me too

#MeToo, Discrimination & Backlash

WOMEN, GENDER & RESEARCH is an academic, peer-reviewed journal that:
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Articles: 5000-7000 words (all included)
Essays or opinion pieces: 3900 words (all included)
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© Rebelicious. Dajo is a multifaceted artist, working with anything from fine art to avant-garde wearables and scenography. He is a trans masculine artist with a love for anything bizarre. His work includes performance art, under the name of Rebelicious, giving you queerness, bizarre looks and storytelling. Instagram: @rebel_icious.

CONTENT

Making Ripples and Waves through Feminist Knowledge Production and Activism

by Lea Skewes, Molly Occhino & Lise Rolandsen Agustín

"A feminist movement is a collective political movement. Many feminisms mean many movements. A collective is what does not stand still but creates and is created by movement. I think of feminist action as ripples in water, a small wave, possibly created by agitation from weather; here, there each movement making another possible, another ripple, outward, reaching." (Ahmed, 2007, 3)

We took on this special issue "#MeToo, Discrimination and Backlash" in order to draw attention to different feminist researchers' and activists' efforts to start these ripple effects within their field and within their worlds. We wanted to help them grow their ripple effects into larger waves, making the rings of the ripples reach even farther. But we also wanted to draw attention to how feminist knowledge production often comes up against institutionalised backlash or *brick wall*s (Ahmed 2017).

Ahmed's concept of *brick walls* captures that institutionalised habits and norms can become cemented to such an extent that challenging them feels like banging your head against a brick wall. This is, unfortunately, a common experience amongst many feminist researchers and activists. We aim to discuss this cementing of institutional habits into brick walls, and the affective experiences of coming up against them. We wanted not only to trouble institutionalised habits and norms (Butler 1990; Ahmed 2017), but also to stay with that trouble (Haraway 2016) as a collective political movement advocating for change.

The base assumption of this special issue is that feminists' come up against brick walls when

fighting for greater inclusion of women, people of colour, trans or queer people; and that this struggle typically has been met with backlash. Often the backlash has been especially harsh when people with minority identities have explicitly challenged currently privileged people. Therefore, the explicit challenge to privileges is central to this special issue. We hope to strengthen the academic voices which challenge patriarchal, masculine, white, cis-, and heteronormative norms, which for so long have been the invisible backdrop from which everyone else in academia has been cast as deviant outsiders (Ahmed 2012; Butler, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989). Therefore, we strive to bring out the internal conflicts and discriminatory processes within knowledge production in academia, and feminist activism more broadly, in order to create knowledge production spaces which are more inclusive, giving voice to many feminisms.

Therefore, we invited articles and essays from people who engaged with #MeToo, sexual assault, and feminist activism inside and outside of academia. We invited people to describe their own experiences, shaped by their own positionality, in order to capture the backlash they have come

up against when they dare to challenge academic or societal norms. This resulted in work by people who challenged sexism, racism, colonialism, heteronormativity and cis-/hetero-normativity. The intention was to invite researchers and activists to join us in a collaborative killjoy effort (Ahmed 2010) in which we present how researchers and activist name, reflect upon, and fight against these cemented discriminatory processes both in academia and society at large.

As an editing team and in our academic work, we embrace the interpellation of us as trouble makers or feminist killjoys (Ahmed 2010, 2017), but insist on causing trouble by consistently addressing biases, discrimination and normative judgements within knowledge production and social practices. We want to insist on speaking openly about different types of feminist knowledge production which are highly controversial and therefore exposed to intense backlash and cemented institutional habits experienced as brick walls. We want to do this, because addressing these problems and staying with the *trouble*, is the first necessary step towards creating more liveable worlds (Ahmed 2017; Haraway 2016).

The Revolutionary Wave of #MeToo

We believe that feminist knowledge production can have revolutionary potential, and we wish to tap into this potential by letting important feminist stories be told. One of the most revolutionary types of knowledge productions that has taken place within recent years is women starting to document and stand up against sexism and sexual harassment. Laura Bates' (2014) *Everyday Sexism Project* was the first global campaign to systematically document the problem. She simply asked people to upload their personal experiences with everyday sexism, which ranged from cat calls to sexual assault. Naming the problem has the potential to be revolutionary!

A similar idea was initiated by Tarana Burke, a Black American woman who created the hashtag #MeToo in order for victims of sexual harassment and sexual assault to share their experiences.

