ (Griffin, 2003). Remarkably, even ‘Princess Diana’ was mentioned in the context of metaphors on women in academia (Griffin, 2003): an actual person whose life and style got so romanticised that she became an icon, the real-life embodiment of the fairy tale princess and a good example of liminality. Even more recurrent are references to the looking glass, which echoes Virginia Woolf’s words in her essay *A Room of One’s Own* (1929):

‘women have served all these centuries as *looking glasses* possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size’ (Woolf 1998[1929]: 45, my italics). There is a powerful symbology associated with the looking glass, threshold of change, portal of discovery bridging reality and the marvellous (Arlandis and Reyes-Torres, 2018). Drawing inspiration from Deleuze (1969), women academics have been compared to Carroll’s *Alice Through the Looking-Glass* as well as *Alice in Wonderland* (Patterson, 1971; Chouinard, 1995; McMillan and Price, 2010; Netolicky et al., 2018). By eating magical food, Alice repeatedly adjusts her size to enter doors that are too small for her, or to reach tables that are too high. The metaphor alludes to ‘academia... designed through time to routinely accommodate the work needs of the male professional’ and demanding strenuous adjustment efforts from women, that are however possible, albeit difficult (Patterson, 1971: 227). The ‘Alice through the looking-glass’ metaphor is also used to refer to gendered gatekeeping practices in the allocation of prestigious job tasks in higher education institutions, made by manipulating ‘perceptions of what constitutes legitimate research’ (McMillan and Price, 2010: 145). When used in this sense, the metaphor manages to capture both status inequality and liminality.

The two features of ‘myth and tale’ metaphors discussed so far, their capacity to represent status inequality while at the same time not portraying women as trapped, make them better depictions of gender inequity in higher education than their engineering, architecture and natural world-based counterparts. However, ‘myth and tale’ metaphors have limitations too. They contribute to othering women scholars, as explained in the next section.

Ambivalence

Another central element in metaphors based on fairy tales and fantasy, legends and sagas, folklore, mythology and religious imagery is *ambivalence*. The ‘otherness’ of women academics, their non-conformity in traditional male-dominated professions led to conceptualising them as monsters or prodigies, with metaphors such as ‘intellectual Frankenstein’ (Palmieri, 1995; Netolicky et al., 2018); ‘Superwoman’ (Suspitsina, 2000); ‘Wonder Woman’ (Martimianakis, 2008; Bozzon et al., 2017); ‘mermaid’ (Anderson, 2008). The very term ‘monster’ is semantically ambiguous in Latin (*monstrum*) and ancient Greek (*τέρας*). It can mean marvel, wonder, prodigy, freak or demon with a negative aesthetic and moral connotation. Along with ambiguity, magic and horror surface often in ‘myth and tale’ metaphors on women academics, that include ‘witch’ and ‘witches’ coven’ for panels or groups (Fisher, 2007; Cabral-Cardoso, 2008). Women live in the ‘academic twilight zone’ (Kroll, 2006), particularly if they are foreigners (Cheng, 2005). Female academics are ‘outsiders in the sacred grove’ (Aisenberg and Harrington, 1988) and ‘strangers’, a metaphor ‘developed from the Wandering Jew’ (Czarniawska and Sevón 2008: 237; also see Simmel, 1950[1909]). The tale of women walking the ‘hallowed halls of academia’ can turn into ‘a horror story’ (Procopio et al., 2016). Academia, the ‘greedy institution’ that demands ‘undivided commitment’ (Coser, 1974), has been metaphorically described as a ‘vampire’ for its impact on the lives of women (Kroll, 2006). In her auto-ethnography, a young academic referred to herself as ‘Buffy the Vampire Slayer’ (Netolicky et al., 2018). ‘Iron maiden’ is used for ‘competent and forthright’ women academics (Kanter, 1977). The reference to iron here symbolises permanence and the suppression of the emotional sphere. The ambivalence built into ‘myth and tale’ metaphors extends beyond the portrayal of individual female academics. These metaphors also narrate ‘female experience under patriarchy, a world in which innocent young women are set against their sisters and mothers in rivalry for the prince’s favour’ (Fisher and Silber, 2000: 121). The ‘queen bee’ (Ellemers et al., 2004; Kinney, 2009; Cummins, 2012; Mansingh and Khan, 2020), consumed by ‘Venus’ envy’ (Mavin, 2006: 264), actively keeps more junior female colleagues from advancing professionally in her ‘queendom’ (Ballif et al., 2008: 119).

I believe the ambivalence of many ‘myth and tale’ metaphors is a shortcoming of this cluster of figurative expressions. They contribute to othering women: by depicting women academics as an *anomaly*, these metaphors ultimately *normalise* women’s traditional condition of non-belonging in academia. The same considerations hold for portraying academic rivalry as a specifically feminine deficiency, when the people involved happen to be women. In the subsequent sections, I will discuss two more important limitations that I see in metaphors falling under this cluster.

Reductionism

‘Myth and tale’ metaphors are certainly fascinating. Notwithstanding their ‘predictable narrative thread’, ‘traditional depictions of gender’ have a ‘palpable fairy tale appeal’ (Kinney 2009: 151; see also Ballif et al., 2008). Prominent psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim suggested that fairy tales and myths ‘help readers see themselves in stories of conflict, and thus move them closer to naming their anxieties’ (Bettelheim, 1976, cited in Kinney 2009: 151; also see Dundes, 1980). The benefits of identification may extend to feeling less isolated: one is, in essence, re-living a familiar plot that is being experienced by other members of one’s same group – *assuming that the degrees of complexity of reality and fiction are comparable*. I believe this assumption is problematic. It has been convincingly argued that there are a limited number of plots in fiction. Indexes have been compiled for fairy tales and folklore (for example, the Aarne–Thompson–Uther Index: Thompson, 1989; Uther 2004). In his relatively recent but

already classic theorisation, Booker (2004) compellingly argued that there exist only seven basic plots in fiction: overcoming the monster; rags to riches; the quest; voyage and return; rebirth; and comedy or tragedy (depending on whether the main character gets his or her hopes fulfilled). The reader can easily fit each of our above-discussed metaphors into one of these archetypal plots: the interesting question is whether people's lives and experiences can also be fitted into a limited number of plots, or patterns of plots. The use of 'myth and tale' metaphors could amount to taking a cognitive shortcut by relying on an already familiar storyline, an *a-priori explanation of social phenomena*. In this way, metaphors could obfuscate the complexity of social phenomena rather than illuminate it. Interestingly, an 'archetypal plots' approach is used in career counselling: the same seven basic plots that underlie 'the greatest works of the human imagination in the arts and humanities' also offer 'a conceptually coherent account of the role of unplanned events in individuals' experiences and careers' (Pryor and Bright, 2008: 76). 'Society's *grand narrative* of a career' (Savickas, 2005: 49, my italics) guides people's interpretation of their own professional hurdles: by problematising such interpretations, the counsellor opens up new perspectives for the individual client. In essence, 'what individuals often attempt to do is to use *closed-systems thinking... to deal with an open-systems reality*' (Pryor and Bright, 2008: 78, my italics). I believe that is, in essence, a form of *reductionism*, and it constitutes a major limitation of 'myth and tale' metaphors.

In conclusion, attempts to fit real-world situations into a limited number of plots (*reductionism*) can be a way of eluding the complexities of life, by embracing a familiar and predictable narrative in which to evade. The possible world generated by the 'myth and tale' metaphor can become a refuge from engaging with reality. In the subsequent section, I will further develop my argument and contend that reductionism is closely linked with normativity, another limitation of 'myth and tale' metaphors.

Normativity

Some fictional stories have a great power of mental attraction, particularly religious and ancient myths with their elegance and charm. Their roots run deep in our collective subconscious. Metaphors based on them can become *normative*, by creating expectations as to the likely outcome of a situation and implicitly suggesting a course of action. This is true even for metaphors based on children's tales such as Cinderella, Alice or Snow White (Trahar, 2019), and it is even more true for myths with their solemnity and magnetism.

I, for one, am guilty as charged: myth-based metaphors are so captivating that I considered using one myself. I studied one decade of professorial hiring through open calls at one Faculty of the biggest University in Norway, attracting over a thousand applicants overall. I found that women (and only women) are advantaged when already working at the institution (internal applicants) and disadvantaged when external applicants. Women apply as external applicants nearly as much as men do, but tend not to be preferred (Moratti, 2020b). This is especially true for women applicants affiliated with a non-Norwegian institution. I considered calling this pattern of findings 'the Ulysses-Penelope effect'. Ulysses was a king, a war hero and a traveller: a 'man skilled in all ways of contending' who 'saw the townlands and learned the minds of many distant men' (Homer, 1961: 273). While he explored and conquered, his wife Penelope, the epitome of loyalty, patience and perseverance, waited at home for decades. Her wanderer husband was not faithful, but Penelope was. I hypothesised that evaluators may be influenced by traditional gender roles. The feminine role is that of the faithful Penelope, who can be retained after her loyalty has been duly tried and tested: women, with respect to men, may have to work harder to build institutional rapport before they are hired permanently. Unsurprisingly, I also found that women held the vast majority of temporary senior lecturer contracts at that Faculty in the decade considered and in the years that preceded it ('senior' means reserved to candidates with a PhD). Ulysses, the conqueror, the discoverer, the prestigious international scholar, is a symbol for masculinity. Ulysses' qualities are seen as prerogatives of the masculine: when women try to perform those exact same masculinities, they are received differently.

However, I paused, and eventually dropped the idea of making reference to Ulysses and Penelope in my interpretation. Was I merely photographing the existent, or was I contributing to perpetuating stereotypes? Was I illuminating the phenomenon I was investigating, or rather clouding it by activating imaginaries linked to gender-role clichés? More importantly, I questioned my fascination with myth and ancient tales. I was constructing a reductionist and normative fictional world, to constrain complex social phenomena into a familiar narrative borrowed from one of the greatest storytellers in human history. The magnetism of the Odyssey's plot enchants the reader, leaving little room for divergent interpretations of trends in the data.

Some of the most fascinating metaphors on gender equality work in academia are based on myths: such work has been described as 'arming Athena', after the goddess of knowledge, arts and military strategies (Stalker, 1994; Collins et al., 1998). Athena was the favourite daughter of Zeus, born adult and fully armed from the head of her father. No uterus or vagina were involved in her birth, she never had a childhood, she was portrayed as a virgin, and brains and pugnacity were her key features: while interesting, this metaphor is certainly suggestive as to the imageries of the 'ideal academic' (Thornton, 2013), and their poor compatibility with the female body, the emotional sphere and traditional feminine social roles, including care and motherhood. Gender equality work has

also been compared to a mythical ‘quest’: that of slaying the seven-headed dragon’ (Van den Brink and Benschop, 2012: 71). The phrase implicitly alludes to the Beast with seven heads in the Book of Revelation, and evokes the Greek myth of the seven-headed Hydra. The Beast was defeated by Saint Michael and his angels, and the mythical god-hero Hercules eventually triumphed over the Hydra, notwithstanding the extreme resilience of the monster: every time one of its heads got severed, two new heads grew, so the legend goes. Does such a metaphor, however elegant and captivating, suggest that only saints or heroes can hope to successfully resist structural inequality? Myth-based metaphors have been used also for gender equality work in organisations in general, not limited to academia. Women who do such work are ‘Sisyphus’ sisters’ (Benschop and Verloo, 2006). Sisyphus was the mythological king of Corinth, punished by Zeus with the torture of forever pushing a rock up a hill, only for it to roll back down again. Gender regimes in organisations are highly resilient; but unlike Sisyphus, his sisters make tangible progress and start from a slightly improved position each time. However, the mythological Sisyphus did not have sisters. This particular metaphor has the merit of playing creatively with an existing myth, effectively re-inventing it and re-defining its meaning: this considerably weakens (but still, does not manage to eliminate) the reductionist and normative force of the myth-based metaphor.

Normativity is the direct consequence of reductionism, interpreted (as I do) as the attempt to understand a social phenomenon through an existing fictional plot. By normativity, I mean that ‘myth and tale’ metaphors can prescribe behaviour: one may be inclined to draw inspiration from the actions of the hero in the story, and believe that therein lies the solution to the social problem that the metaphor alludes to – but that is not necessarily the case.

CONCLUSIONS

I have pointed out the main limitations of the use of ‘myth and tale’ metaphors to refer to women academics, or to academia and women’s position in it. I have acknowledged the interesting and convincing features of such metaphors, too: many of them convey well the *status* disparity between genders that has historically characterised the academic profession, and hint to a dimension of possibility (*liminality*) that goes beyond the current state of affairs, a possible-world where women scholars, their aspirations and talents are nurtured and fully valued. However, ‘myth and tale’ metaphors are typically othering women who trespass into the traditional male territory of academia, by depicting them as monsters or wonders far removed from the human sphere: this seems to express a degree of suspicion (*ambivalence*). Even more importantly, there is evidence that myths and tales, ancient and modern, can be subsumed under a limited number of storylines, the so-called archetypal plots: but real-life social phenomena do not necessarily adhere to such plots (*reductionism*). Images borrowed from myths and tales reconstitute us to familiar narratives, possibly to evade from too incomprehensible and intricate a reality. They trigger expectations as to the outcome of a situation and implicitly prescribe behaviour: do as the hero in the story and you will get out of your predicament; or, if the hero acted foolishly, do not make that same mistake (*normativity*). It is easy to see where the intersection between reductionism and normativity can lead: implicit behavioural prescriptions that, when followed in practice, do not lead to the intended result.

What remains to be seen is whether there can still be merit in the use of ‘myth and tale’ metaphors, despite their limitations. I would like to put forward two suggestions. Firstly, it is perhaps wise to be sceptical of attempts to create yet another grand narrative that claims to apply to *all* women academics. Rather than postulating general models aspiring to universal validity, it is preferable that women actively recount their *own* stories and the meaning they attribute to them (for instance, through auto-ethnography) and coin metaphors they feel apply to their own experiences, such as ‘Buffy the Vampire Slayer’ (Netolicky et al., 2018). Secondly, playing creatively with an existing tale or myth is more interesting than merely borrowing one of its elements. For example, one could re-tell the tale by adding characters or plot twists that are not part of the fictional story alluded to. In addition to making the metaphor more original, this unorthodox and creative editing weakens the normative and reductionist effect of the metaphor (see as an example Benschop and Verloo, 2006). More generally, feminist thinkers see value in unsettling conventional categories and questioning the taken for granted, possibly through irony and paradox (Butler, 1990; Ahmed, 2003). The mission of the feminist metaphor is to trouble received wisdom, and the value of a metaphor for purposes of social change is proportional to its potential to *disrupt and unsettle* conventional thinking.

Table 1. Metaphors derived from fairy tales, fantasy, sagas, mythology and religious imagery, and referring to women academics as individuals; their institutions, success models and experiences; and to the study of gender as a field of knowledge as well as gender equality work in academia

	On individuals	On institutions, success models and experiences	On studying gender and on gender equality work
Fairy tales and fantasy	<p><i>Cinderella</i> (Dowling, 1981; Yoder, 1991; Tripp-Knowles, 1995)</p> <p><i>The Fairy Godmother</i> (Harris et al., 2013)</p> <p><i>Witch</i> (Fisher, 2007)</p> <p><i>Alice</i> (Patterson, 1971; Chouinard, 1995; McMillan and Price, 2010; Netolicky et al., 2018)</p> <p><i>Snow White</i> (Trahar, 2019)</p> <p><i>Queen Bee</i> (Ellemers et al., 2004; Mavin, 2006; Kinney, 2009; Cummins, 2012; Mansingh and Khan 2020)</p> <p><i>Princess</i> (Griffin, 2003; Williams, 2005)</p> <p><i>Crown Prince</i> (Still, 1986; Pullan and Abendstern, 2018)</p> <p><i>Pollyanna</i> (Ferree and Zippel, 2015)</p> <p><i>Intellectual Frankenstein</i> (Palmieri, 1995; Netolicky et al., 2018)</p> <p><i>Superwoman</i> (Suspitsina, 2010)</p> <p><i>Wonder Woman</i> (Martimianakis, 2008; Bozzon et al., 2017)</p> <p><i>Buffy the Vampire Slayer</i> (Netolicky et al., 2018)</p>	<p><i>Glass slippers</i> (Skordaki, 1996; Ashcraft, 2013)</p> <p><i>The Kingdom</i> (Harris et al., 2013)</p> <p><i>The Queendom</i> (of Queen Bee) (Ballif et al., 2008)</p> <p><i>Candied cottage</i> (Barnard, 2019)</p> <p><i>Vampire (greedy institution)</i> (Kroll, 2006)</p> <p><i>The academic twilight zone</i> (Cheng, 2005; Kroll, 2006)</p>	<p><i>Kissing the frog</i> (Griffin, 2003)</p> <p><i>Witches' coven</i> (Fisher, 2007)</p> <p><i>Seeking Yoda</i> (Hutchinson, 2002)</p>
Sagas, mythology, religious imagery	<p><i>Iron maiden</i> (Kanter, 1977)</p> <p><i>Mermaid</i> (Anderson, 2008)</p> <p><i>Cassandra</i> (Ferree and Zippel, 2015)</p> <p><i>Venus envy</i> (Marvin, 2006)</p> <p><i>Eve</i> (Robbins et al., 2008)</p> <p><i>Strangers (developed from the Wandering Jew)</i> (Czarniawska and Sevón, 2008; Amery et al., 2015)</p> <p><i>Martyrs</i> (Czarniawska and Sevón, 2008)</p> <p><i>Wayward puritans</i> (Gallant and Cross, 1993)</p>	<p><i>The hallowed halls of academia</i> (Procopio et al., 2016)</p> <p><i>Iron cage (refers to "Victorian literary heroines")</i> (Morley, 1994)</p> <p><i>Holy Grail</i> (Harris et al., 2013)</p> <p><i>Canterbury Tales</i> (Lord and Robb, 2010)</p> <p><i>Pyramid</i> (Morley, 1994)</p> <p><i>Maze, labyrinth (evokes myth of Theseus)</i> (European Commission, 2008; Gonzales et al., 2013)</p> <p><i>Eden</i> (Palmieri, 1995)</p> <p><i>Ivory tower (comes from the Bible)</i> (Benschop and Brouns, 2003; Harris et al., 2013)</p> <p><i>Sacred grove</i> (Aisenberg and Harrington, 1988)</p>	<p><i>Slaying the seven-headed dragon (evokes myth of Hydra and Bible)</i> (Van den Brink and Benschop, 2012)</p> <p><i>Arming Athena</i> (Stalker, 1994; Collins et al., 1998)</p> <p><i>Sisyphus' sisters</i> (Benschop and Verloo, 2006)</p>

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Innovation Beyond Borders: On Alternative Feminist Discourses of Innovation

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ABSTRACT

In this article a feminist intervention is undertaken to mobilise alternative innovation discourses that recognise activity and passivity as enmeshed – as ‘pactive’. Activity is found to perpetuate the mainstream innovation discourse, aligned with a male construct of an active and rational being. Thus, passivity is viewed as a concept that helps problematise, analyse, negotiate and transgress the discursive borders of innovation. The study is empirically driven from ethnographic insights that emerged in two research projects conducted in Sweden over four years, comprising 50 interviews. For the purpose of this article four cases are selected as they provide strong examples of how slowness is affirmed and integrated in everyday practices of innovation where activity and passivity are entwined. To mobilise alternative feminist discourses of innovation we take inspiration from philosopher Jonna Bornemark’s concept of pactivity (a combination of activity and passivity) and Sara Ahmed’s discussion of emotions, where passivity is related to passion and openness. Applying these two lenses to the empirical cases, aspects of pactivity are analysed and four alternative discourses of innovation are mobilised, making it possible to envision innovation as a social process where people stand in relation to their non-knowing, have space to be both passive and passionate and thus are open for enactment.

Keywords: innovation, feminist interrogation, passivity, activity, pactivity, innovation discourse

INTRODUCTION

Some years ago, the then Director General of the Swedish Governmental Agency for Innovation Systems proposed that ‘If we want to be innovative, we have to affirm the world is increasingly changing,’ concluding that ‘we live in a world that is changing faster and faster.’ Metaphorically, doing innovation was compared with ‘having a huge wave to surf’, while she underlined that ‘if you lie down, not wanting to see this wave, you will be washed away.’ What appears to underpin the discourse of innovation, expressed here, is activity. And perhaps certain kinds of activities – standing strong on an open sea and mastering nature – requiring characteristics such as strength, capability, self-reliance and courage. If you stop surfing the wave (being constantly active) you will be washed away, in the worst case towards an inevitable death. Symbolically, this implies that the innovation discourse provides little space for other calmer activities including contemplation, relaxation and recuperation.

At the heart of the research discourse on innovation, monotonous activity consisting of a search for innovation and a faith in its goodness, like that of a perpetual machine, has been identified (Segercrantz, Sveiby and Berglund, 2017). This ‘self-reinforcing circle’ (Segercrantz, Sveiby and Berglund, 2017: 277) propels innovation as something highly sought after and is seldom scrutinised. The desirable and unassailable outcomes of innovation and its capacity to bring about newness and sustain economic growth are highlighted in policy, research and everyday life (Sveiby, Gripenberg and Segercrantz, 2012). Ironically, however, through the emphasis on change, renewal and transformation, innovation discourses nevertheless appear to perpetuate taken-for-granted assumptions about gender. At face value, innovation discourses present objects and subjects as gender neutral. This is despite extant research showing that innovation is a gender-biased phenomenon (Alsos, Ljunggren and Hytti, 2013) that sustains gender structures in organisations (Andersson et al., 2012) and reproduces hetero-patriarchal relations and practices (Pecis, 2016), through perpetuating a male norm of innovation (Pettersson, 2007).

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Hence, innovation discourse has been found to be gender blind (Andersson et al., 2012), preserve masculine practices (Wikhamn and Knights, 2013), and prioritise men, male-dominated networks and male-dominated sectors in policy incentives (Pecis and Priola, 2019; Pettersson, 2007). In contrast, women have been less likely to be granted the status of innovators (Berglund and Granat Thorslund, 2012). Their contributions have often been neglected (Blake and Hanson, 2005), and historical female inventors have been blatantly made invisible (Pecis and Berglund, 2021). Feminist engagements with innovation have certainly challenged the gendered innovation discourse. The strong links between innovation and technology are problematised when innovation is alternatively conceptualised as a subtle, incremental and iterative social process (Alsos, Ljunggren and Hytti, 2013), in which every wo/man should be able to take equal part (Andersson et al., 2012; Pecis, 2016; Pettersson, 2007). Research has found feminist resistance in various forms – including separatism – towards the ‘masculinist’ innovation discourse (Pettersson and Lindberg, 2013). Further, innovation can be seen as a feminist practice, because applying a feminist epistemology can evoke ‘friction’ and thus innovative and transformative power (Schiebinger and Schraudner, 2011; Berglund and Granat Thorslund, 2012; McIntyre, 2015).

In this article our purpose is to engage in a feminist interrogation of innovation as activity, that in the mainstream innovation discourse is aligned with a male construct of an active and rational being. Since activity is at the centre of the mainstream innovation discourse, we view its opposite – passivity – as a battering ram and thus a concept that can help to problematise, analyse and negotiate the borders of innovation. Empirically, we are inspired by rural men and women’s stories of innovation, which emphasise the practice of slowing down and taking the time to ‘stop and watch the sky’. The study is thus empirically driven, drawing from ethnographic insights that emerged in two research projects in Sweden conducted over four years, and comprising 50 interviews. We view this empirical material as providing powerful stories that provide examples of innovation (Siggeklow, 2007) located at the margins of the innovation discourse. These stories help us engage in a feminist analysis of innovation as an everyday, mundane activity where activity and passivity are entwined. The empirical insights also guided us to philosopher Jonna Bornemark and feminist scholar Sara Ahmed, who provide thought-provoking concepts. Bornemark’s (2018; 2020) concept of reflexive ‘intellectus’ guides us to understand that, in practice, there is no pure activity or passivity, but we must understand the two as combined as ‘pactivity’. In Ahmed’s (2014) discussion on emotions, passivity is related to passion and openness. Applying these two lenses to the empirical stories, we shed light on the enmeshment of activity and passivity (pactivity) in innovative practices of men and women in rural areas.

Adopting a discursive approach to innovation, we view language as performative, generating effects that set borders for what is possible to say, and do, and how we can (re-) think a phenomenon. This means that our knowledge claim is related to phronesis (practical wisdom), rather than to episteme (scientific knowledge) or techne (know how) (Flyvbjerg, Landman and Schram, 2012). Metaphors help to facilitate such knowledge claims. We will return to the metaphors of surfing (activity) and stop and watch the sky (slowness) throughout the paper to highlight how borders of the innovation discourse can be transgressed. A phronetic approach to knowledge adds a ‘bottom up’ perspective that can tilt the status quo of something; in our case, innovation discourse. We view tilting the status quo as being at the heart of feminist interrogation, with its ambition to call scientific norms and androcentric rationalisations into question and challenge established ways of knowing (Harding, 1991). In our view this contributes to a transformative research agenda (Bell et al., 2020).

TOWARDS A ‘PACTIVE’ UNDERSTANDING OF INNOVATION

To assist us in our feminist interrogation of innovation we turned to two inspiring women thinkers: philosopher Jonna Bornemark and feminist scholar Sara Ahmed. Both Bornemark and Ahmed discuss the constructions of dualisms – ratio/intellectus and I/Other. Their discussions link to a larger scheme of gendered binary constructions of activity/passivity. The constructions of ratio/intellectus, I/Other and activity/passivity set borders, but where there is a border there is also a meeting point. At the border, that and those unreflectively looked upon as innovation/innovators, can be questioned and transgressed. Through combining their respective thinking on passivity, as enmeshed with activity, it can be re-thought as pactivity, which helps us to unfold alternative innovation discourses.

Jonna Bornemark on ratio, intellectus and ‘pactivity’

In order to understand activity in the conventional innovation discourse we are captivated by Bornemark’s (2018) philosophical investigation of our current thought system. Taking inspiration from (pre-)renaissance philosophers, she describes how what she terms calculating ‘ratio’ practices, have taken precedence over ‘intellectus’ practices. Ratio describes an (economic) ratio(nality) where everything is turned into abstractions and generalisation in a search for strategies and answers.

In contrast, *intellectus* represents the subjective, emotional and temporary, and stresses the human ability to ‘not know’, but to learn to cope with insecurity, instability, anxiety, confusion and chaos. In this representation, *ratio/intellectus* overlaps the reason/emotion binary and the rational ‘*ratio*’ is placed in relation to the ‘emotional’ *intellectus*. Of particular interest is how Bornemark argues that ‘*ratio*’ – the calculating mode of being – has gained the upper hand in contemporary society. This makes *intellectus*, with its ability to reflect upon our experiences, develop judgement and take responsibility – for example, injustices – as they unfold in everyday life, the underdog. We believe that *ratio* echoes strongly in the conventional innovation discourse’s focus on activity.

However, Bornemark argues that *ratio* and *intellectus* should be seen as interdependent. Thus, both kinds of practices are needed. Without *ratio* – and its ability to represent ‘truth’ and ‘the bigger picture’ – it is difficult to navigate the complex terrain of contemporary society. Generalisations – in both numerical and textual form – facilitate our common understandings of the world. But, without an ability to also practise *intellectus*, *ratio* can have a (dead)locking effect. A person might therefore follow instructions and general guidelines, which is what *ratio* practices demands. This, however, causes them to suffer from their inability to exercise judgement and to act ‘in the heat of the moment’.

Practising *intellectus*, we propose, can be seen as a thoughtful activity; it implies acting as a judicious person, adapting to the specificities of a situation, accepting non-knowing of the outcome of that situation, without being confined to passivity. At the same time, the *intellectus*-driven human, who takes her time to nurture interpersonal qualities of love, empathy, friendship and care, may be seen as passive in her contemplation. This, in turn, puts the person at risk of being blamed for inappropriate slowness, according to contemporary discourses on efficiency and activity, which are incorporated in conventional discourses on innovation (and entrepreneurship).

At the heart of *intellectus* is the ability to stand in relation to ‘non-knowing’ and to endure such situations whereby human judgement can unfold. Bornemark (2020) views *intellectus*-driven activity as neither active (someone in full control on a surfboard), nor passive (a billiard ball that is struck on the table). Instead, she invents the concept ‘*pactive*’, arguing that in human action, there is no such thing as pure activity or pure passivity. In her elaboration of ‘*paction*’ she relates to the experience of giving birth. A woman giving birth must actively push, but also passively wait for labour pains (and the midwife who is helping her). Thus, it is through passivity that activity can be born. The two practices are deeply enmeshed, and separating them provides us with a discourse with only a one-sided dimension.

Actively and continuously riding the wave of innovation appears to be a practice strongly underpinned by *ratio*, detached from *intellectus*. Metaphorically speaking, the surfer is chasing the solution – or newness – but can never stop to actually enjoy it, because, as soon as the innovation has an impact on the world, the next thing must be invented. There is a continuous activity of doing – an activity where *intellectus* suffers. Slowing down and reflecting upon what a particular newness brings, or if it is the most important newness to chase, requires one to contemplate the surfing conditions on the beach. This ‘*pactivity*’ would describe what the stories of the rural women and men inform us about. They seem to accept non-knowing without being paralysed. Rather, they enact *pactivity* as part of their practices and lives.

Sara Ahmed on emotions as performative

The ‘affective turn’ has brought about a shift in social science to recognise feelings, and engage more critically in analytical, feminist, philosophical and political discussions on the role of emotions (e.g., Pedwell and Whitehead, 2012). This ‘turn’ has, however, (not yet) reached innovation research. In stating this, we do not mean that emotions are not important in innovation. On the contrary, we would like to point to how innovators’ language may indeed be very emotional, but that they are conventionally described with a ‘cool’ distance, like, for example, picturing someone able to refrain from emotional turbulence on her ride on the surfboard.

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed (2014: 8) elucidates emotions as relations to oneself and others. In her view, emotions ‘involve (re)actions of relations of “towardness” or “awayness” in relation to particular objects’. Here, emotions are seen as performative and contingent with sociality, since they are part of the very production of borders between subject and object (p. 6). Hence, expressions of emotions do things. For instance, the expression ‘you make me sad’ produces an agentic subject, with a capacity to transfer the object of sadness and plunge the other subject into a passive state. For Ahmed, the point is not to understand what is ‘inside’ a person. Rather, emotions shape the boundaries between you and I, or they and we, as well as becoming the building blocks of subjectivity. Emotions can therefore be seen as means through which both unity/division, or superiority/inferiority, are constructed.

Constructing the active innovator, who has often been described as a ‘cool’, ‘hard’, ‘brave’, ‘fast’, and ‘quick’ man in research, policy and practice (see Berglund and Granat Thorslund, 2012; Pettersson, 2007) creates a certain emotional state. This imaginary subject takes shape against the background of the passive Other who is sitting on the beach, perhaps pondering whether she too wants to ride the waves. She who, in contrast, is described as ‘not yet there’, ‘cautious’, and ‘careful’ (see Berglund and Granat Thorslund, 2012; Pettersson, 2007) which evoke

another emotional state. It is in this way that emotions discursively contribute to the construction of particular subjectivities; the active innovator takes shape in relation to the passive Other. Ahmed's work is therefore especially useful in relation to understanding activity since it allows us to study how borders are invoked through the innovation discourse that produces the active innovator in contrast to the passive follower.

What is interesting when scrutinising activity and passivity is that passion and passivity share the same root in the Latin word ('passio') for 'suffering', which is noticed by Ahmed (2014: 2-3):

To be passive is to be enacted upon, as a negation that is already felt as suffering. The fear of passivity is tied to the fear of emotionality, in which weakness is defined in terms of a tendency to be shaped by others. Softness is narrated as a proneness to injury. The association between passion and passivity is instructive. It works as a reminder of how 'emotion' has been viewed as 'beneath' the faculties of thought and reason. To be emotional is to have one's judgement affected: it is to be reactive rather than active, dependent rather than autonomous.

We understand her elaboration of passio(n) as follows: when a person becomes passionate s/he may run the risk of being 'taken over' by emotions, since as soon as one is taken over, one is purportedly no longer in control of one's feelings; instead, one can be enacted upon, which simultaneously aligns the subject with openness. Ahmed links such openness to the feminised body; a body that may be(come) 'penetrated' or 'invaded' by others, which makes it weak and vulnerable. Being enacted upon, metaphorically, paints a contrasting figure to the focused surfer – the innovator – who must stay on the board, leaving everything and everyone outside of the spotlight. Passivity, in relation to the male construct of an innovator as active, thereby becomes something to be feared, as it is bound with uncontrolled emotionality, implying one runs the risk of being shaped by others.

Innovation as a solitary surfing activity, however, sits in stark contrast to recent understandings of innovation as socially constituted (Styhre, 2013; Pecis, 2016) which depict a subtle, incremental and iterative learning process (Alsos, Ljunggren and Hytti, 2013, Andersson et al., 2012). In these understandings of innovation, we are inevitably enacted upon, because humans are social creatures. The logic here seems to be that the more enacted upon we can tolerate being, the more susceptible we become to our environment. We are thus prone to noticing where something needs to be fixed, or where 'newness' is needed. If such enactment leaves us no peace, we may engage in an innovative practice, in which we pay attention to how existing 'pieces' (ideas, materials, knowledge etc.) can be joined together in a new and innovative way.

When innovators are described as passionate they are opened up to external influence and to a kind of 'suffering'; suffering in terms of being enacted upon and having to see, and not avoiding taking in life and its realities; suffering in terms of wanting to fix what one has seen. Innovation, in this reading, is aligned with being open to external influence, being enacted upon, being responsive 'in the heat of the moment', which ties in neatly with Bornemark's understanding of intellectus.

ON METHOD

Inspired by Swedish rural men's and women's stories of innovation, which emphasise the practice of slowing down and taking the time to 'stop and watch the sky', our ambition in this paper is to unfold alternative discourses of innovation. Methodologically, we understand language as performative (Butler, 2011) and view the stories told not as stories 'against' innovation, but as a 'series of escapes, of small slides, of plays, of crossings, of flights' (Davies and Gannon, 2005, p. 313) that can evoke new discourses of innovation. In that sense, we seek to 'trouble' gender binaries (Butler, 2011) through telling an alternative narrative of innovation (Pettersson and Lindberg, 2013).

In the article we draw on interviews from two research projects in which we have previously been involved. One on women's entrepreneurship in rural Sweden, was undertaken in 2016 to 2020 and involved both authors. The other project on green care farming in Sweden, was undertaken in 2016 to 2020 and involved the second author. Our previous analyses of these interviews indicated that men and women developed new endeavours and ways of working in their rural businesses – sometimes in unconventional ways – and often stressing 'slowness' as important to everyday practices. We view this as an opportunity to better understand – and problematise – innovation from a pactive point of view. In this way, the article is empirically driven, whilst aiming for conceptual and theoretical development.

The empirical material in both projects consist of a total of 50 interviews (project on women's entrepreneurship N=30; project on green care farming N=20). What was crucial in the selection of these interviews was not whether the stories told contained innovation, because many did in some way or another. Rather, our selection was guided by our aspiration to show the variation the narratives of innovation took, not only concerning the participants' businesses and ideas, but also regarding how they talked about their relation to non-knowing, passion and pactivity.

Table 1. Method

	Tea	Maya	Beata	Johanna
<i>Study/ Year</i>	Rural women's entrepreneurship 2018, 2020	Rural women's entrepreneurship 2018	Rural women's entrepreneurship 2018	Green care 2017
<i>Study/ Material</i>	Interview, observation at the farm and café, interaction at seminar, web material, photos	Interview, web material, social media material, photos, observation at the hat factory, discussions with her husband and employees	Interview, photos, web material	Two interviews, two observations on the farm, social media
<i>Business/ Sector</i>	Farming	Manufacturing	Transportation	Care
<i>Place</i>	Lives on the farm	Factory 50 m from home	Coach depot and office close to the home	Lives at the croft

These interviews are contrasted with the construction of innovation as a perpetual activity pursued by the creative, visionary and heroic male genius (Alsos, Ljunggren and Hytti, 2013; Andersson et al., 2012; Pecis, 2016). We understand these contrasts as 'tension points' that emerge when empirical cases collide with mainstream understandings (Flyvbjerg, Landman and Schram, 2012), which is instructive in the feminist production of transformative knowledge (Bell et al., 2020). These tension points can challenge - and potentially change - the innovation discourse to become less exclusive and excluding, and become instead more inclusive regarding how innovation can be 'walked and talked'. Often innovation was 'walked', in that our interviewees did not use the concept of innovation to describe their practices, despite describing unconventional ideas and businesses, but instead emphasised change, creativity, and experimentation. However, at times innovation was 'talked', which is emphasised in the stories.

The stories selected are based on empirical material gathered during micro-ethnography, comprising interviews, observations, visits, participation in the activities, social media and other information from the web (Bell, 2010). The stories stress alternatives to conventional understandings of innovation, namely being in the present, staying in a specific place, experimentation, contemplation, caring for others and creating reciprocal relations. When we approached the primary material, we re-read the interviews and selected five stories each. These were discussed and reflected upon, by both authors, from the selection criteria of variation in relation to non-knowing, passion and pactivity, which left us with four cases in total (see [Table 1](#)). Although the interviews were mainly conducted with women, we also purposively selected three cases where the women worked closely with a male partner and, in one case, with family. Our intention was to stress how innovation was 'walked' jointly in the mundane.

In our analysis of the four stories, we approached the interview transcript and made a draft for the story. Our two versions were then woven into the story presented in the article, with the aim of keeping the nuances and giving the reader an impression of how innovation was performed in that particular context. In the next step of the analysis, we consulted our theoretical sources of inspiration. In this way, the stories thus came first, as the article is driven by empirical insights. However, in order to follow publication conventions, the stories are presented here after the theoretical discussions.

Bornemark's discussion about pactivity and the human ability to stand in relation to non-knowing (which challenges the understanding of innovation activity as rational) spurred us on to pose the question: How is non-knowing expressed in the stories? Ahmed's conceptualisation of *passio*/passivity stresses the need for a profound openness in innovation processes, an openness that is neglected in the conventional male-centred innovation discourse. This impelled us to raise our second question: How are passion and openness expressed in the stories? These questions are summarised in [Table 1](#), which links the stories with the discussion section, showing how the four stories relate to the conventional innovation discourse and how our 'pactive analysis' of the stories unfolds alternative discourses of innovation. For confidentiality considerations, we have de-identified the interviewees and have not disclosed the exact information about their location.

STORIES OF INNOVATION AS PACTIVITY

Below follow stories of innovators in rural areas about their relation to the unknown and to passion.

Tea and Tore: Grounded in the Soil

The landscape is beautiful, and the meadows are lush green as it is early summer and, in the distance, we can see the cows grazing. Tea, the multifunctional farmer we are interviewing, gives us space to take our time to embrace the surroundings, patiently awaiting the questions we are about to ask. It is as if she has all the time in the

world, or perhaps she is used to giving urban people time and space, we muse. She tells us that she likes to invite people to the farm, following the maxim 'If we cannot "go global" (travel), we can at least invite the global world to visit us.'

Tea and Tore can be seen to practise innovation that stretches well beyond investing in technology (Automatic Milking System). On the farm they are adding a range of new activities, beyond traditional farming: keeping pigs over the summer; buying an old school (dismantled into modules and then re-assembled at their farm); converting the school into a café to host visitors from the city; arranging concerts during the summer; catering services; making breakfast boxes; selling boxes of lamb; making cheese and experimenting with artisan food; offering courses in cheese making, and welcoming classes of pupils to visit their farm to learn about farming. Tea and Tore are hence inviting and welcoming different groups of people to experience different aspects of the farm and rural life, to connect them to the soil and cycle of life. We find that their endeavours and the ongoing creative experimentations, resulting in many different activities sprouting from the farm ground, should also be considered innovative. Although these creative experimentations may not always involve new technologies, they enrich the concept of multifunctional farming, and depict innovation as a pactive social process that unfolds, which makes it possible for them to develop life on the farm and also contribute to enhancing rural development.

Relation to the unknown

Reading the transcript of the interview, we see that the story portrays a pactive life where new ideas are contemplated and sometimes acted upon and experimented with. During the interview, Tea took her time. This thoughtfulness recurs in her description of day-to-day interactions between herself and her Tore. They appear to make time for an unhurried walk now and again, where ideas can be mulled over while they wait for the right time to decide if, when and how to enact upon them. In addition, Tea repeatedly returns to the rural condition: nature, the animals and mastering a way to live in symbiosis with this condition. This implies embracing the unknown relation to life and death, and also the family history. Tea explains that a much-loved animal can suddenly be taken ill, forcing her and Tore to make a difficult decision. She describes living on the farm as being in relation to the circular way of life, where life and death cannot be separated (as ratio and intellectus have been), but having to embrace the difficulties, the uncomfortable, without becoming 'hard' and inaccessible to those living beings that surround her. For Tea, the unknown is not something to shy away from, but something she and her family must learn to cope with. In this sense, she appears to stand in relation to intellectus, the ability to 'stand still', making judgements in the heat of the moment (e.g., when something happens to an animal) and keeping her eyes open for the ambiguities of everyday life. Thus, between the lines of Tea's story lies the message: 'Life gives and life takes, you need to be humble.' In our words: grounded, to embrace the unknown with humility and live a pactive life.

Passion and openness

Passion is not explicitly expressed in Tea's story. Her tone is direct, avoiding too many adjectives. Perhaps this is because of her relation to the unknown. There is simply no need to use extra words to 'polish' some aspects of reality, but she remains grounded in the soil and conditions of rural life. Instead, passion sneaks in between the lines, in her smile when talking about her best friends – the dogs – who follow her everywhere or the joy of doing things together as a family and the pride of continuing the family practice of the farm. This includes the mundane work of packing boxes of meat together with the whole family on a Friday evening. It extends to the visitors and their questions, and how she can teach (urban) visitors to have a more complex understanding of the rural and how the urban and rural can never be separated, because they are inextricably linked. If Tea's passion is discursively restrained, her openness and directness shine through.

Maya and Mark: Play it by Ear

We wander around the workshop where Maya shows us all the tools needed to produce the fashionable hats which have brought the business she runs with her husband, Mark, to global recognition. The workshop is located in a rural area, some twenty kilometres north of one of the larger towns on the Swedish west coast. It is difficult to imagine that it is a node of fashion millinery. Chickens are strolling in the backyard, and the neighbouring house is home for Maya, Mark and their two young children. They moved here from Stockholm some five years ago and, Maya explains, 'the place and the house chose us', rather than them choosing to live in this small community.

The hats produced in the workshop are all hand-made but produced as part of a collection. This is highly unusual, according to Maya, who stresses that what is important and what interests her is the actual process of making the hats. She makes a strong point of not compromising either with the materials or the time it takes. Although the hats have gained recognition globally – among celebrities and in the big fashion houses – the innovation stressed by Maya is not only their creative designs, but also their approach to production, making collections of handmade hats. Shying away from efficient production, enjoying the handicraft of hat making, the perpetual activity of the machine is rejected in favour of the pactive production by humans. This production of hats can therefore be viewed as innovative through the design and production process of making hats, because

these move beyond traditional conceptualisations of technological efficiency. Mark and Maya are passionate about the handicraft of making the hats, and maintaining and developing their professional millinery skills.

Relation to the unknown

Whilst Maya and Mark are innovative in broader terms than the conventional innovation discourse suggests, they have benefited greatly from being part of a business incubator at a nearby science park, where they have been given good business advice. Maya also underlines that the incubator staff learnt from working with her and her husband. At first, for example, the staff could not understand why Maya and Mark, who are very selective about who to work with, sometimes turned down stores interested in selling their hats. But for them, it is a question of aesthetics and their hats fitting into the stores, and of finding 'good people' to work with in long-term relationships; and 'we always insist on meeting them personally'. Selling as much as possible and making as much profit as possible is clearly not the priority. Instead, Maya gives voice to the kind of intellectus which Bornemark describes underpins artistic work, where the artist follows her ideas, and where these ideas are often embodied, and thus expressed through the ability to express herself through her designs and creations.

Passion and openness

Maya emphasises that business has never really been a focus for her, nor for her husband. Instead, she tells us that the decisions have always circled around being in the present and catching something in flight:

This is where I am now, and what do I need to do, in order to do the things I want to do at the moment? I mean, when we moved here from Stockholm everyone thought we were crazy moving away from the Swedish Mecca of fashion. However, this is who we are. When we are passionate about something and when it feels right, then we move along.

When we ask her to describe what feeling 'right' implies, she says that it is about being independent and free, and contrasts this with working for somebody else and being controlled. 'Following feelings' is not described as something that needs to be pondered upon, or grounded, but instead passion is presented in a way that appears to subsume both Maya and Mark in making decisions in life, and thus as guided by passion. It is almost as if following their passion means being 'seduced' by a dream and an imaginary future. Being open to feelings and impressions thus appears as a practice that permeates their activities. But their passion is also more long-term, as seen in their wishes to contribute to maintaining a production method with a heritage and to preserve the millinery profession.

Beata and Her Family: Creating Community

It is a sunny day at the beginning of June, and people are strolling by as we enjoy lunch close to the library in the small town on the east coast. Beata tells me how she decided to take over the coach company which her grandfather started. This was something that her father opposed at the time, but of which he is immensely proud today. 'Although, he never says it to me,' Beata says, smiling.

Beata explains the trajectory of the company. It was started by her grandfather, who was a farmer, but who also had time to drive the coach. The company was then taken over by her father, and her father and mother ran it together. However, after her father's retirement, Beata and her mother ran the company together for four years. 'Then I was the innovator,' Beata stresses, and points to how this gave her space to come up with new ideas for what they could do with the company.

Today, Beata and her husband own the company. It is located in a rural area on a large island off the Swedish east coast, very close to the family home and the depot. Their company offers various transportation services, including a direct line from the island to Stockholm, coach trips to different destinations in Europe, and occasional coach hire for various organisations. Previously, a 'backbone' of the company was driving the school bus on the island, which they had been doing since 1954. However, a few years ago they lost this contract under the procurement process performed by the municipality. Following this unfortunate development Beata and her husband expanded the business by buying an existing travel agency.

Relation to the unknown

During the interview, Beata seldom mentions inequality or gender structures. These come up more in passing when she reflects upon her father's hesitant reaction to her desire to take over the company. It is also in passing that she mentions how the women in the community appear to make 'more' out of their entrepreneurial endeavours than the men do. In Beata's view it is the women who are developing the rural community, because they are persistent and inventive, whilst men merely follow in old footsteps. Before wrapping up the discussion, however, Beata begins to reflect upon her older sister's achievements and efforts to change unjust sociocultural systems in Saudi Arabia. We suggest that, reading between the lines, Beata has a strong sense of her own direction, of what is right for her, as well as what is wrong. Perhaps she has been inspired by her sister and her feminist work, perhaps it comes from elsewhere, but reading between the lines of the interview, we see she makes several spot-on

reflections about inequality and what it means to live in a gendered society. The compass that Beata appears to navigate by is undeniably related to an ability to relate to non-knowing, to a sense where she has drawn clear boundaries for what she wants to do, and she does not make a fuss about things, but holds on to her direction and pursues her wishes and dreams.

Passion and openness

For Beata and her husband, running a company in the countryside (in comparison to the town) offers calm, friendly relations and a sense of belonging together. Beata emphasises that she wants to see the coach company not as a family business, but as a business with a family feeling. This involves not only her closest family, but also the employees, neighbours, and basically anyone who passes by: 'A coach company can be so much more than a coach company, it is – kind of – a social institution. People call and just want to chat. You become a bit like the local village hairdresser.' Always available and taking the time to socialise; this is how Beata describes herself and the company. Often people just drop by the office, stopping for a cup of coffee.

It's most fun in the summer when there is so much traffic, because then we have tables outside the depot... so when we sit there and eat lunch ... [tourists] stop [and ask]: 'Oh, is there a restaurant here?' 'No, but you can have a cup of coffee.' And then you sit and talk...

Beata explains how she becomes an ambassador for the countryside and for coach travel, and how she always tries to get people involved in all contexts. She can therefore be taken to create community through continuously inviting new relationships. Beata's passion thus lies in creating a family feeling. She is enacted upon by the people she meets and does not even try to hide this. Rather, this is part of the family feeling, where everyone is invited to put their stamp on the company and its activities (thus bringing innovation). This does not mean that Beata should be described as malleable. On the contrary, her compass is firmly set, but she does not follow strict rules or stated goals. Rather, she appears to listen to her 'inner voice', which tells her to hold on to her own dreams and wishes, despite an uncertain terrain and people who want her to move in other directions.

Johanna: Slow Down and Watch the Sky

While driving to Johanna's small croft in a rural area, we worry that this will be a difficult visit and interview, as it has been a little hard to talk to her on the phone. However, when we arrive at the croft, after driving from a larger town, past a few small communities and lastly over an open pasture, she greets us with warm hugs. The impression, after following her and participating in her workday, and a further day-long visit, is that Johanna is a woman of few words. Instead, she uses more non-verbal communication in her business, such as eye contact, touching, pointing and using images and photos. This also seems to suit her clients, who she takes on for 'daily activities' at her croft, very well. They are not very verbal either, but seem to communicate in other ways. For example, one of the clients shows us that she wants to massage our hands, using a tactile technique, when we rest after lunch. The client takes out a towel and massage oil and puts them in front of us. This makes us reflect as follows, in the field notes, after a second visit: 'It is difficult to summarise the impressions after a day which has been so little about verbal expressions, but instead about non-verbal communication and emotions, and feelings that we have had, including being welcomed, calmness, freedom of stress and being in the present. 'Green care', or providing care farming, is Johanna's innovative practice. She has literally opened up her home to take care of people with varying abilities, supporting their well-being and health through providing them with opportunities to work at a pace that suits them, in the rural environment with small-scale farming activities, such as taking care of animals and growing vegetables. As her clients are not very verbal and cannot read text, Johanna uses the innovative feature of images to support their communication. For example, she has put up a plan for the daily activities on the wall, in the form of a circle representing a clock, with images and photos of the various things that the clients are to do, and when.

Relation to the unknown

For Johanna, as a care giver, relating to the unknown is very real. Working with other people through connecting them with farming – animals and plants – and nature, much of what she does is in constant relation to the unknown. She must be attentive to her clients, which sometimes implies being 'a step ahead' of them, so that they do not, for example, open the gates to let the rabbits run free or add too much salt to the food while cooking. For Johanna, being attentive also means acting in the 'heat of the moment' and solving situations and issues that arise in, and between, the humans (and animals) on the croft. A client might be upset if the cat runs away from them, for example. Johanna being a care-giver is very much about relating to the unknown, as there is no way of knowing how each working day will unfold, and therefore no set 'protocol' to follow, even though she does, of course, have a plan.

Passion and openness

Johanna constantly notes details in the midst of performing every activity with the clients during the day. She passionately notes the drops on an aspen leaf; that a small oak in the forest has lost some of its yellowed leaves; that the needles on the larch are soft. She also photographs many of these details, as well as the activities performed by the clients. Johanna's care farming thus has 'being in the present' at its heart, and she is highly present in the moment throughout the day, seeking to induce calmness in her clients. She explains that walks in the forest are central in the care farming:

It may sound simple that we just go out and walk with the dog, but for them it is a form of training, and at the same time it's also... In the beginning I had a girl who was very, very stressed, and that walk in the forest then was to practise walking and also to focus on being here and now, in the forest, and seeing things instead of being incapable of switching off from all the issues that stress you... it is important.

Johanna is also passionate in caring for her clients, which originally grew out of her own child being neuro-diverse. Johanna found that her child's wellbeing increased through living on a farm with animals and through being in a rural, calm environment, close to nature.

DISCUSSION: INNOVATION BEYOND BORDERS

The ever-increasing interest and penetration of the innovation discourse in contemporary society and its male gendering prompted us to rethink it in this article from a feminist point of view. We have challenged the conventional discourse and, in particular, the focus on newness as something that requires constant activity. Fundamental to the activity is the male construct of a rational being, driven by a need to be influential, which positions the passive Other at the border of the discourse. By approaching four stories of innovative businesses in rural areas from the notion of activity and passivity as enmeshed (pactivity) we have sought to contribute to alternative feminist discourses on innovation. Thus, we have theorised innovation beyond the conventional discursive limits, and problematise innovation as an activity pursued by active, rational, emotionally in-control wo/men in technical sectors of the economy. We suggest that a feminist interrogation of innovation discourse understands and tolerates innovations as produced by pactive people being in relation to non-knowing and by being passionate and open.

In this way we have contributed a novel aspect of feminist and gender innovation research. We have deepened the conceptual and discursive borders of innovation (Pecis and Priola, 2019; Pettersson, 2007), by applying Bornemark's and Ahmed's feminist philosophical approaches. By problematising the notion of activity, we have moved beyond the technical and rationality claims that make up conventional innovation discourse (Alsos, Ljunggren and Hytti, 2013). Through our feminist engagements with innovation the gendered innovation discourse, we have also problematised the strong links between innovation and technology. We hope our feminist investigation and engagement can be built on by other feminist scholars, by, for example, applying a similar approach to capture the enmeshment of activity and passivity in other geographical contexts. Furthermore, our study can broaden theoretical discussions on innovation by allowing more complex understandings of various versions of newness to emerge. This means that practices such as the making of policy incentives must be able to take their point of departure in more complex and alternative innovation processes, rather than prioritising male technological newness.

Inspired by Bornemark's discussion (2018; 2020) we find that the rural men and women in our study, in various ways accept non-knowing without being paralysed. Instead, they embrace non-knowing, integrating it into their stories of their mundane pactive practices. This implies slowing down and reflecting upon what a certain innovation may entail; and reflecting and acting upon whether this particular innovation is the most important one to chase. Metaphorically speaking, this requires contemplating the surfing conditions on the beach. In different ways, the stories unfold innovation as a practice where people hold on to their compass whilst walking in an uncertain terrain. This involves allowing others to enact upon them their ideas, dreams and wishes. The stories analysed do not try to fit innovation into a predestined story of the active human being who does everything by her or himself, and where innovations come 'from within' the individual's efforts to force newness upon the world.

Tea describes pactivity as active passivity (intellectus), which consists of being reflexive, thoughtful and 'grounded'. This can be understood as a restrained activity through which she appears to 'use' passivity to ground herself. Johanna is in tune with non-knowing in her silent relation to clients and nature where she seems to be able to develop embodied relationality beyond verbal expressions. Beata seems to have a compass with a firm direction, but without following strict rules or stated goals. Her compass is thus more tuned to her 'inner voice', which tells her to stand in relation to the unknown, holding on to her dreams and wishes. Finally, Maya, stands in strong relation to an artistic intellectus through which she is able to not only make space for creativity, but to prioritise a

Table 2. Analysis – vignettes

<i>Case</i>	<i>Tea</i>	<i>Maya</i>	<i>Beata</i>	<i>Johanna</i>
<i>Business area</i>	Multifunctional farming Creative experimentation	Creative designs and handmade hats (in serial production)	New transportation routes Acquisition of travel company	Green care
<i>Relation to the unknown</i>	Grounded to embrace the unknown with humility	Embodied, the artist's creative ability to stand in relation to the unknown and express this through design and new creations	Listening to her inner voice – quietly following her compass	Connecting herself and others (clients) to nature and standing in relation to the unknown – the clients' 'silence'
<i>Passion / Openness</i>	Discursively restrained passion. Openness and directness in social situations. Continuing the family history of farming. Passion for nature and animals – the cycle of life	Follow one's dreams Being guided by passion Maintain the production method and the millinery profession	Family feeling Creating situations where she can be 'enacted upon' – absorbing ideas from these social situations	Doing good for her clients Using photography – another language – and showing relations through it Opening her home and herself to be enacted upon by the clients and nature.
<i>Alternative discourses of innovation as pactivity</i>	Grounded in the soil Using 'passivity' to ground herself Restrained activity – requires contemplation Making space for reflexivity	Play it by ear Sensibility towards own feelings, ideas and following emotions rather than keeping them at bay	Creating community Nurturing relations, company culture of family feeling, inviting people to take part	Slow down and watch the sky Connected to nature Embodied, aesthetic and sensory communication

creativity which is not conditioned by ratio(nal) measures. All four stories thus describe the enmeshment of activity and passivity – pactivity – and how it unfolds in different ways (see [Table 2](#)).

Following Ahmed's discussion, the concept of passivity is closely related to passion and to being enacted upon by the other. We find that when such enactment offers no peace, humans may engage in more innovative practices. Again, we find that all four women share stories which disclose invitations to others where the relationship cannot be predefined. They also, in different ways, pay attention to how existing pieces (ideas, materials, knowledge, etc.) can be joined together in new innovations. Borrowing from the conventional innovation discourse, this has required them to be courageous, to be able to let go and to – metaphorically – be swept away by a wave.

From the stories we learn about having the courage to invite (new or deeper) relationships with others, but also the courage to be in relation to the other and to death, as well as the courage to be in relation to one's own feelings and territory. In this way, Tea describes her passion for the animals and the cycle of nature and family, a kind of passion which helps her to ground herself in the community. Johanna's passion is to be in the present in and through her care farming. In contrast, Maya describes the passion of following her feelings, letting them give material shape to her and her husband's ideas through their design. For Beata, passion is related to the extended family – to creating an atmosphere where people can be close to each other and to nurturing this family feeling beyond her biological family and the company to include the rural community.

CONCLUSION

Through our feminist intervention, our ambition has been to make innovation less contained and limited to rational, active men and technology, and thus more open. Placing innovation in relation to non-knowing and passion fills it with a new meaning. In that sense, the alternative feminist discourses on innovation evoked here – grounded in the soil, play it by ear, creating community, slow down and watch the sky – can 'tilt' the status quo of the innovation discourse. These alternative discourses of innovation can flourish as one 'branch on the tree' together with previous feminist attempts to understand innovation as a social process in which everyone should be able to take an equal part (e.g., Alsos, Ljunggren and Hytti, 2013; Andersson et al., 2012; Pecis, 2016; Pettersson, 2007; Pettersson and Lindberg, 2013; Schiebinger and Schraudner, 2011). In that sense they challenge established ways of knowing innovation (Harding, 1991) and contribute to a transformative research agenda of innovation studies (Bell et al., 2020).

The mobilisation of alternative feminist discourses of innovation presents us with the hope of reclaiming the concept so that it reflects collective, caring, reciprocal relations, slowness and contemplation, and thus understands innovation as pactivity. Practising innovation then implies standing in relation to one's non-knowing, being passionate and open for enactment, envisioning innovation anew. Sometimes we may ride the wave, focused, alert

and on the edge; at other times we play like crazy at the water's edge. But there is also time and space to relax in the grass far away from the beach.

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Back on the Barricades: New Feminisms and Market Innovation in the Consultancy Field

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ABSTRACT

The enhanced role given to innovation in capitalist societies has resulted in a development where even matters such as gender equality are assessed and rewarded based on their innovation potential. Markets, innovations and companies are believed to possess and offer solutions to gender inequalities, a development that relies on the commodification of gender equality. This paper is based on an ethnographic study of the field of gender equality consultancy with the aim of critically investigating the belief that gender inequality can be solved with innovations. Focusing on clients, market demand, innovative and sellable solutions, and profits, gender consultancy illustrates how markets have become a model for equality work. The interviewed consultants created new products, thought up new words and concepts, and emphasised gain for the client. Innovation discourse iterates technocratic approaches to social and cultural problems. However, the paper argues that innovation discourse is a 'doing' that is open for re-configuration. By searching for new business models based on the principle of 'together in ways that matter', the interviewed consultants also worked to contribute to a more equal and fair society. Thus, the commodification of gender equality simultaneously opens up possibilities to re-code and reappropriate the concept of 'innovation'.

Keywords: gender equality consultants, market feminism, economic performativity, gender and innovation, commodity feminism

INTRODUCTION

'Such neoliberal bullshit!' That is what the lecturer in gender studies said when we were invited to speak to their students. How should we respond [like that] and [explain] why we have joined the 'bad' side? (Elisabeth, gender equality consultant).

Innovation is considered to be a universal solution to present-day concerns such as securing economic development and growth, solving climate and health crises, and ending poverty and inequalities. As argued by Beckert (2016), innovations are a cornerstone of capitalist dynamics: 'Capitalist growth is driven by the introduction of new products, more efficient production methods, and the expansion of the realm of market exchange' (Beckert, 2016: 169). The enhanced role that is given to innovation in capitalist societies has resulted in a development where even matters such as gender equality are assessed and rewarded for their innovation potential. Markets, innovations and companies are increasingly believed to possess and offer solutions to inequalities. This is particularly the case in Sweden, the context of this study. This development relies on: (a) the belief that economic growth is the ultimate goal of everything; and (b) the transformation of 'gender equality' into a product or service through a process of commodification. The Swedish governmental innovation agency, Vinnova, for instance, regularly calls for funded 'Innovations for increased equality' in which actors are invited to collaborate and explore the 'potential of how new solutions to gender equality and/or diversity challenges can help achieve other goals in Agenda 2030'.¹ Sweden is a country with a strong tradition of (male) industrialism and likes to praise itself for its entrepreneurial spirit and business climate.

Still, gender equality is rarely placed on policy makers' agendas when need for innovation is brought up. On the Swedish government's homepage, *innovation* is defined as 'new or improved solutions that create value for

¹ <https://www.vinnova.se/en/calls-for-proposals/normkritisk-innovation/preparation-projects/>.

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society, businesses and individuals'. Furthermore, it is also described as a means to secure sustainable development, fight unemployment, and create value for individuals.²

The underrepresentation of women in the context of entrepreneurship and innovation has been recognised as a problem and has led to several state initiatives which have the goal to encourage women to engage in business. As argued by Ahl et al. (2014), governments in the Nordic countries recognise entrepreneurship as the engine of economic growth and see women as an untapped resource that can be used to further economic growth. Programs that are intended to stimulate women's entrepreneurship have consequently been implemented. However, the success rates of these programs have been low, and scholarly critique of women's entrepreneurship programs has been somewhat merciless (Ahl et al., 2014; Berglund et al., 2018).

The present article is based on an ethnographic study of the field of *gender equality consultancy*, where I critically examine the idea that gender inequality can be solved by innovations. I examine a group of professionals who operate within a market that addresses issues of feminism and gender equality, and who regularly have to deal with increased demands on issues of gender equality to be innovative. However, I will argue that these professionals also work innovatively to contribute to a more equal and fair society. The title, 'back on the barricades', is taken from my fieldwork experience and refers to how some of the gender equality consultants whom I interviewed described the work that they do. This article thus discusses why the 'barricades' symbolically deployed in the late 2010s are referred to as a matter of entrepreneurship and business, and the impact of innovation discourse on the organisation of equality measures. The following remarks by another gender equality consultant, Elisabeth,³ illustrate the tensions that exist in the field of feminism and gender issues concerning working in a private marketplace, and how those individuals who do work under such conditions choose to deal with those tensions (cf. Kunz and Prügl, 2019). Many of the interviewed consultants in this study felt that their work was questioned or criticised by activists and academic gender scholars who thought they had 'sold out'. As Elisabeth declared: '[w]e can't be as nuanced as theories, the alternative is to do nothing at all'. The purpose of this study is to examine how gender equality has become a commodity and how this commodification is practised and understood in the context of consultancy work. Further, I investigate whether the work that consultants do can be understood in terms of innovations and what the consequences of such a view are. The contribution that this paper makes is twofold: (1) it problematises innovation discourse for its iteration of technocratic approaches to social and cultural problems; and (2) it examines the potential to re-code and reappropriate the concept of 'innovation'. Beckert (2016) demonstrates how, with the advent of capitalism, technologies that had remained constant for centuries began to change rapidly. Innovations satisfy previously unmet needs and create new ones, make the production process more efficient, and provide firms with opportunities for profit. Beckert understands innovation in terms of fictional expectations, utopian visions of a pretended future reality; he terms this 'imagined futures'. As also argued by techno-feminists such as Wajcman (2004), decisions made by entrepreneurs and firms cannot be explained in terms of optimisation since there is no way to determine what an optimal investment in innovation would be. Decisions about innovative activities themselves create the future since 'competition in capitalist economies is in no small measure a struggle over imaginaries of future technologies' (Beckert, 2016: 170).

THE COMMODIFICATION OF GENDER EQUALITY

The term *social innovation* has been used to refer to and promote inclusive processes and solutions that address societal challenges (Lindberg, 2017). However, social innovation can also be seen as an outcome of the influence of innovation discourse on matters that are remote from the context of engineering (i.e., the context in which *innovation* is largely used). In the context of gender and feminism, terms that deal with inequalities from the perspectives of innovation and market exchange range from 'femvertising', referring to advertising with feminist content, to 'norm-creative innovation' — a concept that tackles inequalities as inefficient and views gender equality as ways of optimising organisations so that they can perform to their best potential. Many scholars have criticised these undertakings for draining feminism of its critical edge and content. Ahl et al. (2014) coined the term *FemInclsm* to capture the phenomenon of 'feminist activism through enterprise' which they describe as the use of entrepreneurship to achieve feminist change, an endeavour which they see as possessing potential, but is difficult to achieve. By focusing on representation instead of a gendered redistribution of power and wealth, *FemInclsm* puts the entrepreneurial individual's right to freedom and to contribute to economic growth above collective struggle, it is argued (Berglund, et al., 2018). Furthermore, terms such as 'commodity feminism' (Dworkin and Wachs, 2009; Goldman, Heath and Smith, 1991) and 'post-feminism' (McRobbie, 2009; Negra and Tasker, 2007) have been used to critically discuss the emergence of new forms of feminisms where women's empowerment is located in the domains of consumption, lifestyle, and entrepreneurialism, instead of being seen as a matter of state equality

² <https://www.government.se/government-policy/innovation/> (accessed 9 September 2020).

³ All names have been anonymised.

initiatives. The term ‘post-feminism’ has also been used to critique a subsequent blurring of the relationship between femininity and feminism, and the lack of critical content or edge in narratives of consumption, lifestyle and entrepreneurialism (cf. Gill, 2017; Scharff, 2018).

A related development to the above is the recognition that work on inclusion and diversity can be motivated by the hope for positive outcomes for brands and organisations. A large body of literature on diversity in organisations elaborates on this theme, both for practical use and as a topic of critique. De los Reyes and Mulinari (2005) argue that the concept of ‘diversity’ un-problematically celebrates the benefits of diversity while maintaining unequal conditions for members of society. It [‘diversity’] achieves this by linking the participation of minorities in organisations to demands of profitability, thus setting up special conditions for their participation.

Organising issues of welfare and equality in terms of markets has not avoided further interrogation. Brown (2015, 2003) terms this process ‘the stealth revolution of neoliberalism’; referring to what she describes as the production of everything in the image of a market, and the dangerous outcomes when democracy itself turns into a marketplace. Brown approaches neoliberalism as a structural as well as an ethical element, assuming that neoliberalism does not only change the role of markets but also people’s ways of making sense of their lives (see also Lewis, Benschop and Simpson, 2017: 7; du Gay, 2007). The consultants included in this study constantly struggled to make themselves employable by improving their products and services, as well as their selves. Feminist knowledge was conceived as an asset for entrepreneurship and the feminist subject as ‘malleable’ (Lewis, Benschop and Simpson, 2017: 14). In theories of subjectivity and work that are inspired by Foucault, the concept of ‘entrepreneurship of the self’ has been used to denote the emergence of an entrepreneurial subjectivity that is interwoven with a neoliberal ideology (McNay, 2009; Du Gay, 2006; Foucault, 1988). Neoliberalism is then seen as a ‘governmentality’, that is more than the principles of free-market forces, and includes the organisation of subjectivity (Pettersson McIntyre, 2014).

Gender entrepreneurialism

Other commonly used terms in the literature on professional groups that are similar to the group studied in this article, whom I call ‘gender equality consultants’, are titles such as femocrats, professional feminists, and gender experts (cf. Kunz and Prügl, 2019; Kantola and Squires, 2012). In line with a critique of neoliberal forms of governance, the emergence of these professional groups has been criticised for reducing feminism to measurable goals, checklists, tool-kits, gender-washing, and statistics (Kunz and Prügl, 2019; Ovidius and Rönnblom, 2019). With its clients, market demand, innovative and sellable solutions, and profits, gender consultancy clearly illustrates how markets have become a model for the implementation of equality. By turning to ‘performativity’ theory, I will, however, take a particular approach to this phenomenon.

PERFORMING THE ECONOMY DIFFERENTLY

In the field of gender studies, the term ‘performativity’ has primarily been associated with Butler’s (1990) theories of gender performativity, in which gender is theorised as ‘a kind of becoming or activity ... an incessant and repeated action of some sort’ (Butler, 1990: 112). In the field of new economic sociology, however, performativity theory has also been used to understand economics (or markets) as constituted by material-discursive enactments (Cochoy, Giraudeau and McFall, 2014). According to Callon (1998: 2), ‘[e]conomics, in the broad sense of the term, performs, shapes and formats the economy, rather than observing how it functions.’ How we think about the economy is part of creating that economy.

In the theories of Gibson-Graham (2015), a post-structuralist Foucauldian concept of ‘a technology of the self’ is applied to refer to the way individuals ‘effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves’ (Foucault (1997: 225) in Werner, 2015: 83). These scholars combine this view with a performativity perspective on the economy, for the creation of economies that are fashioned in ‘different ways that matter’ (Gibson and Scott, 2019; Gibson-Graham, 2006; Roelvink, Martin and Gibson-Graham, 2015; 1996). Part of this endeavour is to question how ‘the economy’ is viewed and represented, and disclose to others that there is a gendered nature to the narratives around economics. Gibson (Gibson and Scott, 2019) exemplifies the way production workers are seen as the ‘real’ workers in an economy, and their activities constitute the dynamics of an economy, while people who remain in their homes are seen as doing mere ‘support work’ or ‘reproduction’ work. Today, she argues, economies are primarily represented as financial sectors, which means people who do not have shares nor play the stock market do not feel they are part of the economy (Gibson, in Gibson and Scott, 2019: 3). Such an understanding is not ‘the truth’, but a representation, a narrative, or boundary-drawing practice.

Furthermore, one effect that representations have includes making us see certain kinds of market dynamics as more important and more influential than others, thus allowing for and encouraging specific (select) forms of actions (Gibson and Scott, 2019: 2). The capitalist economy should not be seen as naturally ‘given’, but, instead,

should be viewed as performative and a 'doing'. To counter-perform, to act on, think about, and organise in ways that counter conventions for economic activity can open up different ways of creating economies in ways that matter. I will argue that the activities of the consultants that I studied can be interpreted in this way. Thus, this perspective talks of directions for change, and for transforming the thinking around matters of the economy in order to produce more ethically grounded ways of being and acting. As articulated by Werner (2015: 77—78), 'Gibson-Graham deconstructs capitalocentric discourse and, embracing on ontological politics, propose an alternate set of economic assumptions, questions, and research agendas, namely that of diverse economies, with a focus on ethical practices that fall under the rubric of community economies.' Healy (2015: 113) notes that this approach allows us to see economies as 'constituted through ideas and matter, relationships and systems of accounting', and thus also suggests that 'these assemblages are open to being reconfigured'. Therefore, as well as delineating ways in which we can redefine definitions of economic practice, this perspective also helps us to shift course. Instead of focusing on how neoliberalism produces an entrepreneurial self, the focus can be shifted to examining the possibilities for the formation of a self that desires an economy that matters.

The studies that have been inspired by Gibson-Graham are primarily empirical studies of the food and/or agricultural industries. Such studies have examined the creation of so-called 'community economies' and discuss the possibilities for the creation of different, and more ethically-grounded, ways of organising the supply of food, thereby creating alternatives to markets that already exist (see also Geiger et al., 2014). Despite these apparent differences with the work that is done by gender equality consultants in Sweden, I suggest that the comparison has relevance. I claim this because this comparison allows for an understanding of the work that gender consultants do as performative acts, acts that open up innovation discourses for re-configuration by pointing towards a direction for change. Even if the gender consultants included in this study did not always report that they wished to form an alternative economy or a community economy, in a strict sense, they described their activities as a way of transforming an economy from within. Instead of detaching themselves from capitalism, the consultants wanted to be included. They had previously felt excluded and felt that their perspectives had been excluded.

METHODS

In-depth interviews were carried out with 22 consultants between 2016 and 2020, all of whom are operative in a market that addresses issues related to gender, gender equality, diversity, inclusion, 'norm-critique', and sexuality. Two of the interviewees identified as 'male' (one from a transgender perspective), and the rest of the consultants included in this study identified as 'women' (although many of the interviewees were critical of binary gender definitions and heteronormativity). Most of them had a Swedish or Nordic background. They were based in major Swedish cities, but regularly travelled around the country to do jobs.

Qualitative ethnographic methods were chosen in order to gain insight into the consultants' reported experiences and relate these insights to discourses on entrepreneurship and innovation. During the course of my investigation, I was able to identify several cultural patterns, values, relations, and meanings that (in)form the thinking around the relationship between gender equality, feminism, markets and innovation (Ehn and Löfgren, 2009; Ehn, Löfgren and Wilk, 2016; O'Reilly, 2003; Pink et al., 2016). Participant observations were also carried out during the training of new consultants and in activities with clients, meetings, workshops and lectures. I followed a closed Facebook group, read webpages and materials such as the books written and used by consultants, and also examined some tools that are used by the consultants, such as card games. Four of the consultants were interviewed together in a group interview, referred to in one quote as 'Group of Consultants'. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

I asked all the interviewees to describe the field of gender consultancy in Sweden and identify firms and individuals that they either knew or found prominent in the field. This information gave me a good overall picture of some general tendencies that exist in the field of gender equality consultancy. Many of the consultants also shared their opinions on perspectives in the field. Frequently, these were perspectives which they disagreed with, and I quickly identified that some form of tension existed between certain groups of consultants, typically in relation to (perceived) attitudes towards profits and different approaches to doing business.

The consultants could be categorised as belonging to three different groups. The first group was business-oriented and interested in recruiting clients from private companies, in helping them with ad campaigns, product design, or modifications to their work environment. The second group was more oriented towards promoting gender equality and gender mainstreaming in public administrations, such as universities, municipalities and hospitals. The third group consisted of individuals who gave talks about their private experiences, including topics such as 'sex on equal terms' and 'non-binary experiences'. Just under half of the interviewees belonged either to the first or the second group, whilst only two individuals (2 out of 22) fell under the third category. The consultants who fell under Group 1 were typically a little younger than the consultants in the other two groups. They also had previous experiences of entrepreneurship, even if not personally, and often held university degrees in gender

studies or social sciences and humanities. Group 2 and Group 3 typically had work experience from schools, hospitals and NGOs, and many of them held university degrees in behavioural, educational, or social sciences. However, the differences between these two groups were not clear-cut. The interviewees all had some form of self-employment or employment in a private company, or both. At times, this was combined with employment in the public sphere. Some of the consultants had provided consultancy services for 30 years, while others were new to the field.

WHAT DO GENDER CONSULTANTS DO?

To contextualise the findings of this study, I begin by giving a presentation of what gender equality consultants do. Their work is primarily organised in the form of assignments of varying budgets and durations. An assignment could consist of, for example, a lecture or a series of lectures; workshops; evaluations; a survey; and/or a written report. Some of the informants perform 'gender mainstreaming' in public administrations (surprisingly, often at universities). The consultants reported that their clients generally expected them to suggest 'improvements'.

Other frequent assignments include providing feedback on recruitment and communication strategies. This entails offering input on visual campaigns, ad campaigns, or information campaigns. Occasionally, work assignments consist of a more general analysis of the workings of norms in an organisation, from its lunch-room culture and the jargon used by employees, to attitudes amongst management. Some consultants had clearly defined methods and offered ready-made packages, whilst others were more open to their clients' wishes and so would adapt their services accordingly.

Some of the consultancy firms included in this study were explicitly interested in private enterprise. These firms often made the notion of profit and opportunities for making a profit quite clear on their home pages. They were creative in their efforts to make a living out of gender issues and organised courses, Christmas parties, and different forms of get-togethers, thereby constantly innovating their market products.

The interviewees often felt that it was challenging to explain in simple terms what they could offer to their clients. As noted by Kunz and Prügl (2019: 7), it is something of a paradox to combine feminism's rejection of hierarchical categorisations with the role of expert. In fact, many of the consultants struggled with this, both on a personal level and in relation to selling a service to a potential client. They claimed that having a clearly defined issue for an assignment was one way of overcoming this, along with finding ways of 'explaining to corporate people the opportunities and consequences of our services as simply as possible', as put by for instance Rita during the interview. They thought, for instance, that focusing on communication strategies and examining written and visual materials on recruitment or employee branding was a good method to use to define a job. The consultants would then offer suggestions on how the client could become 'more inclusive' in their communication strategies. Comparing the numbers of men and women at different levels of an organisation with the goal of 'gender mainstreaming' in mind was another way of delivering a service. Another method of turning gender equality into a commodity was to create something new in material form. This would be made manifest in the form of visual communication more often than in three-dimensional object form, even in attempts to create norm-critical product design (see semcon.com/sv/addperspectives; cf. Petersson McIntyre, 2015, 2018).

Clients often had doubts about what the product being sold to them really was. Almost all of the interviewees reported that the biggest challenge that they faced was that clients know very little about what they want and what the consultants can do for them. Furthermore, the clients demonstrated 'unrealistic' expectations concerning their budgets. Clients know that they need or know that they should do 'something' about 'the gender thing', but not quite why, how, or what, the consultants reported. Similarly, clients had no idea of how their expected improvements were going to be implemented. Elina raised this point:

Often you are contacted by someone who says their boss wants something done in the field, and then they don't know what that is, but they still have to make it happen. And then you start one way, and halfway through they change their mind and want something else. Middle hands who don't know what they want, that is the worst. Someone has been told by someone else to do something about 'the gender thing'. Often in public administrations, universities. That is why private industry is so much more fun. You only hear from them if they are serious, if they have the need. It's great, and the process is much faster! Private industry has a more specific goal.

Elina's comments show the increased significance that has been given to gender equality in both public and private organisations in Sweden. However, they also indicate that the reasons why gender matters are important are not always understood, not agreed upon, and subject to bureaucratic processes (cf. Alnebratt and Rönnblom, 2016).

GENDER IN THE FIELD

Turning gender into a commodity was difficult in several ways, and gender, as a cultural process, manifested itself in different forms in the field. A vast majority of the gender consultants are women, and 'gender'/femininity, or non-cis-masculinity, in terms of belonging to a disadvantaged group, was something most of them represented with their bodies and their identities. They were self-employed, not so much out of choice as out of necessity, since being self-employed was the only way for them to make a living out of gender issues. They were entrepreneurs of the self, and many of them were critical of regular work life and said they wanted a 'different life'. They themselves were the products of a gender-segregated education system and work life, and they tried to make a living out of their knowledge/convictions and the cultural position that was given to them. In this way their commodity was 'embodied'. 'Gender' was also the product or service they were selling. Consequently, the consultants needed to make a distinction between their personal goals, and the usefulness of their product, even if, at times, their personal experiences helped to do this. Thus, gender identity was something they represented, but also something they tried to create a professional distance from, in order to explain in neutral and objective terms 'how it works'. They were therefore able to make gender into a commodified 'thing' – something that could be sold and bought. While doing this, the consultants also felt the influence of prevailing gender structures in their daily encounters with their clients. Male consultants generally enjoyed more authority; something that was both reported on during the interviews and something that I noticed during my observation sessions. This meant that the female consultants had to try to sell services to improve inequalities in organisations while at the same time feeling that their clients trusted their male colleagues/competitors more.

Furthermore, the male consultants were often paid more for their services or worked for higher paid jobs. The less jobs pay, the higher the percentage of women doing those jobs, they argued. Thus, working as a gender consultant involved both making 'gender' into a commodity, and dealing with the commodified 'thing' that gender is made into, often in relation to one's own body. In the following sub-sections, I discuss how the interviewees dealt with commodification. It was a constant process, as put by Cameron (2015), of bringing things together, of making interdependencies visible, and challenging divisions.

Creating a Product

During my fieldwork, I visited the communications and advertising office of a major department store with a group of gender equality consultants. The client wanted input on an upcoming campaign and to 'go from being liked to being loved', their marketing department explained. Improving their communication strategies with the help of gender consultants was part of this process. This client also wanted to appear genuine, inclusive, diverse and a little 'cutting-edge', they explained. Their target group was 'an aware woman in the middle of her life'. During the meeting, we were presented with an upcoming campaign for a special calendar day, and the consultants were commissioned to give feedback on this campaign. It had already been agreed that the consultants' feedback was going to be in terms of the possible risks and benefits of the suggested campaign. In this context, the client raised the following questions: 'What kinds of reactions did we [the consultants] think the campaign might result in?' 'How should they [the client] respond to those reactions?' 'What actors/individuals may have an interest in promoting critical or supportive messages around the campaign?' After the meeting, the consultants and I discussed the importance of giving constructive feedback. The senior consultants encouraged the group to be positive and supportive, rather than critical. The assignment consisted of finding solutions to any possible risks that we could identify. Feedback was given to the client a week later.⁴

This assignment was a typical assignment since several similar situations were reported on during the interviews. Sometimes, the client was proud to show what they had accomplished together with the consultants, whilst on other occasions, the consultants were backstage, pretending that they were not involved at all, several of the interviewees said. A company might, for instance, want to use a transgender person in a campaign, but might also want input on this decision and a list of Q&As for how to deal with potential reactions from the general public, they explained. Elvira, one of my interviewees, described what they do in such cases:

We help them, how can such an image get attention 'without making a thing out of it'. We don't want to say 'we are fantastic for showing a transgender woman'. We give recommendations for how to do it right.

Other examples that were brought up during the interviews described assignments in which clients asked for expertise on how, for instance, fashion models wearing hijabs should be represented visually, as well as how adverse reactions to such images should be met:

⁴ Notes from the author's field diary.

'How can we do it the right way?' How should they handle racist comments? We give support and help; we tell them what to say and what not to say. But sometimes you see in the media that they didn't follow our advice. And, of course, we can't anticipate every reaction.' [...] Sometimes, clients don't ask our advice and just go ahead. Then sometimes they come back later and say, 'okay, maybe we do need you'.

The consultants would present 'worst-case scenarios' and give examples of how to deal with angry reactions from the general public.

Words

An essential aspect of the process of commodifying gender equality was through the interviewees' careful attention to the words and concepts they used to describe their services. 'Gender' was itself far from an easily defined 'thing', commodity, or concept, but needed to be adapted to various situations. Different terms and concepts were used in the interviews and during my fieldwork. I suggest that (i) engaging with various linguistic representations, (ii) coining new terms, concepts, and methods, (iii) using language and words in targeted ways, and (iv) marketing products and services may be understood as ways of working innovatively. Further, how the consultants described the field in which they worked can be seen as an important part of working an innovation system. Words do not just describe reality. Naming gives one's work direction and (in)forms the thinking around what is being done. As pointed out by Gibson (2019: 2), representations in language shape the ways we understand reality and affects how we act. Language performs the reality we operate in; it makes 'certain things more real and certain things less real' (Gibson, 2019: 2). This means that the words that the consultants use could also be put to use to enter new spaces, to perform work as innovative, key and economically dynamic.

'Gender', 'equality', 'sexuality', 'diversity', 'norm-critique' and 'inclusion' were concepts that were used by all the consultants. For some, the use of specific terms went through a chronological process. For example, historical developments have gradually favoured the notion of 'inclusion' over 'gender equality'. Ten years ago, the consultants would more readily invoke the concept of 'gender equality', but then came 'diversity', and now 'inclusion' is the more popular concept, they said. Note that the changing use of these concepts reflects the Swedish context and the concepts that were widely used in equality discourse at the time of the study. These historical developments are also related to changes in Swedish legislation (see the Swedish Anti-Discrimination Act of 2017). The act adds to the requirement to work with gender equality the requirement to work with all seven grounds of discrimination:⁵

Doris: It has changed so much. I have been working with these issues since 2012, and the way they are talked about has really changed. It used to be a matter of gender equality, followed by the term 'diversity'. Nowadays, really many use the term 'inclusion'.

Viola: Back then (10 years ago from 2019), gender mainstreaming was really the only thing one talked about, and everyone was at least half-employed by a public institution.

Elsa: You notice a big change. The way companies work with these questions has really changed. Consumers' awareness too. You can't make gender-discriminatory ads anymore. It doesn't sell. The change is enormous.

'Gender equality' was a contested term in many ways because some consultants thought that it should no longer be used and referred to critiques from advocates of the terms 'intersectionality', 'diversity', and 'inclusion'. For others, sticking to the same terms over time was seen as crucial. In fact, some consultants whom I approached for interview thought the correct use of terminology was so important that they declined to be interviewed after they had asked me for my definition of 'gender'. Apparently, I had not used the correct words. This illustrates existing conflicts in the field, typically between advocates of 'gender equality' and more post-structuralist definitions of identities (cf. Martinsson, Griffin and Giritli Nygren, 2016). Importantly, I observed that the terms that were used by the consultants were entangled in the nature of the services that they offer.

Many of the interviewees found the critique of heteronormativity and cis-normativity⁶ to be an imperative development, even on a personal level. Others, however, argued that concepts and theories are changeable, and either thought that it was not important which terms one used, or they emphasised the importance of 'keeping up'

⁵ See <https://www.do.se/other-languages/english/protected-grounds-of-discrimination/>.

⁶ Cis-gender is the opposite of transgender and means that a person's gender identity corresponds with the sex assigned at birth, from the Latin preposition 'cis' which means 'on this side of'. Cis-normativity refers to the assumption that most individuals are cis-gender.

with developments in the field, including terminological developments. For many of the consultants, the boundaries between the different words and concepts related to gender and feminism were fluid, and definitions change and might differ between individuals.

What the consultants called themselves also varied greatly. Surprisingly, often during my fieldwork, a consultant might say, 'I was the one who coined this term', referring to a particular designation, for example, 'gender expert'. However, some of the consultants said that they found the creation of different professional names problematic, and made a point of not branding themselves. An exclusively Swedish term that was brought to my attention was the term *normingenjör* ['norm-engineer'], which combines the masculine term 'engineer' with the idea that norms can be built and re-built. The term can be seen both as a reflection of the strong position that engineering, and innovation discourses have in Sweden, and the consultants consciously filling terms with new content. Norm-engineers sometimes compared themselves to medical doctors, another high-status occupation, as claimed by Paula: 'we make a diagnosis and work salutogenously (health-driven), to create health in this relation, between individuals and within organisations.'

Focus on Inclusion

The term 'inclusion' appeared particularly well suited to consultancy work and may thus be considered an innovation. Although inclusion is not a new term in itself, the interviewees' application of the term illustrates how terms can be adapted to function in specific contexts. As argued by Cecilia:

People find these issues complex and hard to talk about, and think: 'What is it good for?' or 'What's in it for me?'... But 'inclusion' is something everyone can relate to. Everyone can relate norms to themselves, and think, surely there is some norm that I have broken. And then you can get people to understand their own privileges too, and you get them on board in a different way. It is much easier to enter a discussion with someone who is sceptical and say: 'Let's talk about inclusion'. 'Well, who is going to be included?' 'Well, it could be you'.

By talking about inclusion in this way, the consultants presented it as something non-confrontational. The word is presented as involving a form of transformation, from making inequalities visible, such as in gender mainstreaming, to focusing on the inclusion of individuals' rights. Cecilia's argument illustrates how connections are formed between (i) the tools that are used by the consultants, (ii) the devices and words that they use, (iii) general political developments (legislated grounds for discrimination), and (iv) the way that the consultants made sense of who they are.

The consultants fully recognised the fact that words are significant as they worked to associate new meanings with words by using the domains of business and science as sources of signifiers. Developing a new language of economics, or finding new ways to describe the relationship between business and gender issues can, as suggested by Gibson and Scott (2019), be an essential part of imagining other ways of understanding the economy. Furthermore, this approach may be used in examining and understanding the politics of collective action in different ways (see also Gibson-Graham, 2006: 55—56).

One outcome of the commodification processes of gender equality was evident in how the consultants presented their services, or created products, *by denying that it had anything to do with gender*. As one interviewee, Doris, said, 'Diversity, norms and gender equality *is* knowledge and science. We want to show that we don't work with "soft" values, but pure and utter business development and sustainability'. It is, of course, difficult for self-employed individuals to change the rules of the game solely by dint of their own effort. Trying out new terms, words and motivations can, however, be the first step in that direction. This experimental approach can be used to explore alternative ways of performing gender equality work. Healy (2015: 104-5) observes that in the context of a worker-owned cooperative, 'these experiments may succeed or fail, but in either case, they possess the potential to undermine the concept of economy as a monolith and to performatively open a space for the possibilities that come with economic difference.'

Focus on Gain

Disclaiming the idea that products and services are a matter of gender equality was most noticeable when the consultants emphasised the gains that could be enjoyed by the client (De los Reyes, 2016). The consultants emphasised the commercial benefits of gender equality and inclusion, including positive outcomes for branding, the ability to attract competent workers, the avoidance of accusations of discrimination and sexism, or the provision of goods and services that were better adapted to customers. Several consultants expressed the following sentiment: 'People have to see, "what's in it for me."' The consultants were intent on demonstrating that gender equality is consistent with or in line with the goals of the client's organisation. The consultants' work assignments thus entailed the erasure of any possible conflicts between their approach and the goals of the organisation in order to achieve a seamless win-win strategy. However, as suggested by Elisabeth, emphasising (financial) gain was merely

a way of getting a client interested in what the consultant could offer. Thus, the theme of financial gain was ‘smuggled’ into the initial conversations with the client (cf. Petersson McIntyre, 2015).

Elisabeth: I often refer to research, say it has been shown that equality is profitable, but for me, it is a way of getting them to work with equality. A means to get these issues through. I don’t just do it for them to make money. I do it so they become more equal because I believe it is a good thing.

From this perspective, talk of profit may also be seen as a way of talking about gender equality that does not imply an actual standpoint. In fact, it can be understood as part of developing a new language of economics which has the purpose of allowing the client to imagine new ways of understanding profits.

According to Elisabeth, it is no longer necessary to emphasise the potential profits that can be gained from gender equality because most people accept that equality is important and has value in an economic context. This idea was mentioned in several interviews. For example, Elvira observed that, ‘Profit, to motivate gender equality with profitability felt like an old argument.’ Elsa expressed a similar sentiment:

When we work with recruitment, the profit focus is very clear. We say, ‘Well, we try to help you find the right competence faster, so the recruitment processes don’t become too drawn out and expensive. We help you to create a good workplace culture, so you don’t need to recruit again because people quit because they don’t like it.

Elsa continued by saying that these matters rarely need to be explicitly articulated, ‘they are understood’. Many of the consultants even said that with respect to profit, ‘maybe a few years ago you needed to say it, now firms know’, or ‘you don’t need to talk profit anymore!’ Consequently, talk of profit does not only have to be interpreted as evidence of neoliberal rationality; it may also be a way for activists to introduce some degree of innovation to their cause — to counter-perform the economy — by filling the word *profit* with new meaning.

Solution Focus

Another popular technique used by the consultants was to emphasise positivity. ‘Always focus on “the positive”, always focus on solutions. You have to be positive to make it work.’⁷ Even if positive thinking is encouraged in many fields, the meaning and effects are specific when it used in the context of gender issues. As Doris put it:

It is interesting to talk of profit, and those arguments will always be important, like: ‘Did you know that it is like this and that, and you will make more money if you do this instead?’ But there are other arguments that are more interesting. Work environment, sustainability, keeping people from ‘burn-out’, those arguments are trending now, and innovation, not profit, but innovation. Contribute to the development, new ideas, have women design cars. It should be fun, sustainable, inventive, and exciting!

Several other consultants emphasised the importance of being ‘constructive’, and talked about innovation in a manner similar to Doris above. The idea of having women design cars is however not a new one. Women have been involved as designers in the car industry both to accommodate ‘feminine taste’ (Sparke, 1995), and to challenge male bias in car design (Petersson McIntyre, 2010; 2015; 2018). Yet, the idea that inequalities are perpetuated by badly-designed products and organisations and can be ‘fixed’ has perhaps grown stronger alongside the development of firms that offer solutions to these problems.

During a workshop for new consultants, a consultant trainer exhorted the workshop attendees to ‘always be productive’ and ‘embrace difficulties, they will make you stronger and more skilled’.⁸ Challenges were described as something positive, that could be used by the consultants to develop an innovative approach to the field. ‘Norms’ were talked about as something that should not be crushed, or destroyed, but exchanged for other norms that can help people achieve their best potential. Some of the informants even expressed a form of technicalisation of gender issues, for example,

I was asked once, ‘What drives me?’ And I want things to work. And it doesn’t if it is unfair in any way. I don’t know if I am making any sense? ... It should be easy for people to solve their tasks and get on and to be able to make money and have the opportunity ... to feel good. That is what I think ... You feel good when things work. I am more pragmatic; I want things to work in a technical sense (Doris).

Inequalities were often described as non-functional; a predicament that could be changed with the right way of thinking. To find solutions and to be ‘solution-oriented’ was an approach shared by many of the consultants,

⁷ From the author’s field notes.