The hashtag, however, did not go viral until it was picked up by the white Hollywood actress Alyssa Milano, who encouraged others to use the hastag in order to document the extend of the problem (Mendes, Ringrose, & Keller 2018). Immediately after this re-launch of the hashtag, initiated by a white celeberty, it was used 12 million times within 24 hours (CBS 2017). The #MeToo hashtag thereby helped to document that destructive gendered dynamics are at play everywhere in society, all over the world, and amongst all people.

The #MeToo revolution has been very slow to hit Denmark. However, since tv-host Sofie Linde's speech at the Zulu's Comedy Galla in August of this year, the floodgates have been opened, and Denmark has entered into a wave of #MeToo reports. Employees in the Danish media, politicians, doctors, academics and others have followed suit – all telling stories which reveal major challenges with sexism and sexual harassment in Danish workplaces (Astrup & Jensen 2020). High profile politicians have stepped down from their positions after women have come forward with their experiences of being sexually harassed by them. In other words, Denmark has just started riding a #MeToo wave similar to the wave many other countries were caught up in a couple of years ago. The perpetrators are now being called out for their actions, and victims are finally starting to be heard and supported by many.

It is important to celebrate feminist waves in all shapes and sizes. This revolution has definitely offered greater room for people, especially women and other minoritised people, to speak up against sexism and sexual harassment by using the #MeToo hashtag. However, we must also make sure that we dare to stay with, and learn from, the type of resistance this type of progress comes up against. We need to pay serious attention to the fact that when gathering these stories of sexism and sexual harassment, both Bates and Burke also documented silencing strategies. These silencing strategies are put in play in order to deny or delegitimise victims stories about sexism and harassment, thereby ensuring that victims are not heard, and problems are not addressed. These findings bring to our attention that *not* talking about the

problem of sexism and sexual harassment, ironically, is at the core of the problem (Bates 2014; Skewes, Skewes, & Ryan accepted). Brick walls can also manifest themselves as silence. However, it is key that we speak up and demand to be heard even when we are met by silencing strategies. Telling our collective stories and labelling them discrimination (revealing the extent of the problem) has proven to be a very important first step in the feminist revolution.

The ripples of individual voices have collectively become waves which have started breaking down the *postfeminist fantasy* (Ahmed 2017, 5); the fantasy that there are no sexism problems left to solve in academia or in our culture. The wave of collective voices has oriented more and more people toward a realisation that we need to fight for structural change. Maintaining the status quo is not an acceptable option. Until recently, many non-feminist Danes might have bought into the *postfeminist fantasy,* and therefore believed that sexism and sexual harassment were relatively minor problems, or that it had already been solved. However, inside feminist research circles this has never been the case; feminists have worked hard to convince others of the (continued) existence of sexism, racism, homo- and trans-phobia (Ahmed 2017; Butler 1990).

In 2018, Dahlerup revealed that around one-third of Danish Members of Parliament (MPs) believe that no further interventions are needed to achieve gender equality. In other words, many MPs believe that we already have entered this postfeminist utopia of gender equality. Similarly, Høg Utoft (2020) documented that Danish academia was not the *postfeminist* utopia many expected it to be. Skewes, Skewes, & Ryan (2019) uncovered a worryingly high degree of *modern sexism* – the denial of the need for interventions against sexism (Swim et al., 1995) in Danish academia. Furthermore Skewes, Skewes, & Ryan (accepted) linked academic's modern sexist attitudes to attitudes towards #MeToo, and showed that academics with higher modern sexism scores are more likely to be negative or outright hostile about the movement, compared to academics with less modern sexist attitudes. The same study also shows that

the most prominent theme capturing university employees' attitudes about the #MeToo movement concerns silencing strategies, suggesting that many academics still are not ready to hear about co-workers' experiences with sexism and sexual harassment. This of course means that we have to keep staying with the trouble, to reveal the brick walls we are coming up against in our feminist struggles to achieve equity.

We do not have to be alone with our experiences of sexism and sexual harassment. We can find strength in sharing, and in becoming a collective of voices speaking up. Unfortunately, some people's inability to react with recognition and empathy to these stories reveals that structural gender inequalities still do persist (Borchorst and Rolandsen Agustín 2017). The brick walls are still there. Not everyone is ready to listen. However, as the second wave of the #MeToo movement in Denmark shows, a stone thrown causes ripples, it causes movement, it moves us, and the movement of people siding with the victims and killjoys is growing larger every day. Putting a name to the problem and staying with the trouble can start to make lives and worlds more liveable.