⁸ From the author’s field notes.

especially those who primarily work in the private sector. Similarly, if a company had an issue concerning their equality image, consultants were invited to ‘solve’ the issue, but not to point to problems, question the organisation, or the framing of the issue at hand. They were asked not ‘to point fingers’ or to ‘put blame’ on anyone or the organisations, but, instead, to be positive, engaging and constructive. One senior consultant remarked, during my fieldwork and in the context of discussing how new consultants should respond to a client: ‘Well, maybe it is not their [the client’s] job to save the world’. Kantola and Squires (2012) suggest that statements like this illustrate that a market enables some forms of gender business, but not others. Only ‘solutions’ could be ‘sold’ as a commodity on the market; ‘critique’, without practical or material solutions, had no apparent value. Thus, ‘innovation’ is a term that accurately captures this way of thinking since it invokes the idea that innovations can solve problems.

As a term, innovation is often related to ideas of ‘improvement’ and ‘progress’. In the process of ‘fixing’ non-functional norms, appreciating the role that gender and gender equality play is generally motivated in conjunction with something else — such as optimising an organisation by creating a win-win situation. This process is part of a narrative in which inequality is described as ineffective and harmful, but also where striving for equality becomes a project for the self. However, the process may also be understood as an illustration of the potentials in the field of gender work, and as one step in counter-performing the market. In this process, the consultants constantly had to innovate their products and services in order to participate in the field.

Feeling Equal

Being a feminist entrepreneurial subject involves engaging one’s body, feelings and mind in one’s occupation in several ways. Often, the notion of ‘fun’ was part of being an entrepreneurial subject, along with ‘feeling good’. These dimensions were set in opposition to suffering from mental illness, feeling burnt-out and exhaustion syndromes – pathologies that were often brought up by the consultants (cf. Gill, 2016). The consultant Sara argued: ‘The whole reason for doing this is this thing. Desire, inspiration, creativity, making your own assignments, forming them so people understand. I take inspiration from everyday life.’

However, the processes of turning issues of gender and feminism into marketable products often entailed mixed emotions in the consultants. A significant number of compromises had to be made on the way, and the consultants felt that this was far from straightforward: ‘Selling one’s soul’ was regularly mentioned during the interviews. Many of the consultants had asked themselves: ‘Where do you draw the line?’ The consultants had to convince their clients that the products they were selling were good for the former’s business, but they also always had to convince themselves that consultancy work for private companies was in line with their feminist convictions. Often, the jobs that they were commissioned to perform were not really that great, the consultants said, and they were not always convinced that they were doing the right thing. Their own ideas, ideals and beliefs had to be streamlined and modified so that they were in line with the client’s goals and visions. Many described this process as difficult and painful on a personal level. Michael shared his thoughts on this issue thus:

The act of translation implies a de-radicalisation. ‘Power’ [as a concept] is sorted out, and you stop using ‘equality’ as a means to ‘disrupt’ an order, and start using it to ‘support’ an order, that which is going to be kept. It is these little dislocations. I have thought a lot about that. [...] Sometimes, you start hating yourself.

However, ‘being positive’ was an attitude that was expected from clients as well as from the consultants. Several consultants remarked that ‘clients need to “feel” and “change is accomplished with the heart, not with the brain”. Emphasising the domain of emotions and feelings, the consultants expressed that something more significant, more than just optimising organisations and increasing corporate efficiency, was at stake. This was characterised as a way of changing direction, not just for one’s own goals, but for one’s clients’ goals too. Werner (2015: 87), drawing on Gibson-Graham (2006: 129), talks of mobilising the emotion of ‘desire’ to build enterprises that dislodge the emotional investment in capitalism.

Similarly, Healy argues that in order to assemble ‘community economies’, we must also come to desire them: ‘Coming to desire noncapitalism involves believing that it is a possibility and then shifting one’s desires away from the usual way of imagining ourselves in relation to the economy (Healy, 2015: 105). This includes “[a] shift in desire that establishes an affective opening to other economies and noncapitalist possibilities’ (Healy, 2015: 105). Involving emotions can be a matter of pushing norms of what is expected, and of shifting desires while at the same time embracing a neoliberal subjectivity in which all aspects of life become a resource for entrepreneurship. These processes were not clear-cut in the professional lives of the consultants. For example, being paid for one’s work was often understood as a feminist matter in itself:

These questions [gender equality] become more and more important. Of course, previous generations worked with these issues too, but it was often on a non-profit basis. You were meant to see it as a calling. You are supposed to work for free. Save the world and so on! (Paula).

The consultants' reasons for wanting payment for their work were not only a matter of making a living but also the result of adopting the standpoint that equality work has as much economic value as anything else in the world. Thus, even if gender consultancy does not instantiate a clean break with capitalism, in many ways, it is quite the opposite. Many of the consultants still had the ambition to reformulate the narratives of capitalism by insisting that gender issues have a necessary place in business. This approach to the financial aspects of their work constituted a way of forming an empowered subject since the consultants questioned and challenged boundaries of the economy and refused to participate in the gender culture which informs women's work in a public sector that has subordinated women, segregated the labour market, offered women lower wages, caused high levels of illness in women, and less generous career development pathways than men who work in private industry.

Together in Ways that Matter

Gibson and Scott (2019) argue that economies should be reframed in terms of things that matter to people, including living a good life. We should ask ourselves how the narratives around economies stand in the way of thinking about finance differently, and we should engage in what they refer to as 'counter-hegemonic projects' to promote a 'collective disidentification' with the ideological fantasy of capitalism (Gibson and Scott, 2019; Gibson-Graham, 2006: 55—56).

Several of the consultants described their business idea as a way of working together in ways that matter:

Elsa: We don't want to reproduce destructive work relations, competitiveness, and burn-out. We want to find new ways of doing it together. Work together to question the 'alone/unique male genius'.

The consultants often felt that prevailing business models encouraged specific ways of thinking. For example, the rules that govern and regulate public procurement were viewed as a problem for many of the consultants, because the rules prevented them from making offers to certain public sector organisations due to the size of their company or their workload. The economic system thus often entailed that these consultants were subject to certain limitations. Consequently, many of them felt that new business models were needed where they would not have to compromise so much with their personal goals and ambitions, and where their business decisions could be based on ethical commitments.

The consultants reported that it was essential to 'practice what you preach'. Some of the interviewees had wanted to find ways of running a business that were both 'more fun' and could function as a means of getting away from freelancing and 'gigging', and, instead, could provide more security. Whilst the consultants wanted the opportunity to work with questions that they found meaningful, their goal was not to accumulate wealth (Snyder and Martin, 2015: 46).

Doris: We don't want to stand alone and try [to make it work]. Let's unite in a commune [*ett kollektiv*]. Let's support and help each other.

Elsa: In the gig economy, you have to keep things to yourself, and that is not good. It does not create organisations that forward knowledge. You keep your knowledge to yourself. It doesn't lead to positive development. Neither intellectually nor financially. And it doesn't make society any better either; it just takes too long.

Elvira: It goes against our ideas of doing things together, thinking that it should be fair and nice and so on. We work to include, etc. And, at the same time, we elbow ourselves past others to [get contracts]. In my world, that doesn't add up.

Even if the ideas expressed in the above extracts seem somewhat utopian and clash with the reality of having to put food on the table or to compete for clients, they show that the consultants shared an ambition of thinking in new ways. This attitude provides a 'taste of communality' and 'an important part of nurturing and cultivating noncapitalist subjectivities through gradual and sudden shifts in feeling and embodiment' (Werner, 2015: 83). This claim resonates with the idea of being 'affected by the process of collective action' (Healy, 2015: 116).

Magdalena: So you are saying that the organisation of your company is a form of innovation?

Group of Consultants: Oh, god yeah! And a very ideological act [*ideologisk handling*]. It is like standing on the barricades.

Magdalena: Can you add to this description — that it is an act of ideology?

Group of Consultants: Well, it is a questioning of the ideas; it is stretching boundaries of societal norms of the economy, the ways things are supposed to be, how they should work. How one should work.

When one should work. Why one should work. But not just that. It is the whole system, the way it looks today.

Just like gender equality, this reorientation towards the system was often talked about in the form of improvements. Competition within the prevailing system was described as something negative because it is ineffective. This reflection of the innovation discourse may be seen as an expression of the pervasiveness of neoliberal rationality; even the barricade itself is thought of as a market. However, referring to business practice as ‘the barricades’ may also signal a way of renewing the meaning of ‘innovation’, a way of taking control of definitions, and an attempt to transform the masculine narrative of innovation. This may entail turning the market against itself, and trying to transform capitalism from within while using its own language and form to give the language of capitalism new meanings.

Market Innovation

The attitudes described in the previous section were indicative of how many of the consultants had thought about alternative ways of organising their firms. Even though most firms only employed one person, there were a couple of firms that employed four individuals. Some of these had tried to come up with ways of organising themselves like ‘a commune’.

We have a limited company. But the way we work, it is a commune. Everyone gets paid the same. We back each other up when it is needed. [...] We are all equally involved in everything. We have to, to be ready if someone gets ill, or has a sick child. Whatever happens. Our whole idea builds on solidarity and sisterhood. We want to try to practice what we work with [practice what we preach] or offer as services.

The consultants described their manner of working together in the following way: when a work assignment was awarded to an individual, this person might hesitate to ask a colleague for help and advice because the colleague might then want a share of the hours that had been allocated to the work assignment. To move away from such inward-looking work relations, some of the consultants decided to work cooperatively together and share their work assignment hours, and create more stable employment opportunities, instead of working as self-employed individuals on *ad hoc* individual work assignments. This arrangement allowed these consultants to fulfil the requirements needed to be entitled to sick-pay that is paid by the Swedish social insurance system. The consultants thus created a joint limited company that employed them all of them on the same salary. Self-employment was not a goal for them. Instead, self-employment was something they wanted to get away from in order to benefit from the social security safety net that the Swedish state offers to employees. As Elvira put it:

Say you work 40% effective time per month. If we create a full-time post based on your earnings for 40%, then you still get an okay salary, and we have fooled the social security system. Well, it is not about fooling anyone; we didn’t get any money off the system. But we say: ‘Fine; we get nothing from you, so we don’t give a shit about you!’ Sorry! This is feminism for real. If losing sick-pay stops us from starting a business, that is awful.

The extract above illustrates the performative nature of economic knowledge. Mapping out economic relations allowed some of the consultants to perform those relations as economic to their benefit. The consultants’ discussions revolved around (i) the generation and use of financial surplus, (ii) how to create well-being, and (iii) how to use shared assets (see Werner, 2015: 78). Even if the consultants’ businesses and economic turnover were small, knowledge about them opened up what Werner calls ‘economic imaginaries and [performances of] new worlds’ (Werner, 2015: 78). Viola touched on this idea:

It is supposed to be organised in a certain way, and we have taken outer pieces and built our company in a different way. That, in itself, is a comment on the fact that we were unhappy with the way things usually worked or were organised previously.

In a manner similar to the way the idea of ‘togetherness’ was discussed, ‘social security’ was also talked about in terms of increased efficiency. One consultant remarked that:

Motivation increases when there is security. Otherwise, you have to try to grab as many hours as you can. But when you feel that others are prepared to help you out, then you get motivated to help them back.

Thus, similar to the idea of ‘togetherness’, an innovation can take control of work relationships. The consultants argued that they were unhappy with how companies were expected to be organised, but all the while, ‘a “gender

consultant” is morally and ethically obliged to contribute to this work. The alternative is no longer possible; we cannot watch and stand aside. We want to use our competence to make a difference.”⁹

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have discussed the commodification of gender equality in the context of gender equality consultancy work. The increased demands for gender equality to be profitable are quite clearly entangled in innovation discourse because capitalist growth is driven by the introduction of new products and services (Beckert, 2016). During my fieldwork and during the interviews that I conducted with the consultants, innovation discourse manifested itself in the demands that the consultants felt were being placed on them. These demands included being innovative, being able to suggest improvements and having to design new products and services. Moreover, the interviewees also wanted to innovate the form and content of their communication so that they could better explain the importance of gender issues and sell their services. This was something they did by creating new products, thinking up new words and concepts, and by emphasising what the client could gain from the consultants’ work. They also searched for new ways of organising their work with economic innovations; I have termed this ‘together in ways that matter’. I also analysed the double meaning of innovation in this context. On the one hand, the impact on innovation discourse was visible in consultants’ work and the ways they made sense of their activities. On the other hand, the consultants struggled to fill this term with new meanings that corresponded to their own personal views on gender equality and their ideals of living a meaningful life. I argue that the use of words and terms that are taken from corporate life, innovation systems, and the domain of optimising and maximising profits and organisations can be evidence of the impact of neoliberal discourses on how everything can be organised in the form of a market. However, the consultants’ use of these terms also suggests a way of associating new meanings with these terms, of opening up and creating alternative ways of understanding and doing gender issues, commercially on the market, and to imagine the economy in new ways. Some of the interviewees had succeeded in putting their economic innovations into practice by rethinking the use of surplus, sharing assets and creating well-being, they had found a way of organising themselves in ways that they felt mattered.

I analysed the consultants’ engagement in business and innovation discourse *as ways of counter-performing* or countermanding the gendered narratives of economics, private industry and innovation. The consultants questioned (misguided) ideas that gender issues are ‘soft values’ that should be paid for by the state or public sector. Their activities were thus deployed in creating a rift in the gendering of innovation discourse, and we may thus begin to deconstruct certain dominant narratives by developing a new language of economics. This perspective opens up a view of capitalism as performative, as something that is made, not something that is. By adopting this perspective, the consultants’ activities staked out a path for change, and opened up discussions of more ethically grounded ways of organising work in ways that matter. By innovating their business models, the consultants showed that conventional business models can be reconfigured. Thus, as well as delineating ways by which definitions of economic practice can be redefined, this perspective also helps to shift the course toward more equal ways of organising society. Instead of focusing on how neoliberalism produces the entrepreneurial self, the focus can be shifted to examining the possibilities for the formation of a self that is desirous of an economy that matters.

Instead of seeing the consultants’ explanations of what they do as an adaptation of a market form that is merely modelled on corporate life, I have analysed them as one step towards countermanding the market. Their descriptions were illustrative of their constant reworking of their feminist ideals to a functioning reality. I analysed consultants’ emotional investments in their products and services, and conclude that these investments can be interpreted as a shift in desire that opens up to other possibilities of doing feminist entrepreneurialism. Given this, the reader should note that in this article I have not focused on evaluating the success of feminism in a market setting (cf. Kunz and Prügl, 2019), but, instead, I have focused on the feminist agencies that the commodification of feminism allows for. The interviewees reported that they were encouraged, by themselves and others, to create an entrepreneurial self. However, during this process of creating an entrepreneurial self, they resisted becoming merely an iteration of the usual capitalist entrepreneur, in favour of a self that worked together with others in ways that matter. When entrepreneurial or business success is measured by the ability to create an equal world, rather than the ability to generate economic turnover or a share dividend, a different economic subjectivity is created. Concern for an equal world, of course, poses a challenge to definitions of ‘the economy’, but may well allow the creation of more feminist economies and the opening up of a space where innovation may find a different place and function.

⁹ From the author’s field notes.

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Feminising Innovation: Challenges in Science and Technology Studies (STS)

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ABSTRACT

This article explores why innovation, conventionally associated with the masculine (e.g., Andersson et al., 2012; Lindberg, 2012), might also be framed as feminine, indeed on occasion feminist. It does so via an exploration of the embedding of a new academic discipline, in this instance Digital Humanities, in existing higher education institutions in the Nordic countries. Drawing on qualitative research conducted in 2017-18 with Digital Humanities practitioners in Finland, Sweden and Norway, this article argues that the feminisation of innovation in higher education institutions can lead to the material and symbolic marginalisation of those disciplines, with specific consequences both for their practitioners and for those disciplines. As part of this, the article analyses how innovation can be considered both desirable and disruptive (innovation as such constitutes a disruptive technology), and utilises Fiona Mackay's (2014) notions of 'embedded newness' and the 'liability of newness' to explore the gendered implications of the feminising of innovation.

Keywords: Digital Humanities, feminising innovation, nested newness, Nordic countries, innovation and gender

INTRODUCTION

Innovation and innovation studies have come to the fore in the past twenty years or so, and with this, a concern regarding the role of gender in innovation (Ahl and Marlow, 2012; Alsos et al., 2013; Marlow and McAdam, 2012; Pettersson and Lindberg, 2013). The discussion of that role has gradually broadened from quasi-essentialist preoccupations with women and men as sexed entities in innovation, to a consideration of the context, processes and practices of innovation as being gendered (Alsos et al., 2013; Blake and Hanson, 2005; Lindberg et al., 2015; Pecis, 2016). It has also gradually broadened from a focus on male-dominated industries and technology to including social innovation and domains dominated by women such as healthcare (André, 2013; Lindberg et al., 2016; Maestriprieti, 2017; Pecis and Priola, 2019; Sundin, 2012). All of this work has shown that gender in innovation is a highly complex multi-faceted issue.

Innovation studies shares the concern regarding the role of gender with science and technology studies (STS) where questions of women's under-representation at various levels and in diverse domains have dominated discussions (such as Schiebinger, 1999; Ernst and Horwath, 2013; Fox et al., 2017; Hearn and Husu, 2011; Henwood and Miller, 2001; Wajcman, 2000, 2007, 2010). The discussion about women's under-representation in science and technology has led to extensive debates about measures to combat such under-representation and their relative effectiveness (such as Buse, 2018; Nnachi and Okpube, 2015; Roberts, 2014; Siann and Callaghan, 2001). At the same time new areas of enquiry such as 'Medical Humanities', 'Health Technology' and 'Digital Humanities' have emerged which conjoin technology, traditionally male dominated, and disciplines (e.g., humanities, health care) that have traditionally been female dominated. These innovations in the academic domain to some extent confound binarist assumptions about gender and disciplinary preferences, but they also produce certain gendered problematics as I shall explore below. The confounding of binarist assumptions about gender occurs as a function of the fact that in these emerging domains women frequently, but not invariably, occupy both majority and leadership positions – two positions they supposedly do not inhabit within innovation (e.g., Pecis, 2016; Pettersson and Lindberg, 2013) or in science and technology contexts (e.g., Chau and Quire, 2018; Sassler et al., 2017; Van Veelen et al., 2019). This defies certain gendered assumptions, putting women in central rather than in marginal

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positions but it does not necessarily obviate difficult gender dynamics within these terrains. The disruption of gendered conventions here which speaks to the disruptions that innovation entails signals the possibilities of thinking differently about innovation than in the established terms of innovation being associated with masculinity.

In this article I focus on one particular form of gendering innovation – its feminising – and what challenges or effects arise from this within one particular field of science, Digital Humanities (DH). DH itself constitutes an innovation in the academy in that it is a relatively new academic domain, particularly in Europe (Griffin and Hayler, 2018). This article takes as its starting point that innovation is conventionally associated with men and masculinity but then argues that some of the connotations of innovation as a concept and a practice mark innovation as feminized. It draws on qualitative empirical research in the form of thirty qualitative professional-life interviews conducted with women and men working in Digital Humanities in Finland, Sweden and Norway in 2017 and 2018. The article dwells on a particular case study of one such worker whose responses were representative of what many informants said, to explore the effects of the feminisation of innovation on those working in Digital Humanities and on the academic field as such.

The article begins with a brief exploration of how men and masculinities have figured in innovation. It then discusses, contrary to the conventional notion of innovation being associated with men and masculinity, why innovation might be connoted as feminised. Following a brief explication of the empirical data collection, the article then analyses the empirical material in the light of this feminization. It draws on Fiona Mackay's (2014) notion of 'nested newness' to explain the gender regime (Acker, 2006) at play here. This is important because innovation and science and technology studies do not occur in a vacuum. They are, as Sheila Jasanoff (2005) for example shows, embedded in organisations and cultures in relation to which they articulate themselves and take on specific forms. Indeed, as innovation research has highlighted repeatedly, innovation is relational (e.g., Knights and Kerfoot, 2004; Pecis, 2016; Pel et al., 2020). Relationality here refers not only to the relations between the different actors involved in innovation or in science and technology (female and male innovators; funders, etc.) but also to non-human factors, processes, and contexts. Hence context matters, and in particular ways as Mackay's concept of 'nested newness' helps to explain. The article provides a feminist analysis of the effects of certain kinds of feminisation on disciplinary innovation in academe. It thereby challenges conventional gendered understandings of innovation at the conceptual level.

INNOVATION, MEN AND MASCULINITY

We have become very used to thinking of innovation as being associated with the male and with masculinity (e.g., Ahl, 2006; Alsos, Hytti and Ljunggren, 2016: 11-14; Andersson, 2012; Lindberg et al., 2012; Mellström, 2004). This association takes a number of different forms. It is often linked straightforwardly and in binary terms to sex, i.e. the sex of the innovator, for instance, in differentiating between men as innovators and women as not being as innovative as men or as being differently innovative from men (Ahl and Nelson, 2010; Marlow and McAdam, 2013; Nählinder et al., 2012). This derives, at least in part, from a history of assuming that innovation manifests itself predominantly in male-dominated heavy industries and in relation to technology (Ranga and Eitzkowitz, 2010: 2). It aligns with the notion that innovation concerns new products and processes, as these occur in male-dominated, technology-driven work contexts. However, this view of innovation has been widely challenged in feminist work on innovation, entrepreneurship, and organisation studies (see Acker, 2006; Alsos et al., 2013; Alsos, Hytti and Ljunggren, 2016; Marlow and McAdam, 2013; Pettersson and Lindberg, 2013). Here the emphasis has increasingly been on practices and processes and how these are complexly gendered (Knights and Kerfoot, 2004; Pecis, 2016). Masculinities and femininities continue to be evoked, not least because individual actors have gendered identities but also because attributes associated with masculinities and femininities tend to be ascribed to innovation processes and practices, whether this is in binary or post-binary terms. Pecis and Priola (2019), for example, demonstrate the tenacity of a particular version of masculinity, the 'industrial man', in an Italian biotech research centre where men seek to reconcile their low pay, subjugation to work, and minority status with that old ideal (the 'industrial man'). They do this by devaluing women's competences, women's supposed traits, and simultaneously recasting themselves as 'new industrial men', loyal to their employer, hard-working and constantly available at/for work, whilst also being 'new fathers' and needing to rely on their partners for necessary income. Mackay's theorisations help to explain that tenacity as will be shown below.

THINKING INNOVATION GENDER-DIFFERENTLY: FEMINISING INNOVATION

Against the common discussion of gender in innovation in terms of binary opposites, a literature has emerged (such as Martin, 2006; Pecis, 2016; Pettersson and Lindberg, 2013) that argues, via the notion of gendering practices and practicing gender, adapted from West and Zimmerman's (1987) 'doing gender', that 'femininities and

masculinities are not aligned in a binary and oppositional order; rather, their practising is multiple and non-dichotomous' (Pecis, 2016: 2119). This itself constitutes a feminist insight that refuses certain forms of binary logic in relation to gender. It opens up the possibility that we might think about innovation as other than aligned with the masculine. This is important for three reasons. First, new and emerging innovation sectors show that different gender dynamics than the conventional ones may be at play (Griffin, 2019; Knights and Kerfoot, 2004; Pecis and Priola, 2019). Second, focussing on conventionally gendered ways of viewing innovation leads to the reproduction of the same and can act as a block to challenging those conventions (Knights, 2015). Third, in challenging conventional gendered notions of innovation we open up the field for new interventions.

My proposition in this article is that innovation as a concept is gendered in specific ways that are different from its conventional association with masculinity (e.g., Pettersson and Lindberg 2013). I shall sketch this gendering here, starting from the proposition that innovation as a concept is gendered *feminine*. In doing this, I argue implicitly that it is possible to utilise existing categories such as masculine and feminine to challenge their use and utility, as opposed to simply refusing those categories. This also means that I do not think that the use of these categories automatically and inevitably condemns one to binarist thinking as is sometimes implied (see Knights and Kerfoot, 2004; Knights, 2015). Indeed, one might argue that one can only speak from within the discursive frameworks available to us (Butler, 2005). As Judith Butler puts it, 'there is no "I" that can stand fully apart from the social conditions of its emergence, no "I" that is not implicated in a set of conditioning...norms' (2005: 7). However, the existence of those norms and the I's imbrication in them does not condemn that I to the uncritical reproduction of those norms. In appropriating them, and their attendant discourses, the I can exercise critique (Butler, 2005: 17) and in doing so challenge gender binaries through a critical engagement with them. It is in this spirit that I suggest that innovation may be considered feminine, and for the following three theoretical reasons:

- 1) Innovation is constructed as that which constitutes or makes a difference, a difference from what has gone before. It is 'a new or significantly changed product or process' according to the Oslo Manual (Gault, 2018: 617). It is different. Difference, a much-discussed concept in feminist theory of the 1980s and 1990s (see Braidotti, 1994; Elam, 1994; Flax, 1990), is conventionally attributed to women, to females, to femininity – since difference designates that which deviates from what is culturally taken as the norm, what is dominant. In its difference femininity or femininities has/have been distinguished from masculinity, or masculinities. Difference is then associated with femininity, and hence innovation which is about difference, as a concept, is also associated with femininity.
- 2) Innovation as difference (new product, new process, new practice) is not about sameness, it is not about retaining the status quo. Instead it is about change, indeed sometimes about challenging the status quo or the hitherto dominant mode. Kaasa (2016) highlights the importance of being able to challenge existing or established ways of thinking and doing as one important key to innovation. Cultures which refuse such possibilities are less innovative.

Innovation, invested in change, is about transformation, gradual or abrupt. Feminism has also been about the idea of change, challenging the status quo, and transformation – the change from hegemonic masculinity to more inclusive forms of interrelation, for example. Hence, I would suggest that innovation as the refusal of sameness, as challenge to the status quo, and as transformation is connoted as feminine, we might even say feminist.

- 3) Finally, innovation *per se* is a disruptor, an intervention into established norms (whatever they happen to be). The phrases 'disruptive innovation' (Bower and Christensen, 1995; Christensen, 1997),¹ and disruptive technologies, much used now, might well be applied to innovation *as such*, especially if we define technology also in Foucauldian terms to encompass not only new products and processes but also modes of governance and power (Foucault, 2004: 23-41; Behrent, 2013). Women, the feminine, femininity have also been viewed as disruptive of the male order, of the status quo, of certain forms of rationality, etc. Hence innovation as disruptive, and as a disruptive technology in its own right, is also associated with the feminine.

My argument is that the properties conventionally ascribed to innovation, or some of these properties at least, are the same as those conventionally ascribed to women, females, the feminine, femininities – hence my proposition that innovation can be viewed as gendered feminine. As such, innovation is considered both desirable and disruptive – we want it (or her?), *and* it (she?) needs to be contained. Understanding this helps us to understand the reception of certain kinds of innovation in their specific institutional settings.

To think of innovation as feminine in terms of the three reasons cited above is to evoke a particular form of femininity, disruptive of the masculine order rather than conforming to it. There are, of course, other kinds of femininity – queer gender orders at the very least teach us that (see Halberstam, 2008; Hale and Ojeda, 2018) – but

¹ Bower and Christensen (1995) and Christensen (1997) use the phrase 'disruptive innovation' in a particular technical sense (see Christensen et al., 2015) to refer to starting from 'low-end' or 'new-market' footholds. I use 'disruptive innovation' here in a somewhat more general sense although many of the underpinnings of the more technical use also apply.

the one evoked here in its resistance to a hegemonic notion of innovation as masculine might be termed feminist precisely because of its disruptive potential and intent.

DIGITAL HUMANITIES AS INNOVATION

Given this feminised status of innovation I want to consider a particular innovation in the academy – Digital Humanities or DH for short – and its reception within Nordic universities, and I want to suggest that the very fact that Digital Humanities is an innovation in the academy puts it into a feminised position. Interestingly there is a vast literature on curriculum innovation – a search in google scholar on 28 August 2020 on the topic produced 2 000 000 results – but that literature is largely concerned either with pedagogical innovation or with curriculum content innovation. There is much less work that considers disciplinary innovation, here meaning the introduction of a new discipline into the academy. This remains somewhat under-researched, except in terms of ‘histories of disciplines.’ My focus in this article, however, is on what happens when a new discipline, Digital Humanities, is introduced into higher education. The emergence of DH as a discipline has, broadly speaking, occurred over the past twenty years or so. It has antecedents in areas such as ‘Humanities Computing’ and ‘Computing for the Humanities’. In the USA DH has become well established (Zorich, 2008) whilst across Europe it largely exists in forums, laboratories, centres, networks and projects (Matres, 2016; Nygren et al., 2015). As will be indicated below, this is important for its status within the academy. I shall now briefly outline the research methods employed in this study and information about my informants before discussing my findings.

RESEARCH METHODS AND INFORMANTS

Between 2017 and 2018 I conducted 30 semi-structured professional-life interviews with Digital Humanities practitioners, women and men, in Norway, Sweden and Finland, to explore the gendered dimensions of their experiences of working in an emerging discipline and in a technology-driven context.² Participants were purposively selected through searching online staff lists on DH websites at five universities in each of the three selected countries, and through searching research funder websites for staff working in funded DH projects. The key variables were that participants had to work in Digital Humanities, and to interview roughly equal proportions of women and men. In the event 17 women and 13 men were recruited between July 2017 and September 2018. As the Nordic countries have relatively few higher education institutions³ and to maintain confidentiality, participants’ institutions are not named here. The study involved 17 Swedes (11 women, 6 men), 7 Finns (3 women, 4 men) and 6 Norwegians (3 women, 3 men), very roughly in proportion with the difference in population size across the three countries. Their average age range was 44 to 49. Three participants (two women and one man) were white but had not been born in the Nordic countries; a further participant was of Chinese background but raised in the Nordic countries. All other participants were white. This reflects the dominance of white people in Nordic academe, but also the colonial and immigration histories of the Nordic countries.⁴ All the participants were working in funded DH projects, as directors or research co-ordinators of DH labs or centres, as DH lecturers, systems developers, or programmers.

All participants were interviewed individually, 12 by Skype, and 18 face-to-face. The interviews lasted from 50 minutes to 75 minutes. They were conducted in English. The interviews were transcribed, uploaded into NVivo, and coded using a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This means that the texts were read through carefully multiple times to identify core themes that emerged within them. One significant theme which emerged in this way was the role of gender in the context of working in DH as an emerging academic discipline.

For the purposes of this article I shall draw mainly on the interview with just one female participant. I do this because she was both highly articulate about her experiences and because much of what she said was representative of what I was told by other participants. Her comments thus stand for the gendered experiences professed in different ways by most of my participants. These comments also in various ways reinforce the notion of innovation as gendered feminine as I intend to show.

² This research was funded by Nordforsk (grant no. 81520).

³ Sweden has 24 HEs able to award third-cycle qualifications (<http://english.uka.se/facts-about-higher-education/higher-education-institutions-heis/list-of-higher-education-institutions-in-sweden.html>); Finland has 14 universities (http://www.studyinfinland.fi/instancedata/prime_product_julkaisu/cimo/embeds/studyinfinlandwwwstructure/100601_Higher_Education_Finland_2016_2017.pdf); and Norway has 9 universities (<https://www.studyinnorway.no/study-in-norway/higher-education-system>) – all accessed 19 July 2018.

⁴ There is no space to explore this further here, but the Nordic countries have had relatively ‘late’ immigration, from the 1970s, but mainly from the 1990s onwards (see Pred, 2000).

A little bit about the informant whom I call Sara here: Sara, a researcher in Digital Humanities, was 36 at the time of the interview, in a conflict-ridden relation with her partner who shortly afterwards left her, so that she became a single mum with a very small child. She was one of only 5 women I interviewed who had had a long association with technology. As she put it, 'I was a gamer all my life, I happen to be lucky because there was always technology at home because my brother [21 years older] is a sound engineer.' From him and her father she had inherited technological equipment from an early age. And, typically for the handful of technologically highly adept and versatile women I met, she had done degrees both in humanities subjects (in her case classics and music) and in computer technology. Unlike the majority of female interviewees who were adept at only one particular technological method such as using eye-movement tracking, or a particular linguistics computer software, which they had come across as adults at university, Sara could range across many different kinds of technology, offer critiques of their structures and applications, and work concretely with computer programming. This was atypical for 75% of the women I interviewed. Nonetheless, her professional gendered experiences in Digital Humanities mapped very closely onto those of the other women I talked with.

DIGITAL HUMANITIES AS A 'PARADOXICAL SPACE' OF INNOVATION

Katarina Pettersson and Malin Lindberg (2013) use Gillian Rose's (1993) work in feminist geography to talk about 'paradoxical spaces' in relation to innovation. They discuss the feminist approaches that have been used to resist hegemonic masculinist discourses regarding innovation in Swedish innovation programs (2013: 324), highlighting four possible approaches. One of these is the movement back and forth between margin and centre. One might argue that DH as an emerging discipline occupies a central space in knowledge production due to its presence in the university. However, as already indicated above, one of the intriguing dimensions about exploring the establishment of DH in the academy is that to date (2020) across Europe and including in the Nordic countries DH exists almost exclusively in research centres, networks, laboratories, and projects (see Matres, 2016; Nygren et al., 2015). This is significant because such formations are by and large atypical, and hence marginal, for the university which functions mainly by discipline, departments and faculties. This also means that Digital Humanities entities are often marginalised materially and symbolically within universities, meaning that they may lack appropriate physical locations (they may, for example, be located in cellars of buildings, or in other buildings than where their core staff are housed). One of the DH labs that I visited, for instance, was housed in the cellar of a university building where the door leading to the staircase down had a larger sign on it pointing to the toilets than for the DH lab itself. Importantly, these DH entities are also often not represented on key decision-making bodies within their institutions because they do not fit the conventional structural or disciplinary university divisions which institutions utilise for participation in decision-making (such as departmental or faculty boards, representation by discipline, or disciplinary domain). Pettersson and Lindberg (2013) talk about being present and at the same time absent as one of the dimensions of Rose's (1993) paradoxical spaces, or inhabiting the centre and the margins simultaneously. This, one might suggest, is the situation of Digital Humanities as a discipline, which is situated both at a core centre of knowledge production – the university – and simultaneously at its margins in geospatial and symbolic terms. The actual and symbolic space most DH centres in the Nordic countries inhabit is one of marginalisation or institutional, feminised subordination. DH spaces therefore are paradoxical precisely because they – as spaces of disciplinary innovation – are treated in a feminised manner. This has multiple effects on the DH practitioners as I have discussed elsewhere (Griffin, 2019): 1) many DH practitioners do not identify with the physical space provided for them and indeed rarely or never go there; 2) they also have difficulty identifying with DH as a discipline, and 3) instead they tend to identify with the disciplines into which they were socialised when they first arrived in the academy.

This has to be seen in a context where DH was not available as a discipline when most of my interviewees were students. Hence their disciplinary socialisation (Becher, 1989) occurred in other disciplines. But the feminised marginalisation of DH within the space of the university also generates a certain disavowal and distancing by its practitioners who understand their marginalisation quite well. By way of contrast one might want to compare this with the institutionalisation of Women's and Gender Studies where practitioners enthusiastically embraced their new discipline, despite it being treated largely in rather similar ways by the institutions as Digital Humanities is now. One explanation for this is, of course, that Women's and Gender Studies in many countries was set up in explicit opposition to hegemonic science discourses and organisations, offering epistemic and ontological resistance to these, whereas DH and other newly established disciplines such as Health Care do not start from that political position. The point here, however, is that the spatial and symbolic marginalization of Digital Humanities within universities expresses these institutions' ambivalence towards innovation and towards this specific form of innovation in particular. Innovation as expressed through DH is both desired (the economic and commercial potential of DH's products is recognised) and contained (through how it is positioned), imbuing the discipline with an aura of provisionality and precarity.

There are, from an institutional point of view, good reasons for this ambivalence: for one thing the humanities through new disciplines such as ‘digital humanities’ or ‘medical humanities’ have begun to protest their increasingly marginalised status within many universities and have begun to claim parity with the sciences (Smith, 2016). One way in which this manifests itself is in claims to the need for resources: by scientising themselves in hard sciences fashion the humanities are also laying claim to material needs that go beyond ‘pencil and paper’, ‘chalk and talk’, or ‘just books’. They are becoming the expensive ‘bit on the side’ or mistress of academe. This is what my informant Sara, coming from a DH Centre in Sweden, had to say when she described visiting a major Scottish university to give a presentation there:

I walk in there and they just had a frigging projector! You know, they don’t have expensive floor screens or with crazy resolutions and immersive sound environments, like we do.

Sara was surprised to find that, unlike in her home institution, this large prestigious university and well-known department did not have anything but very basic technology. However, she also went on to qualify this, revealing how resource need could become a significant problem in her then home university in Sweden:

Not that I’m saying technology was bad for us but it did put a strain on the organization ... so you have for example an expensive screen. The question is, can you use it or do you need a technician for it? Which means technicians become part of the infrastructure and then when you have to apply for money you need the cost to maintain that big bullshit. Sorry! But that’s what it is. And is it actually, does it actually help you produce deliverables in your field or is it just there for show? ... the floor screen we had, it’s leaking for 3 years and nobody is fixing it because it is more expensive and then we don’t use it for anything...

Sara’s comments clearly outline what marks Digital Humanities as ‘the bit on the side’, the marginalised new – it involves ever-evolving technologies whose upkeep and operation require further labour, money, and personnel. Humanities, once the Cinderella of the university, in the form of Digital Humanities is turning into a high-maintenance figure, to which institutions are slow to commit themselves.

Sara’s comments also reveal her own contradictory or paradoxical relation to all of this. She both desires and disdains technology because – whilst signalling opportunities for doing research differently – technology constrains her through its material and human requirements, and through the institution’s non-response to these requirements.

FEMINISING LABOUR IN INNOVATION IN THE ACADEMY

DH’s marginalisation also impacts on the contractual arrangements of those working in the field. Many Nordic DH practitioners have mosaic or portfolio careers, as indeed did this informant. At the time of the interview Sara had 25% on one project and:

On the rest, I am doing my own work. XX% of my own money, you know how it works in Sweden. I was given 50% from the faculty and in this 50% I did things that have to do with film, media and the digital aesthetic. So, for the last year I’ve been writing work separately like tying up loose ends or previous projects...

One might view this way of working as a form of multi-tasking which women are conventionally said to be good at (Stoet et al., 2013). But another way of looking at it is to think of it as fragmenting and dispersing professional identities (Griffin, 2019) whilst upping the workload (since all tasks are accompanied by meetings, paperwork, etc., and the more different tasks one has, the more attendant meetings and paperwork one has to deal with). Much of this is simply unacknowledged in everyday academic labour; here we are back with the unacknowledged, indeed often unpaid labour that is so familiar from discussions of women’s work (e.g., Hester, 2018). We might, I suggest, talk of a feminisation of labour within the innovation scene. This goes together with the so-called precarisation of labour (Standing, 2011) that increasingly and disproportionately affects women. My informant, 36 at the time of the interview, had moved from one insecure because time-limited contract, or multiplicity of contracts, to another. She continues to do so even in 2020. For a single mother with a small child being on time-limited contracts with uncertainty regarding renewal is quite difficult because she is not readily movable – commuting or moving from city to city is not a genuine option for her. In this, my informant was no different from what has been reported by others regarding the pursuit of careers in STEM subjects, for example (Murgia and Poggio, 2019). It was notable among my interviewees that those who had moved, nationally or internationally, were almost all single at the time and did not have children. Especially with younger children, moving proved very tricky. But being able to move,

especially when one comes from countries with relatively small populations such as the Nordic ones where knowledge-producing personnel and expertise can be more constrained simply as a function of that population size, is vital for advancing one's career.

There was another dimension to the feminisation of labour within DH – a sort of *Handmaid's Tale* of service, to produce offspring in the form of project applications, publications and other such outputs, all without any form of job guarantee. Universities engage in extractive labour practices, requiring staff in temporary positions to apply for funding from which they may not profit (because the grant is 'owned' by the university) and publications that they may not benefit from (as their contract may be terminated but the publications may still count as part of the university's research productivity). Sara was very vociferous about this experience which she clearly linked intersectionally to status and power asymmetries, seeing herself as a young exploitable woman required to do the bidding of 'old professors' as she called them. This reflects, in micro, or at organisational level, the hierarchist masculinist culture that Hofstede et al. (2010) refer to and that is detrimental to innovation. Sara had not only observed very clearly that young men were more likely to get stable or permanent posts, stating, 'the graduates of my generation...there's at the moment 6 people with permanent jobs, 5 of them are men,' but also noticed how young men seemed to slip into jobs without these necessarily being advertised. More than one male interviewee whom I asked about how he got into his jobs (successive ones) confirmed this – they had been invited into jobs, sometimes even without any particular qualifications in the field. This did not happen to any of my female interviewees. Sara had found herself significantly exploited. She said of one male professor with whom she had worked:

...he never really did anything and then wanted to take all the credit... Previously organising [work] with men has been the same. Organising conferences, edited volumes, anything, it's always been, I did ALL the donkey work, and that makes sense because I was younger I guess. But there comes a time in which you actually want to...say, you know what? It's like household work... Also, men tend to be in my experience less appreciative of your time.

Along with the recognition, well established in feminist thinking, that young women are often treated as the equivalent of housewives in their work situation ('It's like housework'), came also the already semi-internalised agreement that such asymmetry and exploitation at work is somehow appropriate: 'that makes sense because I was younger I guess.' Here we see what Lara Pecis (2016: 2122), following Francine Deutsch (2007), describes as change feeding back into processes of conformity to existing gender norms. These existing gender norms constitute the 'durable inequality' that Charles Tilly first discussed in 1998, where female staff are the objects of exploitation and opportunity hoarding (men and older colleagues preserving their domains for people like themselves).

Sara experienced problems of exploitation specifically with older men, working at the intersection of seniority/status and gender. She eventually came to the realisation that it was easier to work either with men of her own age or, preferably, with women, but as she immediately pointed out, there were few female role models and few women working in her field. At the time of the interview her centre had 12 men and 3 women but one of the women was on maternity leave and the other had just moved to another university following a history of being sexually harassed and professionally disregarded, so effectively Sara was the only woman left.

UNDERSTANDING THE FEMINISATION OF INNOVATION IN THE ACADEMY: A CASE OF 'NESTED NEWNESS'

How might we then understand the problems Sara faced, the difficulties of institutionalising Digital Humanities as a disciplinary innovation, and its feminisation? To answer this, I draw on Fiona Mackay's (2014) work on 'Nested newness, institutional change, and the gendered limits of change'. Mackay utilises the term 'nested newness' to explain the contradictory gender regimes that govern institutions. She argues that newness is:

nested within a dense institutional environment comprising sets of institutional legacies and ongoing dynamics, including gender regimes that can open and foreclose opportunities for the embedding of innovation (Mackay, 2014: 567).

These institutional legacies and ongoing dynamics are evident in how universities are structured and the privileges that come with conventional organisational forms such as being a department or a faculty rather than a centre. The nestedness of newness is, according to Mackay, also compromised by what she describes as the 'liability of newness', in other words its vulnerabilities and uncertainties (what is it, how will it work, etc.). Institutions can be unwilling to invest in innovations unless they see a clear (economic) return. The mitigation of this liability can result in the reproduction of the norm—i.e., the reproduction of institutional legacies and older orders or gender regimes – what one might describe as 'the tried and the tested.'

Mackay (2014) suggests that institutions seek to mitigate the liability of newness in two ways: by ‘remembering the old’ and by ‘forgetting the new’. By ‘remembering the old’ she means that institutions and individuals and groups within them refer, directly or indirectly, to ‘how we’ve always done things’ or ‘custom and practice’ as a bulwark against innovation. ‘Forgetting the new’ refers to its marginalisation or silencing within academe. The obvious examples in my material here are the reproduction of gendered status and seniority hierarchies between the ‘old professor’ and the young female researcher which even the young female researcher partially accepts. ‘Forgetting the new’ at the same time manifests itself in my material in the material and symbolic spatial marginalisation of Digital Humanities as a presence in the academy – by placing centres into marginal spaces you render them forgettable. Mackay (2014) argues that both ‘remembering the old’ and ‘forgetting the new’ are ways of seeking acceptance and reaffirming the status quo:

In seeking internal and external credibility and legitimacy, actors in new [figurations] are likely to fall back on authoritative modes – firmly anchored and recognizably so – which tend to be older, more traditional, and hegemonically masculinized rules, gendered norms of appropriateness...and ways of doing things. The liability of newness is therefore gendered. (Mackay 2014: 566)

It is gendered feminine. And this is, indeed, what my material shows.

CONCLUSIONS

To innovate is to struggle, not least against institutional legacies. Within academe, the imperative and rhetoric to produce original research and advance knowledge, to produce solutions for the challenges that societies face, and to conduct ‘world-class’ research create opportunities for innovation. In this sense, innovation is desired. However, this also occurs within existing institutional frameworks and gender regimes in which the new tends to have to compete with the established for both space and recognition, or in Nancy Fraser’s (1995) terms, for redistribution of resources and recognition. Here constraints come into play. Without recognition, the redistribution of resources is unlikely to occur. In this scenario the new can easily be made to occupy a feminised position, one of marginalisation and subservience, until it has proven its worth. But this can be difficult to achieve from a position of marginalisation where resource needs, for example, are ignored. Mackay’s depiction of ‘nested newness’ with its mechanisms of ‘remembering the old’ and ‘forgetting the new’ as props to mitigate the liability of newness aptly depicts what can happen to disciplinary innovation as it hits the buffers of institutional legacies. This is clearly one of the major challenges that innovation faces. It is an effect of the feminised position in which newly emerging disciplines in academe can find themselves, one of spatial and symbolic marginalisation. This clearly retards innovation and the opportunities that innovation, including innovation of academic disciplines, offers. When institutions, for example, find it difficult to commit to the provision and support of the necessary technology and person power to enable new disciplines to operate effectively, these disciplines’ innovation potential is undermined. The challenge that DH poses to the status of the humanities in the academy as ‘poor relation’ has yet to be met. Expensive but unusable equipment is just one expression of this. Working under such conditions can be demoralising for staff, and may drive them back into more traditional disciplines, as was the case with a number of my informants, thus further undermining the innovation potential of new disciplines but also negating any investments already made. Further, the working conditions for staff as such with their attendant extractive practices (see also Murgia and Poggio, 2019) need to be addressed.

These issues are not specific to Digital Humanities as a new discipline, but one might argue that they are exacerbated when the new is freighted by the fact that a sizeable proportion of staff are female as is the case in emerging fields such as DH but also Health Technology and Medical Humanities, for example. Here entrenched gender regimes, underpinned by masculinist hierarchical institutional cultures, manifest themselves through the spatial and symbolic marginalisation of these new disciplines as discussed above. Challenging these is one of the challenges for STS.

To end on a positive note: This does not mean that all innovation is futile or doomed to the reproduction of the same by its context. Sara’s positive experiences of collaborating with men her own age as well as with women suggest possibilities for change even despite the stickiness – to use Sara Ahmed’s (2004) term – of gendered institutional legacies.

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Unpacking the Nordic Gender Equality Paradox in ICT Research and Innovation

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ABSTRACT

Most fields of technology-driven research and innovation are highly male-dominated across the Western world. However, in the Nordic countries, recognised as the most gender equal in the world, this gender segregation appears as a paradox. With Norway as an example, the present article explores the paradox that appears to be entangled with the yet unsolved question of why women are still a minority in information and communication technology (ICT) disciplines. The analysis draws examples from five studies of girls and women in contexts of ICT training, education, and work to analyse the fabric of the paradox through the 'free choice' argument, 'affluent nations' argument, and 'nation vs. individual women' argument. The analysis suggests that the paradox, by putting the nation's gender equality ideal against atomized individuals' choices, contributes to obscuring the situation regarding the underrepresentation of women in ICT.

Keywords: gender equality paradox, gender equality ideal, Nordic countries, ICT, horizontal gender segregation

INTRODUCTION: THE NORDIC GENDER EQUALITY PARADOX

Norway and its Nordic neighbours are recognised as the most egalitarian countries in the world according to international ratings (Teigen and Skjeie, 2017; World Economic Forum, 2020). There is, however, still notable gender segregation, identified as vertical segregation where few women are in top positions and horizontal segregation with gender division between occupations and disciplines, a pattern that appears to be in conflict with the perception of gender equality as a widespread and accepted value (Ellingsæter, 2014; Sund, 2015). Furthermore, the notion of paradox is often invoked in international comparisons where certain types of gender segregation seem to be more extreme in highly gender egalitarian and affluent countries (Chow and Charles, 2019; Stoet and Geary, 2018), often referred to as a Nordic gender equality or gender diversity paradox (Minelgaite et al., 2020).

In this article we will unpack the Nordic gender equality paradox in relation to the horizontal segregation recognised in fields of information and communication technology (ICT), where the paradox is entangled with the yet unsolved question of why women are still underrepresented in most ICT disciplines and jobs. Supported by research and theories from feminist technology studies and studies of gender segregation in working life, this study explores how the low proportion of women in ICT training, education, and employment translates into a paradox in affluent and gender-equal Nordic countries with Norway as an example. The rhetoric of the paradox is a strategic starting point for studying why the national gender equality regime fails to reach contexts of ICT, as it claims to identify important features explaining women's underrepresentation in ICT. International analyses of the paradox often involve three features. The first is an analytical framework in which a national gender equality regime is used as the horizon for explaining individual citizens' choices. The second is national affluence, used as a reference point for gender-stereotypical career choices. The third is an assumption that gender-equal countries promoting free choices put women's choices at the centre of the paradox, suggesting that the continuous gender imbalance in fields such as ICT mainly reflects women's preferences. Below we will explore the validity of these features as we revisit research on women's underrepresentation in ICT with a particular focus on women's entry points to ICT, in order to unpack how the paradox is shaped and reproduced across contexts of ICT.

The development of this study emerges from Nordwit, the Nordic Centre of Excellence on women in technology-driven careers, and the recognition of the challenge to recruit women to ICT careers (McKinney et al., 2008). This includes not only early-stage recruitment; recent research has shown that women often find alternative

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routes to developing their ICT competence and expertise (Hyrnsalmi and Hyrnsalmi, 2019; Lyon and Green, 2020), some at later stages in their career (Cajander et al., 2020; Corneliussen, 2020). This suggests that the contexts for raising girls' and women's engagement in ICT careers are many. ICT disciplines in social sciences and humanities often attract a higher proportion of women than ICT disciplines in faculties of science and technology (Corneliussen, 2011). Disciplines focusing on programming and more technical aspects of computing often have the lowest proportion of women (Samordna opptak, 2020). Research shows that the perceptions of programming are more affected by gender stereotypes than those of many other fields of ICT (Corneliussen, 2020). The studies revisited here involve various fields of ICT training and education that include either programming or ICT disciplines in science and technology faculties. The analysis draws examples from five studies of girls and women in contexts of ICT training, education, and work to analyse the fabric of the paradox through the 'free choice' argument, 'affluent nations' argument, and 'nation vs. individual women' argument. Revisiting these studies will help to identifying the validity of the rhetoric of the paradox when confronted by empirical examples.

THE FABRIC OF THE NORDIC GENDER EQUALITY PARADOX

The Nordic countries have a long tradition of working toward gender equality in politics, education, and working life. High governmental engagement has been instrumental in developing a 'women-friendly state' (Hernes, 1987) and family-friendly work-life policies that have secured high participation of women in paid work (Seierstad and Kirton, 2015; Statistics Norway, 2018). Norway, like the other Nordic countries, scores exceptionally high on rankings measuring various equality indicators (Teigen and Skjeie, 2017). The notion of a Nordic paradox is invoked because there is simultaneously a notable vertical and horizontal gender segregation in education and working life (Ellingsæter, 2014). Thus, the Nordic gender equality paradox appears as a contradiction between gender equality as a national ideal and the actual lack of gender diversity in working life—a gap between theory and practice (Minelgaite et al., 2020).

The Nordic aspect of the paradox comes into view in international rankings of countries' level of gender equality and in comparison with less gender-equal countries. The *Global Gender Gap Report 2020 (GGGR)*, published by the World Economic Forum, ranks countries according to indicators for economic participation, educational attainment, health, and political participation. The GGGR ranks Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and Finland as the 'most gender-equal countries in the world' (World Economic Forum, 2020, p. 25). Although there are differences between the Nordic countries, wherein Norway is regularly placed in the middle, the Nordic countries' gender equality model clearly stands out as exceptional compared with other European Union countries (Teigen and Skjeie, 2017). Simultaneously, these four 'most gender-equal countries' are surpassed by, for instance, Bulgaria at 49th place on the GGGR in terms of the proportion of female professors (European Commission, 2019) and the proportion of women in the ICT sector (Simonsen and Corneliussen, 2020). The paradox is shaped by a failed expectation of gender equality in one field leading to gender equality in other fields (Ellingsæter, 2014, p. 101).

The Nordic gender equality paradox has been discussed in relation to vertical (Minelgaite et al., 2020; Teigen, 2014) and horizontal gender segregation (Charles and Bradley, 2006; Charles and Thébaud, 2018; Chow and Charles, 2019) as well as with regard to societal issues (Wemrell et al., 2019). Researchers have pointed out that vertical and horizontal gender segregation have different origins and explanations (Reisel, 2014; Sund, 2015). Suggesting that women lack abilities to take on top positions, for instance, is not acceptable within a discourse of gender equality (Charles and Grusky, 2005; Ellingsæter, 2014). Thus, the gender equality ideology has challenged vertical gender segregation and resulted in measures to increase gender diversity in top positions in Nordic countries (Minelgaite et al., 2020). Horizontal gender segregation, in contrast, is more often described in terms reflecting a gender essentialist notion of men and women as suitable for different, supposedly complementary, tasks and occupations. Horizontal segregation thus appears to reflect men's and women's career preferences (Ellingsæter, 2014). According to Charles and Bradley (2009), horizontal segregation is 'less politically and socially contested than are many types of vertical inequality' (p. 930). Ellingsæter (2014) suggests that horizontal gender segregation mainly reproduces gender inequality in Norwegian working life, which is legitimised through gender essentialist ideas. The horizontal gender segregation in fields of ICT and how this can be understood through explanations to the paradox are the focus of the analysis below.

Three features appear to be of importance for the notion of the Nordic gender equality paradox in relation to horizontal segregation. First, international comparisons invoking the notion of the paradox typically rely on an explanation based on the nation vs. the individual (Minelgaite et al., 2020). Researchers have, for instance, studied the gender gap in fields of ICT for decades, and among the most critical challenges recognised today are gender stereotypes associating ICT with men rather than with women (Corneliussen and Seddighi, 2020; Master et al., 2016; Sagebiel, 2016). This makes computing appear as a masculine arena and demotivates girls to engage (Blum et al., 2007; Corneliussen, 2020; European Institute for Gender Equality, 2018). Although these and other explanations from social science and psychology are recognised in international comparisons, such factors often

remain in the periphery of the paradox, suggesting a pattern wherein the goal of a 'gender equal' nation is not fulfilled by its atomised individuals. Stoet and Geary (2018) illustrate this in their analysis of girls' performance in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) across 67 countries participating in the PISA 2015 (OECD, 2017) assessment of student achievement:

One of the main findings of this study is that, paradoxically, countries with lower levels of gender equality had relatively more women among STEM graduates than did more gender-equal countries. This is a paradox, because gender-equal countries are those that give girls and women more educational and empowerment opportunities and that generally promote girls' and women's engagement in STEM fields (Stoet and Geary, 2018, p. 590).

Combining the analytical levels of the nation, on one hand, and individuals, on the other, points at a gap between a societal level of gender equality value and an individual level of attitudes and behaviours that contributes to the paradox (Minelgaite et al., 2020). Furthermore, because the national level of gender equality is already 'confirmed' in ratings such as the GGGR, it remains to find the explanation elsewhere, such as in individual women's preferences and choices.

The second feature of the paradox is associated with national affluence. Nordic countries scoring high on gender equality measures are also typically affluent welfare states. Affluence thus appears to be one of the differentiating factors between countries that are divided by the gender equality paradox, again illustrated by Stoet and Geary (2018, p. 590):

In our explanation of this paradox, we focused on decisions that individual students may make and decisions and attitudes that are likely influenced by broader socioeconomic considerations.

The link between national affluence and women's underrepresentation in fields such as ICT is interpreted as a reflection of the national economic situation, suggesting that 'life-quality pressures in less gender-equal countries promote girls' and women's engagement with STEM subjects' (Stoet and Geary, 2018, p. 581), whereas women in more affluent countries do not experience a similar pressure in their study choices. This interpretation suggests that national affluence is considered instrumental in reproducing women's underrepresentation in fields such as ICT. However, this interpretation also includes an image of men as rational actors that avoid low-paid 'women's jobs', whereas women appear less ambitious and as the ones who choose work in accordance with gender identity (Ellingsæter, 2014). The image of national gender equality combined with a welfare state and affluence produces an image of the national egalitarian values endorsing women's 'right to choose poorly paid female-labeled career paths' (Charles and Bradley, 2006, p. 195). This points to the third argument feeding the notion of a paradox: the 'free choice' argument.

Women's career choice is the main target even for this argument, not so much in terms of ambition but rather with reference to women's preferences.

Sex segregation by field of study is widely understood to represent the outcome of free choices by autonomous, but fundamentally gendered, individuals (Charles and Bradley, 2009, p. 961).

The perception of a free atomised individual making choices in a context of a democratic, free, and gender-equal nation makes choices appear to reflect individuals' preferences (Ellingsæter, 2014).

The magazine *The Atlantic's* coverage of Stoet and Geary's (2018) study suggests that this type of gender essentialist explanations to horizontal segregation resonates with a popular discourse:

The upshot of this research is neither especially feminist nor especially sad: It's not that gender equality discourages girls from pursuing science. It's that it allows them not to if they're not interested (Khazan, 2018, February 18).

Gender equality is this way translated into a freedom that produces and endorses gender difference and the paradox rhetoric contributes to a narrative in which women's choice is a key to gender divides in the labour market. Simultaneously, this exempts other actors' and institutions' relevance when aiming to understand patterns of horizontal gender segregation. This will be further explored below through empirical studies of girls and women in contexts of ICT training, education, and work and by confronting the central findings from these studies with the three features that make up the fabric of the Nordic gender equality paradox: the 'nation vs. atomised individuals' argument, 'affluent nation' argument, and 'free choice' argument.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The analysis below is based on studies of girls' and women's participation in ICT training and education in Norway between 2000 and 2020. Two studies focus on women's study choice when entering ICT disciplines. The first includes 3 months of observation in programming classes and in-depth interviews with 21 women and 7 men taking a university course in programming (Corneliussen, 2003). A discourse theoretical framework (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) contributed to the analysis of how men and women position themselves in relation to a gendered discourse about computing. Twenty years divide the first and the second study, which includes in-depth interviews with 24 female students and women in academic recruitment positions in ICT disciplines within science and technology faculties. This study explores how and when women's decisions to enter ICT disciplines are shaped (Corneliussen, 2020, 2021).

Two studies focus on how girls are included in arenas for coding and programming; the first is a study wherein Lin Prøitz and myself visited a code club and interviewed children, parents, instructors, and teachers from the local school (Corneliussen and Prøitz, 2016). The second study explores the recruitment of girls to a pilot elective in programming for schoolchildren in Grade 8, 9, and 10. This study includes a survey among schools analysing the gender distribution as well as interviews with girls and school representatives conducted by Fay Tveranger (Corneliussen and Tveranger, 2018).

The final study focuses on how ICT organisations and employers perceive and deal with women's underrepresentation. This study builds on individual dialogue meetings for discussing this topic with 12 organisations and a total of 13 women and 10 men, where Gilda Seddighi also participated (Corneliussen and Seddighi, 2019; Corneliussen and Seddighi, 2020). The study aimed to understand how the organisations' representatives engage with a national gender equality ideal and how they respond to a call for gender equality action to increase diversity in ICT disciplines.

All the above-mentioned studies were designed within the framework of feminist technology studies (FTS), emphasising technology as socially produced and shaped by culture and society. An important insight from FTS is the emphasis on the mutual relationship between, and the co-construction of, gender and technology (Cockburn, 1992). Gender, in this perspective, is not predefined or fixed but is a fluid and flexible identity (Braidotti, 2002) that is culturally enacted and performed (Butler, 1993; West and Zimmerman, 1987). This perspective is also a foundation for the analysis below. The analysis involves a feminist discursive approach encouraging 'a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge' (Livholts and Tamboukou, 2015). Discourse in this context refers to a widespread attitude in a certain field, and the analysis aims to explore how meaning is constantly negotiated and re-constructed (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985).

The analysis below aims to further entangle the main features of the notion of a Nordic gender equality paradox and to explore the validity of the paradox when confronted with empirical examples of girls' and women's participation in ICT training, education, and work. Explanations to the paradox reviewed above are built on a national image of gender equality that apparently is interrupted by women's individual choices, which makes sense within a neoliberal framework that favours governance techniques that make citizens become 'responsible citizen-subjects' (Ferguson, 2009, quoted in Budgeon, 2015, p. 304) 'who willingly respond to incentives' in ways that make state intervention less important (Budgeon, 2015, p. 304). This implies an image of the state facilitating for individuals to make the 'right' choices. The question of women's choice has followed feminist debates for several decades (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020), and Gill (2007) discusses this in terms of a 'postfeminist sensibility'. 'Postfeminism' is not a branch of feminism but rather refers to a type of reaction or a discourse assuming that structural issues that previously created gender differences have been removed and that any remaining gender inequality 'can be accounted for by choices knowingly made by individuals' (Budgeon, 2015, p. 304). Responsibility for gender segregation is consequently moved from structures defining the nation to the individuals. This contributes to a perception of gender-typical career choices as a legitimate result of free choices and therefore as something that needs to be supported (Ellingsæter, 2014, p. 87).

The analysis below will engage with the ideas reflected by these concepts and show how neoliberal ideas of the state facilitating for autonomous individuals and the 'postfeminist sensibility' assuming that women's choices are a reflection of what they want contribute important insights to the co-construction of gender and technology in the rhetoric of a gender equality paradox.

SEEING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN ICT THROUGH THE FABRIC OF THE PARADOX

The fabric of the paradox has been identified as an entanglement including a nation vs. individual level of analysis, seeing women's choices as a reflection of national affluence, and treating the gender imbalance in male-

dominated fields, such as ICT, as a result of women's free choices. In the analysis below, we will explore these three arguments more in depth in relation to girls and women in ICT training, education, and work in Norway. We will start with the 'free choice' argument considered in light of women's study choices. Next, we will explore the validity of the 'affluence nation' argument analysed in light of code clubs and programming in schools. Finally, we will explore the 'nation vs. individual women' argument in light of employers' attitudes toward gender segregation in ICT jobs and the ICT sector.

The 'free choice' argument's validity for women's decisions to study ICT

The argument of 'women's choice' as a crucial feature of the Nordic gender equality paradox rests on the notion of the autonomous individual choosing according to preferences (Charles and Bradley, 2006) and achievements (Stoet and Geary, 2018). In a study of men and women in a university ICT program, a clear difference was observed in how the men and women described their feeling of belonging in the programming class. Whereas some men suggested there was a special male relationship with computers that made it easier for them to learn programming, several women described the programming class as an 'unexpected' venture into 'a masculine, forbidden world' (Corneliusson, 2003). Two feelings stood out in the women's narratives: *pleasure* about having the opportunity to learn programming and *surprise* that they were able to do it. One of the women who was struggling with the programming structures, however, claimed the struggle was 'because I am a woman' (Corneliusson, 2003). The women's narratives illustrate how their experiences are enclosed by a discourse defining ICT as a masculine field. The surprise and pleasure they expressed over learning to program suggest that the decision they had made was not only about interest in ICT but also about entering a masculine field that did not appear inviting for women.

The next example fast-forwards 20 years, to a study of what made female students and women in early research positions choose ICT disciplines in science and technology departments and universities. One of the most important periods for recruiting girls to ICT careers is the transition from high school to higher education, but most of the women in the study had not thought about ICT as a potential career choice at that time. Their narratives suggest that this viewpoint was a result of little concrete knowledge about ICT disciplines and even less about ICT work combined with an expectation that ICT studies at universities are filled with 'hooded gamers': young men whom they imagined had been gaming and programming since their early teens. Most of the women told stories about choosing ICT *despite* these barriers, in particular, stereotypical notions of ICT as a masculine field in which they did not see themselves fit in. Only five women identified as interested in ICT already during secondary or high school; however, knowing little about relevant ICT programs, they found it difficult to know which subject to choose. Ten of the women had first signed up for another study program, but after gaining more insights regarding ICT and, in particular, regarding programming, they came to see ICT as a relevant choice for themselves and subsequently decided to change to study a program in ICT, which for some meant starting on a second bachelor's degree. Most of the women, however, told a story of *not* being interested in ICT; thus, they described the decision to study ICT by referring to interest and professional strength in a different field in science, social science, or humanities that offered them a 'safe and well known' platform within ICT:

Math was probably my strongest subject ever since I was young. So, then I thought I had something I could feel confident about while learning something new (Corneliusson, 2021).

Nearly half of the women identified their strength in mathematics, whereas other fields of science and social sciences also took the role as a safe platform in the women's narratives. The platform allowed them to define their belonging in ICT in ways that did not compete with the image they had of the male ICT students (Corneliusson, 2021). Similar to the women interviewed 20 years ago, these women also struggled with a masculine discourse of ICT that appeared as an obstacle for them to express their interest in ICT. The detour via other fields before 'discovering' ICT works as a 'penalty round' for women, as they have to spend extra time after high school to gain insights regarding ICT as an academic field. For some, this also included building courage to enter a field where they assumed they would never really be able to compete with men based on their image of men's experience, like one of the women illustrates: 'they are so skilled that it feels completely unattainable to be as good as them' (Corneliusson, 2021). Once the women had actually started at their chosen ICT program, they found many reasons for developing both interest and a feeling of belonging in ICT. Contrary to the stereotypical notion of programming as more attractive for men than for women, programming was one of the topics that made the women 'fall in love' with ICT, with one saying, 'I can't explain the joy I got from my first programming class', and another suggesting, 'If I had known about the possibilities before, I would have sat down and started programming right away'.

Although these examples should not be read as a general description valid for all women, neither should they be considered unique, as similar findings are reported across research projects (Frieze and Quesenberry, 2019; Master and Meltzoff, 2020; Vainionpää et al., 2019). What they do illustrate is that the paradox rhetoric emphasising

individual women's choices obscures a situation where the young women experienced a culture defining ICT as a masculine field and with little welcome for women.

The 'affluent nation' argument in light of recruitment arenas for children

International studies have suggested that because ICT is culturally associated with boys and men, girls need to be recruited early, typically during their teens, before gender stereotypes about ICT start dominating their ideas (Cheryan et al., 2013; Microsoft Corporation, 2017). Whereas primary schools in Norway did not offer ICT as a specialist field (e.g., computer science), afterschool 'code clubs' inviting children to learn to program started spreading in the 2010s (Corneliussen and Prøitz, 2016). Descriptions of code clubs as an arena that also included girls raised our curiosity and resulted in a research project where we observed and interviewed a wide selection of participants associated with a code club: children, parents, instructors, and a local school's head teacher and teachers (Corneliussen and Prøitz, 2015, 2016).

The instructors, parents, and teachers involved in the code club compared learning about programming with learning about society and described it as a 'necessity for becoming a good/efficient/empowered citizen in our digital society' (Corneliussen and Prøitz, 2016, p. 106). The code club was open for all children aged 11 to 12 years; however, very few girls participated. The interviews suggested that these young boys and girls had not yet internalised (Berger and Luckmann, (1966) 1991) ICT as a field only for boys and they questioned the absence of girls. The involved parents, instructors, and teachers also recognised the gender imbalance at the club. However, they did not question this and rather admitted that they had not given it much thought because low participation by girls was what they expected to see; it was what 'we have been used to' (Corneliussen and Prøitz, 2016, p. 104). Recognising the low number of girls while not pursuing any strategy to recruit girls indicates that the gender imbalance in the club was accepted as a documentation of boys and girls as different (Corneliussen and Prøitz, 2016), in line with a gender essentialist attitude welcoming gender difference.

The trend of teaching children coding also reached the schools in Norway in 2016 through a pilot for programming as an elective in secondary schools. Studying the pilot, we found that the schools placed very little focus on recruiting girls and only 16% of the pupils in the programming classes were girls. Several schools and more than a hundred programming classes did not engage even a single girl (Corneliussen and Tveranger, 2018). Our question about whether it would be possible to recruit more girls was often met with doubt or was even rejected by parents and school representatives with the explanation that girls are not interested in ICT. Thus, here we found a circular pattern wherein a low proportion of girls justifies a lack of initiatives to engage girls.

Returning to the paradox and the affluence argument, it is difficult to identify a link between national affluence and girls' choices in these examples. What we can identify is rather a pattern of adults who should have been the young girls' supporters and door openers to the code clubs and programming classes that have given up on recruiting girls because they think girls are not interested and that it is not within their power to change the situation. This pattern also highlights how girls' choices cannot be seen as isolated events produced by girls alone but are rather entangled in a web of gendered discourses of ICT that permeate contexts and actors that go far beyond girls' control.

Initiatives to recruit girls to STEM fields have promoted the idea of producing a 'girl-centric ecosystem' based on a conviction that collaboration between a diverse set of actors is necessary for creating inclusive learning environments (Traphagen and Traill, 2014).

STEM workforce issues will only be solved by diverse partners collaborating to create disruptive solutions that promote equity for all girls and underrepresented racial minorities. (...) We need organizations to work on different parts of a girl-centric STEM ecosystem (Sammet and Kekelis, 2016, p. 5).

The 'ecosystem' is a suitable image of the environment, for instance, around a code club, with an assemblage of actors, institutions, attitudes, opportunities, physical meetings, hands-on practice with programming, and more—only that the code club ecosystem is not 'girl-centric'.

The 'nation vs. individual women' argument and employers' attitudes toward gender equality work

The last example is from a study of how employers and organisations in fields of ICT research and innovation perceive and deal with the low proportion of women in ICT jobs (Corneliussen and Seddighi, 2019; Corneliussen and Seddighi, 2020). Twelve employers and organisations with a total of 13 women and 10 men in the field of ICT research and innovation participated in 2018 and 2019 in dialogue meetings to discuss the underrepresentation of women in ICT work. All the organisations' representatives agreed to gender equality as a goal in society, demonstrating Brown's description of gender equality as something we 'cannot not want' (2000, p. 238). When the representatives were asked to reflect on how they dealt with this issue in their own organisation, they revealed a series of alternative approaches and reasons for *not* making gender equality a goal in ICT. For some, it was the

presence of women in other positions that obscured the goal of recruiting women to ICT positions: they did not feel that they needed to recruit more women. Other companies with fewer female employees that also struggled to recruit women to ICT positions, found a solution by recruiting women to, for instance, HR positions instead. One ICT company without any women in ICT positions considered gender equality as already achieved because ‘everybody is treated the same’ (Corneliussen and Seddighi, 2020, p. 44). Another suggested that targeting women when recruiting could have ‘the opposite effect’ (Corneliussen and Seddighi, 2020, p. 45) and therefore continued to rely on what they considered ‘gender-neutral’ strategies. One ICT company suggested that because boys develop their interest in ICT early, they have an advantage in building their knowledge in ways with which women cannot compete. Consequently, this line of argumentation raised doubts about women’s competence in ICT.

This study illustrates two elements that can help to identify how the gender equality paradox is shaped. First, it shows the wide acceptance of the national gender equality regime, which is not questioned but rather accepted by the organisations’ representatives, also when renegotiating what gender equality means in the context of their own organisation. Second, the study shows that the idea of a national gender equality regime coexists with discourses of ICT as a male-dominated field including gender stereotypes that leave little space for establishing gender equality as a goal for ICT positions. Because making changes (e.g., those affecting women’s preferences) appears out of reach for the organisations, they do not consider themselves as being in breach with the general ideas of gender equality.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to explore how the low proportion of women in academic fields of ICT and ICT work translates into a paradox in the affluent and highly gender egalitarian Nordic countries with Norway as an example. The paradox refers to the mismatch between a perception of a national gender equality regime and a lack of realising gender equality goals in certain fields: a failed expectation of gender equality in one field leading to gender equality in other fields (Chow and Charles, 2019; Ellingsæter, 2014; Minelgaite et al., 2020; Stoet and Geary, 2018). The *Nordic* gender equality paradox typically appears in international comparisons, showing this pattern to be more extreme in gender egalitarian, democratic, and affluent Nordic countries (Minelgaite et al., 2020). The analysis above focused on the horizontal gender segregation in Norway in fields of ICT. The aim of revisiting research on girls’ and women’s participation in ICT training, education, and work was to unpack how the paradox manifests itself in contexts of ICT. The analysis focused on three features that contribute to making women’s underrepresentation in fields such as ICT appear as a paradox: the ‘free choice’ argument, ‘affluence nation’ argument, and ‘nation vs. individual women’ argument.

The ‘free choice’ argument assumes that gender barriers have been removed in the gender egalitarian Nordic countries and therefore women’s choices must reflect their preferences (Stoet and Geary, 2018). The analysis showed examples from 20 years apart of how young women perceive ICT as a masculine field and how images of male ICT experts, like the ‘hooded gamer’ who has programmed since he was young, appear as obstacles for women to even express their interest in ICT. Thus, whereas the paradox infers that a positive preference, such as interest, is a main driving force for choosing to study ICT, the women’s narratives illustrate a struggle with a discourse challenging women’s image of themselves as (future) ICT experts. Thus, the women’s stories do not support the ‘free choice’ argument but rather point to how a combination of a masculine discourse of ICT and lack of knowledge about it makes ICT an invisible career choice for women.

The next example illustrates how this is further complicated when the low proportion of women in ICT works as a circular motivation for the lack of engagement in recruiting girls to ICT. The ‘affluent nation’ argument suggests that women in wealthy countries do not feel the same urgency to choose high-paid jobs as women in poor countries (Stoet and Geary, 2018) and they appear to be less ambitious than men in their own country (Ellingsæter, 2014). This argument is generally not supported by the fact that women make up 60% of the applicants to higher education and are a majority in high-status fields such as medicine and law in Norway (Samordna opptak, 2020). The examples of the code club and programming in school served to illustrate how a masculine discourse of ICT made parents, instructors, and teachers less motivated to target girls with invitations to coding or programming. Even when ICT is recognised as vital for becoming a ‘successful citizen’, girls are often left out of arenas for ICT training in ways that remain ‘invisible’ and that are perceived as a natural reflection of gender differences rather than, for instance, concerns being raised about how to increase diversity in the field or how to build, if not a ‘girl-centric’, at least a ‘gender inclusive’ ecosystem. Thus, women are not alone in making choices that reproduce gender imbalance in ICT, which also indicates that the concurrence of national affluence and women’s choices does not mean that one explains the other.

Exploring the third feature of the paradox, the ‘nation vs. individual women’ argument, further emphasises that women’s actions alone cannot explain the entire paradox by highlighting ICT employers’ and organisations’ responses to the lack of diversity in this sector. The empirical examples show how these groups agreed with a

general gender equality ideal and simultaneously expressed doubts about the possibility as well as necessity of recruiting women to ICT positions. A masculine discourse of ICT raises doubts about women's engagement, resulting in organisations' weak motivation to work for gender diversity in ICT jobs. The examples illustrate a widely accepted national gender equality regime existing in parallel with attitudes and practices that make fields of ICT appear less welcoming to girls and women but that take place in such a subtle way that it appears as if the gender equality ideal itself is not questioned. The analysis illustrates the need to study the context of girls' and women's choices as they take place within contexts wherein girls and women are not the only contributing actors.

Thus, as illustrated above, treating the underrepresentation of women in ICT as part of a gender equality paradox is problematic for several reasons. First, the rhetoric of the paradox seems to rest on a neoliberal idea of the state facilitating for individuals to make the 'right' choices (Ferguson, 2009) combined with a postfeminist 'sensitivity' that considers gender equality as already achieved and therefore considers the remaining inequalities as a result of women's choices reflecting what they want (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020, p. 5). This paves the way for gender essentialist ideas to figure as explanations and further makes it appear as a good strategy to defend women's rights to choose according to their preferences (Ellingsæter, 2014). Whereas free choices are certainly a democratic good, this paradoxical thinking contributes to a perception of the paradox as a result of unchangeable gender differences and takes the focus away from structures and practices that continue to produce inequality, also independent of women's own choices. The examples put forward illustrate how the rhetoric of the paradox frees relevant actors from their contribution and responsibility in developing inclusive cultures in ICT training, education, and work.

Thus, whereas the gender equality ideology is recognised as *delegitimising vertical segregation* (Charles and Grusky, 2005; Ellingsæter, 2014; Reisel, 2014), the analysis above suggests that the national gender ideal combined with a postfeminist sensitivity has the effect of *legitimising the horizontal segregation*. The employers, parents, teachers, and others we have interviewed do not feel they are in breach with the gender equality ideal; they are simply adjusting according to their context and their expectations of girls' and women's interest in ICT. The result is the renegotiation of gender equality as less relevant in ICT that is discursively happening from *inside* the national gender equality regime. This leaves the national ideal intact while explaining the lack of gender equality in line with gender essentialist ideas and women's choices reflecting a postfeminist assumption of gender barriers already being removed. In this way, the national gender equality regime is distorted into authorising the lack of gender equality actions in the context of ICT (Corneliussen and Seddighi, 2019; Corneliussen and Seddighi, 2020) and the gender imbalance in ICT thus remains a challenge produced by women.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to unpack the Nordic gender equality paradox in relation to women's underrepresentation in ICT, by exploring the validity of the paradox when confronted with empirical examples of girls' and women's participation in ICT training, education, and work. We have seen how the fabric of the paradox—the 'nation vs. individual women' argument, 'affluent nation' argument, and 'free choice' argument—works to promote some types of explanations, while simultaneously making other mechanisms producing gender imbalance in ICT invisible. The paradox simplifies the situation by emphasising the nation on one hand and individual women on the other. Using this nation vs. atomised individuals argument as the foundation for analysis risks making causal connections between elements that do indeed coexist but may not explain each other. Women in Norway and the Nordic countries are, for instance, free from many barriers and limitations found in less gender egalitarian, less democratic, and less affluent countries (Barbieri et al., 2020; World Economic Forum, 2020). Contrary to the idea of free choices and preferences driving study choice, the empirical research revisited suggests that there is still a series of barriers to ICT affecting girls more than boys. Furthermore, it suggests that girls and women are not the only ones making choices that result in a continuous gender inequality in ICT, indicating that a more finely tuned analysis is needed to account for the paradox.

Sund (2015) suggests that 'gender equality in Norway is perhaps more of an illusion than reality' as long as it is 'a commonly held value, but this is not reflected in the actual gender diversity situation' (p. 180). Here, we have seen examples of how the notion of a Nordic paradox simultaneously assumes that gender equality is already achieved on a national level while notable gender segregation exists in education and working life. The analysis suggests that as long as the horizontal gender segregation is defined as a consequence of women's choices, other actors' (lack of) contributions are ignored, thus practices reproducing women's underrepresentation in ICT can continue in perfect harmony with the national gender equality regime. This situation appears as a paradox because the starting point—the nation—is the already acclaimed winner of gender equality, leaving women at fault. The examples above show that a change of perspective is needed to encourage efforts not only to remove barriers for women's engagement in contexts of ICT but also to build ecosystems of more active initiatives targeting, inviting, and encouraging girls and women to enter fields of ICT.

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The Illusion of Balance: Women in ICT Working Full-Time and Still Having a Feeling of Opting Out

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ABSTRACT

Women – mothers in particular – working as ICT experts in research, development, and innovation are under double pressure: they work within both a male-dominated profession, and a greedy, 24/7 work style that continues to produce an image of the ideal worker according to the male norm of less childcare responsibility. This study explores how women working as ICT experts in research, development, and innovation in Norway's gender egalitarian culture negotiate work alongside family responsibilities. We discuss which factors affect women's experiences of combining ICT work and family, building our analysis on 22 interviews conducted with women ICT experts in research, development, and innovation in Norway during 2017-2018. Our study illustrates that insufficient public childcare and work-life balance solutions cause women to feel like they are 'opting out', even when working full-time. This suggests that some of the main structures of working life continue to work as barriers to women's career opportunities. Indeed, while some women narrate their encounters with such structures along the lines of traditional gendered patterns of work and family, we also found the same structures being gendered in new ways.

Keywords: work-life balance, research and innovation, ICT work, career, motherhood

INTRODUCTION

In Norway, most fields of information, communication, and technology (ICT) work are still male-dominated. In this paper, we ask: How do women in fields of ICT research, development, and innovation in Norway's gender egalitarian culture negotiate the contradictory values of work and family? As digitalisation changes the landscape of ICT work and increases the need for ICT expertise in non-technical fields, education, training, and upskilling are crucial for ICT research, development, and innovation. However, unequal gendered divisions of labour in care and household responsibilities remain barriers to career development in ICT research, development, and innovation's greedy work cultures (Quesenberry et al., 2006; Bailey and Riley, 2018; EIGE, 2020). Indeed, it is increasingly challenging to reconcile time constraints between work and family (Lewis et al., 2007) as the pace of work intensifies (Mauno et al., 2019). As women take on a greater share of care responsibilities (EIGE, 2018; Seierstad and Kirton, 2015), it is a matter, not only of making time for work and family, but also navigating gendered work cultures and norms, such as around parenthood (Bø et al., 2008; Ellingsæter, 2006; Hakim, 2006). While women are often associated with 'mommy tracks' (Quesenberry et al., 2006) or the 'family schema', men are often associated with a 'work schema' (Hakim, 2006). These associations create expectations of how men and women reconcile work and family responsibilities, leaving women who do not integrate into the greedy, typically male work style at risk of not being perceived as 'true professionals' (Padavic et al., 2019: 64; Singstad, 2011).

The context for our study is Norway, recognised for its high degree of gender equality and progressive welfare regime that supports women's participation in working life (Seierstad and Kirton, 2015). Recent directives include family-oriented measures that not only support mothers returning to work, but also fathers taking parental leave (Kitterød and Halrynjo, 2019). Although women make up 47 percent of the workforce (Statistics Norway, 2018), traditional gender norms that locate women as the primary family caregiver are still prevalent (Seierstad and Kirton, 2015). This is reflected in the number of women who work part-time: currently, 37 percent of employed women work only part-time, as compared to 13 percent of employed men (Statistics Norway, 2018). While policies have

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helped women return to work earlier, they have not been beneficial to women's career development (Kitterød and Halrynjo, 2019).

Women make up only one in four of those studying and working in ICT in Norway (Simonsen and Corneliussen, 2020; Statistics Norway, 2018; Samordna opptak, 2018). A recent European study found that women in ICT experience more flexible working conditions and a smaller pay gap than in other fields, but also work longer hours, with a lower proportion having childcare responsibilities (EIGE, 2018). In addition to this, fewer women in ICT work part-time, as compared to other occupations (Simonsen and Corneliussen, 2020). These factors indicate a double pressure on women, as they try to perform care work, as well as fit into a style of work that favours men as ideal workers (Singstad, 2011; Watts, 2009; Acker, 1995). This specific context highlights the need to conduct research on how women working as ICT experts in research, development, and innovation reconcile family and work responsibilities, while pursuing their career.

Drawing on the theory of 're-doing gender' (Hirschauer, 2001; West and Zimmerman, 1987), this article delves into how women in ICT research, development, and innovation re-do gender through their negotiation of work, family, and responsibilities. We ask which factors affect women's experiences of combining ICT work and family. In addition, considering how the work-life balance discourse is widespread across many countries (Rottenberg, 2018), including Norway (Sørensen, 2017), we also look at women's negotiation of ICT work and family responsibilities in the context of the work-life balance discourse, aiming to contribute to its critiques.

Our study includes interviews with 22 women working full-time in ICT research, development and innovation in Norway, whose accounts we introduce using a narrative analysis approach (Freeman, 2015). Our findings suggest that some of the main structures of working life, such as practices that create expectations favouring men, continue to challenge women's career opportunities. Some of our interviewees spoke of their encounters with these structures, along the lines of traditional gendered patterns of work and family, employing the discourse of choice. However, we also found that the above-mentioned structures are being re-gendered, yet, this still does not necessarily challenge work cultures that discriminate against women more than men. Most importantly, our analysis reveals the need to take a critical view of the work-life balance discourse, as even the term itself lays responsibility for creating 'balance' at the feet of the individual (Gregory and Milner, 2009). Taking such a view is important to policymakers' understanding of the economic and social structures that enable or restrict women's opportunities for careers in male-dominated fields, such as ICT.

We begin with a literature review, before presenting this study's theoretical and methodological framework. Following this, the article turns to an analysis of our data: women's accounts of how they reconcile work and family responsibilities. Using a narrative analysis approach the analysis is divided by two main narratives: the feeling of opting out while working full-time, and support for working more than full-time.

GENDERED STRUCTURES OF WORK AND NORMS OF CARE FOR WOMEN IN ICT

Despite family-friendly employment policies, women struggle to reconcile work and care responsibilities in social democratic welfare states, such as Norway (Kitterød and Halrynjo, 2019). While there is little difference in career development among dual-career childless couples in Norway, there remains a notable difference between mothers and fathers (Halrynjo and Lyng, 2010). The reconciliation of work and care responsibilities is even more difficult in male-dominated fields, (Watts, 2006) such as ICT, where the need to continuously upskill is a precondition for a successful career (EIGE, 2018:3). Flexible parental leave (Rudlende and Bryghaug, 2017), a higher uptake of paternal quota leave (Gram, 2019), and the extension of kindergarten to children aged one and two have aided women's faster return to work (Johnsen and Løken, 2016). However, these policies do not seem to have had an impact on women's career development (Kitterød and Halrynjo, 2019).

Work-life balance – referring to solving the dilemmas of intertwining institutional and non-work times and spaces (Felstead et al., 2002) – has become a dominant discourse in many societies (Rottenberg, 2018), including Norway (Sørensen, 2017), over the past few decades. Indeed, the discourse is at the forefront of policies aiming to increase women's workforce participation and improve conditions for them to pursue careers (OECD, 2004). These policies focus on workers' autonomy, individuals' control over their time, and flexibility in work arrangements (Fleetwood, 2007; Lewis et al., 2007), implying that this balance relies on individuals' choices (Gregory and Milner, 2009). However, such framing neglects 'the recognition of privileges and inequalities between groupings of people and individuals' (Niemistö et al. 2019: 506), and thus, does not challenge well-established structures of gendered work cultures (Chung and Van der Lippe, 2018). In this section, we focus on the structures covered up by the work-life balance discourse; namely, the gendered culture of work, and norms of care in international literature, Norway, and the ICT field.

Work cultures, especially in male-dominated fields, imagine the 'ideal worker' (Acker, 1990) as one who prioritises work over care responsibilities (Williams, 2000), something men typically appear to do more often than women (Singstad, 2011). As many have shown, the pace and requirements of work have intensified (Mauno et al.,

2019) over the past decades, creating a work culture marked by greed (Hakim, 2006), and the expectation of constant availability or a 24/7 work style (Padavic et al., 2019). Research on working life in Norway has also shown that employees in some sectors experience a greedy or boundaryless work culture where standard, full-time work is not enough (Brandth and Kvande, 2005; Nilsen and Skarsbø, 2009). Greedy work culture is caused by changes such as intensification of work where employers have extraordinary demands and expectations from their employees' attitude, behaviour and time (Franzway, 2001; Peetz, 2006). These expectations are even more prevalent in male-dominated fields such as ICT (Watts, 2006). As several studies have suggested, women in ICT work more than women in many other occupations (EIGE, 2018; Watts, 2009). Watts' (2009) study of women in engineering shows that women working full-time adopt work styles that include long hours, as they perceive this as necessary to being accepted in the workplace. A 24/7 work culture – i.e., employees' increased availability due to such technologies as email and mobile phones – has blurred the boundaries between work time and private time, workplace and private space, and intensified the challenges of negotiating work and family time, for women more so than men (Zerwas, 2019).

The gender norms of care responsibilities are another well-established structure hidden within the work-life balance discourse. This is often looked at as a matter of choice; for example, Hakim's suggestion that men and women tend to choose different career paths, as women are drawn more towards jobs that 'can be fitted around family life' (2006: 285). From a British perspective, Hakim argues that family-friendly policies do not solve gender equality, rather they increase inequalities by allowing women to reduce their work time. Consequently, women struggle to compete against full-time workers with 'a momentum, knowledge, fitness and experience that can never be achieved by a part time worker' (Hakim, 2006: 282).

Adding a layer of normative evaluation to her model, Sørensen (2017) identifies three subject positions describing women's actions using the vocabulary of choice in the Norwegian media: 'the part-time working, good mother' opting out of work; 'the exceptional career mother' who aims to have it all, both children and a career; and 'the failing mother', who also aims to have it all, but faces accusations of failing at motherhood. Sørensen (2017: 310) argues that invoking the vocabulary of choice here not only covers up power structures, as McRobbie (2009) shows, but it also produces differences and inequalities.

Literature on intensive parenting gives new context to studies investigating women's choice in relation to work and care. Ideal parenting, especially mothering, has increasingly been drawn from the ideal of intense commitment to parental requirements and the mother role over the past decades (Hays, 1996; Stefansen and Aarseth, 2011). Pedersen and Egeland's (2020) study of Norwegian parents' everyday life confirms that so-called intensive parenting is practiced by Norwegian parents, especially highly educated and middle-class families, and that the ideal parenting style in Norway relies on equally shared parenting responsibilities. Mothers administrate care responsibilities and function as the primary caregiver, but it is the parents' working hours that influence how work-care conflicts are solved. Pedersen and Egeland explain further that parents with flexible working hours have a greater capacity to solve work-care conflicts regardless of gender. However, this is a privilege one earns, often through extended higher education. According to a study by EIGE,

ICT jobs actually offer favourable working conditions for both men and women. Working hours are often more flexible and employees have more autonomy in adjusting them to their needs. (EIGE, 2018: 3)

However, flexible working conditions can also cause more intensified working patterns (Ellingsæter, 2002; Richardson and Bennetts, 2007), as this situation leaves the responsibility for work-life balance to the individual (Håpnes and Rasmussen, 2007). Pedersen and Egeland (2020) show that parents with flexible working hours who must solve work-care conflicts during work hours catch up with their work in the late evenings or over weekends. For mothers with flexible working hours, this becomes another burden, in addition to being the primary caregiver. As women often take more care responsibilities, the ICT industry's flexibility might be both a pressure on and barrier to women's career advancement in the sector (Consalvo, 2008), even though flexible hours may be a privilege that women in other sectors do not have.

The focus on employees' autonomy and flexible working time (or place) shows the privileges that women in ICT fields have, but also hides the potential double pressure they face. This is because the responsibility for dealing with work-life balance is left to the individual and remains a task of the private sphere. In the context of the dominant work-life balance discourse, complete balance being the ideal, this study sheds light on gendered structures and privileges that contribute to the way in which women in ICT negotiate the relationship between work and family demands.

RE-DOING GENDER: NEGOTIATIONS WITHIN TWO-TRACK PARENTHOOD

This article is part of a larger project looking at women's careers in ICT research, development, and innovation through the lens of emphasising the social construction of gender and technology (Cockburn, 1992; Corneliusen, 2011; Sørensen et al., 2011). Feminist technology studies have shown that, across the Western world, cultures and stereotypes tend to associate men with ICT work more so than women (Corneliusen, 2014; Misa, 2010; Wajcman, 2004). To address how women negotiate the relationship between work and family roles and responsibilities, this article employs the concepts of negotiation and re-doing gender. 'Doing gender' is a central concept in research on gender and work, as it seeks to understand how gender is practiced and stabilised (Gherardi, 1994), as well as how these practices contribute to producing hierarchies and inequalities (Nentwich and Kelan, 2014) in the work context. 'Doing gender' is defined by West and Zimmerman (1987: 125) as:

a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine 'natures'.

In this article, doing gender refers to the practices drawn from gender norms used to reconcile work and life in the Norwegian context.

Although women's high workforce participation in Norway has established the idea of the dual-earner household (Melby and Carlsson Wetterberg, 2009; Singstad, 2011), a male-earner norm still prevails (Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006). Work practices create expectations favouring men (Acker, 1990) as the 'ideal worker' who prioritises work over care responsibilities (Williams, 2000). Despite policies aimed at increasing men's participation in care responsibilities (Kitterød and Rønsen, 2012), the combination of the dual-earner household and this 'ideal worker' has created a pattern of 'two-track parenthood': one track for mothers, often taking long parental leave and part-time work, and another for men emphasising work rather than family, regardless of whether they have children (Bø et al., 2008; Ellingsæter, 2006). The two-track parenthood model is the dominant gender norm regulating work-life balance in Norway, guiding gendered practices in the process.

A work-life balance implicitly taken as a happy solution to the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities has become an ideal 'enfolded into mainstream common sense' (Rottenberg, 2018:8). In this regard, the concept of negotiation refers to women's attempts to overcome the competing values and practices of work and family life while imagining a 'balanced' work-family life – i.e., 'having it all'. Focusing on how full-time working women with care responsibilities reconcile work and family, we look closer at how negotiation in relation to a two-track parenthood model is practiced. In this sense, negotiation refers to the practices of 're-doing' gender norms associated with the two-track parenthood model, however, not by changing the model itself but by changing women's and men's positions in the model. Different from 'undoing' gender norms that results in these norms *losing* their importance in social interactions (cf. Hirschauer, 2001), the concept of re-doing refers to social practices enacted in new ways, but still with reference to conventional gender norms and values (Kelan, 2010).