While we celebrate the progress that both the Everyday Sexism Project and the #MeToo movement has paved the way for, it is also important to be attentive to which voices are offered most speaking time within and through these movements. The experiences of women of colour and indigenous women, trans and queer people, people with disabilities, and other marginalised identities are often excluded. This inability to hear certain voices within the movement has resulted in white, cis-, heterosexual, upper/middle-class women dominating many of the discussions. Phipps (2019) uses #MeToo as an example of a movement which has co-opted the work of women of colour and other minorities. This co-opting of Black women's work was exemplified in the media visibility of #MeToo, where white Hollywood actresses' experiences became highly visible with the Harvey Weinstein trial. Similarly, when the #MeToo founder Tarana Burke and actress Alyssa Milano were interviewed on the *Today* show together, Milano was criticised for not

only interrupting and talking over Burke, but also taking up most of the airtime (Phipps 2019). This teaches us that we also need to be willing to be attentive to the discriminatory processes *within* our feminist movements. We need to keep insisting that multiple feminist voices are invited in and heard in our collective revolutionary spaces.

Who fits comfortably into academia and academic knowledge production?

The #MeToo movement brings home that knowledge is power which can reshape the world. The ripples of individual stories about sexism and sexual harassment have grown into a wave of collective stories, which have clearly had a revolutionary impact. The Everyday Sexism Project and the #MeToo movement, have extended the reach of feminist waves by using their platforms to show how all-encompassing gendered violence is. One example of the potential power of such waves is documented by Levy & Mattson (2019) who shows how the increase in awareness of the problems which has been achieved through the #MeToo movement has led to an increase in reporting of sexual crimes to the police. When we put a name to the problem, and insist that our voices are heard, we can turn little ripples into waves – using the new collectively produced knowledge to push for further structural change. Thus, we need to keep pointing to the problems captured in our collective stories of oppression. We need to stay with the trouble until we see the necessary structural changes. The wave of the #MeToo movement shows us that knowledge holds an agentic potential to reshape both our worlds and the subjects in it.

However, exactly because knowledge is power, the rights to knowledge and knowledge production has always been policed extensively. A significant part of this policing has been gendered (Possing, 2018) and racialised (Ahmed 2017). In the last 50 years, feminist knowledge production has concerned itself with questions of

power within knowledge production and the political entanglements of knowledge production and knowledge producers (Anzaldúa & Moraga 1981; Ahmed 2012, 2017; Butler 1990; Collins 1989, 1990; Haraway 1988, 2016; Haraway & Goodeve 1997; Stryker 1998, 2006; Spivak 1981, 1998). These questions have centred around; Who produces knowledge for whom? Who is the research subject/object and what degree of agency are the subjects offered in the process? Who does the knowledge production empower? And from which status position is the knowledge produced and disseminated?

These kinds of questions draw attention to the notion of objectivity, and the absence of self-positioning in a lot of academic knowledge production. One of the most famous critiques of the disembodied research stance is captured by Haraway's notion of the *God trick* (1988) – the absent all-seeing eye/I (1989). With this notion, Haraway discusses the idea of the faceless, bodiless and contextless knower as an illusion which hides the knowledge producers and their particular power positions (1988). In contrast to this positivist notion of objectivity, feminist theory has striven to draw attention to the male, white, straight, cis-, able-bodied researcher as the normative embodiment of objectivity (Ahmed, 2012; 2017; Butler, 1990; Haraway 1988, 1997, 2016; Stryker 2006). We need to keep drawing attention to the fact that non-situated knowledge production maintains the status quo's power hierarchies. We need to speak openly about who is facilitated in our academic institutions and who therefore sinks *comfortably* into the academic work environment, at the expense of others (Ahmed, 2007, 2017).