METHODOLOGY

Interviews with women working in ICT research, development and innovation

This article builds upon interviews with women working as ICT experts in research, development, and innovation in Western Norway. We recruited women through organisations working with regional innovation, ICT development, research, and funding agencies, as well as public and private companies. The selection criteria included: higher education, the minimum being an undergraduate degree, and diversity, in terms of women working as ICT experts in different sectors and industries, as we recognise that digitalisation is changing the landscape of ICT work.

The data presented here is part of a larger dataset of 28 interviews we conducted with women ICT experts in 2017-2018. Twenty-two of the interviews analysed here were with women who also had childcare responsibilities. One had an undergraduate degree, seven had PhDs, and the rest had postgraduate taught degrees. The interviewees were between 37 and 59 years old (average 45). 14 were born in Norway and eight were immigrants born in counties in North and West Europe, East and South Asia and East Africa. These women immigrated to Norway for higher education or work. No other information about informants' social backgrounds was gathered. In Norway higher education and work reduce social differences. All interviewees had higher education and a job that is considered to have high income. The women had between one and four children, some women having children of different ages and with different fathers. Thus, our participants represented a variety of heterosexual family constellations.

Seven interviewees had their first degree in ICT and two had a second degree in ICT, after first obtaining a degree in a non-technical discipline. These women work as ICT experts in management, design, programming, research, and implementation of new technology. Thirteen interviewees acquired ICT competence by combining

an ICT education with a non-technical education, or training and upskilling combined with a non-technical profession. These women work in the ICT area of a non-tech profession in the management, design, programming, and implementation of new technology.

Interviews lasted around one hour and followed an interview guide with a professional-life history structure, including questions about family, education, occupational history, experiences of hierarchies and gender at work, career drivers, barriers, and work-family arrangements. Although interviewees also reflected on family roles and responsibilities apart from motherhood, it was mainly parenthood-related topics that triggered women to share their experiences of combining work and family. In this article, we focus on the narratives of women who explicitly reflected on how work and career development are entangled with family life, which involved care for children.

This study gained ethical approval from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data and followed their rules for data security. All informants are anonymous. Parenthesis following quotes indicate the participant's approximate age.

Analytical framework

The interviews were designed using the professional life history approach, and thus, our interviewees spoke about their work, careers, and personal lives. We considered the interview material to be narratives and analysed it using a narrative analysis approach. Narrative analysis, as Freeman (2015: 24) stresses, focuses on how people make sense of their experiences by constructing 'a coherent life out of the chaos of experience'. Narrative analysis takes the story as an object of interpretation. Thus, we attempted to understand women's experiences combining work and family life by asking why a narrative about family occurred during the part of our interview that focused on career. As Earthy and Cronin (2008: 8) explain, 'a narrative approach will take account of both the content and the form of the interviewee's account' by considering the way in which an interviewee narrates an experience.

A narrative about family often arose when we asked about the barriers our interviewees faced in career development or support for career development. By questioning *why* they spoke about their families in the context of their career in this particular way and at this particular point, we discovered the two leading ways women speak about how they combine ICT work and family life, which are outlined in the following section. Then, we compare the accounts to shed light on underlying gender structures and norms, while asking what the key factors affecting women's experiences of combining ICT work and family are.

FINDINGS

The fact that women in ICT work longer hours than women in many other occupations (EIGE, 2018), as they try to fit into a male-dominated and greedy work style, suggests that women in ICT struggle reconciling work and family. In this section, we introduce two narratives shared by our interviewees. The first narrative was shared by full-time working women who, even sometimes with support from their spouse and relatives, still had a feeling of having opted out. This feeling was expressed through the rhetoric of choice in relation to care responsibilities. The second narrative was shared by women who work more than standard full-time hours and receive spousal support. This narrative emphasises the privileges that enable women to pursue careers and have less care responsibilities.

When full-time work equals opting out of career development

About two thirds of the women explicitly pointed to family when asked about barriers to their career: 'The family, but... I have chosen that myself, so it is not something I am bitter about' (early 40s). These women all had between one and four young children and also worked full-time. Typically, when family or children were put forward as a barrier, interviewees immediately talked about this as a voluntary and a conscious choice:

Establishing a family, managing that, you could call it a barrier, but it was also a choice. It was completely voluntary. (late 30s)

Sørensen (2017) identified the discourse of the 'good mother', one who works part-time, as implicit in the opting out traceable in national statistics. However, different from this discourse and a home-centred narrative (Hakim, 2006), our women were in full-time work but still described a feeling of 'opting out':

I turn down travelling because I am away so much already. So, I avoided most of the travelling I could have done. (40s)

They were aware that they lost opportunities when deciding to have children:

The fact that I have chosen to have four children means that I cannot just take any job. That has to do with priorities. It was wanted and conscious. I could have chosen or prioritised differently. (40s)

Every time you have a child... I've never been promoted or gotten a pay raise when I've been on [maternity] leave (...) So, you stagnate a bit. (30s)

Indeed, as they presupposed a balance between work and life in their career development (Rottenberg, 2018), our interviewees calculated what their career might have been if they had 'chosen' differently:

I could have prioritised having fewer children and aimed for a higher position. I think I could have had that if I wanted, but I made a different choice. (40s).

When the male-dominated work culture of ICT intersects with the gender hierarchies in the fields of research, development, and innovation (EIGE, 2020), even women with full-time work experience are punished, career-wise:

If I had other priorities, I could have been a professor. If you want to climb, you have to work more than a hundred percent. I refrain from many things because I have a family and want to be with them, and that prevents me from climbing in the system. (40s)

Although this narrative is reminiscent of the 'good mother' or other, home-centred narratives (Hakim, 2006; Sørensen, 2017), these women were holding full-time work in ICT while speaking to the fact that they prioritise family over work. Interviewees had not only foregone work activities, such as travelling, but also postponed career-developing training. For instance, five of our interviewees had left behind their desires to obtain a PhD. These women's version of work-life 'balance', however, disguises the cost of prioritising family over career-driving activities; costs that could have notable and long-term consequences on their careers. However, such costs are not visible in statistics, unlike the part-time working of 'good mothers' in Sørensen's study (2017).

Our interviewees' feeling of opting out did not stem from working life or the dual-earner model. It was not *work*, but their *careers* that they put on hold for children, and this hold is temporary:

I have three kids now and I don't think I will have more, so now it is a different situation (...) It is very exciting to be able to look forward to career possibilities. (30s)

Participants justified their feeling of opting out by pointing to family and children as a choice, an explanation that reproduces gender norms associating women with childcare responsibilities. The rhetoric of 'choice' reflects the gender practices of the two-track parenthood model, where women take more care-responsibilities, and contributes to covering up the feeling of opting out. Thus, our findings support Sørensen's suggestion that the rhetoric of choice might reproduce traditional gender roles by defining motherhood according to a maternal presence in the family (Sørensen, 2017).

Furthermore, the co-production of work and family – evident in our interviewees' claims of prioritising family while engaged in full-time work – indicates that working 'only' full-time is seen as limiting to career development. This resonates with research showing that women in ICT feel the need to adopt a male style and work long hours (Watts, 2009), which also indicates a greedy work culture with intense achievement targets, and expectations of availability and working time (Brandth and Kvande, 2005; Egeland and Bergene 2012).

Career mothers needing supporters with predictable working hours

In the second narrative, women also talked about their work in relation to care responsibilities; however, they described a situation in which they had *less* care-responsibility for family and children. Like Sørensen's (2017) 'failing (career) mothers', these women may risk being perceived as prioritising career and failing at motherhood. However, in their (nonjudgmental) narratives (different from the judgmental tendency in the media discourse Sørensen analyses), women described how supporters took care of their childcare tasks.

Unlike Sørensen's 'exceptional mothers' who buy support from cleaners and au pairs, only one of the women in our study mentioned domestic help. Instead, their male partners took on the main childcare responsibilities:

Because I'm commuting, it is him who picks up and drops off at school and kindergarten every day. (...) Even the one day a week that I'm at home, he still picks them up and drops them off. (30s)

Furthermore, participants did not speak of pursuing a career while having children as a *choice*, but rather a *privilege* entangled with and dependent on a supportive partner:

My husband was very good at staying home. He has helped out there, and he is still the one making dinner at home. He has taken that over more and more, and now I don't even know what we're having for dinner. (50s)

Among our interviewees, there were also examples of dual-career couples who both had greedy careers (Hakim, 2006). In these cases, support from other close relatives was needed to help supplement the care for family and children, such as the women's parents:

My husband is travelling and away a lot as well, and then we have my mother and father. (...) My father, he is still working, but he is working from home. He is looking after them [the children] a lot. (40s)

This example involves two generations of dual-career couples and a grandfather solving the challenges, thanks to work arrangements that make him available for the children. However, this example stands apart from Pedersen and Egeland's study on Norwegian parents' everyday life (2020) that shows how grandparents contribute by helping to unburden families' everyday lives in relation to care, but here the grandparents contribute by making an intensive work culture possible.

Pedersen and Egeland (2020) also argue that the Norwegian ideal of parenthood involves equal parenting and time spent with children in evenings and weekends, even though women do more household and administrative care responsibilities. Nevertheless, combining work and care responsibilities to some degree depends on working hours. Parents with flexible working hours can better facilitate care responsibilities in everyday life (Pedersen and Egeland, 2020: 20). Among our interviewees, aside from one case of a male partner who became a stay-at-home-dad to support the woman's career, it was not the women's *flexible* working practices that helped, but the opposite: their partners had stable work positions with flexible and predictable hours and little or no work-related travel. This is what made the women's greedy work possible.

My husband has not changed his job much. He has not had jobs where he had to travel. If he also had a job where he had to travel a lot, things would have been much more difficult. He was always at home. (50s)

As public childcare services do not cover the amount of care women who work over full-time hours require, they need a close supporter to step in where public childcare ends and, in this way, help stabilise their work practices. For our participants, it was not only the partners with flexible working hours who dropped off and picked up children from school that solved work and care conflicts, it was also the husbands who did not travel much and were available out of office hours, and the fathers who took extra leave. The women interviewed here identified their partners' flexible working hours as a support, so long as work remained within and did not exceed either standard work times or number of hours. If we consider two-track parenthood as the main gender norm reconciling work-life balance in Norway, even with equally shared parenting as the ideal, the mentioned privileges enable both a negotiation for re-doing gender and, at the same time, the continuation of a two-track parenthood model. However, how gender norms are re-done here involves men taking more responsibility for children and family along the lines of the traditional female role. Thus, this also involves negotiating solutions and arrangements that challenge the hegemonic gender norms of men as the ideal worker (Hook, 2010).

DISCUSSION

A recognised challenge to work-life balance policies is that they often rely on a flexibility-of-work discourse which enables employees to adjust work according to family responsibilities (Singley and Hynes, 2005). However, flexible work practices may also have the opposite effect; indeed, some are seen as employer-friendly, rather than being supportive of employees (Fleetwood, 2007). Family-friendly policies providing a high level of work flexibility are recognised as increasing gender inequality in working life, as women mainly adopt the role of carer in the two-track parenthood model (Ellingsæter, 2006; Hakim, 2006). While work-life policies take for granted that flexibility at work implies working *less* during office hours to spend time on family, the women in our study that spoke to this mostly described working *more*, with longer days and more travelling. Flexibility in greedy work cultures is not just a simple adjustment of work time and place; in such contexts, rather, flexibility institutes working more than full-time as the norm, which conflicts with family responsibilities even if women do not 'prioritise' family.

This does not only leave the struggle of reconciling work and family responsibilities to the individual (Gregory and Milner, 2009), but also turns the issue of intensive and greedy work cultures into an issue solved in the private sphere. Through the rhetoric of choice, the work-life balance discourse frames greedy work cultures as a problem of prioritising children, even when women work full-time. Therefore, the two-track parenthood model is re-gendered while the greedy work style that Padavic et al. (2019) identify as the main obstacle to gender inequality in working life (especially in ICT work), goes unchallenged.

Our study challenges the traditional two-track parenthood model that gives priority to the father's career (Halrynjo and Lyng, 2010; Sørensen, 2017), as our participants' male partners were instead taking on roles traditionally associated with women. Both stay-at-home dads and fathers with more flexible and predictable work

hours were key to solving the work-life time squeeze, giving priority to women's careers. As has been shown regarding dual-career couples, women who pursue a career need private supporters (Metz-Goeckel, 2018). In addition, as the second narrative may suggest, changes in how heterosexual couples negotiate work and family allow women to develop a career. However, as Pedersen and Egeland (2020) argue, flexible hours in normal working time was a privilege for those who have undergone longer higher education.

The work-life balance discourse's focus on time management and choice seems too narrow to precisely capture women's negotiation of work and family. This becomes evident in the mismatch between women's narratives of choosing or prioritising family over work, while still engaged in full-time work. As Biese and Choroszewicz (2019) point out, the issue of opting out has often been associated with women who leave the work force altogether. However, our participants' feeling of having to 'opt out' indicates that success in their work environments requires more than full-time commitment. Having said this, the women in our study also did not imagine this opting out in the way that the term is often taken, in definitions of women who prioritise family (Hakim, 2006; Quesenberry et al., 2006; Sørensen, 2017). Also, in contrast to the adaptive category Hakim defines, these women tended to see the child-period as an intermezzo in their career, rather than a reason to take on part-time work.

While part-time work indicates gender inequality (Statistics Norway, 2017), our interviewees' full-time participation could be interpreted as a success of policies aimed at keeping women in the workforce. Simultaneously, however, the feeling of opting out that they describe is critical, as it is not visible in national statistics but will continue to produce vertical gender segregation; opportunities that women let pass by, because of this, are likely to slow their career trajectories. In a field like ICT, where women are a minority, this has unfortunate consequences.

Hakim suggests that part-time working mothers are in danger of losing the competition against full-time workers, due to the advantageous amount of knowledge and experience full-time workers obtain (2006). However, it seems Hakim's dividing line between part-time and full-time work is too optimistic for women ICT experts. Instead, our findings support Watts' (2009) study, which highlights that women feel long working hours are required to develop a successful career in male-dominated fields.

CONCLUSION

Our study illustrates that even in Norway, which boasts some of the world's most family-friendly policies (Seierstad and Kirton, 2015), the available public childcare and work-life balance solutions are not sufficient to support women in greedy work cultures, such as ICT. We need to look beyond the discourse of flexible working hours to truly understand what women's experiences of prioritising family in a greedy work culture really entail. Some of our interviewees claimed that they prioritise family over work, yet they acted more along the lines of adaptive or work-centred participants in other studies (Hakim, 2006; Sørensen, 2017). Thus, it can be seen that dividing women into work-or-family categories does not fully capture the experiences of women ICT experts and masks the 'opting out' of women working full-time in cultures that require continuous upskilling and long hours (EIGE, 2020).

The work-life balance policies, making time management and flexibility central, falls short in fields that are both male-dominated and vertically gender segregated. From a work-life balance policy perspective, using flexible working condition to keep women in paid work has been a success. Our findings also support a growing acceptance of women developing their careers. However, most women experience a requirement to work in the pattern of men's career development to achieve this. Our study suggests an urgent need to reorient work-life discussions more towards career-life policies and solutions that acknowledge the challenges of greedy work styles. Our findings indicate that balance is an illusion in intensive and greedy work cultures. Rather, women with full-time work still describe prioritising family and therefore feel that they are opting out while women who work more than full-time rely on the partner's work conditions for making intensive work possible.

Our informants' voices were united in describing how their career development requires private support. As one said: 'If it had been only me, it would not have worked out.' Indeed, a male partner's predictable and less greedy work pattern, not work-life balance policies targeting women, is the main factor enabling women to combine work and family responsibilities in ICT research, development, and innovation.

We recognise that work-life balance policies have not only aimed at keeping women in paid work, but also have men take more responsibility in the home. This is not easy to solve with legislation, as it requires attitudes towards traditional gender patterns of work-family arrangements to change, which this study's participants suggest is in part happening. However, the negotiation necessary to achieve this is left to individuals, remaining an issue of the private sphere.

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Doing/Undoing Gender in Research and Innovation – Practicing Downplaying and Doubt

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to analyse the ways in which highly educated women ‘do’ and ‘undo’ gender when they reflect on their work and careers in research and innovation (R&I). The broader research task is to identify the gendering effects that ‘doing’ and ‘undoing’ gender achieve in R&I work. The findings indicate a constant uncertainty among interviewees about whether gender is significant at work. There are few signs of interviewees ‘undoing’ gender with the aim of changing the status quo. Instead, they conceive of gender as insignificant for various reasons, usually because of an absence of individual experience. They understand the core of gender equality at work in terms of a numerical balance of women and men and the promotion of balance in female-dominated work communities. The argumentation by women in R&I about ‘doing gender’ can be defined as ‘gender-doubtful’. Interviewees oscillate between two notions of the effects of gender: they see that gender may have an impact, but at the same time they resist any feelings about that impact by deploying counterarguments or scepticism. This article calls for an analysis of the ways in which doing and undoing gender are situationally specific.

Keywords: doing gender, undoing gender, research and innovation

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article is to identify ways of ‘doing gender’ expressed by highly educated women working in research and innovation (R&I). In their ground-breaking article, Candace West and Don Zimmerman (1987: 129) propose that gender is ‘the product of social doings of some sort’ and ‘produced as a socially organized achievement’, meaning that people do gender in their social interactions. According to their core idea, gender is ‘an ongoing accomplishment’ (Fenstermaker and West, 2002: 42) embedded in everyday and routine interactions between people (Fenstermaker and West, 2002: 6). By enabling the analysis of how people practise, recount and convince others about gender matters in their everyday lives, the concept of ‘doing gender’ aims to open up ways to discern the embeddedness of gendered structures – power relations, hierarchies and differences – in everyday life. Thus, doing gender and its consequences ‘are linked to and supported by historical and structural circumstances’ (West and Zimmerman, 2009: 117).

The main focuses of ‘doing gender’ differ according to the conceptual approach adopted. The production of gender in interaction is the focus of ethnomethodological sociology, whereas the production of gender identities and positions through discourse is the focus of the poststructuralist approach (Moloney and Fenstermaker, 2002; Nentwich and Kelan, 2014). Despite their differences, these approaches share an understanding of gender as both a verb and a dynamic process.

Empirical studies on gender in society, and conceptual developments based on such empirical studies, have crossed the borders between these approaches, thereby demonstrating the fluidity and contextuality of gender in society (Nentwich and Kelan, 2014). This is also apparent in a variety of influential feminist contributions whose empirical analyses draw, for example, on gendered processes (Acker, 1990), gendered practices and the practising of gender (Martin, 2003), the mobilisation of masculinities (Martin, 2001) and remedial and ceremonial work (Gherardi, 1995).

The aim of using the concept of ‘doing gender’ is to reveal persistent gender inequalities and pave the way for alternative and transformative ways of understanding gender. Consequently, in addition to doing gender, the question of undoing gender has become salient. The concept of ‘undoing gender’ can have different emphases,

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such as the transformation and diminishment of the relevance of gender in the interactionist approach, or the subversion of subject positions in the poststructuralist approach (Nentwich and Kelan, 2014; Butler, 2004). In addition, ‘undoing gender’ can be understood as referring to conscious activities to make gender irrelevant in society (Deutsch, 2007), ‘degendering’ through the elimination of gender differences (Lorber, 2005), challenges to the gender binary (Risman, 2009), or the denial of gender at work (Britton, 2017).

In her analysis of women academics in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, Dana Britton (2017) found that such women tended to minimise the significance of gender in their interactions. With regard to structures, although the women recognised gender discrimination, they did not experience it as intentional or systematic; in relation to culture, they felt that gender became visible only randomly. Britton concluded that the women understood gender as an isolated phenomenon at work, and consequently that gender needs to be analysed and placed within organisational contexts. In this article, my aim is to analyse how women reflect on gender in R&I work. I argue that doing and undoing gender affects and mobilises women in ways that may have both advantageous and disadvantageous gendering consequences at work and in organisations.

My analysis takes place in the context of Finland, a country with a favourable reputation for gender equality (Kantola et al., 2020). This means that the assumed prevalence of gender equality is often taken for granted, both in research and among the public. However, statistics demonstrate the clearly gendered segregation of educational sectors, occupations and industries, as well as hierarchical inequalities and a wage gap in organisations (Gender Equality in Finland, 2018). Engineering, manufacturing, construction, and information and communication technology (ICT) are male-dominated, while the arts, humanities and social sciences are female-dominated (Gender Equality in Finland, 2018). Patented innovations are mostly registered to men, thus strengthening the gendered segregation of R&I. Moreover, men’s patents are typically related to highly advanced technology, whereas women’s patents are related to what are regarded as less-developed technologies. Women work and produce innovations mostly in the pharmaceutical and chemical industries, whereas men’s work involves developing machines and related equipment (Poutanen and Kovalainen, 2017: 21). Qualitative studies have also reported the undermining of and discrimination against women in academia – a core site of R&I work (Husu, 2001; Kantola, 2008).

In addition, it is important to consider how gender matters are recognised and valued in society. Women’s and men’s views on gender equality in working life differ strongly; women report far more experiences of harm than men (Attila et al., 2018: 67–70). However, the general attitude in Finland is that everything regarding gender equality and equal opportunities is good compared with many other countries in Europe. A few years ago as many as 70 per cent of women believed that gender equality strongly or very strongly prevailed in their workplace; among men, the rate was even higher (Attila et al., 2018: 63–64). This pride in being ‘more advanced’ than other countries results in the disregard of gender issues. Gender equality is a contested (Elomäki et al., 2019) and highly emotional issue when it comes to its promotion in the workplace (Ylöstalo, 2019). The late 2010s saw a weakening of equality policies, both within the Finnish government and in the European Union (EU) more widely. Situational and project-type feminist activities have recently taken up more space in the Finnish political arena (Elomäki et al., 2019). However, active feminist politics around R&I in Finland is sparse; where such politics does exist, it is very local, individually based or informal, and is only on its way to becoming visible. In short, the culture in Finland is highly complex and contradictory: clearly gendered segregation and power relations coexist with a strong belief in the prevalence of gender equality.

In the next section, I continue my theoretical considerations of doing and undoing gender, before moving on to outline the research interviews and method of analysis used in this paper. I suggest that the argumentation about doing gender by women in R&I can be defined as ‘gender-sceptical’ or ‘gender-suspicious’. Our interviewees were unsure whether gender had any effect on them or their organisations. They oscillated between two notions of gender effects: they saw that gender had an impact, but they nonetheless presented counterarguments or showed scepticism about it.

COMPLEX DOINGS OF GENDER

In ethnomethodological approaches, ‘doing gender’ is often seen as a way to conceptualise conventional and conservative practices, whereas poststructuralist approaches conceptualise ‘doing gender’ in terms of possibilities for change and transformation (Nentwich and Kelan, 2014; Pecis, 2016). However, the two approaches are not mutually exclusive. They both suggest that research into doing gender should look for structures, hierarchies and gender identities, their flexibility and contextuality, and the strength of gender’s relevance in a given social context (Nentwich and Kelan, 2014). Patricia Yancey Martin (2003; 2006) shows in her empirical analysis that the two approaches are intertwined, inseparable and applicable in combination. This means that available gender discourses and ways of practising gender are related to each other.

Empirical analyses suggest that gender is also done by treating or understanding it as non-existent. Doing gender is often identifiable, yet gender is also done silently, or seemingly not done at all. Rosalind Gill (2014) suggests that

inequalities in creative work are performed and produced by not speaking about inequalities, in such a way that femininities or masculinities do not give meaning to people's activities or their outcomes. In a similar vein, Liisa Husu (2020) proposes that gender can sometimes be done in silence, out of sight and away from recognised incidents. Thus, gender can be done in non-events that are hard to perceive and recognise.

Such silent and invisible ways of doing gender imply that the concepts of 'gender neutrality' and 'gender fatigue' are also worth considering as ways of doing and undoing gender. On the basis of diverse analyses of gendered practices in Finland, it can be concluded that gender neutrality is a common attitude towards gender issues among employees and employers (Rantalaiho and Heiskanen, 1997; Korvajärvi, 2011). This means that gender inequalities are recognised but simultaneously repudiated, because the general model of thinking is that gender equality has been achieved in this country. This is also referred to as the 'duality of gender': impressions of both gender inequality and gender equality are simultaneously felt to be reliable and true (Benschop and Doorewaard, 1998). International comparisons and publicity about Finland (e.g. Kale, 2020) confirm this when they celebrate the achievement of equality. Although they recognise gender conflicts, people prefer to regard their own society or organisation as providing equal opportunities to both women and men.

This is close to how 'gender fatigue' works as a thought model. This concept, suggested by Elisabeth Kelan (2009), also helps us to understand how appearing not to do gender is itself a way of 'doing gender'. Her suggestion is based on an analysis of ideological dilemmas where people use and accept knowledge that includes simultaneously contradictory aspects. Kelan identifies two strategies that ICT workers use in their argumentations: the temporal displacement of gender conflicts to the past, and the feeling among women that they have to take individual responsibility for changing discriminative practices. In a study of ICT workers in Switzerland, Kelan concludes that with regard to structures the women were 'tired of seeing gender discrimination and prefer[red] to see a world which is gender egalitarian, where gender no longer matters' (Kelan, 2009: 199). I interpret this as an affective stance towards gender, since it mobilises workers to think of gender questions as irrelevant but not non-existent. Both the irrelevance and the non-existence are emotionally burdensome in that emerging inequalities are surprises and hard to deal with.

The concept of 'undoing gender' can refer to a multiplicity of arguments. One such argument is that gender is becoming irrelevant or ceasing to shape interactive encounters between people (Deutsch, 2007). Accordingly, the relevance of gender vanishes in certain contexts or situations. Another argument, suggested by Kelan (2010: 188), is that doing and undoing gender are very close to each other, since undoing gender 'seems to mean doing gender differently'. For poststructuralist approaches, 'undoing' takes place when discursively produced gendered norms are questioned (McDonald, 2013). Accordingly, normative and stereotypical female characteristics or discourses are found in certain situations, such as when men care for other people, or when women work in male-dominated fields such as R&I.

Analyses of doing gender and its variations show that gender is far from non-existent in R&I work. Indeed, it is crucially embedded there. Lara Pecis (2016) emphasises that the practices of doing gender in innovation processes are ambiguous and messy. Thus, it is not always clear when gender is an integral part of everyday innovation work or organisations. Pecis (2016) introduces the concept 'positions of displacement': at the core of doing gender is its constant fluidity, which suggests the erosion of a preconceived binary gender order. Accordingly, femininities and masculinities interact with each other, and are mobile rather than strictly identifiable entities. Moreover, her findings indicate that gender orders in innovative organisations can be unexpected, and that the binary order can be undone.

In short, the doing and undoing of gender in society have a multiplicity of conceptual dimensions. But 'doing' and 'undoing gender' stress different aspects of gender. Approaches to 'doing gender' aim to reveal gender inequalities and the power of gender's relevance in various social contexts. In addition, 'doing gender' can refer to the invisibility or denial of gender. 'Undoing gender' includes variations such as making gender consciously irrelevant, doing gender differently, and seeking to change gender inequalities. It can also be interpreted as certain ways of 'doing gender', and thus as being on the edge of the same phenomenon. Gender neutrality and gender fatigue can frame the doing and undoing of gender, and express affective stances towards gender, including suspicion, indifference and exhaustion.

This article examines the ways in which women in R&I do gender in a culture that is imbued with the assumption of prevailing gender equality. The specific aim is to contribute to the discussion by analysing interviewees' argumentation about the insignificance of gender and their resistance to doing gender (e.g. Kelan, 2010; Nash and Moore, 2018). The focus is on the views of women in R&I who express or justify indifference, denials of gender, or avoidance and hesitancy in relation to the meanings of gender. There are two concrete underlying research questions: what are the ways in which highly educated women working in R&I reflect on and speak about the (in)significance of gender in their everyday lives at work? What implications do the ways of doing and undoing gender have for gender (in)equalities in R&I work? On the basis of the empirical analysis, the article

makes it possible to rethink ‘doing gender’, advocating a research agenda that looks at how emotions and affects are embedded in the ways of doing and undoing gender at work.

METHODS, DATA AND ANALYSIS

The research material was collected as part of the larger cooperative Nordic project Nordwit (<https://nordwit.com/>), the broad aim of which is to analyse women’s career opportunities and trajectories in technology-driven R&I. The Finnish team decided to interview women in R&I, concentrating on women working in health technology in a broad sense. For economic and logistical reasons, the vast majority of these interviews were conducted in one region with a multidisciplinary university and a relatively lively R&I enterprise sector.

We selected the women by using the websites of the university and enterprises related to health technology. In addition, at the end of each interview we asked for relevant further contacts, thus also using the snowball method of recruitment. We aimed to have women in different kinds of organisational and professional positions, different sectors of the economy, and different research fields. We also aimed to interview women of diverse ages, family situations and origins.

Ultimately, 30 women working in R&I were interviewed. All were white, and all except two were of Finnish origin. Thus, we failed to achieve the diversity we desired in terms of origin. The ages of the interviewees ranged from 25 to 62 years. The largest age group comprised women aged 30 to 39 years (12) who were born in the 1980s. We had similar-sized groups of women aged 50–58, born in the 1960s (seven interviews), and aged 40–48, born in 1970s (nine interviews). One interviewee was born in the 1950s, and one in the 1990s. Nearly all were heterosexually married (two were divorced), and all but three had children. Two women were single mothers at the time of the interviews.

All but two had PhD degrees, most commonly in the bio or health sciences or technology. Their doctoral studies and theses usually represented newly emerging (at the time) multi- or interdisciplinary research areas. Three interviewees had PhDs in established disciplines in the humanities or social sciences, although their research and jobs had also broken conventional disciplinary boundaries.

Slightly over half (17) of the interviewees worked in universities, including one who worked in an applied university. The vast majority of these had successful careers as full or associate professors (five) or senior researchers (seven). In addition to the university staff, three researchers worked in a sectoral research institute, which seeks research funding from the same external sources as universities (EU sources, for example). Six interviewees worked as experts in the Finnish offices of relatively large international firms. Two had jobs in non-governmental organisations, and two held managerial positions in small Finnish firms. Except for the full and associate professors, those who worked in universities had temporary contracts, as is generally the case in Finland.

In short, there was diversity among the interviewees in terms of their ages, employers, and types of job contract at the time of the interviews. In terms of their personal relationships, family situations and nationalities or ethnic backgrounds, the snowball method produced a homogenous group of interviewees. For all but a few, their educational level was clearly higher than that of their parents. Even though the women were highly educated and worked in a strategic field, they did not represent elite positions in Finnish society. Nearly all of them were familiar with job precarity, since they had worked for at least some time in academia. Their salaries were higher than average but did not make them rich or provide them with a particular status. The interviewees can thus be categorised as highly educated and relatively well-to-do middle-class women who mostly lived with a partner and/or a child or children.

The interviews were conducted between April 2018 and April 2020. Interview agreements were signed according to the EU’s General Data Protection Regulation. The interviews were conducted face-to-face in Finnish by team members and colleagues, except for the final interview, which was conducted in April 2020 via Skype due to COVID-19 restrictions. The interviews lasted around one to two hours and were audio-recorded. The verbatim transcription was carried out by a firm that had signed the required confidentiality agreement.

The interviewees were told that the interviews dealt with women’s careers. The topics included significant events during their educational and work careers, their current work situations, their future work plans, the effects of gender on their work, and aspects of their work-life balance. If the interviewee did not speak about gender, the interviewer asked about it in relation to various topics. Interviewers rarely interrupted interviewees’ speech; rather, the interviewees were allowed to talk about their experiences freely.

As a member of the research group, I participated in the planning of the interviews, including whom to interview and what topics to introduce. However, I was not able to conduct the interviews. Consequently, I mostly had to rely on the textual material. However, as a feminist, I must admit that when analysing and contemplating the content of the interviews, I sometimes felt both anger and puzzlement on one hand, and joy on the other.

The search for and analysis of various modes of doing gender resembled a hunt for shadows of the signs and traces of gender, since gender issues did not frequently arise in the interviews unless the interviewer asked gender-

related questions. Therefore, I read all the interviews carefully several times, and I picked out items that either explicitly concerned aspects of gender or dealt with gender indirectly. This thematically coded subcorpus of research material comprised 60,000 words in Finnish, close to 100 pages in size 11 font. (The excerpts selected are translated into English here). In this phase, it was necessary to go over the interviews in their entirety and look at the contexts where gender was and was not mentioned. Thus, the analysis of the interviews proceeded from theoretically informed categorisations to the more elusive aspects of doing gender. My analysis process resembled – but did not systematically follow – constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2021) in its aim to explain the analysis transparently: going back and forth between the data and the conceptualisations, making continuous comparisons between them, coding the material accordingly, and memo-writing on the analysis-in-progress (Charmaz and Thornberg, 2020).

In the next section, I analyse how the interviewees reflected on the (in)significance of gender.

DOUBTING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GENDER

My focus is on the ‘messier’ and more elusive ways of doing and undoing gender; experiences of open discrimination are beyond the scope of this article. In fact, only three interviewees were sure that they had encountered such open discrimination. The vast majority – 24 of the 30 interviewees – said at some point during their interview that they had not experienced gender issues during their doctoral studies or later in their work history. However, this appeared to be far from the whole story: there was wide variation in the ways in which the women ignored or passed over gender issues, and in how certain they were about the unimportance of gender in their work or organisation. Furthermore, what made the situation more complicated was that when talking about the insignificance of gender, the same women would also pick up a different theme – either later in the interview, or simultaneously – that they considered to be more important than gender.

My analysis of the interviews revealed five patterns in the interviewees’ reflections on gender or its absence in their everyday lives. I identify these patterns in relation to doing and undoing gender, as follows: 1) doing gender by not doing gender; 2) doing gender by justifying one’s doubts; 3) doing gender with reservations; 4) doing gender by speculating and anticipating; 5) undoing gender by dismantling female domination. In addition, following Britton (2017), I looked for the ways in which gender was conceived as isolated or context-bound in R&I work. Furthermore, I watched for expressions of affect such as doubt, security, pride or insecurity in relation to gender. The overall aim of my analysis is to discuss the implications of ways of doing and undoing gender for gender (in)equalities.

In the following, I quote extensively from 18 of the interviews. The aim is to present the full range of views related to each topic, and to show the complexity of doing or undoing gender as experienced by the interviewees. Therefore, I quote the women whose arguments or thoughts add relevant information about aspects of gender in R&I work.

DOING GENDER BY NOT DOING GENDER

There were women who said explicitly that gender issues had not affected them or their work organisation. They connected their views to their personal situations and to what they had not experienced. This meant, according to them, that gender had not been a reality in their work communities or recruitment processes. One sign of the absence of gender was that the interviewees had not experienced anything gender-specific, or – and this was repeated – that they themselves had not felt any discrimination based on gender.

One principal researcher working outside academia felt that she had never experienced or registered that she was the only woman in her organisation. It was a question of adjustment: ‘Because it’s been like that from the beginning, so I’ve never really paid attention to it.’ A senior researcher working at a university linked the gender question to career opportunities:

I don’t know, and I haven’t really heard either, that we’d have that, in this unit at least, that gender would have somehow affected your prospects.

The manager of a company connected gender to discrimination, saying:

I don’t know (...) or else I’m blind or something, but personally I don’t think I’ve experienced any discrimination.

A professor who cooperated closely with the heads of her organisation was unsure about the role of gender with regard to leadership positions:

Well, if you think about the leadership of the faculty/organisation, the superior is a man, the vice superiors are men. So maybe, but I don't really know if gender has been the deciding factor there or what the criteria were.

Furthermore, events in which the undervaluing of women was clear appeared to be so rare that it did not make sense to consider them events; rather, they were non-events. When such incidents took place in unusual situations, at a distance from everyday work, they were seen as mere trivial details, as reported by one manager of a small firm:

Shall we say that in some ways yes and in some ways [gender] doesn't affect anything. On the other hand, I personally haven't felt like it has much of an effect on anything. Sometimes in some conferences (...) you do often start to feel like, did that guy call me a girl just now? But when you just let it go and don't get involved, it doesn't matter (...) they're pretty isolated events in the end.

Rosalind Gill and her colleagues (2017) found the same minimisation of potential undermining and discrimination. They suggested that this might be a way for women to cope with their experiences of gender inequality. Thus, denying gender issues appears to be doing gender by adapting to the existing inequality.

In our interviews, a variety of reasons were given that appeared to push gender aside or keep it at bay, denying its significance at work. For interviewees, the individual's personal experience was the criterion according to which gender was irrelevant in their R&I work. This is also the case among women academics in the United States, as Britton (2017) suggests. However, these denials of the relevance of gender included some reflections about not knowing, not hearing or not paying attention. The women seemed to be uncertain. While they lacked individual experience and expressed individual reasons, gender was also conceived of as a woman/man binary in which men disturbed gender equality, but not to the extent that it made sense to take notice of trivial incidents. Thus, gender was also understood as two collectives comprising women and men.

DOING GENDER BY JUSTIFYING ONE'S DOUBTS

One way to react to the question of gender was to change the subject to something that interviewees said and felt was more important. At the same time, there was a sense that, in principle, gender was impossible to perceive in the same way as other issues. One expert pondered the meaning of gender for her in relation to personality, although with some uncertainty:

I don't know if it's had an effect, it hasn't hurt at least (...) yeah. Of course, it's probably more a matter of personality.

Similarly, one professor said, 'I don't know if gender does matter as much as personality, maybe.' A co-owner of a firm thought that age was decisive in recruitment:

There hasn't (...) been any direct discrimination or harassment ever, in my opinion. So, it's more like these nuances maybe or how you might experience something yourself. Like, specifically, if I've applied for a job, then I feel like young men, younger men go ahead of me.

A senior researcher spoke about her experience of a troublesome female boss:

[W]hen I started thinking about this, what's had a bigger effect, there are certain personalities and they've been (...) men. But there has been one woman there, too. (...) [W]hen you want to make other people's lives more difficult, that can happen regardless of gender. I don't feel like it [gender] has played a part.

However, passing over gender was not only about people's personal characteristics. Disciplinary battles could outweigh gender, as one senior researcher said of her difficulties in obtaining an appointment in another organisation:

I suspect that it's not so much a matter of gender, but more a kind of battle over science, like what field gets the funding and which one wins.

It is possible to interpret this statement as meaning that a particular discipline might have a gendered image, or even a gender. In addition, this interviewee referred to the multidisciplinary that she herself advocated and represented, and which she felt was an obstacle for her as a woman. Thus, one's research can have characteristics that may also include a gendered image. This was not explicitly mentioned, but it was an additional aspect in the context of the whole interview. It is well known and self-evident that gender does not have an effect in isolation;

rather, it functions in various intersections with other personal characteristics or social categories – strongly in some situations, and less so in others (Crenshaw, 1991; Lykke, 2005).

However, according to this pattern, gender was systematically presented as less relevant than other differences between people, although these differences remained vague. I detect here a sense that gender is an elusive and ambiguous matter that is easily taken for granted, or about which scepticism is justifiable. Interviewees seemed to think it was more relevant to mention something more important, thereby making it possible to put gender aside, rather than to do gender differently or aim for change – that is, to undo it. Putting gender aside appeared to include both denying gender and relating it to other things simultaneously. Gender and other issues were expressed in ways that intertwined and entangled them, albeit elusively. Nevertheless, possibly gendered meanings were suppressed in favour of other issues – whether structural, such as age or position in the organisational hierarchy, or individual, such as personality.

DOING GENDER WITH RESERVATIONS

One way of expressing the meaning of gender that came close to finding intersections was to state a fairly clear message but then, almost in the same breath, to express reservations about what had just been said. There were several topics and contexts where such reservations were expressed.

A senior researcher in academia expressed reservations on each occasion in the interview when she spoke about her views on aspects of gender during her doctoral studies. The following quotations show how miscellaneous and contradictory aspects of gender can be. The interviewee recognised that women were not perceived as professionals – as Kelan (2010) has also shown – and spoke about the classic situation of women as coffee makers, but with a remark that this was not an everyday phenomenon. She said that perhaps women were not really appreciated in the way that men were, and that there was possibly a traditional role in which women made coffee – and then she laughed. She also said that while women’s organisational competences were appreciated, she thought that everyone, including men, were capable of organising. She continued:

[M]e, personally, during that time there, I didn’t experience that kind of, well, lack of equality, maybe, not directly at least, but I also might be a bit naive. [laughter]

Later she said, ‘In our own core group, we didn’t have any problems. We got on well regardless of gender.’ She was aware of ‘shady deals to fill positions’, but these did not take place ‘in our group, which consisted of half women and half men’. She also noticed the following when vacancies were being filled:

[M]aybe the people who they’d wanted there to start with were men more often than not, but I think, of the ones I’ve heard, there have been women as well, so it’s not always about gender when it comes to who these positions are set up for.

Sexual harassment occurred very seldom according to her, only during ‘bar nights’ and, she made clear, ‘not at work’. Her argumentation followed the same logic – first a statement, and immediately afterwards a qualification – even when she spoke about her husband, who she said ‘encouraged’ her in everything. However, he did no housework other than what she told him to do.

Reservations were also expressed by another senior researcher, who started by saying that gender questions had not affected her:

I don’t think I have thought about [gender] much in this job then. Like, I’ve come across very little of that, so [gender] hasn’t really actualised, so to speak.

However, she continued that gender may have been significant but not explicit:

If I start thinking more closely about why things shape out the way they do, behind it there may be many things that have to do with equality and gender, but they’re not so clear somehow.

Thus, gender issues were interpreted as feelings, hesitations, assumptions, non-actualisations, gossip, a good atmosphere and personal character, among other things. These somehow moved or touched people in a way that led them to suspect that the gender issues might not be graspable. That is, gender remained on the informal or shadow side of everyday life. It is as though gender needed supplementation by additional aspects that might make such events and processes relevant at work.

DOING GENDER BY SPECULATING AND ANTICIPATING

By speculating and anticipating, the interviewees generated open questions or assumptions about the meaning of gender in their work. Making decisions and recruiting while in leadership positions could be challenging from the point of view of gender. A senior researcher contemplated whether or not gender was a barrier to career advancement. However, it was not easy to admit that gender was a barrier:

[W]hen I was in a leadership position, I do admit that sometimes I wondered if it was about gender when I didn't get in [wasn't invited] to some meeting.

She also speculated as to whether the wage gap was due to women's way of negotiating wages:

[E]ven though they say a woman's euro is different from a man's, you can of course ask whether we women ask for that equal salary. So, it's hard to determine why there are still differences.

She placed women's career options in a context where one might hear something about inequality but in the end had to rely on one's own experience:

But I do feel that in the academic world, there were totally comparable opportunities to advance as a woman. You did sometimes hear that you couldn't get some higher position and someone might say it was because of gender but I haven't come across that.

Another senior researcher who led a large, highly regarded research group and had international funding, was caught between whether women were simply undermined or whether there was genuine discrimination:

[T]he superiors are still all men, so are they really so much more intelligent, or does something happen during your career that somehow diminishes women's personalities and how target-driven we are, or is there actually some kind of discrimination?

She herself had been through a discrimination hearing, at which legal officers had provided evidence. Nonetheless, she hesitated to be definite about the discrimination. In a similar vein, one manager of a firm remembered when her promotion had been delayed:

[M]y spouse has pointed out that the recruiting process might have had something to do with gender, which has made me wonder.

Otherwise, however, she held the view that gender had not affected her.

One senior researcher spoke about potential sexual harassment situations:

[A] couple of times, there has been a situation in which an older male professor has made suggestions to me, and I've seen that that's a kind of dangerous situation and that I don't want to be dragged into this. It hasn't been harassment or anything, but I've seen that this, these people have been interested, not necessarily in my research but in something else.

This kind of anticipation seems to depend on past experiences and assumptions regarding whether and when it is wise, for one's safety and bodily autonomy, to step aside and avoid further contact. Unspoken encounters or not-yet-events arouse speculation and anticipation, including hints at gender inequality and gender discrimination, but the women left these inequalities open and elusive. Nonetheless, speculation and anticipation included vague suggestions about existing structural inequalities, such as the gender wage gap or discrimination.

UNDOING GENDER BY DISMANTLING FEMALE DOMINATION

In addition to the denial of and affective withdrawal from gender matters, the interviewees also talked about how to advance gender equality. Surprisingly, they were concerned about women's numerical domination in relation to the social atmosphere at work and in the outside world. According to the interviewees, the improvement of women's lot would require the recruitment of men and the achievement of mixed-gender or gender-balanced work communities.

This version of the significance of the gender balance was a live issue among women managers or co-owners of small firms. They related the desire for a numerical gender balance to matters of reputation, livelihood, and opportunities to take risks in terms of income and social atmosphere. According to these women, women-only or

female-dominated organisations might be regarded with suspicion by outsiders. A manager and co-owner of a small firm said:

[W]e've selected the kind of people who have a certain knowhow (...) and they've happened to be women. It's not like we discriminate against men or anything. And as advisors we have tons of men, so that's all fine. But in a certain way we've had to maybe consider whether people will look at us sideways if we hire women, that even if the woman is the better candidate, what it will look like from the outside if we hired another woman, even though it doesn't matter at all to us, because we want to hire the best person. I wouldn't want it to come to that, that it has to matter if it's a man or a woman, but on the other hand how do outsiders see it?

In a similar vein, another manager and co-owner said, 'We're unfortunately really homogenous at the moment. We're all women.' However, she did not regard this fact as entirely negative:

But on the other hand, it's really nice because we're a tech company, so we do have partners who are men.

The interviewees had diverse opinions about and experiences of women's work communities. One line of argumentation presented women's work groups or workplaces as very tough and unpleasant. As one manager, the co-owner of a small firm, said:

[W]omen have some kind of clear need to show off, especially towards each other. (...) I've started, unfortunately, to also feel a bit that women specifically are pretty brutal to each other, and I've even sort of thought we should maybe actually be supporting each other. (...) In work communities where there have been more men, the atmosphere has always been much better to start with. And the more women there are, the more there is this weird kind of backstabbing and needing to show off and somehow actually be really negative like that. It's obviously really unfortunate to say this and as a woman to boot but (...) [t]here's more unnecessary conflict between women, maybe. (...) I'm not saying it's a matter of equality. I mean, I can't say that it's ever been discrimination or anything like that. So, I don't know if it's a matter of equality but personally I do have that experience that a workplace that has more men, I've personally felt, has been more functional.

This view about the bad atmosphere of women's work communities was common. One manager of a public-sector firm wondered why women so often competed with other women. The bad atmosphere in women-dominated communities was usually stated as a fact; only one interviewee, who worked as an expert in a big company, said that the bad atmosphere in women's workplaces was a stereotypical way of labelling women's communities. This storyline about women's bad communities has been long-standing among women in Finland and has been found in many studies going back at least to the 1980s (Korvajärvi, 1998; 2002; Koivunen, 2011). However, it is only women who talk about competition, bad atmosphere, conflict and envy in female-dominated workplaces; male bosses do not recognise it, or perhaps will not talk about it to a female researcher (Korvajärvi, 2004).

One university professor was concerned about the numerical domination of female students, and the need to consider

how we can attract male students and maintain the balance (...) to avoid things becoming completely female-dominated.

However, she saw this as a potential opportunity to change the gender composition of the faculty's professors in the future:

[T]he majority are male, but when they retire, women will start to rise up the ladder, so female domination must start to show at some point, surely.

Her belief in the connection between gender equality and equal numbers of women and men was strong, thus following the social and cultural ideal of a structural preference for equal numbers. This included the idea that having a mixture of women and men might pave the way for women to enter higher positions. Her trust in women's future numerical dominance was strong, and according to the interviewee it would give women the chance of a solid career pipeline instead of a leaky pipeline (Blickenstaff, 2005).

The concern about and desire to change women's numerical domination was striking. The interviewees who were concerned about the reputation and image of women working together, or who had experiences of a bad workplace atmosphere, included women working in both academia and business. However, all the women who

ran small firms were unanimous that women-only constellations did not look good. Consequently, they spoke strongly in favour of and aimed to build mixed-gender workplaces. These interviewees did not clearly say whether they had clients who did not like female-dominated firms, or whether the promotion of business with other firms and the negotiation of funding were more plausible when done by men.

Furthermore, from the point of view of gender as an institution (Martin, 2004), when we include gender orders in each social context, the picture of this undoing of gender expands to relationships between different organisations. The interviews with representatives of small firms suggested that organisations or enterprises preferred not to have exceptional structures or values in their field, following instead the structures and values they saw around them in order to be seen as legitimate and successful. Thus, a normative isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), based on the idea of having the same gendered culture across the R&I field, may direct ideas about changing and consequently undoing gender in organisations.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this article, I have analysed how women experts employed in R&I talk about their views of gender at work. My theoretical frame came from broad discussions around ‘doing gender’, including ‘undoing gender’. The data consisted of 30 interviews with highly educated women working in R&I in Finland. My analysis process resembled – but did not systematically follow – constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2021).

I asked the following questions. First, what are the ways in which highly educated women working in R&I reflect on and speak about the (in)significance of gender in their everyday lives at work? Second, what implications do the ways of doing and undoing gender have for gender (in)equalities in R&I work?

The first question relates to the lines of argumentation that are present in the doing and undoing of gender among women experts working in R&I. I identified four patterns of doing gender and one pattern of undoing gender. The boundaries between these were not clearly delineated.

The four patterns of doing gender included the downplaying of the effects of gender in male-dominated work communities, which allowed the women to think that gender was unimportant. The criterion they used was their own individual experience. This way of doing gender is very much in line with Britton’s (2017) finding that women academics tend to deny the significance of gender. Another pattern of doing gender was for the women to be highly doubtful of aspects of the significance of gender. By downplaying it, providing counterexamples, and doubting the truth of the effects of gender, the women came to regard gender as entangled with other issues that were more prominent. Personality or personal characteristics, as well as the prevailing feminine or masculine images of certain issues, were arguments for downplaying gender aspects at work. The women had ongoing reservations about both the significance and insignificance of gender, and while the effects of gender were recognised and regarded as possibilities, the reality of those effects was constantly regarded with doubt. Gender seemed to be in the air, but only as a suspicion. Speculation and even surprise in the face of gender inequalities produced scepticism about whether to believe in their existence. While gender was experienced as elusive, it was understood as a contextual and even structural feature. Furthermore, and due to the uncertainty, gender appeared in R&I work as almost meaningless on the one hand, but also as potentially very significant on the other. Moreover, the lines of argumentation came close to suggestions of gender fatigue (Kelan, 2009). The interviewees were reluctant to recognise the kind of gender discrimination in which women were subordinated. They preferred to see their working environments as numerically egalitarian. In this respect, their thinking came close to gender neutrality (Korvajärvi, 2011), although our interviewees did not argue that gender equality had been achieved in society.

The pattern of undoing gender by aiming towards change was a surprise – at least for a feminist. The women aimed to give up their numerical domination and create gender-balanced working environments because they felt that a gender balance would benefit the reputation of their organisation, firm, or scientific discipline. The solution was to recruit more men into female-dominated areas, even when there was a woman who was as well or better qualified. However, this solution might ultimately diminish the power of women experts in these firms and might make women’s numerical domination – and hence their structural domination – irrelevant. The reason was the fear of a bad reputation resulting from women in exceptional positions. The interviewees spoke of this bad reputation as self-evident, without offering further explanations. Contrary to other patterns of doing gender, this assumption was not an individual one. Instead, it was cultural, framed by implicit gender structures and enterprise cultures.

The argument here is in line with Britton (2017): the women could think that their observations of the insignificance of gender substantiated their view that gender was irrelevant. If their perspective included cultural or structural contexts of gender, or at least hints of them, doing gender was more potentially present. However, cultural and structural contexts were not felt to be clear-cut and salient except in the case of a numerical gender balance (or the lack thereof). In spite of the felt irrelevance of and suspicion towards gender, one thing seemed to be clear: for the interviewees, gender was a binary issue – women and men. There were no signs in the interviews

of any 'position of displacement' (Pecis, 2016). The gender binary, a strong reliance on the truth of one's own individual experiences, and a simultaneous denial of and suspicion towards existing orders as gendered imbued the interviewees' patterns of doing and undoing gender.

In particular, ways of doing gender were characterised by uncertainty and indifference. The interviewees were not willing to express, or did not know, how gender related to their working lives. If gender aspects were felt to be vague in a given situation, the women expressed scepticism that gender was genuinely present. Certainty about the presence of gender was related to its non-existence on the one hand, and to numerical gender balance on the other.

The second question, regarding the implications of ways of doing and undoing gender for gender (in)equalities in R&I, relates to gender and affects related to gender (in)equalities. The women were reluctant to speak about the effects of gender at work unless gender was measurable using numbers or their own experience. Otherwise, they felt insecure and hesitant to talk about gender – with the exception of cases of open discrimination, which three of the interviewed had encountered.

Gender was conceived as a potential source of conflict, or as a barrier that would pop up occasionally and prevent women from doing something, particularly from advancing their career in their organisation. The interviewees were successful and had made their way educationally to the top. They were familiar with academia's meritocratic system, which is assumed to be based purely on formal qualifications. Even so the interviewees felt able individually to struggle against inequalities if they suffered personally. In this context, female gender was understood as something negative, entailing feelings of inferiority and insecurity. Talking about gender reawakened feelings that were troublesome and unwanted. However, the interviewees did not tend to position gender inequalities in the past (Gill, Kelan and Scharff, 2017) or at a distance in other workplaces (Korvajärvi, 1998); nor did they blame themselves (Nash and Moore, 2018). Instead, the felt insignificance of gender was tightly bound to the women themselves as individuals who were hesitant to draw on anything other than their own personal experience.

These findings need to be framed with certain limitations concerning first the sample, second the interview method, third the conceptual framework, and fourth the generalisability. First, all interviewees were white women, all but two were of Finnish origin, and a large majority were in heterosexual relationships. Thus, the findings do not include the experiences of non-Finnish women or ethnic minorities, single women, men, or LGBT people working in R&I. Second, it was my starting point that 'any method' can be deployed to study doing gender (West and Zimmerman, 2009: 116). In this case, the findings about doing gender are based on individual interviews that provided interviewees' reflections on, views of and experiences of gender. Thus, the findings do not directly inform us about actual gendered practices, which would become visible through observations, informal discussions, or other forms of ethnographic fieldwork, or through participative action research. In my view, however, observation would not necessarily address the lack of information about actual practices, since intensive knowledge work such as R&I can be – and often is – impossible to observe, thanks to its mobility, indefinite working hours and confidential client contact, as well as the mental work it entails (Karjalainen, Niemistö and Hearn, 2015). I consider the quality of the interviews used here to be rich. However, I also consider that a second round of interviews, focusing on the interviewees' uncertainties, reservations, and public opinions, would shed more light on their relationship with gender issues in R&I work. The views expressed in the interviews discussed in this article reveal more about their overriding and dominant views. Third, existing conceptualisations of 'doing gender' have not explicitly integrated questions of affect. I would suggest that more research and theoretical discussion is needed on the interaction between affects and ways of doing gender. Fourth, the findings do not represent general patterns of doing gender in R&I work among highly educated women. Instead, the findings reveal a variety of the messy logics of 'doing gender' in R&I work in the social and cultural context of Finland, which is often assumed to be favourable to gender equality at work.

On the basis of the analysis, I suggest that the interviewees felt undermined but at the same time accepted their situation. They were resigned to celebrating the country's good reputation while simultaneously doubting and downplaying the significance of gender. While the women did not explicitly acknowledge current gender orders, they downplayed gender in the context of their work in R&I. I think that open discussion about such doubts may move the argument away from individual experiences and towards the cultural and structural orders that maintain constant insecurity. Open reflection on suspicion and indifference may also pave the way for a genuine undoing of gender, that is, a transformation of gender inequalities. The strongly felt egalitarian social atmosphere could provide safe opportunities to share and reflect on this.

This article therefore calls for an analysis of the ways in which doing and undoing gender is situationally specific, and further, the ways in which affects are embedded in the 'socially organized achievements' (West and Zimmerman, 1987) of gender. In addition, and related to my findings, sophisticated further analysis is needed of 'the contemporary common sense on gender' (Kelan, 2018: 106). This entails a thorough analysis of a seemingly dominant gender regime that one might call postfeminist (Utoft, 2020: 126–131, 155), which stresses prevailing assumptions regarding the achievement of gender equality, gender binarity, and the reliance on individual

experience. This kind of analysis is in debt to both interactionist and discursive approaches of ‘doing gender’, but needs to reach beyond them into the changing psychic and social situational conditions of doing gender at work (Scharff, 2016). An analysis of the traces of affective views related to doing gender and self-evident assumptions about gender might pave the way for new contributions to tackle gender inequalities in social contexts and societies that maintain a façade of gender equality.

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The Persistence of Gender Struggles in Nordic Research and Innovation

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ABSTRACT

Despite being renowned for their gender equality, the Nordic countries continue to suffer from persistent inequalities including in research and innovation (R&I) as an employment field. Drawing on interviews conducted between 2017 and 2020 with women and men working in R&I inside and outside of the academy, and on Charles Tilly's (1998) conceptualisations of durable inequalities, the authors find that specific and cumulative gendered disadvantages accompany women's R&I careers at each of the four researcher career stages (doctoral student, postdoc, researcher/lecturer, full professor), in particular through unquestioned informal everyday practices.

Keywords: durable inequality, gender inequality, researcher career stages, research and innovation, informal practices, Nordic countries

INTRODUCTION

The persistence of gender inequalities throughout the western world into the 21st century is well documented in numerous studies and statistics (OECD; SHE Figures) despite the fact that all western countries have national, regional, and local equality legislation, plans, and guidelines that legally enshrine and promote gender equality. This is the case in research and innovation (R&I) as much as in other work contexts. As extensive research from the USA (Acker and Armenti, 2004; Etzkowitz et al., 2000; Ibarra et al., 2013; Winslow and Davis, 2016) and the UK (Gill, 2010; Ahmed, 2012), as well as recent comparative studies from the European Union, have shown (e.g., Murgia and Poggio, 2019), context matters for understanding the dynamics of this persistence, including in more recent and emerging employment fields such as biotechnology, health technology, and Digital Humanities (Cozzens and Thakur, 2014; Evans, 2019; Earhart et al., 2020; Gkiouleka et al., 2018; Griffin, 2019). These fields provide useful examples of the gendered R&I career struggles that are typical under the current regime of academic capitalism (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997; Slaughter et al., 2004).

In this article, we explore the persistence of gender inequalities in R&I as an employment arena, specifically their occurrence in academia throughout three Nordic countries: Finland, Sweden, and Norway. These Nordic countries are of particular interest here because they have consistently topped the charts in both gender equality and innovation.¹ This article focuses particularly on relatively new and emerging employment fields in academia (biotechnology, health technology, and Digital Humanities) and women's careers in these work contexts. Our key research question is: in these ostensibly egalitarian countries, how are women's careers in R&I impacted by persisting inequalities? By exploring these careers, we purposively adopt a qualitative, bottom-up approach, drawing on two sets of interviews conducted in the period 2017 to 2020. Such data provides the rich, in-depth reflections that speak to the mundane everyday experiences of women working in R&I, in ways that cannot be captured by statistics and which provide some unexpected answers regarding the persistence of Nordic R&I workplace inequalities. We, therefore, contribute to a wider understanding of how specific everyday experiences of women working in R&I articulate persistent gender inequalities in academe.

Theoretically, we draw upon Charles Tilly's (1998) *Durable Inequality* to explore the salience (for the Nordic R&I context) of the four mechanisms perpetuating inequality that Tilly identifies – exploitation, opportunity hoarding, emulation, and adaptation. To examine this, we map these mechanisms onto the 4-stage researcher career model that governs the Nordic countries (Scholz et al., 2009: 9): doctoral student; postdoctoral researcher;

¹ See <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2019>, European Innovation Scoreboard, 2019 (accessed 10 July 2020).

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researcher/university lecturer; and research director/full professor. We contribute to the current knowledge of gender inequalities in academe by arguing firstly, that a complex interplay of factors produces the gender inequalities that continue to prevail in Nordic R&I. Secondly, we argue that academic institutions and work communities both co-produce and reinforce these inequalities. Thirdly, we claim that these are particularly evident in unquestioned mundane everyday practices.

We begin with a literature review about gender in R&I, discussing Tilly's theorisation of durable inequalities before outlining the specificities of the 4-stage researcher career model of the Nordic countries. We detail our research methods and materials, then discuss our findings in the light of Tilly's inequality mechanisms. Here, we contribute to our understanding of gender inequalities in academe by suggesting that somewhat different gender inequalities are at play at each of the career stages, and that their interplay contributes to the durable inequalities that accompany women's research careers in the Nordic countries.

GENDER IN R&I: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Gendered careers in R&I take many different forms and are well documented (e.g. Andersson et al., 2012; Lindberg, 2012). Commonly asserting binary differences between women and men, this research covers a broad range of processes, practices, products, and actors, revealing the gendered differentials at play in hiring, promotion, pay, research funding, end-user imaginaries, the conception of innovations, and their execution, and many other dimensions, as described by Joan Acker (2006) in her work on organisations as 'inequality regimes'. Metaphors, such as the glass ceiling, the leaky pipeline, and scissors, have been used to describe the diminishing numbers of women involved in R&I higher up the organisational ladder (Dubois-Shaik et al., 2019). The underlying message is always the same; R&I is associated with the masculine (Ahl, 2004; Andersson et al., 2012; Lindberg, 2012) due to the fact that men typically dominate these domains. Further, innovation is invested with notions of creativity, competitiveness, the aggression to pursue one's aims, and so forth, which are seen culturally as masculine qualities (Berglund and Granat Thorslund, 2012). This puts women at an automatic disadvantage, resulting in them being side-lined, not promoted, not supported, getting less funding, and having to perform more strenuously to gain recognition (Dubois-Shaik et al., 2019). This disadvantage is even greater for women of colour in STEM fields (Williams et al., 2016).

One might expect this situation to be different in countries that top the gender equality charts, such as the Nordic countries. But this, as we shall show, is not the case. Statistics from the USA and Europe indicate a gender paradox, namely: women remain under-represented in the top positions of R&I, in many STEM fields, and private sector R&I, although they represent around 50% of PhD students overall — though not in STEM subjects (SHE Figures, 2018: 23, 26). Significant research has been undertaken regarding the mechanisms that produce this paradox at the level of individuals, organisations and institutions, cultures and societies, and a combination of these levels (e.g., Caprile et al., 2012; Murgia and Poggio, 2019; Gill and Donaghue, 2016). The attitudes and aspirations of individual women have received broad attention (e.g., in European Conferences on Gender Equality in Higher Education, in the *Journal of Gender, Science and Technology*). Many studies focus on top positions (professorships) or the STEM fields, investigating why women do not enter or stay within them, exploring the gendering of recruitment practices (Nielsen, 2016; Van den Brink and Benschop, 2012), excellence, talent, and relative advantages (Salminen Karlsson et al., 2018), networking that influences promotion (Berger et al., 2015; Henry et al., 2020; Nielsen, 2016; Vehviläinen et al., 2010), old and new masculinity cultures in R&I (Lund et al., 2019; Pecis and Priola, 2019), struggles to combine R&I work and care responsibilities (Acker and Armenti, 2004; Thun, 2020), and STEM fields and institutions (Branch, 2016; Rolin and Vainio, 2011; Seron et al., 2018; Tiainen and Berki, 2019). Researchers have further analysed gendered practices in R&I in terms of societal and institutional discourses of gender equality (Thun, 2020; Lätti, 2017), and from the perspective of the marketisation of R&I in neoliberal ideologies and economies, which emphasises the individuality of careers (Blackmore and Sawers, 2015; Gill, 2010; Gill and Donaghue, 2016; Morley and Crossourd, 2016). All these studies demonstrate how persistent gendered inequalities in R&I cause disadvantages for women. These studies frequently focus on the formal processes associated with entering and progressing in R&I. However, as Herschberg et al. (2019) and Husu (2001a; 2001b; 2005) indicate (as we shall demonstrate below), these gendered processes are exercised significantly through informal processes and practices which intersect with and cut across formal ones.

The gendering of R&I is shaped within the formal and informal practices of work organisations and communities of practice (Acker, 2006). The prevailing gender segregation of R&I institutions itself structures those organisations. Work communities in R&I vary from being male-dominated (more than 60% men, found especially in many STEM fields) to female-dominated (more than 60% women, for example in pharmaceutical sector) and mixed-gender communities (for example in the social sciences) (SHE Figures, 2018: 53, 78, 83). The first and last communities of practice often have male-dominated leadership. There is more gender inequality in male-dominated

STEM communities than in mixed-gender and female-dominated communities in European countries; similar inequalities occur in US male-dominated R&I organisations (Case and Richley, 2013).

Gendered disadvantage is mainly investigated through the concept of gender inequality (e.g., Van den Brink and Benschop, 2012) or in terms of gender discrimination. Liisa Husu's (2001a; 2001b) study of Finnish universities observed direct discrimination in breach of the Gender Equality Act, and subtle discrimination in mundane practices that were not always recognised or directly labelled as such. Husu acknowledges that many of the discriminatory patterns she identifies were already highlighted in research in the 1980s (Luukkonen-Gronow and Stolte-Heiskanen, 1983). The implication is that the reality of gendered discrimination has not improved very much, and that subtle forms of discrimination can cause as much harm as direct ones (Jones et al., 2017). Jones et al. and Winslow and Davis (2016) also raise the issue of cumulative disadvantage (see Merton, 1988: 606). They researched women in the US tenure-track system to explore how gender inequality manifests itself across the academic life course. Family and care responsibilities were implicated in this disadvantage (see also Acker and Armenti, 2004).

Neoliberalism and the marketisation of universities (Gill, 2010; Gill and Donaghue, 2016) have led to increasing job precarity through the casualisation of research labour, including a rise in fixed-term contracts in R&I, affecting female researchers in particular (Le Feuvre et al., 2019). LeFeuvre et al. examine different forms of R&I labour markets in relation to early career arrangements and gender equality in six European countries, not including Finland, Norway, or Sweden, the countries we focus on in this article. Although gender inequalities in R&I occur in all six countries and manifest similar gendered subtle discriminatory patterns, for example in recruitment (Herschberg et al., 2019) and in combining family and work in 'greedy' R&I institutions (Krilic et al., 2019), they argue that it is the local institutional contexts that primarily matter in issues of gender inequality in R&I (see also Gatrell, 2011; Lund et al., 2019; Pecis, 2016). Our study thus contributes to knowledge about gender and R&I careers by focusing on the institutional contexts prevailing in the Nordic countries.

European and USA R&I institutions have promoted policies directed at achieving gender equality for decades. Gender equality is integrated into the research frameworks of the European Commission; it is mainstreamed in the policies and even practices in many European universities. For example, all Nordic university employees are covered by gender equality plans (SHE Figures, 2018). Herschberg et al. (2019) note that all members of the recruitment committees in the six European countries they interviewed supported the idea of gender equality in academia on a general level (although failing to do so in practice). There is a well-established discrepancy between the supposedly favourable policies of equality and diversity, and their actual implementation or achievement (Ahmed, 2012; Callerstig, 2014; Mazur, 2017). The Nordic countries have a further, specific problem: they top global gender equality indexes (Gender Equality Index 2019), being described as 'near nirvanas' of gender equality (cf. Lister, 2009). But gender inequalities prevail in R&I throughout these countries, as they do in many others (Holth et al., 2017). However, the high international ranking of the Nordic countries on gender equality indexes makes such inequalities, especially the structural elements and practices that foster them, harder to be recognised and articulated (Thun, 2020; Ylöstalo, 2016). The Nordic version of the gender paradox in R&I (with the underrepresentation of women in top R&I positions and STEM fields) has to develop a gender equality that supposedly already exists (Martinsson et al., 2016: 1).

In considering the connections between R&I labour markets, career path systems, and gender inequality in R&I, one has to remember that the Nordic academic career path models differ from those in Europe and the USA (Le Feuvre et al., 2019) — although the Anglo-American tenure-track system is slowly becoming more common in certain Nordic countries. However, overall researcher career paths in the Nordic countries remain closer to the European Science Foundation 4-stage model. As our data consists of biographical researcher career path accounts and the interviews were almost exclusively conducted with stage 2 to 4 R&I personnel, we, like Winslow and Davis (2016), examine gender struggles throughout the research career stages, but for the Nordic context.

To change male-dominated or masculine structures and cultures (Burke and Major, 2014), we need to understand the underlying assumptions and practices that sustain them. Hence, we utilise Charles Tilly's (1998) conceptualisation of inequality mechanisms to explore women's R&I careers in the Nordic countries. This conceptualisation speaks to our understanding of the constructedness of gendered career opportunities (Burr, 2015). Women's careers are often more disrupted than men's, particularly in the new technology-driven knowledge economies where linear careers have given way to increasingly flexible and parallel careers (Allen et al., 2016; Biese, 2017). These have specific implications for women's careers. What happens to women's careers specifically in the Nordic countries, therefore, remains both a timely and an urgent research question.

DURABLE INEQUALITY

Since we are concerned with the persistent inequalities that frame women's experiences of working in Nordic R&I, we utilise Charles Tilly's (1998) *Durable Inequality* to explore what explanatory power Tilly's inequality

mechanisms have in this context. His volume takes as its starting point the notion that ‘socially organized systems of distinction’ such as class, gender and race operate on the basis of categorical pairs, such as female/male, old/young, and other such binaries (Tilly, 1998: 4). These circulate widely inside and outside of organisations, used by those who ‘control access to value-producing resources [to] solve pressing organizational problems’ such as who to give research funding to when resources are circumscribed, or whom to promote when only one professorship is available (Tilly, 1998: 8). Tilly’s argument is that durable inequality ‘depends heavily on the institutionalization of categorical pairs’ and on their combination with hierarchies (1998, 8: 100). Durable inequality thus rests upon distinctions affected by categorisations that asymmetrically enshrine differences. On the basis of these asymmetrical differentiations, all manner of other differences are legitimated; for instance, differences in status or income, or access to networks and funding. Organisations incorporate categorical distinctions that circulate more broadly in society because this lowers their transaction costs. Categorical inequalities do boundary work in that they create distinctions of inclusion and exclusion. Change occurs when the benefit of that change outweighs the costs of staying within established patterns of inequality.²

Tilly identifies four mechanisms through which durable inequalities are generated and maintained – exploitation, opportunity hoarding, emulation, and adaptation. Exploitation occurs when people command resources from which they benefit whilst excluding those who help to produce those resources (Tilly, 1998: 10). One example of this could be senior staff getting junior staff to conduct research on which the former then base their publications without a proper acknowledgement of the latter’s work. Opportunity hoarding involves people of one categorically bounded network having access to resources that support their network, for example men’s use of ‘old boys’ networks’ to access jobs (Tilly, 1998: 10). Emulation refers to the copying of existing organisational and structural models, meaning that communities replicate certain patterns across different organisational structures. In many university contexts, for example, it is only departments (not centres or other less typical institutional formations) that have representation on faculty and other important decision-making boards. Finally, adaptation refers to ‘the elaboration of daily routines... on the basis of categorically unequal structures’ (Tilly, 1998: 10). Adaptation, in some respects, follows on from emulation — for instance, in the unequal treatment of women compared to their male counterparts, regardless of when they come into the university or at what level. Our intention in this article is to analyse how these four mechanisms play out in the narratives of our informants when analysing persistent inequalities in Nordic R&I.

Although we are drawing on Tilly’s work, we are well aware of the criticisms it has attracted (e.g., Mann, 1999; Morris, 2000), in particular Barbara Laslett’s (2000: 476) contention that ‘in Tilly’s exclusive emphasis on organizations and on categorical relationships, the actor – the human agent – is lost from sight’ However, we understand organisations as bounded but porous entities. They involve human actors through whom direct and indirect exchanges between organisation-extrinsic and organisation-intrinsic worlds take place in complex and non-linear ways. Indeed, we approach the R&I organisations that we investigate, universities, and the private sector, from the perspective of those human agents. In this we do not posit organisations and human agents as discrete and/or incommensurate entities but rather view them as mutually constitutive in respect of their practices. Tilly’s work is valuable for us here because it focuses on an issue that preoccupies us – persistent gender inequalities – and centres on organisations, which for our purposes are R&I institutions. We also find his relational approach (Diani, 2007; Tilly, 2001; Tomaskovic-Devey, 2014; Tomaskovic-Devey et al., 2009) useful as it gestures towards the importance of context (understood as both human and non-human) and structure whilst refusing the individualising logics of contemporary socio-political cultures. Such cultures permeate organisations so thoroughly that even in the face of blatant structural inequalities such as wage differentials, these are not attributed to structural issues requiring collective action but to individual failings (Orgad, 2019). An example of this is Seron et al.’s (2018) account of women’s interpretation of their status within the engineering profession and the attrition rates of women on engineering degree courses. Despite fully recognising their unequal treatment and status, these women had internalised two core values of the engineering culture, meritocracy and individualism, so strongly that they were unable to mount anything but self-criticism against ‘the gendered consequences of engineering professional hegemony’ (Seron et al., 2018: 158). The detrimental effects of this internalisation of individualising discourses of merit, excellence, and choice have also been explored elsewhere (Beddoes and Pawley, 2014; Canetto et al., 2017; Sørensen, 2017). Against such individualising, we welcome Tilly’s focus on systemic and structural inequality mechanisms as a necessary corrective to contemporary work cultures. We now outline the Nordic 4-stage career model.

² Laslett (2000: 476) states that Tilly is ‘unable to address the question of how inequalities can be ameliorated’ but he at least sketches the conditions under which change might occur.

THE 4-STAGE RESEARCH CAREER MODEL: NORDIC VARIATIONS ON A THEME

In 2009 the European Science Foundation proposed a 4-stage researcher career model consisting of stage 1 (doctoral training stage), stage 2 (postdoctoral stage), stage 3 (independent researcher stage) and stage 4 (established researchers: professors, research professors, directors, senior scientists, etc.) (Scholz et al., 2009, 9). Career structures function as hierarchies of professional attainment, involving greater financial rewards, greater degrees of power (over juniors in the profession, within institutions and in the discipline) and reward as one progresses. Researcher careers in Finland, Norway, and Sweden broadly follow this model (but see Siekkinen et al., 2017). However, all three countries also exhibit complex variations on this theme. Automatic advancement from one career stage to the next does not occur; rather, at each stage individuals must apply when posts become available. The moves from stage 2 to 3, and from stage 3 to 4, are tricky. The number of professor posts is low, relatively and in absolute numbers, vacancies are rare, and women represent a minority at Grade A (professor) level (**Table 1**). Thus, as can be seen in other countries, many researchers with high academic competences never progress beyond stage 3 (Grade B).

Table 1. Proportion (%) of women among academic staff by country

	Grade A	Grade B	Grade C	Grade D
EU-28	23.7	40.5	46.4	46.9
Finland	29.4	49.1	50.7	49.0
Norway	27.9	45.6	49.6	57.1
Sweden	25.4	45.8	45.7	49.7

Source: Adapted from SHE Figures 2018, R=Table 6.1, p. 118.

The term ‘grade’ used in **Table 1** broadly maps onto the 4-stage career model: Grade A represents full professors and Grade D people in jobs such as junior researchers who do not yet have a PhD. **Table 1** suggests that the greatest problem in women’s researcher careers is the move from stage 3 (Grade B) to stage 4 (Grade A). However, as our data show, gender inequalities occur at every career stage, with serious consequences for the move from stage 3 to 4.

The 4-stage model’s specifics are somewhat different in Finland, Norway, and Sweden, especially at stages 3 and 4 (**Table 2**).

Table 2. 4-stage research career model in Finland, Norway and Sweden

	Finland	Norway	Sweden
Stage 1 (doctoral students)	Nearly all on fixed-term contracts.	Fixed-term contracts.	Fixed-term contracts.
Stage 2 (postdocs)	Nearly all on fixed-term contracts, mainly external funding.	Nearly all on fixed-term contracts, mainly external funding.	Nearly all on fixed-term contracts, mainly external funding.
Stage 3 (independent researcher; university lecturer)	Researchers: mostly on fixed-term contracts and on external funding. University lecturers: either on fixed-term contracts or on permanent contracts.	Mostly permanent positions.	Researchers: mostly on fixed-term contracts and on external funding. University lecturers: either on fixed-term contracts or on permanent contracts.
Stage 4 (senior researcher, professor, director etc.)	75% on permanent contracts.	Mostly permanent positions.	Mostly permanent positions; mix of internal and external funding.

As **Table 2** shows, stage 3 researcher and university lecturer positions in Finland and Sweden can be either fixed-term or permanent, whilst in Norway they are permanent (see Svalund and Berglund, 2018, for a discussion of fixed-term contracts and their impacts in Sweden and Norway; also on Finland Aarnikoivu et al., 2019). Lecturer positions tend to be permanent, teaching-centred and dependent on internal funding associated with student numbers. Research positions are often fixed-term and externally funded. In Finland and Sweden, the move from stage 3 to stage 4 frequently involves a move from external funding to (partial) university funding (one’s own salary comes fully or partially from internal university funding, but the research group – if the professor runs such a group – would still require external funding). Many researchers become stuck here, experiencing, as we shall discuss, gendered injustices at the point when they should move from one stage to the next.

RESEARCH METHODS: DATA COLLECTION, PARTICIPANTS, AND DATA ANALYSIS

We draw on qualitative research conducted in 2017-2020 to explore why R&I has not followed the general trend in the Nordic countries towards greater gender equality. We discuss the gendered experiential actualities that women and men pursuing careers in R&I reported encountering in their everyday working lives. In doing this, our intention is to start from the data in a qualitative, bottom-up approach as opposed to seeking to provide objective comparisons, either between women and men, or across countries. The two data sets offer rich information in this respect. Our research involved semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with women and men in R&I in Sweden, Finland, and Norway. However, in this article we focus only the women's reported experiences. The questions centred on six topics: 1) their current post; 2) their employment histories; 3) education, specifically technology training; 4) experiences of being mentored; 5) experiences of the role of gender; 6) ways of updating oneself professionally (i.e. how informants learnt about developments in their field). As the Nordic countries have relatively few higher education institutions, and so as to maintain confidentiality, participants' institutions are not named here.³ All except one participant in both data sets were white. This reflects the dominance of white people in Nordic academe, but also the colonial and immigration histories of the Nordic countries.⁴ For the purposes of this article, we draw on two sets of interview data. The first set involved 30 Digital Humanities (DH) practitioners in higher education institutions and officers responsible for DH research programmes in Sweden, Finland, and Norway (16 women and 14 men). Their ages ranged from 29 to 62. Participants were purposively selected through searching the online staff lists on DH websites of five universities in each of the three selected countries, and through searching research funder websites for staff working in funded DH projects. Nine of the DH participants were professors (stage 4), 11 were researchers or university lecturers (stage 3), one was a postdoc (stage 2) and two were PhDs (stage 1). Seven interviewees were technicians, programmers, or similar. The professors had, of course, gone through the previous three stages and talked eloquently about their experiences at those stages. The interviews lasted between 43 and 70 minutes. In addition to the shared six topics, the interviews dealt with technology acceptance within the family and DH as an academic discipline.

The second set of data consisted of 30 career interviews with women working in R&I in health technology fields in Finland, conducted in 2018-2020. The interviewees were found using the snowball technique. All but two had PhDs. Many had multidisciplinary backgrounds, and had undertaken doctoral studies and/or postdoc research in emerging multidisciplinary research areas. The interviewees' ages ranged from 25 to 62. Five were professors (stage 4), nine were senior researchers (stage 3) at universities and research institutes, and three were experts in the Finnish offices of large international firms. Three women had expert jobs in public-sector organisations and seven worked in managerial positions in small Finnish firms. One was a doctoral student and two had started an educational programme in a new field. All but one of the 30 women were interviewed face-to-face in Finnish.⁵ The interviews took 1-2 hours. They were conducted and analysed in Finnish, then translated into English for the purposes of this article. In addition to the shared six topics, they covered the theme of the work-life balance.

All interviews were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This means that intense, repeat readings of each transcribed interview took place to identify core themes that emerged from the data. These identified themes included 'career blocking,' 'derogating women,' 'differences between women and men,' 'employment through networks,' 'exploitation,' and 'female mentors'. They were also re-read separately, utilising Tilly's four mechanisms. The combination of these two processes led to thematic nodes according to certain core themes, including recruitment experiences, experiences of discrimination, work cultures, and employment histories. Overall, we identified four key practices which produced gendered inequality effects on R&I researcher careers: supervision, recruitment, seeking external funding, and networking. These practices articulated forms of exploitation, opportunity hoarding, emulation, and adaptation. They came into play in different ways throughout the four different career stages, as we discuss below.

³ Sweden has 24 HEs able to award third-cycle qualifications (<http://english.uka.se/facts-about-higher-education/higher-education-institutions-heis/list-of-higher-education-institutions-in-sweden.html>); Finland has 14 universities (http://www.studyinfinland.fi/instancedata/prime_product_julkaisu/cimo/embeds/studyinfinlandwwwstructure/100601_Higher_Education_Finland_2016_2017.pdf); and Norway has 9 universities (<https://www.studyinnorway.no/study-in-norway/higher-education-system>) – all accessed 19 June 2018.

⁴ There is no space to explore this further here, but the Nordic countries have had relatively 'late' immigration, from the 1970s, mainly from the 1990s onwards (see Pred, 2000).

⁵ The interviews were carried out by the Nordwit researchers Tiina Suopajarvi and Minna Leinonen.

FINDINGS

Charles Tilly's (1998) four inequality-producing mechanisms – exploitation, opportunity hoarding, emulation, and adaptation – operate at societal, institutional and individual levels in the Nordic countries, but in diverse ways and to different degrees. Tilly argues that 'exploitation and opportunity hoarding favour the installation of categorical inequality, while emulation and adaptation generalize its influence' (1998: 10). In the following we will show that exploitation and opportunity hoarding in various forms were by far the most common mechanisms deployed in R&I institutions. Intra-organisational inequalities come into being through '*emulation*, the copying of established organisational models and/or the transplanting of existing social relations from one setting to another' (Tilly, 1998: 10)

Emulation and Adaptation in R&I Organisations

In the Nordic countries, welfare practices and equality measures have been spread throughout society through emulation. This emulation might suggest that gender equality may readily emerge in R&I as well. But, this rests on the erroneous assumption that the Nordic countries are largely gender equal (Martinsson et al., 2016). Equality before the law is extensively established in the Nordic countries (for example in granting generous parental leave of up to a year). However, this does not mean equality in practice. Thus, although *de jure* men in all Nordic countries can take parental leave, *de facto* only a limited percentage do so, and mostly for a limited period of time (Cederström, 2019).

Nonetheless, the Nordic countries are strongly associated with a public discourse of equality and related institutionalised policies (see Silius, 2002; Gordon, 2002), including institutional gender mainstreaming and gender equality plans which cover practically all staff members in R&I organisations (SHE Figures, Table 5.8). These constitute, in Tilly's terms, adaptations or 'the elaboration of daily routines ... and information gathering... on the basis of categorically unequal structures' (Tilly, 1998: 10). In other words, R&I organisations adapt to broader societal requirements to implement gender equality by creating gender equality plans. For example, these frequently involve gathering data regarding unequal structures such as salary information disaggregated by gender. R&I institutions then produce gender equality plans, but these vary widely and are often vague (see Lätti, 2017; Nielsen, 2014). Many employees do not know about these equality plans (e.g., Gender Equality Barometer 2018: 59), and they are rarely invoked in any way.⁶ Science funding agencies, including European ones, have installed gender equality measures (such as aiming to have equal numbers of women and men on boards and in international reviews) but either content themselves with a 40/60 split (or thereabouts), or do not have any form of sanction if those measures are not adhered to (Husu and Cheveigné, 2010). They promote a myth of equality (see Martinsson et al., 2016) which silences issues of inequality, making claims based on actual experiences of inequality difficult to raise and pursue.

In *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*, Sara Ahmed (2012) discusses the ways in which equality measures, policies, and the public rhetoric on equality can act as non-performative performatives, meaning that the changes these measures and policies are meant to bring about are assumed to have been effected by the very fact of having a policy. In other words: nothing is done because a policy is in place. This then becomes an empty signifier. One might argue that many equality measures constitute empty signifiers of sorts. This is one important reason why gender discrimination in the Nordic countries persists, including within R&I (Callerstig, 2014). The gap between policy and practice, between ideal and on-the-ground experience, and between the formal and the informal is significant (Mazur, 2017).

Opportunity Hoarding and Exploitation at Career Stage 1 (PhD)

At stage 1 (PhD) five issues crystallised the gendered inequalities experienced by our interviewees: the quality of the supervision and mentoring received, sexual harassment, being side-lined in terms of their work or in research project participation, and not being given statutory rights, in particular parental leave. The quality of supervision and mentoring was crucial for PhDs to complete their thesis successfully but, more importantly perhaps, for them to be able to position themselves effectively when entering the next career stage – becoming a postdoc. As Pauliina, a former Finnish PhD, described it:

I never had the feeling that my research really started to fly. I had always been very good at school, at the top until the Masters. Really good. If I had had sophisticated supervision, I could have become an

⁶ The Swedish HE system has a number of equality mechanisms that the institutions invoke (see <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gear/legislative-policy-backgrounds/sweden>) but this does not detract from persistent gendered inequalities within the system, for example around the pay gap.

Academy⁷-funded researcher, but as it did not happen, I experienced continuous difficulties, sometimes also failures. It, of course, was eating away my motivation to stay in the field.

Poor PhD supervision impacted on the interviewees' ability to move from stage 1 to stage 2. This move requires the competence to write successful grant applications, meaning PhDs who had not been mentored in this skill found it hard to compete. As Marika, at the time of the interview working in a private company in Finland, said: 'I continued with the same distress, how can I get the application done, I thought that I should have done the Academy application...despair started to emerge.' This problem was exacerbated if their supervisor had not helped the PhD to establish relevant networks since such postdoc applications often depend on inter/national collaborations.

Whilst the failure to supervise PhDs effectively might, in Tilly's terms, be considered a form of opportunity hoarding in that those who were well supervised were at a significant advantage over those who were not, straightforward exploitation was mainly described in terms of sexual harassment, as well as in terms of being made to do all the work for a professor who then took the credit. Among our interviewees, several reported experiences of (sexual) harassment, bullying, and forms of professional exclusion they had experienced from senior colleagues. Such experiences mostly belonged to the first and sometimes the second stage of researchers' careers. Bullying and sexual harassment by male professors – only in one case by a female professor – were raised by a distinct minority of former PhDs. One Finnish interviewee, Susanna, said:

I lasted longer than the others [other female PhDs], but still he was kind of, I guess in retrospect I would call him sociopath, but I didn't understand it then because I thought this is the way that academia works, that somebody is telling you how shit your work is. So he had his male protégés, so big impact there.

This interviewee brings up a significant point: normally one only undertakes a PhD once, so it is difficult to know what is acceptable workplace behaviour and what is not. In countries with small PhD cohorts, such as the Nordic ones, this can be a particular problem because there are few points of comparison. Although this interviewee, like another one, had not taken this bullying lightly, she said that 'when I left university after my postdoc I was so disillusioned.' Such disillusionment was not uncommon among our female interviewees. Britta (Swedish, director of studies) effectively had her research closed down by the leading male professor in her lab. 'Closed down' here means that she was prevented from continuing her research. This man reportedly 'didn't believe in our results... it was like someone was in the room who made decisions that we didn't know, who we were fighting against...' He had undermined Britta's attempts to gain new research monies. This eventually led to her leaving the DH field. Here, the categorical co-pairing, or imbrication, of gender with status and professional know-how (male-female, senior-junior, experienced-inexperienced) facilitated behaviour that allowed no room for negotiation for the woman in question.

Women such as Britta were likely not to have developed networks in their field. This created professional isolation which then made it easy for them to be side-lined by senior men. Anna, a DH researcher working in Sweden, spoke of her experiences as a PhD student in a DH centre, led by a male professor who had silenced young women: 'we would find it quite difficult to say something, to know where I can say things'. She was fully aware of the gendered hierarchies that prevailed, and said of the two senior males in the centre: 'it was quite clear that... I was not someone they would prioritise.' Experiences of overtly gendered discrimination, exploitation and opportunity hoarding (in favour of males) in the early stages of one's career were thus not uncommon, and could potentially lead to some women's premature abandonment of their research careers, or to them seeking employment in the private R&I sector.

Women's Experiences of Harassment: Exploitation and its Effects

Women's experiences of harassment in R&I took different forms among our interviewees. Sexual harassment as such was not much discussed. Importantly, neither women nor men reported being sexually harassed by women. Nonetheless, quite a few interviewees knew about male-on-female sexual harassment in their research groups and networks, or talked about avoiding actual harassment; as did Sari, a senior researcher in Finland:

A couple of times I've been in a situation that an older male professor has suggested, and then I've seen that that's a kind of dangerous situation, that I don't want to end up here, ... afterwards it's turned out that they've ... given the position to someone else.

Thus, actual harassment or even, as noted here, its avoidance, influenced individual careers, the mundane research work, and the giving and taking of work opportunities. Failure to succumb to harassment would lead to

⁷ 'Academy' here and elsewhere in this text refers to the Academy of Finland, the equivalent of a national research council, and the key research funding body in Finland.

professional exclusion and side-lining, where women found themselves disregarded by the senior males (often professors) who called the shots. Harriet (Finnish, associate professor) talked about the power play her male supervisor engaged in. Despite having also encountered men who 'systematically pushed [her] forward,' her experience in academe was as follows:

the faculty is, professors are almost all male, when I talk about them, they are all men. And the women who are among them, they start behaving like them also. So it's very kind of male... PhD men [male doctoral students] tend to have better academic careers than women, systematically, if you look at the numbers.

Harriet describes not just a masculinist culture in academe, but also how female professors emulate this culture as part of an adaptation to their position.

Opportunity Hoarding at Career Stages 2 and 3 (Postdocs, Researchers): The Vicissitudes of Informal Recruitment and Other Processes

A masculinist culture became particularly prominent at the point of recruitment to research career stages 2 and 3. Here we found strong consistent evidence of opportunity hoarding in favour of men through informal processes, even when formal processes were engaged with. Formal recruitment processes were, in the case of men, effectively disregarded in favour of informal ones that completely bypassed the formal ones. A common experience among the men we interviewed was to be 'handpicked,' as respondent Sven (Swedish, director of DH lab) stated, meaning that they were invited into posts at DH centres or labs by more senior staff, usually males, who hired them even if they had no direct qualifications for such jobs. This constitutes obvious opportunity hoarding: senior men assisting junior men into jobs. Anders, a Finnish digital media scholar, said: 'I've been, so to say, actively recruited to quite a few of the ... positions I've had.' These cases of opportunity hoarding among male researchers were very common in our sample (also, tellingly, a website discussing researcher careers in Norway unambiguously states: 'many jobs are offered through personal contacts, even if they already have been or plan to be advertised'⁸). Some female interviewees working in health technology also reported being recruited through networks, usually by other women. Health technology has large numbers of women so opportunity hoarding among women was possible there. Female DH interviewees did not report such experiences.

If women did manage to move into stage 2 and 3 positions, they had to contend with three issues that dogged their progress: getting external funding, not just for themselves but for the research groups they were expected to establish to move into stage 3; lack of control over their research groups and projects; and issues around parenthood. These issues could become intertwined in complex and opaque ways. Helena, a Finnish researcher working in a university, for example, described this as follows:

After having children, the support that I had had started somehow to diminish. I can't say, is it because I had children or because we started to approach the end of the funding period which meant the start of the survival game. ... They transferred the research lab that I had established with the funding I had secured to another [male] researcher ... Soon after, he was appointed as a professor.

Helena was unable to get any explanation for the process that had occurred:

I never got any answer, and I've spoken to several professors, even confidentially... this is very typical in the academic world, that one never actually finds out...

Such gender discrimination leaves female researchers in a quandary as to what exactly happened, unable to get redress. Women with this experience had a clear sense of gender discrimination and understood it as opportunity hoarding among men, but found it impossible to challenge or resist. Johanna, a Swedish associate professor, for example, described how jobs had been arranged for men by their 'mates': 'they are part of this circle of friends and it makes sense that this person is a professor there, supporting those other friends who are men.' The very fact that this 'makes sense' to Johanna points to the logics of informal unequal arrangements that prevail here, and to a known acceptance of this. These arrangements were, in the Finnish context, exacerbated by the decline in research funding from 2008 onwards (OECD, 2017: 110, 114) which has shaped that R&I context. They point to the persistence of homosocial networks or 'old boys' networks' in academe (Coate and Howson, 2016; Rose, 1989; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2014).

⁸ At <https://www.lifeinnorway.net/researcher-jobs-in-norway/> (accessed 16 May 2020).

Opportunity Hoarding and Parenthood

In the Nordic countries, the drive to promote equality in the workplace has been one factor contributing to the provision of generous public childcare by international standards. But parenthood still works to the detriment of women, since despite the fact of such childcare and of the availability of parental leave for childcare (see also Edlund and Öun, 2016), only a minority of men take such leave and for very limited periods of time (NIKK, 2019: n.p.). This can retard women's careers. Among the women working in bio- and health technology it was evident that women in couples where both partners were equally involved in the childcare provision, had a greater ability to pursue their careers. This was also very clearly coupled with men having a stable, predictable work life with fixed hours, the ability to work from home, and taking a much greater share of the household work. As one Finnish biotech interviewee, Emilia, said: 'Luckily my husband can work from home a lot, that's how it usually goes if a kid is sick or something, my husband works remotely from home then.' Public childcare hours are fixed, even in the Nordic countries, so that the expansion of work beyond conventional working hours is often an issue. The continuing assumption and practice of women as carers produces specific difficulties in the context of R&I work where expectations of flexible hours (= expansion of working time), project and deadline cultures, and the still limited involvement of men in care produce unfavourable conditions for women.

Adaptation and Emulation at Career Stage 4 (Professors, Senior Researchers)

As and when women arrive at stage 4, they have worked through an extensive process of professionalisation, acculturation, selection and adaptation. The women professors in our data shared certain characteristics: they had been mentored, sometimes by other women but also by men; they had had functional roles in academe (i.e., they had been 'good citizens', see Bergeron et al., 2013); they had spent substantial time outside of academe and/or abroad, thus building up inter/national networks, and used these networks to access significant external funding at European Commission level or in other collaborations. They were, nonetheless, the exceptions to the rule.

Once at this stage, women's gender could work in their favour as they were often 'the only one' or 'the token woman' (Kanter, 1977) since there are, relatively speaking, so few female professors (Table 1, Grade A). Being the so-called token woman means that female professors get invited to participate in high-level events precisely because they are women. This might be seen as a form of inverse opportunity hoarding, in Tilly's terms, or as a form of opportunity ascription. As Marta, a Swedish DH lab director, put it: 'I don't get much sleep, because my symbol, my symbolic value is huge, right, so I am a woman, tick, and I am a woman in humanities who deals with tech, tick, so I sit on millions of committees, right? Everywhere where there is an issue of infrastructure, I am there.' Being put in this situation afforded her possibilities for intervention, which she used: 'I use the opportunity, so you know, I am given a voice and so I use [it].' But these opportunities also produced costs. The women were always in the minority. If they supported younger female staff, they also always supported fewer people than men in equivalent positions, simply because only about 30% of professors are women. Like many other interviewees', many of the female professors' work situations were split, involving half appointments in one place and half in another. This generated particular issues that they were able to overcome partly because they had PhDs and postdocs to carry out the research work they had no time for. As Nina, a professor in Linguistics in Sweden, said:

I'm supposed to be sort of professor of [subject] half of the time, and that's obviously not possible (laughs a little)... I don't know, 15% of the time of something, it may be at night, but so, a lot of, a lot of my research gets done by proxies, through my PhD students and my postdocs... I was very lucky to be awarded [a large] grant... but it's now [2017], it was in 2013, and this is a bit of a, it's a sad issue because I haven't really been able to exploit that fully, I mean, under normal circumstances, if you are given a grant of that size, ... you're bought out of admin duties and so on, but because of the nature of the, you know, the directorship of the lab, that sort of hasn't been possible.

In this quote, several conflicting demands come together. This professor has obvious difficulties in conducting research because of the demands that her two main roles make on her. Her research is therefore done 'by proxies'. This she considers 'a sad issue' which points to the fact that under other circumstances she would do that work herself. Larivière (2012) indicates that PhDs in the Arts and Humanities are far less likely to contribute to publications as PhDs, compared to those in fields such as medicine or the natural sciences. In other words, PhDs in the Arts and Humanities are not as commonly involved in research collaborations with their professors as PhDs in some other fields. However, this professor could only get her research done at all if she asked more junior staff to take it on.

Nina, the Swedish female professor cited above, was unable to make use of a significant grant because she was mired in two major roles – being a good university citizen – which curtailed her research opportunities. Her representation of this situation reveals an adaptation to a situation where professors, especially female professors, accommodate unreasonable work conditions and acquiesce to their exploitation. This, in turn, exploits younger

staff (docs, postdocs) who can end up doing the research work, or other academic help, for them, as Sarah Wall (2008) also points out. Interestingly, however, this was a complaint usually levelled at male professors rather than female ones. As Anna, a female lecturer in Sweden, angrily reflecting on her time as a PhD student, said: ‘organising educational programs with men has been the same... I did ALL the donkey work, and that makes sense because I was younger, I guess. But there comes a time in which you actually want to ... say, “I’m not gonna sit and write this for you.”’ Unlike some of the high-flying women in Orgad’s (2019) research, for example, who left their careers because of the unreasonable work-life demands placed upon them and on their partners but read their decision in terms of personal pathology rather than structural inequalities, Anna was very aware of the gender injustices that accompanied her situation. She maintained that her best projects had been with women because ‘there was a clear division of labour. Plain and simple. That’s not always the case with men. Especially if the man is... higher in sort of hierarchy. They dump on you....’ In the interplay between seniority and gender, unequal treatment occurred.

DISCUSSION

Tilly’s inequality-producing mechanisms, especially opportunity hoarding and exploitation, dominated the durable inequality experiences which our interviewees reported at all researcher career stages. Opportunity hoarding and exploitation were evident throughout the R&I structures, at institutional as well as individual levels, as Murgia and Poggio’s work (2019) also suggests, though they do not name it in such terms. One might argue that the current academic system which requires researchers to give their all, including in precarious conditions where the notion of career progression is a process of gradual funnelling out, is itself highly exploitative, in particular at stage 3 where female researchers might acquire competitive funding and build a research group, only to see these given to other male researchers without explanation or redress — as was the case with several of our interviewees. The problematics of how institutions and individuals respond to experiences of unequal treatment in R&I requires more research. Much of the rest of our interviewees’ on-the-ground experience showed a high degree of acceptance of practices that directly contravened equal opportunities legislation, including in the context of recruitment, where parallel worlds opened up as opportunity hoarding reigned, even when formal processes were undertaken. Our findings in this respect contribute to Husu’s (2001a; 2001b; 2005) in pointing to unequal treatment occurring not within but outside of or in parallel to a formal process. All of this suggests that, without rooting out such practices, tinkering with formal processes to achieve greater equality will at best have limited effects.

Exploitation and opportunity hoarding became evident in how the supervision and mentoring of PhDs was conducted, which either enabled PhDs to take the next step in their career through proper professional preparation, including how to write effective grant proposals or, on the contrary, as happened to our female interviewees, served to retard their competences, undermine their academic confidence, and to side-line them. It continued in the recruitment practices through stages 2 and 3, and was evident in how researchers’ achievements (such as gaining funding and building research groups) were dealt with in obviously gendered ways. This also showed in matters of networking, as much literature already testifies, that women were mostly not introduced to, or have, sustained professional networks.

Once women became professors, they had been thoroughly acculturated into the mundane practices of inequality in the everyday of R&I and were sometimes perceived as acting like men in that context. Part of this adaptation related to their position was turning their situation — often being the only woman — to their advantage. However, this also came at the considerable cost of overworking (cf. Britton, 2017: 18-20) and having too many demands made on them, factors that characterise contemporary research work cultures. This points to R&I’s and institutions’ exploitative practices (Gill, 2010). Female professors talked about mentoring younger female colleagues, but since they themselves are always in a significant minority, they can achieve only a limited elevator effect through these practices.

This also means that the advantages that R&I researchers in the Nordic countries appear to enjoy (such as generous parental leave and public childcare provision) will not, by themselves, change the durable inequalities that persist in the inequality-promoting informal practices found within R&I organisations. Overall, gender equality in the Nordic R&I emerges as a field of continuing struggle, advocated as an ideal but not enacted in practice in the ways one might hope for. The supposedly transparent and democratic work culture of the Nordic countries (Götz and Marklund, 2019) serves to contribute to the durable inequality which prevails through installing formal processes that act as non-performative performatives (Ahmed, 2012; Mazur, 2017), whilst openly practising parallel informal processes that facilitate gendered opportunity hoarding and exploitation.

In line with neoliberal ideologies, researchers at all stages adapt to the inequalities they encounter and, despite being able to name these accurately, seek their individual solutions. In the case of young female researchers this often means leaving academe after the PhD or postdoc stage and moving to R&I work in the private sector, particularly if parenthood comes into play. Those who survive do so, interestingly, either by being mentored and succeeding in gaining research funding, by searching for new opportunities in other organisations, or (as was the

case with the women who eventually made it to the professor stage and for some at stage 3) by spending significant time abroad, building international networks that supported and sustained them in their search for recognition.

CONCLUSION

Charles Tilly's inequality mechanisms retain their salience, even in the Nordic countries in the 21st century. Our study examined women's R&I careers in these countries based on the four-stage career model that dominates European higher education. It shows how each of these four career stages has certain specificities regarding the persistent gender inequalities that accompany them. Altogether it is clear that a wide variety of durable gender inequalities (as documented in the existing literature on gender struggles in research and innovation) is still to be found in contemporary R&I careers today, notably in the most gender equal parts of the world which have already advanced gender equality policies: the Nordic countries. This speaks to the limited progress that has been made regarding the elimination of these inequalities and raises questions about the salience of some of the instruments used to measure gender equality. It also suggests that topping the gender equality charts does not mean that gender equality has been achieved. Further research might be required to understand what it does mean.

Our research shows that persistent gender inequalities occur within R&I institutions operating in a system of academic capitalism which is highly exploitative of its labour force, characterised by excessive workloads, the continuous search for competitive funding, insecure employment, and unreasonable demands of multi-tasking (Blackmore and Sawers, 2015; Gill and Donaghue, 2016; Morley and Crossourd, 2016). Given this scenario, we contribute specifically to knowledge of the *gendered* effects of these career conditions. We also contribute by showing that Tilly's categories for framing the persistence of gender inequalities continue to hold in contemporary R&I in the Nordic countries, enabling us to recognise the complex dynamics of persistent gender inequalities within this structural framework. We argue that although policies for gender equality exist in all the Nordic countries and are widely emulated in Nordic R&I, the adaptation of these into the actual practices within these institutions and organisations remains at best partial (cf. Callerstig, 2014). Instead, informal, highly gendered practices take precedence. Here, we contribute to our understanding of these informal practices by providing granular accounts of practices not commonly discussed, such as the mentoring of PhDs that enables them to write successful grant applications for the next stage of their career.

Van den Brink and Benschop's (2011; 2012) accounts of Dutch appointment practices regarding full professorships and Nielsen's (2016) of Danish appointment practices already pinpoint certain ways in which female applicants for these positions are either not encouraged to apply or are assessed in a discriminatory fashion. Herschberg et al. (2019) examine these processes for early R&I careers. We, however, show that in the Nordic countries there are informal processes throughout the academic career which completely bypass the formal processes. The direct invitation of junior male scholars into posts by senior male colleagues outside of any application process is one such example. Our findings show that each of the stages has specific gendered problems, first related to supervision and harassment, and then increasingly in relation to recruitment and competitive funding processes. A culture of acquiescence accompanying unequal treatment explains how opportunity hoarding becomes possible. It is relatively easy to exercise this, relative to those in an asymmetrical power/status relation to oneself when there is little challenge to the non-observance of equality prescriptions.

A generous childcare and parental leave system is in place, which all parents in our data use. Although this does not make parenting gender equal, it could potentially have significant effects on women's opportunities in R&I work, at least in the early career stages, if R&I institutions themselves did not exercise informal discriminatory practices (cf. Lund et al., 2019; Thun, 2020). Childcare provision as such was not regarded as discriminatory, but R&I institutions' decisions to move projects and research centres to other researchers, usually men, when women were on parental leave, for example, was. We had several examples of this in our study. This makes the tinkering with formal practices to promote gender equality which many studies focus on ineffective if such informal practices are not rooted out (cf. Van den Brink and Benschop, 2012).

Exploitation goes together with opportunity hoarding in R&I. Researchers and institutions perform opportunity hoarding to secure resources and opportunities along gendered lines: men tend to favour other men by supervising and mentoring them carefully, supporting their funding applications and inviting them into their networks, whilst frequently leaving women with less supervision and support, and often also quite simply sidelining them (cf. Husu, 2001a). Gender equality and transparency in recruitment procedures were clearly violated through parallel informal processes which favour men and were widely accepted.

R&I institutions and organisations hence play a major role in sustaining gender inequalities, and our analysis shows how this happens. If we had only looked at the SHE Figures (Table 1), valuable as they are, we would have concluded that there is a major problem and drop in women's numbers between stages 3 and 4. Instead, we have shown that gender disadvantages start piling up from the stage 1 and continue throughout. This confirms what Liisa Husu (2001a; 2001b: 204) found for academic women in Finland already, 20 years ago. Winslow and Davis

(2016) recognised such comparable cumulative disadvantage in women's tenure track careers in the US. Our study examines women R&I careers in Nordic four-stage research careers which differs from the US model, and yet, shows a similar cumulative effect.

Is all this specific to the Nordic countries? To some extent. The well-established childcare and parental leave system, for example, supports women in their R&I careers but R&I institutions fail them. We argue that the dynamics of durable inequality that we found using Tilly's four categories, and exploitation and opportunity hoarding in particular, are a surprise in connection with the Nordic countries and hold more broadly. Much more research needs to be undertaken on the informal everyday activities that sustain gender inequality in R&I and its specificities in different fields, including in the Nordic countries.

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Prim 'A' Geniture: Gender Bias and Daughter Successors of Entrepreneurial Family Businesses

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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurs establishing businesses from research and innovation eventually must consider the succession of their firms. Often the enterprise is passed to a family member to continue the vision and legacy of the entrepreneurial founder. While typically the norm of primogeniture dictates that the eldest son is the recipient, today, with changing societal attitudes toward women's leadership, daughters often find themselves as the firm leader. While some daughters report advantages, others experience significant gender bias in the successor-leader role. Using a critical realist methodology, this exploratory study used interviews from three daughters who were either the successor-leader or were in the process of becoming the successor-leader of a business founded by their father to identify mechanisms within the family, the family business and societal social structures that caused them to experience gender bias. Marxist feminist notions of patriarchy and its roots within the family structure were applied as an *a priori* theory to identify potential mechanisms that cause gender bias. While this 'triple patriarchy' was expected to explain the cause of gender bias, the data suggest that when daughter successors receive validation by their father, any mechanisms that may have caused gender bias are counteracted by others that enable a daughter to be accepted as the successor-leader.

Keywords: gender bias, critical realism, Marxist feminism, family business, daughter succession

INTRODUCTION

Research and innovation efforts often become commercialised as business endeavours (Baldwin et al., 2006). While it is the entrepreneur-founder who is typically associated with the enterprise, the entrepreneur's family often plays a critical role throughout its development (Anderson et al., 2005; Dyer and Handler, 1994). Early life experiences in the business founder's family of origin, family involvement in the start-up activities, employment of family members in the firm, and family members' involvement in ownership and management succession are all points where entrepreneurship and family often merge (Dyer and Handler, 1994). This intimate connection between family and business makes many endeavours based on research and innovation a family business. In all businesses, who will take over the firm's ownership and leadership must eventually be considered (Barnes and Hershon, 1989). While some businesses are sold (Martin, 2001) or dissolved, others are passed to a family member (Handler, 1994; Martin, 2001; Nordqvist et al., 2013; Wang, 2010). Our interest is in this latter connection, the point at which an entrepreneur passes their enterprise to the next generation to continue their vision and legacy.

When deciding which family member will continue the enterprise, most families follow the norm of primogeniture, which prescribes that a son, typically the eldest, is the natural successor of the family business (Allen and Langowitz, 2013; Constantinidis and Nelson, 2010; Dumas, 1989, 1998; Nelson and Constantinidis, 2017; Wang, 2010). However, with changing societal norms toward the acceptance of women as business leaders (Ahrens et al., 2015; Constantinidis and Nelson, 2010), prim 'a' geniture sees daughters more often being appointed as leaders of family firms (Cole, 1997; Constantinidis and Nelson, 2009; Dumas, 1989, 1998; Humphreys, 2013; Smythe and Sardeshmukh, 2013). While some daughters report advantages to leading their family business (Nelson and Constantinidis, 2017; Salganicoff, 1990), others experience considerable challenges, often stemming from

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gender bias (e.g., Dumas, 1989; Glover, 2014; Nelson and Constantinidis, 2017; Vera and Dean, 2005; Wang, 2010). With daughters expected increasingly to be part of the generational transfer of family businesses (Nelson and Constantinidis, 2017), it is essential to understand why they experience gender bias and, in doing so, whether and how the gender bias can be eliminated.

The cause of gender bias against daughter successors as leaders of the family firm is an under-researched area. Some research (e.g., Dumas, 1989; Haberman and Danes, 2007; Wang, 2010) suggests that primogeniture may be important. For example, when daughters are excluded from consideration as successors at the outset of the succession process, they are often unprepared for assuming the leader role (Dumas, 1989). This exclusion, in turn, contributes to the belief that the only appropriate head of the family business is a son. Other research (e.g., Constantinidis and Nelson, 2009; Hollander and Bukowitz, 1990; Salganicoff, 1990; Vera and Dean, 2005; Wang, 2010) suggests that expectations about the role of women in the family and stereotypes about women's leadership ability (Eagly, 2003; Eagly and Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2001, 2012; Schein, 2001) may lead to gender bias. However, none of these explanations considers how certain social structures may cause or counteract gender bias when daughters become leaders of their family firms. We propose, via this exploratory study, that mechanisms within the social structures of the family, the family business and society may play an important role.

Framing our study within a Marxist feminist theoretical perspective, we suggest that daughter successors experience 'triple patriarchy' whereby patriarchy (i.e., men's domination over women) embedded in the family structure, society and the organisational structure causes daughters to experience gender bias when they take over leadership from their entrepreneurial fathers. While recognising that class is an integral part of a Marxist feminist perspective, our primary focus is on Marxist feminist notions of patriarchy and its roots within the heteronormative family structure and the division of labour within the structure, in other words, how gender roles within the heteronormative family are transferred to the family business and how this transference produces and reproduces patriarchy within the organisation.

Discussed in detail in the methodology section of this paper, a critical realist approach recognises that pre-existing social structures and mechanisms within social structures cause events, such as events of gender bias, that individuals experience. However, these mechanisms are not immediately identifiable because they exist deep within the three levels of social reality: the empirical, the actual and the real (Sayer, 2010). By applying a critical realist approach and its method of analysis referred to as 'retroduction' (Sayer, 2010), it may be possible to identify mechanisms at the level of the real that either cause or counteract events of gender bias observable at either the empirical or actual level of reality. We use semi-structured interviews to gather data from three daughters who inherited or are in the process of inheriting the successor-leader role from their father entrepreneur. We then use the critical realist process of retroduction to analyse the data to uncover the mechanisms within the family, society and the family business social structures that may cause or counteract gender biases against daughters when they become the family business successor-leaders.

With this exploratory study, our contributions are three-fold. First, we add a gender lens to the literature on the experiences of daughter successors in the leader role, a neglected area in entrepreneurial and family business literature. Second, we demonstrate how Marxist feminist theory and its notions of patriarchy may be applied to understand why daughters experience gender bias as leaders of their family firms. Finally, we use a critical realist approach to discover how mechanisms within the social structures of the family, society and the family business may cause gender bias and whether they can be altered or counteracted to eliminate the gender bias that daughter successor-leaders experience.

We begin by discussing what a family business is and the notion of 'familiness'. Next, we consider patriarchy as understood within Marxist feminist theory and how it influences gender bias against women in business and leadership positions. That discussion is followed by a brief review of the research focused on the challenges that daughters experience in the leader role and possible reasons for gender biases. We then move to an overview of critical realism and how retroduction will be used to uncover mechanisms that either cause or counteract gender bias against daughter successor-leaders. Next, we outline our research methodology, present the succession stories of three daughter successor-leaders, and analyse their stories. Because our focus is the effect of patriarchal influences on daughter successors and how it is influenced by heteronormative family structures, daughters from non-traditional and non-heterosexual families were excluded as participants. After discussing our results, we conclude with insights into how mechanisms that cause gender bias are counteracted by others to eliminate bias.

FAMILY BUSINESS AND FAMILINESS

While heteronormative family businesses have been described as a quaint relic or an ideological icon that 'combines motherhood and apple pie with entrepreneurial drive' (Aronoff and Ward, 1995: 121), practically, they are something quite different. First, family businesses are the oldest and most widespread organisations in the world (Aronoff and Ward, 1995), ranging in size from the 'mom and pop' corner store to some of the largest

organisations in the world (EY and University of St. Gallen, 2019). They are also critical to the global economy, generating between 70 and 90 percent of annual global gross domestic products (GDP) and creating up to 80 percent of jobs in most countries worldwide (De Massis et al., 2018). Family businesses are also the primary structure through which entrepreneurs commercialise research and innovation efforts, with families involved throughout the life of the entrepreneurial endeavour (Dyer and Handler, 1994).

Despite their prevalence, there is no one definition of the family business (Chua et al., 1999). Structural definitions consider the amount of control held by a family (Villalonga and Amit, 2006), while behavioural definitions focus on the role of the family in determining the vision and control mechanisms used in the firm coupled with an intention that the business will survive intergenerationally (Chrisman et al., 2003; Ward, 2011). Dual approaches argue that both structure and behaviour are essential (Litz, 1995; Zellweger et al., 2012). For our research, we adopt a dual approach and consider the family business as an organisation where ownership and control are concentrated in one family, and the daughter successor received these elements due to an intentional intergenerational transfer.

The connection between the family and the business means that family businesses are strongly influenced by the family (Chua et al., 1999; Sharma, 2004). As McCollom notes, 'when one looks at a family firm, one is really looking at the interaction of two complex social systems' (1990: 251). Habbershon and Williams use the term 'familiness' to describe 'the unique bundle of resources a particular firm has because of the interaction between the family, its individual members, and the business' (1999: 11). Or, as Gherardi and Perrotta note, 'the intertwining of family and business is a defining characteristic of family business' (2016: 30). The entwined relationship of the family and the business means that family businesses are affected by the family's culture and values (Distelberg and Sorenson, 2009; Hollander and Bukowitz, 1990; Litz, 1995), with some research suggesting a family's notion about gender roles within the family may influence expectations of gender roles within the family firm (Hollander and Bukowitz, 1990). With this in mind, we now explore our theoretical framework built on Marxist feminism and triple patriarchy.

MARXIST FEMINISM AND PATRIARCHY

The influence of the family structure in perpetuating patriarchy is central to our application of Marxist theory (Firestone, 2003; Salganicoff, 1990; Walby, 1990). According to Marxist feminist theory, men's domination of women is caused, at least in part, by the evolution of the family structure and the delineation of roles within the household as it existed historically within a capitalist system (Firestone, 2003; Walby, 1990). As Salganicoff explains:

[During the Industrial Revolution] home and work became geographically separate places for the first time; with this change came an increased segregation of roles based on gender. Women were confined to the house and the caring of children (...) As men working outside the home used their wages to buy goods no longer made at home, their role became increasingly circumscribed to that of provider. As this occurred, the woman's role became that of caretaker; she gave the necessary nurturance and sustenance without pay. The unfortunate result was that cash came to represent power, and women's work was devalued (1990: 129).

Even today, private (Walby, 1990) or familial patriarchy is perpetuated due to various socialisation processes that are passed down from generation to generation, establishing and supporting gender roles within the family (Sanderson, 2001). From its roots within the family, patriarchy was broadened to the public sphere, resulting in the public (Walby, 1990) or societal domination of men over women (Hartmann, 1976; Lerner, 1986; Millett, 2016; Walby, 1990). In turn, this societal patriarchy influences the expectation that a man should be the organisational leader (Eagly and Karau, 2002) and that gender bias is inherent to many organisational social structures (Kanter, 1977). In the family business context, these expectations are likely more acute as the leader is literally the patriarch of both the family and the business. Given the intimate connection between the family and business, we consider the combination of familial, societal and organisational patriarchy as triple patriarchy; the patriarchy perpetuated by each of these three social structures causes or at least contributes to the gender bias that many daughters experience when they become the leader of their family business.

DAUGHTERS AND FAMILY BUSINESS SUCCESSION LITERATURE

In line with the slow but increasing acceptance of women leaders (Akhmedova et al., 2019; Constantinidis and Nelson, 2009; Kubu, 2018), more daughters are becoming successors of their family firms (Constantinidis & Nelson, 2009). However, until recently, most family business research was genderless (Dumas, 1989; Humphreys, 2013; Wang, 2010) or based on the assumption that both sons and daughters have similar experiences in the

successor-leader role (Dumas, 1989; Nelson and Constantinidis, 2017). Reviewing the succession literature with a gendered lens, we see that being a daughter successor has both advantages and disadvantages. For example, Salganicoff (1990) found that daughters working in the family firm enjoy both the flexibility to raise a family and improved job security. Family businesses also offer opportunities for daughters to hold positions and have incomes better than those of women in non-family firms. Indeed, the family business is where women have a real opportunity to reach the highest positions in an organisation (Salganicoff, 1990).

Other research suggests that many daughter successors face extraordinary challenges (e.g., Constantinidis and Nelson, 2009; Vera and Dean, 2005), with one of the primary challenges being primogeniture (Dumas, 1989; Hollander and Bukowitz, 1990; Wang, 2010). Primogeniture is a societal norm that the eldest son inherits the role of family leader, the family property, and in the case of family businesses, the role of successor (Aldamiz-Echevarría et al., 2017; Cole, 1997; Dumas, 1989, 1998; Wang, 2010). Primogeniture occurs globally, across cultures, and is an implicit rule that deliberately excludes daughters as successors of the family business (Constantinidis and Nelson, 2009; Dumas, 1992; Humphreys, 2013; Martinez Jimenez, 2009; Nelson and Constantinidis, 2017).

Several authors (e.g., Aldamiz-Echevarría et al., 2017; Dumas, 1989; Glover, 2014; Haberman and Danes, 2007; Keating and Little, 1997; Martinez Jimenez, 2009; Wang, 2010) confirm that gender is often the primary factor when choosing a successor, with sons preferred and daughters seldom considered as successors of the family business. Indeed, primogeniture can lead some families to go to great lengths to avoid passing the family business to a daughter, including appointing a less-qualified son-in-law as the business leader (Lee et al., 2003), selling the business, or even, adopting a grown man to become the 'son' to take on the leader role (Mehrotra et al., 2013). Primogeniture also means that daughters are typically not expected to become the family business successor and, therefore, often miss out on the important experience, training, and social support necessary to assume the leader role (Dumas, 1989; Haberman and Danes, 2007). Without these elements, the perception of a daughter's competence to carry out the leader role is diminished, and daughters are met with scepticism about their leadership abilities. This scepticism can come from both family members (Galiano and Vinturella, 1995; Wang, 2010) and stakeholders within the business (Wang, 2010).

Another common challenge is reconciling the role of successor-leader with family-based expectations of the roles of women in the family and societal-based expectations of the roles of women in business (Constantinidis and Nelson, 2009). Dumas (1989) reported that daughter successors often experience role conflict between acting as the independent manager of the business and the role of 'daddy's little girl,' which stresses her fragile and defenceless position within the family. Daughter successors also face difficulties integrating the role of mother with the role of the leader of the family business (Salganicoff, 1990; Vera and Dean, 2005; Wang, 2010). As Salganicoff found, daughters often receive conflicting messages such as 'dedicate yourself fully to the business, but give the family children,' and 'be independent and autonomous and behave like a businessman but be dependent, take care of the family, and behave like a mother' (1990: 133). Cole (1997) confirmed this double messaging, noting that parents sometimes push daughters into producing grandchildren yet complain if the daughter neglects the business.

Several authors have specifically identified gender biases as a challenge (e.g., Cole, 1997; Dumas, 1989; Parada and Dawson, 2017; Salganicoff, 1990; Vera and Dean, 2005; Wang, 2010). Wang (2010) observes that in family businesses, the interaction of macro factors such as societal and cultural attitudes toward women, and micro factors such as the individual and family, leads to stereotyping and discrimination against the daughter. As Dumas notes, 'families need to recognize a daughter's potential, however, this may require some persistence, considering that the limited view of the daughter's potential is embedded in societal and familial norms' (1989: 43). Indeed, many daughters face an uphill battle against familial and societal attitudes that they should be at home caring for the patriarchal entrepreneur's grandchildren rather than leading his business.

In sum, while the role of the successor of a family business can be rewarding for daughters, many experience challenges based on gender bias throughout the succession process (Cole, 1997; Dumas, 1989; Parada and Dawson, 2017; Salganicoff, 1990; Vera and Dean, 2005; Wang, 2010). While some authors (e.g., Dumas, 1998; Wang, 2010) have offered suggestions as to why gender biases occur, the cause of gender biases against daughter successors has seldom been the subject of empirical analysis. In this research initiative, we seek to explore the mechanisms operating within the family, society and the family business structures that may cause gender bias against daughter successors taking on the successor-leader role.

METHODOLOGY

We used a critical realist methodology to identify the mechanisms that may cause or counteract gender bias against daughter successor-leaders. Critical realism explains the relationship between social structures and human action and how social structures affect the world in which humans exist (Sayer, 2010). Within these social structures are powers or liabilities or 'mechanisms' (Sayer, 2010) that cause events that individuals experience. Because of the

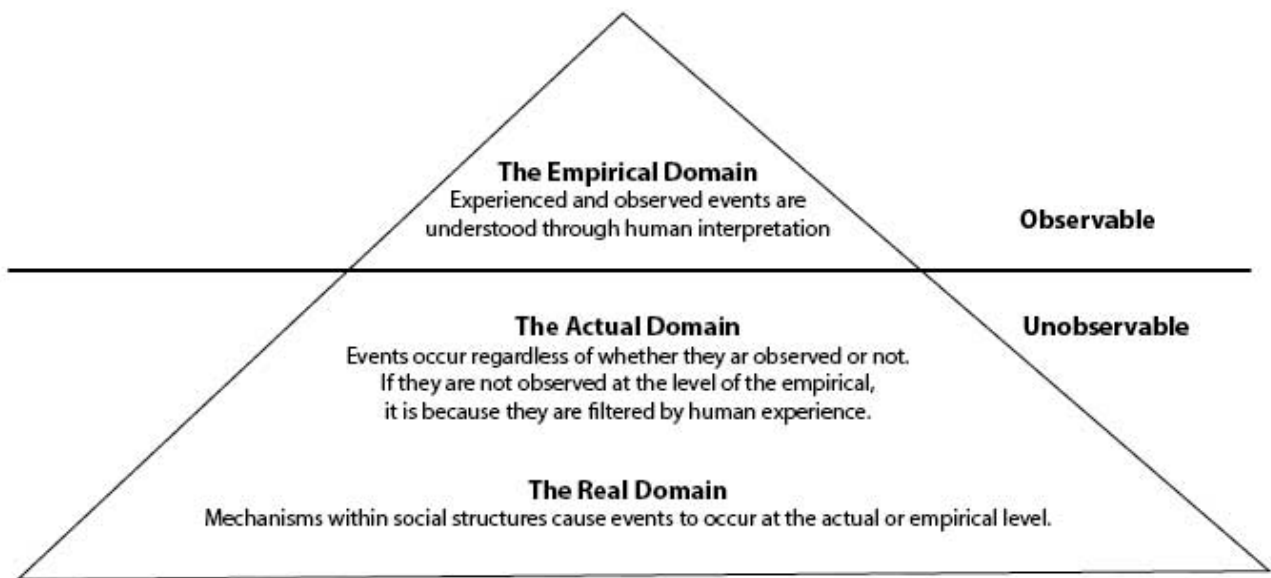


Figure 1. The three domains of reality

relationship between social structures and human awareness of them, critical realists consider the social world as having depth and that it can be understood as existing within three layers or domains of reality: the empirical, the actual, and the real (Bhaskar, 2013). The first domain, the empirical, is the world of the human experience of events (Sayer, 2010). Observations, perceptions, and sensations of reality exist within this domain (Leca and Naccache, 2006). At this empirical level, events are perceivable by both the actors who are part of a particular phenomenon and the researcher investigating it (Hu, 2018). However, events perceived by actors at this level of reality are always mediated through the filter of human experience and interpretation. Therefore, what is perceived (or not perceived) may not reveal what is actually occurring and to reveal what is actually occurring, the middle level of reality must be accessed (Fletcher, 2017).

The second or middle domain is the domain of the actual. Events happen at this level whether or not they are experienced or interpreted by humans. Since humans do not interpret events at this level of reality (Fletcher, 2017), they are often different from those observed within the empirical domain (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000; Danermark et al., 2019; Fletcher, 2017). In other words, events can occur independently of the experience and perception that actors may have of them (Bhaskar, 2013). They are only transferred into the empirical domain when identified by individuals (i.e., human agency) and transformed into experience (Bhaskar, 2013).

The third domain is the domain of the real. This domain comprises social structures that contain mechanisms that generate events (Bhaskar, 2013). It is the aim of critical realism to identify and understand these causative mechanisms (Sayer, 2010). However, while events occur due to the enactment of causal powers, they sometimes act transfactually such that they are not observed or do not occur as expected (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000). This is due to one or more other causal mechanisms that counteract or hide their effects (Wynn and Williams, 2012). Fletcher (2017) describes the three levels of social reality as being like an iceberg - only a small portion is observable, and much of what makes up social reality lies below the surface. This is illustrated in [Figure 1](#)¹.

One of the key tenets of critical realism is that human action is both enabled and constrained by pre-existing social structures independent of humans and their interpretation (Sayer, 2010). Furthermore, these social structures tend to be enduring as they are unconsciously reproduced by humans. However, in some cases, human agency has the power to change some of these structures (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000)².

Critical realists also understand that causal mechanisms within social structures are not always observable, are not always activated, or are counteracted by other mechanisms (i.e. they act transfactually) (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000; Bhaskar, 2013; McAvoy and Butler, 2018; Wynn and Williams, 2012). This is because the mechanisms that influence human behaviour exist in an open system of reality and operate in isolation from another. In other words, depending on the circumstance, the same mechanism may produce different events, and

¹ Adapted from Fletcher, A. J. (2017). Applying Critical Realism in Qualitative Research: Methodology Meets Method. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 20(2), 181–194. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2016.1144401>

² This is referred to as the Transformational Model of Social Activity (TMSA) by Bhaskar, R. (2014). *The Possibility of Naturalism: A Philosophical Critique of the Contemporary Human Sciences* (4th ed.). London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315756332>.

conversely, the same event may have different causes (Sayer, 2010). As will be highlighted later in our discussion of the findings, we believe that certain mechanisms may counteract the mechanisms that would typically cause daughters to experience gender bias when they become the successor-leader of their family firm.

Data Collection

Interview data were collected from three daughter participants in November of 2020. Each of the daughters inherited or was in the process of inheriting the leadership of the family business from their father entrepreneur. The companies were small or medium-sized³ private companies and operated in the areas of engineering and technology in Canada. Engineering and technology-based businesses were chosen due to their association with research and innovation efforts. The participants were recruited through the business contacts of the first author. The same author interviewed all of the participants, and the one-hour interviews took place using video conferencing. Semi-structured questions⁴ were developed by examining the literature on daughter succession, as presented earlier in our literature review. The responses of the participants were recorded and transcribed using the iPhone app Otter.

Data Analysis

To analyse the data, we used retroduction (Sayer, 2010). Retroduction enables a researcher to move between the three domains of reality to discover the mechanisms that may cause events to occur. Its aim is to go beyond simply recognising that something produces change to an understanding of what it is about the object that causes or enables the change (Sayer, 2010). In other words, retroduction enables the identification of causal mechanisms within social structures that may result in the empirical trends observed (Bhaskar, 2013). To be clear, causal mechanisms in critical realism are not the traditional positivist understandings of cause-and-effect that can be objectively measured. Instead, they are the inherent properties of an object or social structure that cause events to occur (Fletcher, 2017).

The retroduction process begins with the identification of demi-regularities (Fletcher, 2017). Demi-regularities are themes or patterns revealed in the empirical data worthy of further analysis to discover their causation (Bhaskar, 2013). Demi-regularities can be identified through qualitative data coding (Fletcher, 2017). Therefore, each of the daughters' succession stories was coded according to themes that emerged from the literature review, the Marxist feminist theoretical framework, and several critical realist concepts. The data was also analysed using NVivo software, which revealed additional demi-regularities. After the initial coding, the data was re-coded and broadly categorised as either structure or agency, consistent with a critical realist ontology. Examples of social structures stemming from Marxist feminist theory included the family, the family business and society. Examples of agency included expectations associated with women in leadership and gender roles within the family. While the first author coded the data, themes revealed by the data were reviewed by the other authors to control for bias.

Retroduction also involves 'abduction' or the redescription of the empirical data using theoretical concepts (Fletcher, 2017: 8). Some researchers (such as Bhaskar, 2013; McAvoy and Butler, 2018) suggest using *a priori* theory for this process. Initial theory enables a deeper analysis to confirm, elaborate or reject the theory, allowing a new or better explanation of reality (Fletcher, 2017). In our case, we applied Marxist feminist theory and its notion of patriarchy to understand how social structures such as the family, the family business and society may harbour mechanisms that cause gender biases against daughter successor-leaders. If our *a priori* theory was not supported, other explanations of the cause of gender bias would be considered (Sayer, 2010).

Given this brief overview of critical realism, our participants, and our data collection and analysis techniques, we now present a summary of each of our participants' succession stories.

THE SUCCESSION STORIES

Chelsea⁵

Chelsea is white and both parents were born in Canada. After Chelsea's father was diagnosed with a severe and chronic health concern ten years ago, Chelsea became president and CEO of her family's medium-sized energy technology company. Chelsea described her father as 'an amazing leader' and respected by everyone in the organisation and the industry. In the home, Chelsea's father was also considered the leader, taking care of the family finances, and as Chelsea said, 'the big decisions,' while her mother stayed at home to raise Chelsea and her

³ A small business is defined as having less than 100 employees and a medium-sized business is defined as having 100 to 499 employees. We excluded daughters leading larger organisations because of their potential lack of engagement with employees outside of the director sphere.

⁴ Questions can be provided upon request.

⁵ Names and company information have been changed to protect the identity of the participants in this study.

younger sister. Chelsea described her upbringing as 'traditional, where the husband has a role, and the wife has a stay-at-home mom role.' However, her father believed his daughters should go to university and have a career, as his own mother did.

Chelsea's succession to leader occurred rapidly over approximately six months due to her father's unexpected illness. While the family discussed selling the business, they eventually decided that Chelsea had the education and skills to take on the leader role. According to Chelsea, she never wanted the role but agreed to it because 'I wanted to help my family. I wanted to take the burden off my dad. I wanted it to keep going'. Once her father was unable to lead, she explained, 'I struggled for a couple of years having anger and resentment. I felt like he had this big company, he worked so hard to build and create, and he literally just left me to deal with things that I had no idea how to figure out. I was abandoned'.

Chelsea described feeling like she was on a constant battlefield when she became the leader because she was continually fending off competitors trying to poach and hire her employees away. She attributed this to a perception by competitors that she was not capable of running the company. For example, she would often hear rumours such as 'you guys are going under' and noted that one competitor even took out an advertisement in a trade publication portraying her company as being run by a little girl in over her head. She summarised her first few years as a leader as follows:

I felt like I had to have this tough shell on. I didn't want to say that I don't know what I'm doing, and I need help. So, for a couple of years, I was doing my best to tread water and prove that I could do it, and we would be around.

Over time, Chelsea hired new employees that complimented her management approach, although she noted that 'we needed to work on some of the preconditioning that they had and break it down.' Competitors who had spread rumours about her company's demise eventually respected her for her business acumen. She said she was only able to continue because her dad 'believed in me,' and while her mother was initially worried about the stress of the business, she became 'an advocate and cheerleader.'

At the time of the interview, Chelsea said she loved her role and would never do anything else. Chelsea and her husband have a two-year-old son. However, because her husband's time 'isn't flexible,' she is the primary childcare provider. On the days she needed to focus on the business, her mother looked after her son. While she recognised the challenge of balancing childcare and running the business, she and her husband planned on more children.

Kara

Kara's father immigrated to Canada from India and developed a successful engineering business. Her mother immigrated from Germany to Canada and stayed at home to raise Kara, her younger brother, and her sister. Kara described her upbringing as 'very traditional', with her German mother expecting that she would marry at a young age and stay at home to raise children. Her father, however, encouraged her to get an education, stating that 'no one can take an education away from you, especially as a woman.' Growing up, Kara perceived her father as a 'figurehead' and 'patriarch' in both the family and the industry in which her family business operated.

After completing two degrees, Kara joined her family business, starting in the office answering phones. Over the years, her responsibilities increased such that she eventually became her 'father's right hand.' When Kara's father semi-retired from the company, she became CEO. Kara explained that even though she has a younger brother and sister, her father groomed her for the role by encouraging her education and mentoring her to become the leader at a young age. She said she wanted the role from the beginning and that she 'gave up a lot,' including caring for her own three children to run the business. She said her mother was supportive of her becoming the leader and took on the role of caregiver to Kara's children to enable her to go to work.

Involved in the family firm from the beginning, Kara said that her employees and industry peers always assumed she would become the successor. When asked how her siblings fit into the family business structure, she explained that 'my sister was not interested in the business, and my brother never really lived up to my Dad's expectations.' Therefore, her brother was not considered a viable successor.

Kara said that she never experienced gender biases in her role. However, she described her business industry as 'very male,' and therefore, she learned to 'push forward my views when needed and to be accurate in my job so that I can't be pushed around.' She also explained that she knew how to 'handle guys with big egos,' and they 'know that they can't pull one over on me because I have the experience and the expertise to prove myself.' She also said she made sure to include all of her degrees on her business cards, email signatures, etc. because, 'I think it is an important thing for females to make sure that you show that you have the credentials because unfortunately, otherwise, I'm just a daughter, a no one. I need to prove myself as having an education, and then through years and years of work'.

Table 1. Case summaries

	Chelsea	Kara	Ella
<i>The Daughter</i>			
Age	36	57	37
Marital status	Married	Married	Divorced
Children's ages	2	25, 23, 20	7, 7
Childcare arrangements	Mother	Mother when children were younger	None, occasionally a day home when needed
Education	Communications degree	Engineering and MBA degrees	Business degree
Years working for the family business before becoming leader	4	25	4
Age the daughter became leader-successor	26	50	30
Years as leader-successor	10	7	8
<i>The Family Business</i>			
Industry	Energy Technology	Engineering	Mining and Forestry
Age of business	40 years	41 years	65 years
Number of employees	40	150	275
<i>The Family</i>			
Immediate family structure	Father, Mother, one younger sister	Father, Mother, one younger brother and one younger sister	Father, Mother and one older brother
Roles of immediate family involved in the business	Sister – Vice President	Father – Chairman (semi-retired) Brother – Vice President Sister – Head of a Division	Father – Chairman (semi-retired) Brother – Head of a Division

Ella

Ella is white and both her parents were born in Canada. Her father began a mining and forestry equipment company in the 1950s. While initially a one-person operation, it grew to over 200 employees and operated several divisions globally. Because of the nature of the business, her father was often away managing the business in remote locations, while her mother stayed at home to look after Ella and her younger brother. After completing a business degree, Ella worked for another company in a related industry for several years. When a job opened up in her family business, Ella saw it as an opportunity to learn the business and over the years, she took on increasing responsibilities. At age 37, she became the company leader while her father took a less active role.

Ella described her father as a 'legend,' with everyone in the industry and the company respecting him. Both parents had what she described as 'traditional family values.' For example, according to Ella's mother, a woman's role is to 'be responsible for the house and the kids and be dependable, always available and always there.' As for her father, Ella stated, 'he's still a bit old school and thinks that women should be at home looking after the kids.'

When asked to describe the industry she worked in, Ella said, 'it has always been male-dominated, where the men are out working and doing things, and women are expected to be at home.' She added, 'I think there are people that just grow up with that picture in mind, and therefore there is not a lot of interest in the business from females.' Ella described her most significant challenge during the succession process as coming from competitors who wondered how long she would last. She explained that 'they were almost just waiting for the failure to happen.' On the other hand, she never heard anything negative about her role in the organisation from employees and attributed it to the respect everyone had for her father.

At the time of the interview, Ella had not been going into the office due to childcare issues during the Covid-19 quarantine. A single parent with seven-year-old twin boys, she spoke about the challenge of caring for children while trying to manage her business from home. She stated, 'Right now, I feel a little disappointed in myself.' She also talked about the messages she received from her parents about her business and family role. Neither parent actively encouraged her to join the business, and she felt that she had not received a great deal of support from her father as he was primarily involved with other divisions of the company. Because of this, she developed into the role on her own. Additionally, when she was expecting her twins, her father told her it was a mistake to keep working and that she 'should be at home with her boys.' She mentioned she was confused by her mother's recent remark that 'you need to be back in the office because otherwise, someone will take your job.' Ella concluded by stating, 'you just can't win, there's just no happy medium, there's no balance, it's either one or the other.'

Table 1 summarises the key information from each case to help the reader follow the participants in our analysis and discussion sections, to which we now turn.

ANALYSIS

All three daughters stated that they did not experience gender bias in the successor-leader role. However, recognising that events are interpreted by actors (Bhaskar, 2013; Fletcher, 2017; Sayer, 2010) we looked below the level of the empirical to that of the actual and identified several events of gender bias. For example, Chelsea mentioned how she felt that her competitors saw her as ‘a little girl’ and therefore incapable of managing her business. Kara mentioned the need to ‘handle men with big egos’ and the importance of making her credentials known to gain respect from clients and competitors. Ella recalled, ‘when I first started in the leader role, I’d be at the team meeting and couldn’t get a word in edgeways. They would just talk right over me, plus they would do a lot of mansplaining.’

Reviewing the data further, we identified several demi-regularities. For example, all of the daughters described coming from families with ‘traditional’ values where the father worked, and the mother stayed home to raise children. Kara described her upbringing as ‘very traditional with the expectation that I would marry at a young age and stay at home with the children.’ Ella explained, ‘My mom’s role was being responsible for the house and the kids and being dependable and always available. Her focus was dealing with the kids in the house.’ When asked about her father’s notion of family roles, Ella stated, ‘I think he’s still a bit old school. I think he thinks that women should be at home looking after the kids.’

Despite this traditional upbringing, we observed that all of the fathers encouraged their daughters not to follow traditional familial gender role expectations. For example, Ella noted that ‘my Dad always gave me the opportunity to do whatever it is that I wanted to do and said, whatever you do, I’ll support it.’ Chelsea also explained how her father did not expect her to conform to traditional familial roles and stated, ‘My sister and I grew up knowing and thinking we could do anything. That’s just fundamental to me. When I was younger, I didn’t even think that I needed a husband to help take care of things’ and Kara explained, ‘The sky was the limit for me from my Dad’s point of view.’

We also noted that all the fathers encouraged their daughters to pursue higher education before taking on the role of successor. For example, Kara described how her father encouraged her to get an education and how he told her, ‘No one can take an education away from you, especially as a woman.’ She added, ‘My father always wanted me to get an education. It didn’t matter if I didn’t want to. I was going to university.’ All of the fathers also wanted their daughters to gain direct work experience in the business. For example, Kara mentioned how her father saw her as ‘his right hand and his backup for everything.’ While the statements suggest that the fathers recognised the importance of helping their daughter achieve the credentials to overcome gender bias, they were also consistent with ideals of a Marxist working-class aspirational model.

We also observed that all the daughters had support from their mothers to carry out the leader role. This is evidenced by Chelsea and Kara’s mothers helping with childcare or, in Ella’s case, encouraging her to go back to work to secure her position in the firm. This also seemed to be in opposition to the traditional gender roles their mothers held in the family unit.

Having identified several demi-regularities, we used retroduction to discover potential mechanisms that may have caused the events of gender bias. This involved applying Marxist feminist theory and notions of patriarchy. Since all the daughters came from families with traditional values, we expected to find evidence of gender bias stemming from gender role expectations within the family. However, our research did not indicate this. Instead, the daughters seemed to be accepted in the leader role by the family members and employees within the family business.

To better understand the why of this, we reviewed the interviews to identify additional demi-regularities. For example, we noted that all three daughters discussed their father’s power within the family, the family business, and the industry in which their company operated. Chelsea described her father as the leader of the family in terms of the financial and ‘other big decisions,’ and both Kara and Ella described their fathers as a ‘patriarch’ and a ‘legend.’ Ella added, ‘I think there’s a lot of respect out there for him for taking the risk to start the business.’ On the other hand, while all of the daughters seemed to be accepted by family members and employees in the successor-leader role, all mentioned the challenges they faced from competitors outside the organisation. For example, Ella spoke of masculine competitors, ‘just waiting for the failure to happen.’ Kara explained how competitors were always surprised by her and stated, ‘Even though they try, they can’t pull one over on me because I have the experience and the expertise to be able to prove myself. I mean, as a woman, you have to.’ Chelsea mentioned that when she took over, ‘There was a lot of chatter. You know how long is it going to last, you know, almost just waiting for the failure to happen because of being female.’

DISCUSSION

The intimate connection between the family and the business led us to hypothesise that gender roles within the household would create similar mechanisms within the family business. Combined with patriarchy within society (Walby, 1990) and its influence on the expectation of men as organisational leaders (Eagly and Karau, 2002), this triple influence of patriarchy would cause daughter successors to experience events of gender bias when they became the successor and leader. Instead, we found that rather than reinforcing gender roles, the family, and most significantly, the patriarchal father, acted to counteract the mechanisms that could cause gender biases within the organisation. For example, both Kara and Chelsea's fathers were highly supportive of their daughters as successor. This support came not only through encouragement to obtain education and skills but also to work with the daughter and present her as his successor. By contrasting the three cases, we can see this more clearly. Kara's father actively groomed her over a long period to become his successor, making her transition easy. Chelsea's father also appointed her as his successor. However, his illness made a lengthy and comprehensive training/mentoring period impossible, resulting in a more difficult but ultimately successful transition. In contrast, Ella did not have her father's support, with him actively discouraging her as his successor when she had children. This made her role both difficult and tenuous.

Based on these observations, we concluded that the father's message of 'my daughter is qualified and experienced, and she will be taking over my role' was a mechanism that counteracted gender bias. As the father was constructed as the respected patriarch of both the family and the business, any mechanisms that could lead to gender biases were counteracted. This counteraction, in turn, enabled mechanisms that caused the acceptance of the daughter as the leader of the family business to emerge. In other words, our analysis of the data demonstrated that validation by the father and, to some degree, support by the mother counteracted the mechanisms that would ordinarily have caused gender bias and created new mechanisms whereby the daughter was accepted as the family business successor. This finding is consistent with previous research that suggests that a father's actions either enable a daughter to be accepted as the successor or cast doubt on the daughter's capacity as the successor-leader (Dumas, 1992; Gherardi and Perrotta, 2016; Haberman and Danes, 2007).

We also believe that this finding is supported by the demi-regularity of all of the daughters describing gender bias as coming from sources outside the organisation. While prim 'a' geniture supported by the father patriarch gives cues to the employees and other stakeholders within the organisation that his daughter is acceptable in the role of leader, this message is not necessarily communicated outside the firm. Thus, daughters still experience gender bias from competitors and other outsiders to the organisation.

In observing that the daughter successor-leaders had support and validation from their fathers who were viewed as patriarchs of their family, the family business and their respective industries, we wonder whether the social structures which support patriarchy might be important. In other words, patriarchy gives fathers the power to validate their daughter as the leader and override mechanisms that cause gender bias. Indeed, the daughters' stories suggest the need for support from their patriarchal father to counteract gender bias and imply that daughters cannot counteract gender bias by themselves. Only with the support of their father, who derives power from patriarchy, can mechanisms that cause gender bias be overcome. Because of his power and domination within the family, the family business and society, the father has the ability to (re)create mechanisms that support a daughter as the family business successor and create an environment where a daughter is both validated and expected in the leader role. In doing so, prim 'a' geniture is considered acceptable, and gender bias events are eliminated.

Applying these findings within a critical realist ontology, our research not only demonstrates how generative mechanisms often act transfactually (that is to say, they do not always act as expected or even at all) but that individuals can change social structures that no longer serve them. Not only do the actions of the patriarchal father recreate the social structures within the organisation to counteract gender bias, but the daughter herself plays a role. For example, all the daughters believed education gave them credibility. As Kara stated, 'I think it is an important thing for females to make sure that you show that you have the credentials because unfortunately, otherwise, I'm just a daughter, a no one.' When the daughters obtained an education, the credibility that the education provided helped to counteract structures that supported gender bias.

Finally, focusing on the class element of Marxist feminist theory, we were aware that gender was not the only issue at play. All three daughters spoke of how their respective fathers started as 'one man' operations and grew the business to become successful. For example, they used phrases such as 'we're the largest company' or 'we are a highly successful company,' implying their fathers overcame class barriers as entrepreneurs. Furthermore, all of the daughters recognised their role in not just maintaining the success of their father's entrepreneurial endeavour but improving upon it. We concluded that the fathers were instrumental in enabling the daughters to not only overcome gender bias but to open doors for them to overcome class barriers.

We did observe key elements of intersectionality scholarship with respect to intersecting identities and the resultant order that can ensue (Crenshaw 1989, 1991; Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016). We do acknowledge this

scholarship by sharing the intersecting identities and some of the cultural orders that our participants experienced inside and outside the family unit. In Kara's case, for example, she did share that she was the daughter of an immigrant of Indian descent. We did wonder if Kara's father recognised that his help was instrumental for Kara to overcome not just gender bias but also bias based on a gender/ethnicity/class order. Through his messaging to Kara to 'do the right thing,' such as achieving higher education and relevant work experience, and his messaging to others within the organisation that she was his legitimate successor, Kara's father helped her to overcome these intersecting biases and the resultant order that would have otherwise marginalised her and negatively affected her success in the leader role.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

While our study produced important exploratory results, the research's primary limitation is the small sample size. More interviews with daughter successor-leaders are necessary to confirm our findings. Discussions with the employees and family members of the daughters would also be useful to interpret better the experiences the daughter successors described. Most notably, interviews with the fathers of daughter successors would add depth to our analysis, creating a richer understanding of the three levels of reality. Comparing our research to that of daughter successors' experiences inheriting the leadership of their family business from a mother entrepreneur would also be valuable. Such a comparison may confirm whether or how patriarchy can act as both a validating mechanism that eliminates gender bias or a causative mechanism of bias. Finally, a further exploration of how patriarchy influences not just bias based on gender but how it may affect how women can overcome bias associated with intersections of class and race would be important.

CONCLUSION

A strength of the critical realist framework is that it provides insight into how we might modify social structures that no longer serve us. This article demonstrated that not only can patriarchal structures be overridden by counteracting mechanisms, but how this structural dismantling can be achieved. While patriarchy arising from role expectations within the family, society, and the family business social structure may cause gender bias against daughter successors in the leader role, our analysis found that actions of the father that validated and legitimised a daughter as successor may counteract that causal mechanism. Specifically, father entrepreneurs who embrace prim 'a' geniture and actively encourage their daughters to gain education and work experience to take over their role appear to be important for counteracting gender bias. Our findings also suggest that while patriarchy may contribute to gender bias, it may also counteract gender bias by giving the father incumbent power to validate his daughter in the leader role.

This exploratory study contributes a gender lens to the literature on daughter successors in the leader role, a neglected area in entrepreneurial and family business literature. We also demonstrate how Marxist feminist theory and its notions of patriarchy may be applied to understand why daughters experience gender biases as their family firms' leaders. Finally, we reveal how a critical realist methodology can be used to identify mechanisms that cause gender bias and how those mechanisms can be counteracted by other mechanisms that eliminate gender bias, such as those that emerge when daughters are validated by their father entrepreneur. This discovery is significant as more entrepreneurs adopt prim 'a' geniture and pass the legacy of their research and innovation efforts to their daughters.

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Book Review

Homeland Maternity: US Security Culture and the New Reproductive Regime

Mary C. Carruth ^{1*}

Published: September 1, 2021

Book's Author: Natalie Fixmer-Oraiz

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Number of Pages: 280 pp.

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Natalie Fixmer-Oraiz's book, published in the University of Illinois Press's *Feminist Media Series*, combines two fields of inquiry: feminist studies of maternal and reproductive politics, and critical scholarship on homeland security culture. She clarifies *homeland security culture* as 'the state in concert with the felt quality of life in post-9/11 US culture - including the rise of neoconservatism, postfeminist gender politics, as well as heightened nationalism, nativism, and US exceptionalism' (p. 14). Her examination is impressively conceived, theoretically informed, and thorough. Her timely work exemplifies feminist communications scholarship at its best, promising to broaden the standpoints and knowledge of academics, activists, and public policymakers.

Fixmer-Oraiz coins the term *homeland maternity* to refer to 'a significant force within US reproductive regimes of the early twentieth-century – namely, the relationship between motherhood and nation within homeland security' (p. 3). She recognises this relationship as 'deeply enmeshed and mutually constitutive' (p. 3). From an historical perspective, as she points out, national security, (not post-9/11 homeland security), has theorised 'domesticity as a requisite to the future of the nation, which has often meant governing reproduction through the differential surveillance and control of women's bodies and behaviours' (p. 4). Focused on this trend in the present moment, Fixmer-Oraiz's purpose is to 'account for the recent history of US reproductive politics [which is] stubbornly inflected by, but also active in shaping, collective life in the post-9/11 homeland security culture' (p. 5).

Her hope is to intervene in 'the conditions that fuel contemporary forms of reproductive injustice' and to point toward the possibilities of reproductive justice. Fixmer-Oraiz wisely situates her argument within a historical context, noting that 'the cultural alignment of motherhood and nation is evident at several key historical moments in the United States from the colonial era to postwar containment culture and into the present' (p. 4). In her introduction, she briefly but incisively traces how early state formation and colonialism in the United States relied on the regulation of maternal and reproductive labour, thus legitimising hetero-patriarchy and white supremacy. She reminds readers that such regulation ranged from the use of reproductive and sexual violence against enslaved and indigenous women to the conceptualisation of republican motherhood, which made wealthy white women's childrearing abilities a 'national resource' (p. 6). This regulation proceeded with the passages of the Alien and Sedition Acts in 1798 to exclusive immigration policies that deterred the formation of Asian immigrant families in 1882, and later after World War I, prevented the entry of pregnant, unmarried, and lesbian women. These exclusionary practices continued onwards into the Progressive Era (1896-1916), implicating the birth control

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movement of the 1920s and 1930s in eugenics and population control, especially of people of colour, and ultimately, in federally funded sterilisation, which was at its peak in the 1970s.

Once she recollects this history, Fixmer-Oraiz clearly foregrounds her methodology, and her commitment to inclusive language, acknowledging also the reproductive experiences of trans and nonbinary people, within her ethic of reproductive justice. As a rhetorical critic, Fixmer-Oraiz collected and analysed for her book a variety of artifacts—newspaper articles, public campaigns, advertisements, popular film and television, legal documents, and advocacy efforts by professional associations and nongovernmental organisations—that ‘bear meaningfully on figurations of motherhood and reproduction in homeland security culture’ (p. 26).

She aligns her study with reproductive justice rather than USA pro-choice advocacy since the former understands ‘reproductive rights as part of a broader human rights and social justice agenda’, centring the experiences of women of colour and increasingly, members of trans and nonbinary communities. Through an intersectional lens, she reiterates that ‘motherhood is a key site in the production and maintenance of homeland security culture’ (p. 14).

In the book, Chapter 1 focuses on post-9/11 pronatalist campaigns that have discursively valorised ‘domesticity and motherhood for women of means as a critical dimension of homeland security culture’ (p. 27). In particular, these efforts were the so-called ‘opt-out’ revolution of the early twenty-first century, ‘a trend reminiscent of postwar white suburbia but refigured in the context of postfeminist culture,’ and ‘fertility campaigns that targeted young professional women ... encouraging the use of assisted reproductive technologies [egg-freezing] to secure the possibility of pregnancy in life’ (p. 27). In Chapter 2, the author considers the opposite trend, how homeland maternity calls attention to the punishment of women of colour and poor women for fertility, as demonstrated in the case of Nadya Suleman, who gave birth to sixteen children via IVF, including a set of octuplets in 2009, and whose physician was ultimately deprived of his medical license. In public discourse, Suleman embodied two contradictory stereotypes: that of “the sympathetic infertile woman and the welfare queen,” potentially eroding the distinctions between so-called deserving and undeserving mothers. As anthropologist Dana-Ain Davis, quoted by Fixmer-Oraiz, concludes, Suleman’s ‘right to reproduce and nurture was denounced because she was single, had no verifiable source of income, and was an inadequate representative of whiteness’ (p. 65). Thus, in her analysis, Fixmer-Oraiz points to the ‘rhetorics of pathology and risk that marked Suleman as a threat to be contained,’ thereby ‘policing the borders of maternity and asserting the primacy of medical authority in maintaining these borders’ (p. 28). Chapter 3 addresses the public debates in the USA from 2001 to 2006 around the availability of emergency contraception (EC) obtained ‘over the counter’. Since EC provided a method of prevention after unprotected sex, it caused ‘cultural panics regarding sexual purity and young people’s sexual and reproductive decision making’ (p. 28). In the discourse on EC, Fixmer-Oraiz illuminates the ‘rhetorics of emergency that drew on the ethos of science, and emphasised normative family planning and sexual restraint, and disciplined women differentially according to longstanding (classed, racialised) hierarchies of maternal worth’ (p. 28). In Chapter 4, she analyses the rhetorics of crisis operating in the film *Juno* (2007) and the television shows *Glee* (2009-2015), *16 and Pregnant* (2009-2014), and *Teen Mom* (2009-2012) as well as in the evangelical crisis pregnancy centre (CPC) movement. The popular culture narratives ‘privilege whiteness and class mobility and promote “good” choice making and motherhood to mitigate the crisis of teen pregnancy (and relatedly, the infertility of elite women’ (p. 122). They evade ‘the politics of teen pregnancy and its links to racism, sexism, classism, and poverty’ (p. 127) while also stigmatising abortion.

For me, Fixmer-Oraiz performs her most brilliant analysis by demonstrating how the emphasis on crisis in media narratives of teen pregnancy ‘filter[s] into other aspects of reproductive and maternal politics,’ namely, in the CPC movement’ (135). She concludes that ‘the use of “crisis” in teen pregnancy narratives and by the CPC movement has promoted a narrow vision of motherhood, intensified the policing of young women’s lives, and fuelled the colonization of reproductive health clinics across the country’ (p. 140).

Fixmer-Oraiz ends her book with hope by suggesting methods of resistance to homeland maternity, including co-optation, subversion, and ‘other modes of rhetorical invention and reinvention’ (p. 29). To disentangle reproduction and motherhood from service to the nation, Fixmer-Oraiz invites readers to ‘rearticulate alignments in ways that make the nation more readily responsive to longstanding forms of injustice that disproportionately impact mothers, parents, and families’ (p. 158).

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Book Review

Maid to Queer: Asian Labor Migration and Female Same-Sex Desires

En-Chieh Chao ^{1*}

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Book's Author: Francisca Yuenki Lai

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Maid to Queer: Asian labor migration and female same-sex desires is an ethnographic study of the economic, social and sexual complexities underpinning the making of female same-sex relationships among Indonesian migrant workers in Hong Kong. The author, Francisca Yuenki Lai, contends that the uniqueness of Indonesian women's subject positions as *tomboy* (the Indonesian term for 'tomboy,' male-looking females) and *cewek* ('girls,' especially girlfriends of *tomboy*) must be understood in terms of the contingencies of their situation as migrant workers living outside of Indonesia. As a disciple of the anthropologist Evelyn Blackwood whose work on *tomboy* subjectivity in West Sumatra has inspired many in sex/gender studies, Lai carries on Blackwood's interest in the distinctiveness of Indonesian same-sex female identities and complicates them further by focusing on the case of migrant workers. Given the fact that many of the migrant workers shifted their sexual orientation from heterosexual to 'lesbians', this work amounts to a striking departure from the common heteronormative narrative of the 'chain of care' or transnational motherhood that has long surrounded female migrant workers.

To research for this book, Dr Lai engaged in 21 months of fieldwork in Hong Kong, immersing herself in the Sunday life of Indonesian migrant workers in parks (especially Victoria Park and Kowloon Park), beaches, malls, food venues, and monthly rental rooms. Revealing her own *tomboy* subjectivity helped her gain acceptance into the community. Other than participant observation, Lai also conducted structured interviews with her informants regarding their aspirations, relationships, work conditions, and future plans.

Chapter One introduces the risk of being homosexual in Indonesia amid the rising tide of Islamic populism before covering the LGBT movements in Hong Kong, both local and migrant-based. Chapter Two explores the cultivation of the subject positions of *tomboy* and *cewek* respectively. For the former, the chapter reveals the ways in which some became aware of their interest in women in the training centres where they prepared to become migrant workers. In other words, the life change of migration provided them an opportunity to reevaluate their sexual desires. For the latter, Yuenki identifies the key concepts of *manja* (pampering someone) and *dimanja* (being pampered by someone) in the relationship, which is a romantic and trusting one that they believe is not available with biological men, Indonesian, South Asian, and Hongkongner. It is not uncommon that migrant workers' husbands in Indonesia often cheat on them or squander the disproportionately high income they make. Meanwhile, racial prejudice and a lack of trust also prevented migrant workers from seeking serious relationships with South Asian and Hong Kong men. In a nutshell, in Hong Kong where life is only temporary, Indonesian women in this study perceive *tomboy* to be 'better lovers' than men (p. 76).

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In Chapter Three, Lai discusses how religion, class, and race influence Indonesian workers' lives. An important discovery that is consistent with previous work such as that of Tom Boellstorff (1999) is that homosexuality and heterosexuality are not an either/or proposition. Many of the subjects believe that their lesbian lives could only be possible in Hong Kong, and not Indonesia. Lai's argument that migration makes religious piety negotiable, however, should be further examined, given the fact that even within Indonesia piety is almost always changing, contested and negotiable, rather than a fixed thing (see Chao, 2017; Hefner, 2014; Bowen, 1993). First of all, to depict a Muslim woman as an independent daughter prior to marriage (p. 79) hardly applies to Indonesia, as female autonomy in the economic and political realms varies greatly in different historical periods, and women are often seen as free and even 'coarse' in the market. Also, to see dog saliva instead of the entire dog as unclean is a common notion in Java, and hence not some 'new interpretation' (p. 81) or 'personal interpretation' that was invented in Hong Kong. Likewise, touching or even eating pork under circumstances beyond one's control would be forgiven by God, and this has a solid endorsement from the *Qur'an*. Hence this is also perhaps not the best example of negotiated piety.

As an anthropologist of religion, I find it fascinating that same-sex female couples in Hong Kong keep the religious habitus they have acquired in Indonesia whilst living in Hong Kong, such as having a prayer at the beginning of every event, be it a birthday party or a celebration. In fact, that is exactly what people do all the time in Indonesia, namely saying a prayer to start literally every event, religious or not. Saying a prayer together at home or in a non-religious place is also quite typical. Hence what Dr Lai found as something novel (pp. 85-86) was actually a strong continuation of the style of social life in Indonesia, even among homosexual couples. I would even imagine that precisely because they shift their sexual subject position, there could be some incentives to emphasise what is *not* lost in the adoption of a homosexual identity, such as Robin's insistence on entering the mosque through the men's entrance, showing her masculine piety. While transgender individuals' piety is not a new phenomenon in Indonesia (a famous example is a transgender *pesantren* or Islamic boarding school in Yogyakarta), the possibility of a Muslim's heightening piety in non-Muslim lands should be kept in mind. For example, eating halal food often only becomes problematic when a Muslim leaves her Muslim-majority homeland. At the same time, researchers too often are biased by their own secularist assumptions and assume that Muslims lose their piety once living in secular places. The reality, however, could be the other way around, depending on the case in question.

Towards the end of Chapter Three, Lai is insightful to point out that her informants do not see their religion of Islam as oppressive at all, but instead they draw strength from their religious activities, even describing the risky journey to work abroad as a religious trial given by Allah. Nevertheless, the obvious conflict between the common disapproval of their relationships by other Muslims (although female same-sex relationships can be easily covered up as displays of affectionate sisterhood) and female-to-female desires still looms large, whether the disapproval comes from the Islamic shelter, mosques, or the inner voices within these women.

The last chapter shows us that most couples end (or imagine they would end) their relationships upon returning to Indonesia. However, a few of them feel that they could continue their lifestyles. This is illuminating, as Gayatri Gopinah (2005) has reminded us in the queer South Asian diasporic context that home should not always be imagined to be a place left behind or 'to be escaped' by queer people (pp. 14-15). Home can be queered, remade, homoerotic, and even homoromantic.

Finally, the title of this book 'Maid to Queer' did not fail to catch my eyes. I once heard Dr Lai explain in person that the pun was about the process of being 'made to queer'. But I could not help but to think of the masterpiece *Maid to Order* authored by Nicole Constable (1997). The title could be a homage, but also a transformation. With Lai's welcome contribution, it will be remembered that female migrant workers can be, have been, and presumably will continue to be - non-heteronormative.

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Book Review

The Afterlife of Reproductive Slavery: Biocapitalism and Black Feminism's Philosophy of History

Gina Marie Longo ^{1*}

Published: September 1, 2021

Book's Author: Alys Eve Weinbaum

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Number of Pages: 286 pp.

ISBN: 9781478002840

Family planning purveyors in the global North hail surrogacy and egg donation as treasured opportunities to build families for those unable to have biological children of their own. Offering a range of resources that bring together donors, surrogates, and families, surrogacy agencies frame their services as acts of love and compassion, treasured experiences, and creators of legacies that make 'the impossible possible.' Evidence of surrogacy's roots in capitalism and racial politics, is exemplified by such practices as using rating sites for industry agencies (i.e., 'the Trip Advisor of Surrogacy'¹), web-based cost-benefit analyses of using surrogates from different countries, together with the prevalence of using reproductive labour from women in the global South for the benefit of families in the global North. Surrogacy agencies use marketing tactics that portray surrogacy as 'acts of trust', 'loving care', and 'facilitating relationships' mute the exploitation of surrogates' reproductive labour.

How have such forms of gendered and racialised reproductive biocapitalism and its cultural production entered into our collective imaginaries and become possible? In her book, *The Afterlife of Reproductive Slavery: Biocapitalism and black feminism's philosophy of history*, Dr. Alys Eve Weinbaum examines how four hundred years of Atlantic slavery has materially, and most crucially, epistemically influenced this global reproductive capitalist market. Analysing the literary and scholarly works of Black feminists such as Angela Davis, Toni Morrison, and Octavia Butler, Weinbaum argues that Atlantic slavery, especially slave breeding, provided society with an intellectual template to conceive of the commodification and extraction of women's reproductive labour and their 'biological fruits'.

Weinbaum engages with Marxism and critical race theories to extend our understanding of how conceptions of race endure within this slave episteme. Here, she suggests that the endurance of the slave episteme is not about physical attributes or the visibility of blackness of the worker; instead, she configures how reproductive labour and products continue to be racialised. Racialisation as a process operates in ways that renders women's labour power external and interchangeable, which strips away such women's rights to be recognised as mothers and full citizens with complete legal protection. Weinbaum calls this 'the flickering on and off of blackness' (p. 10). In other words, the racial power that rendered a population of people as biological commodities within the Atlantic slave trade still operates, even though such racial power and 'distinctions' are currently disavowed.

¹ Growing Families, Surrogacy Service Provider Rating (Crow's Nest, Australia, accessed on April 25, 2021)
<https://www.growingfamilies.org/agency-ratings/>.

Weinbaum carefully develops her arguments using a critical, speculative reading of an array of Black feminist literary works. In the first chapter, 'The Surrogacy/Slavery Nexus,' she examines how slave breeding dovetails with current-day biocapitalism and surrogacy, thus creating the racialising process of legitimising women's reproductive labour as extractable, and alien to themselves. Weinbaum draws out the connection between slave breeding and contemporary reproduction exploitation through her treatment of Black feminist historical scholarship on reproduction in the time of the Atlantic slave trade, to demonstrate how surrogacy 'binds reproductive labourers together by racializing their labour and dehumanizing those who perform it' (p. 52). Chapters two and three demonstrate the importance of what she calls *the Black feminist philosophy of history* to analyse neo-slave narratives *vis-à-vis* an array of contemporary black feminist texts. Here, Weinbaum highlights how Black feminist writings in the late twentieth century gender deployed the DuBoisian concept of the general strike against slavery, as the notion centres 'sexual and reproductive insurgency as central to slavery's overthrow' (p. 26). Weinbaum illustrates this further in her close reading of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), which follows the story of Margaret Garner, an enslaved woman on the run who would rather commit infanticide than see her children endure a life of slavery. Weinbaum posits that the protagonist's socio-political sexual and reproductive agency encapsulates the radical idea that insurgent violence interrupts the hegemony that undergirds reproduction extraction, both past and present. As chapter four unfolds, Weinbaum expounds on the subtleties of women's political agency within the contemporary reproductive extraction nexus, using the literary genre of Black feminist science fiction works. The final and most engaging chapter takes on the topic of cloning via the films, *The Island* (2005) and *Never Let Me Go* (2010). Weinbaum demonstrates how the racialising process of reproductive extraction also affects non-Black women. White characters are racialised as chattel for reproduction and organ harvesting. Despite their humanity and personal agency, their status as 'clones' normalises the extraction of the biological labour. This 'flickering on and off of blackness' extends the process beyond Black women and perpetuates the slave episteme in today's neoliberal biocapitalism.

The contributions of this book intersect with Black Marxism, Intellectual History, and critical race theory. Weinbaum challenges the genealogy of black Marxism as distinctly masculine through her treatment of selected black feminist works of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. These works address reproductive extraction and slavery using a Black Marxist tradition of radical insurgency. Consequently, she calls for the recognition of these thinkers as contributors to Black Marxism. This three-decade period of black feminists, who published works on rising neoliberalism and biocapitalism, constitutes what Weinbaum calls a Black feminist philosophy of history that needs further examination. As for critical race studies, Weinbaum contributes to a new dimension of how race operates. Instead of situating race as a mobilising social construct attached to individual bodies and populations that lends to the hierarchical power of nation-states, capitalism, and racial domination (p. 48), she treats race as a *process*. Weinbaum notes that this is a point of departure from theories of racialisation since it renders racial ascription to populations of little use in understanding how the slave episteme operates in today's neoliberal biocapitalism. In this way, racialisation as a process accounts for why society can conceive of the dehumanisation and alienation of those whose reproductive labour is extracted - in the absence of black bodies.

Despite the sometimes rather weighty, dense writing of this tome, feminist scholars will find this book an engaging and exciting read. Weinbaum is a careful scholar who meticulously lays out and traces the evolution of her argument. She eloquently demonstrates how current-day neoliberal biocapitalism is reproduced through racialised and gendered processes that continue to exploit, dehumanise, and devalue women's reproductive labour. The foci on Black feminist scholars - who Weinbaum argues should be included in the Black Marxist tradition - emphasises the history of women's insurgency against exploitation, instead of the emphasis on exploitation itself. These insights lend to strategies that can be used to epistemically and empirically dismantle reproductive exploitation. However, I did find it curious that Carole Boyce Davies' work is absent, primarily as she addresses some of the key criticisms of Black Marxism that Weinbaum lays out in her book. As a scholar who uses critical race theories in my own work, I held a high level of scepticism at the concept of the 'flickering on and off of blackness.' However, Weinbaum thoroughly engages the literature to present the reader with a sound and convincing argument. Her exegesis of Black feminist scholarship makes visible the slave episteme that does not necessarily manifest itself in tangible ways.

Ultimately, *The Afterlife of Reproductive Slavery: Biocapitalism and black feminism's philosophy of history* does not disappoint. It does the job of demonstrating the complex connections between the gendered and racialised reproductive exploitation and extraction during the historical Atlantic slave trade period and today exceedingly well.

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Book Review

Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory

C. Laura Lovin ^{1*}

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As its title indicates, Patricia Hill Collins' *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory* intervenes into significant conversations about intersectionality as a theoretical framework for looking at social problems in the global west. The term 'critical' in the title could take the reader on two different interpretive paths. On one hand, it announces that intersectionality is part of the field of noteworthy contemporary social theory. On the other hand, it signals intersectionality's belonging with strands of social theorising which have had co-constitutive genealogies with social movements, thus mutually shaping each other's analytical terms and political agendas.

Collins' scholarship has been crucial to the study of oppression as an interlocking system of power relations, which she termed the 'matrix of domination' in her seminal 1990 work *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. Throughout her work, she has consistently foregrounded the relevance of knowledge production in the study of social issues, calling attention to differential lines of access to epistemic privilege, particularly with regard to black women's knowledge, experiences, and politics.

Intersectional modalities of social analysis are rooted in the work of civil rights activists such as Sojourner Truth and Ida B. Wells, and later on to black lesbian feminists like Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith, and the Combahee River Collective. By asking how, when, and toward what ends categories of gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, age, nation, and citizenship are deployed, intersectional analyses unearth complex structures of social, economic, and political inequality and power which shape experiences of multiple, interdependent, and simultaneous oppression. Collins' volume is an analytical tour de force of remarkable depth which astutely demonstrates that intersectionality must remain connected to resistive knowledge production projects and social justice movements.

In arguing for intersectionality's place within the field of critical social theories, Collins engages with vast and varied sources in an effort to map and elucidate its critical theoretical possibilities, objectives, modes of analysis, and context-specific practices. Her theoretical work and secondary analysis reach across social theories and socio-political practices, and in doing so, she foregrounds important dialogues that are crucial to theorising through social action, and most importantly, to bringing about social change.

The analytical category of intersectionality was coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to account theoretically and methodologically for violence experienced by women of colour and migrant women at the confluence of USA race and gender regimes. It soon crossed the disciplinary boundaries of legal studies into all the disciplines and inter-disciplinary areas clustered into the larger field of social studies. Over the course of the past three decades, intersectional analysis has become the preferred framework of inquiry into inequalities structured by race, class, and gender violence. Its influence is also evidenced by the expansion of its geographical

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deployment across the globe to illuminate structural violences experienced by different kinds of marginalised groups.

This book is more than a mere investigation of the theoretical or methodological aspects of intersectionality. In fact, Collins argues that the containment of intersectionality within academic research could ossify its productive openness. In the light of the countless and harrowing instances in which social theories have been co-opted by systems of domination, Collins calls for explicit and sustained processes of self-reflection regarding the interrelations between intersectionality's 'own critical analyses and social actions' (2019: 4). Collins' double project of simultaneously mapping the language of intersectionality while keeping it open as an analytical framework is brilliantly rendered by the formal aspects of her writing; multiple lines of questioning intersperse with her rigorous exegesis. Her numerous questions disrupt the reader from passively receiving her terms and conclusions, interpolating them into the dialogical engagement that keeps intersectionality open toward complexity through ongoing connections with other resistive knowledges.

Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory is organised into four parts, each consisting of two chapters. The first part, 'Framing the Issues,' provides an introduction to the terminological registers of intersectionality as they are employed across the heterogeneous fields of the social sciences, philosophy, and the humanities. In the opening chapter, 'Intersectionality as Critical Inquiry,' Collins unpacks the meanings of terms such as 'theoretical,' 'critical,' and 'social' in the contexts that employ intersectionality as an analytical metaphor, a heuristic mode of inquiry, or a paradigmatic framing. Chapter 2, 'What's Critical about Critical Social Theory,' pursues the proposition that intersectionality is not only 'a social theory in the making' but, most significantly, a social theory that is interwoven with social change. Collins foregrounds the knowledge production and social transformation projects of three schools or disciplines of critical analysis—the Frankfurt School, British Cultural Studies, and Francophone social theorisation.

More specifically, she looks at 'reflexive accountability' in Max Horkheimer's formulation of critical theory under 20th century European fascism, Stuart Hall's idea of 'articulation,' and Frantz Fanon's theorisation of liberation within contexts of racism, colonialism, and anti-colonial struggle at a time when the francophone theoretical field was dominated by existentialist ideas of freedom, individual consciousness, and agency. Collins' examination of these three strands reconstructs invaluable connections between intersectionality and the historical use of theorising in struggles against fascism, colonialisation, and racial inequality. Each individual project of social transformation has shaped our current understandings of transformative knowledge and could inform the self-reflexive practice intended to prevent the co-optation of intersectionality by projects that contribute to the 'unequal participation in knowledge production' (2019: 81).

Part 2, 'How Power Matters—Intersectionality and Intellectual Resistance,' examines intersectionality's links, commonalities, and discontinuities with projects of intellectual resistance spurred by 'people who are subordinated within domestic and global expressions of racism, sexism, capitalism, colonialism, and similar systems of political domination and economic exploitation' (2019:10). Chapter 3, 'Intersectionality and Resistant Knowledge Projects,' stages a conversation between critical race studies, feminism, and decolonialism—three knowledge projects that render visible and foster resistance to the power structures that shape and legitimise the dominant questions of contemporary social theory; the author reveals that the practitioners of these three strains of critical theory ground knowledge production on strong ties with their research constituencies. The insights collected from their research participants are mobilised not only toward generating knowledge but also toward 'fostering social change' (2019: 118). Epistemic resistance unsettles structures of power that uphold inequalities within and outside academia.

Chapter 4, 'Intersectionality and Epistemic Resistance,' the normalisation of inequality within academia and publishing—the differential valorisation of social theorists themselves, who bear the marks of race, gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity, age, and ability (2019, 131). By revisiting Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectional work—spanning legal, academic, public engagement, publishing, institution-building, and local and global activist contexts—Collins foregrounds the importance of intersectional theorising in an expanded field that transcends academia. She calls attention to the epistemic violence of testimonial quieting and testimonial smothering, which suppress and elide the ideas of subordinated epistemic agents.

In the particular case of intersectionality, the author calls attention to the elision of the epistemic agency of 'the Black people, women, colonised subjects, poor people, stateless people, and similarly subordinated people whose social action created it' (2019: 152). Collins warns against the pursuit of 'intersectionality's academic respectability' by alliance with agents of epistemic power who are ultimately invested in devaluing resistant knowledge. She identifies dialogical methodology as the better strategy for stimulating intersectionality's theoretical development. Collins argues that dialogical engagement with multiple 'interpretive communities,' 'critical theories,' and 'resistant knowledge projects' is bound to set in motion internal dialogues and self-reflexivity *vis-à-vis* its own 'constructs, premises and practices' (2019: 153-154).

Part 3, 'Theorising Intersectionality: Social Action as a Way of Knowing,' explores how social action and experience are invaluable modalities of knowing and theorising within but also outside spaces of resistant

knowledge traditions. Chapter 5, 'Intersectionality, Experience, and Community,' stages a dialogue between Black feminist thought and American pragmatism. At the centre of her examination Collins places the constructs of 'experience,' 'community,' and 'social action.' Through her critical intersectional rethinking of these terms, she illuminates the hidden vectors of gender, race, indigeneity, and nationalism that shape lives across the scales of the individual, the family, various kinds of collectivities, the nation, and beyond. Through the lenses of 'experience' and 'social action,' social worlds are rendered more complex than a mere 'constellations of individuals' (2019: 14). The different angles provided by various instantiations of Black feminist thought (Ida B. Wells-Barnett's Anti-Lynching Campaign, Black women's engagement with solidarity politics, and their contemporary engagement with Black Lives Matter) and American pragmatism (John Dewey's philosophy of experimentalism, community, participatory democracy, dialogue, and creative social action) lead Collins to identify 'experience' and 'community' as vital components of methodologies that further position social action as a robust way of knowing.

Chapter 6, 'Intersectionality and the Question of Freedom,' continues Collins' explorations of the question of liberation—a topic previously introduced through her reading of Fanon and existentialist philosophy. Black people's freedom constitutes life-long social justice pursuit for Collins. Here, Collins stages a conversation between the works of Simone de Beauvoir and Pauli Murray. Collins' engagement with Murray is notable for the archival excavation of a less circulated thinker. By placing side by side these two differently located thinkers of oppression and freedom, Collins exposes two different modalities of subjectification and analytical-category formation, which have significant theoretical implications for intersectionality.

Within the framework of existentialism, De Beauvoir's thinking builds an argument for women's oppression that relies on recurrent analogies among age (childhood), class, gender and race. Rather than exposing differences in location, experience, privilege, social action, and politics among women, Collins argues that De Beauvoir's comparative thinking suppresses intersectional thinking and ultimately restrains the agency of existential freedom. On the other side, Collins positions Murray within the framework of visionary pragmatism of Black women's social thought and community work. Unlike De Beauvoir's masterful yet decontextualised presentation of women's oppression, Murray's engagements with different systems of power (more precisely, race, class, nation, gender, and sexuality) is thoroughly context specific and primarily driven by her commitment to advancing the social justice agendas of 'the African American community, [...] the labor movement, the women's movement, the social justice actions of religious organisations, and broader initiatives in support of American democracy writ large' (2019: 26). The fact that Murray's critical thinking is embedded in the particulars of activism sharpened her understanding of relational differences, the terms of coalition building, and the conditions of flexible solidarities. Ultimately, Collins' inclusion of Murray in the genealogy of critical social theory is in itself an act of institutional change.

Part 4, 'Sharpening Intersectionality's Critical Edge,' opens with chapter 7, 'Relationality within Intersectionality,' which analyses three modalities of relational thinking: additive frameworks, approaches that foreground processes of articulation, and analytics of co-formation. Each analytical framework is approached genealogically and critically appraised through specific case studies (such as revisitations of Beauvoir and Murray alongside Marxist social theory for additive models; Murray's creation of the term 'Jane Crow' or French feminist Colette Guillaumin's construct of 'sexage' for relational thinking through articulation; and the metaphors of borderlands, jazz, and the spider's web in the case of co-formation). In each case, Collins points out the framework's specific contributions to our current understanding and practice of intersectional social theorising.

For me, Collins' commitment to positioning intersectionality as a continuously evolving field is visible in her strategic side-stepping of a critical stance in relation to additive frameworks. Additive approaches to oppression are often criticised for combining distinctive systems of oppression in ways that fail to capture their interlocking functioning. Collins stresses that additive frameworks have been essential in shaping categorical innovation by challenging the 'logic of segregation' and dominant Western beliefs in 'classification, objectivity, linearity, and empiricism.' (2019: 228). Thus, challenging the logic of separate categories may become a recurrent battle as we cross disciplinary boundaries, travel across geographical space, and commit to new political causes.

The last chapter of the volume, 'Intersectionality without Social Justice,' examines the deployment of race, gender, disability as relational formations within the logic of eugenics. Attending to different historical contexts, Collins interrogates categories of difference that have grounded the political visions and social engineering programs pursued by eugenic policies. She unpacks the combinations of difference categories that gave salience to dis/ability in order to justify the exclusion of racialised or gendered individuals from citizenship, education, work, and housing. Collins places intersectional analysis (which is generally perceived to be social justice focused) in juxtaposition with eugenics (a prominent case of social injustice) in order to highlight the malleability that 'constitutes intersectionality's promise and danger' (2019: 285). She ultimately compels readers to consider the implications of engaging in intersectional analysis without deep consideration of the 'ethical commitments [that] influence our inquiry and practice' (2019: 219). For me, *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory* is a book that cannot be missed by scholars, activists, and students of all disciplines.

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Book Review

AIDS and the Distribution of Crises

Alvaro Martinez-Lacabe ^{1*}

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This polyphonic collection of writings on the distribution of the AIDS crises needs to be understood as a response to the framing of global narratives that proclaim the end of the AIDS crisis by 2030. This is a time in the history of the epidemic in which the biomedicalisation of HIV prevention and treatment is more evident than ever. It is also a time when it is possible to witness the contrast between global policies that advocate for community involvement and the scarcity of resources that these communities suffer due to the lack of genuine interest from governments. Under the title 'AIDS and the distribution of crises', this volume looks back at the history of AIDS to draw connections between the present epidemic and the practices of racism, sexism, homo-transphobia, global capitalism and colonialism as engines of perpetuation of the crisis in more marginal groups. In the words of Bishnupriya Gosh, 'this volume is mostly timely in exploring a core concept for historical narration: crisis as an epistemological category that prompts a diagnosis of the past and a blueprint for the future' (p. 69).

The book is structured in three parts which contain three dispatches and nine analytical chapters that feature ethnographies, interviews, and cultural production analysis, deploying various methodologies to analyse different case studies. The three dispatches chapters are intended to be guided dialogues for a number of collaborators where questions about the globalisation of the crisis, its historicisation, and its potential future are answered from personal perspectives. These dispatches, and specifically the second dispatch, reflect a current debate in the United States about the cultural/media production of the history of AIDS wherein accusations of silencing minorities and privileging gay men's stories are at the centre of the conversation. This debate is not the only key to understanding the past and future of the AIDS crisis, but it also draws attention to the crisis in queer scholarship in the United States.

As a starting point, this volume points at the scattering of the crisis in space and time as a phenomenon that challenges the legacy of the hegemonic narratives of the pandemic linked to the history of 'patient zero' and the white gay populations of the United States. As is frequently stated throughout the book, this narrative has contributed to marginalising and occluding the history and stories of other communities, places, and voices. However, this volume makes a greater effort towards bringing to the front those other histories including for example Haitians in Montreal (Viviane Namaste), Black gay men (Darius Bost, Marlon M. Bailey), chicanxs affected by AIDS in California (Pablo Alvarez; Juana Maria Rodriguez), Native Americans (Andrew J. Jolivet), and injecting drug users in India (Bishnupriya Ghosh). The invisibilisation of the crisis is clearly one of the main concerns of the collaborators of the book. For example, in chapter four, Julia S. Jordan-Zachery asks an important question: is it a crisis if it is not seen? Her chapter features an in-depth analysis of the processes of invisibilisation

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of specific groups of HIV positive black women in the context of the AIDS and HIV pandemic in the United States. For that, Jordan-Zachery examines the role of some Black women in this dynamic of invisibilisation. Specifically, she explores the role of black congress women, black female bloggers and *Essence* and *Ebony* magazines in marginalising other types of black bodies by celebrating certain black personalities and employing the human disaster/ reporting frame to consciously or unconsciously avoid addressing how economic deprivation, sexual identity, incarceration and housing segregation and other intersectional factors make some black women more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS.

Aligned with Jordan-Zachery's question, Vivian Namaste challenges the idea that it was *only* gay men who were primarily touched by AIDS. She illustrates the case of the Haitian population in Montreal as clear evidence of how clinical practice in Canada was influenced by the lived experience of white gay men in the USA. The author refers to the fact that Haitians were experiencing symptoms of toxoplasmosis in larger numbers than Kaposi sarcoma, but the weight of the white gay men's clinical experiences eclipsed other clinical occurrences. However, I found this point might needed more stronger support since the data provided by the author suggests that white bodies were more vulnerable to more opportunistic infections.

For me, one of the interesting contributions of this book emerging in several chapters is to show the role that statistics play in making pockets of crisis invisible. It is well explained how national statistics that may appear at first glance to show success in reducing HIV transmission, but it can actually hide regional crises instead.

This is the case of Manipur in India where the epidemic mostly affects injectable drug users, unlike in other parts of the country. In this region the epidemic has been militarised in favour of securitisation since people living with HIV are perceived as a threat to the security of the country. Another case where statistics contribute to the invisibility of the crisis is that of the American Indians and Alaska Natives (AIAN). In his contribution on the intersection of HIV, indigenusness and settler colonialism, Andrew J. Jolivet explains that due to the small population of American Indians and Alaska Natives in the USA it is easy to ignore the disproportionate impact that HIV has on this population. However, Jolivet points to a dramatic increase in the gay and bisexual AIAN population, of 63 percent annually. Likewise, Julia S. Jordan-Zachery argues how the realism of statistics hides the experiential realities of American black women who are at risk of HIV transmission at the micro and macro levels.

Also, the ongoing biomedicalisation of HIV prevention, specifically PrEP, is critically analysed in the book. Sara Schulman states that although she supports people using PrEP, the psychological demand for PrEP is based on the "general perception that people with HIV are overwhelmingly infectious" and this idea is 'dependent on HIV-positive people not getting existing medication' (46). Ian Bradley-Perrin also argues that biomedical interventions, including PrEP, rely on randomised control trials that ultimately are funded by the pharmaceutical industry. Bradley-Perry explains that these trials are often funded with global north money but performed in impoverished areas. Challenging the individualistic approaches of biomedical means for HIV treatment and prevention, Jolivet advocates for more communal forms of healing through the art of ceremony.

The theme of representation in the cultural production of AIDS in the United States is perhaps one of the most controversial of this book. There are two texts in this book that are especially relevant in this regard. The first one is the second dispatch in which collaborators discuss the 'revisitation' of (American) AIDS history. Undoubtedly there are legitimate concerns such as those raised by Cecilia Aldarondo, when she states that 'most of the recent cultural texts on AIDS are overwhelmingly white, overwhelmingly male, and overwhelmingly bourgeois' (p. 189). She continues 'If we allow these representations to dominate this moment of re-visitation, then we risk many things. We risk implying that AIDS never touched people of color and non-Americans, those very communities for whom stigma, disclosure, HIV criminalization, access to medical care, and family dynamics are ever present.'

Since the time that Aldarondo and other collaborators in this volume raised these concerns, there have been several research books, articles, and cultural artefacts that are less white, male and bourgeois. However, I agree with Jim Hubbard's assertion that AIDS history in the USA, and in the rest of the world, is currently understudied. It is too early to talk about re-visitation because there is continuous work being done on compiling oral history and doing history that aims to comprehend the reach of the epidemic. Historical epidemiology reviews along with qualitative studies can help to fix the lagoons in the academic scholarship.

However, as polyphonic as the book is, it is only fair to admit that most of these writings are USA-centric and that questions about the local distribution of the crisis might only attract those who are interested in the history of AIDS in United States. In this sense, the book seems somewhat to fail to de-colonise AIDS activism history, although it does focus mostly on the struggles of non-white activism to attain representation and a place in history. In this context, I believe that some of the chapters might have benefited from more work in terms of reflexivity and positionality. Despite this, this volume provides numerous contributions to various debates on the history of AIDS and opens the door to new paths for research in this field.

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