Feminist challenges to the illusion of a neutral or objective stance have also led to critical self-reflection *within* feminist research. Multiple diverse researchers have criticised exclusionary and discriminatory processes and practices *within* the discipline of feminist research, often driven by a privilege blindness to multiple intersecting social category positions. For instance, the most famous queer-theorist Butler (1990) pointed out the hidden heteronormative assumption in standpoint feminism, which excluded non-heterosexual

women from the scientific discourse. Early deco-lonial and Black feminists such as Collins (1990, 1998), Mohanty (1988), Anzaldúa & Moraga (1981), and Spivak (1991, 1998), have criticised how white Western women's voices typically are the ones being heard in feminist research at the expense of Black voices, Indigenous voices, and the voices of people of colour. Within transfemi-nist studies, Namaste (2000) and Prosser (1998) authored some of the earliest critiques of feminist queer studies for only using trans people as props to hold up their theories, while ignoring the lived experiences and realities of trans people. Joining these critiques, researcher such as Enke (2012), Halberstam (2017), Raun (2014), Stone (1987), and Stryker (1994, 1998, 2006), have pushed back against the problematic discourses of trans-exclu-sionary radical feminists, and feminists engaging with trans people's lived experiences in problem-atic ways.

Feminist scholars existing in the margins have therefore used their scholarship to call for greater inclusion in the scientific communi-ties, and have called for critical but "respectful engagement" (Raun 2014) with subject matter about marginalised peoples' lives and bodies. In other words, scholars embodying multi-layered *troubled subject positions* (Staunæs 2005) have drawn attention to the different kinds of norma-tive structures within academia. In this special issue, we want to open feminisms up, thinking about feminisms in a pluralist fashion. Thus, we want to connect with other feminist thinkers and genealogies (Halberstam 2017, 110), in order to build other liveable worlds and more liveable lives (Haraway 2016).

Born unfit for academia and knowledge production?

Often arguments against the inclusion of wom-en, people of colour, and trans and queer people has been entangled in essentialist arguments. For example, the arguments against women's access to knowledge and knowledge produc-tion has been based on gender essentialist and heteronormative assumptions: that (cis-)men and (cis-)women biologically are programmed fundamentally differently. Arguments of this kind typically rely on the premise that women are bi-ologically wired to take on tasks which situate them in the home in a caring, facilitating role to both men and children. Men, on the other hand, are considered biologically more rational and strong and thus equipped with abilities that make them superior at shaping and controlling the world outside the home (for information on the positive correlation between gender essentialist beliefs and the support of gender discriminatory practices see Skewes, Fine & Haslam, 2018 and for historical examples of this type of arguments see Possing 2018). Similarly, Black and decolo-nial feminisms have criticised how essentialist arguments have been used against people of colour, by positioning white Western people as the superior race. For instance, Mohanty (1988) shows that white Western feminist research of-ten has cast "Third World Women" as essential-ly inferior to Western women defining them as: poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domesticated, family-oriented, and victimised.

While many women, people of colour, and trans and queer people have entered university settings, we have never quite moved beyond the argument of the deficiency of minorities within academia. For instance, Nielsen (2017) docu-ments that Danish universities stand out in com-parison to Swedish and Norwegian universities' approach to gender equity, by often relying on a 'fixing the women' approach. That is, women's lack of progress in academia is still often attri-buted to their gendered inadequacies, rather than structural discriminatory practices or sexist insti-tutions. The universities have striven to compen-sate for these expected deficiencies by offering special training courses for women; even though we know from other sectors that training aimed at addressing assumed 'individual characteristics' rather than structural barriers tend to exacerbate the problems (Piscopo, 2019). In other words, the 'fixing the women approach' does not fix the core underlying structural problems of academia and institutionalised knowledge production.

Similarly, pointing to troubled access for people of colour in academia, Shardé Davis and Joy Melody Woods started the hashtag #BlackInTheIvory documenting how being a Black women in research exposed them to racism at many different levels. This hashtag illustrates that some researchers come up against brick walls when they are just trying to carry out their research. Both the example of 'fixing the women' and the BlackInTheIvory hashtag illustrate that not all subject positions are a comfortable fit in academia – some are assumed deficient simply because they do not fit the traditional mold of the knowledge producer. In other words, these examples illustrate that knowledge production still remains rooted in patriarchal and racist assumptions which have become institutionalised. In order to stay with the trouble, we need to do the kind of research that can create waves that can trouble and dismantle the current oppressive structures which are blocking people from entering universities. We need to keep insisting on producing knowledge from different and diverse *subject postions*.

Just like a feminist revolutionary potential was unleashed when we started sharing our stories from all our unique and intersectional *subject positions* (Staunæs 2005) under #MeToo, we share a hope that academia and academic voices will increasingly become more and more diverse. We hope to achieve this by speaking out against the brick walls faced both in and outside of the ivory tower. As a part of this practice, we argue that we need to create a space where we can speak about who is facilitated by the university, as well as its hegemonic definitions of 'legitimate' and 'objective' science. We argue that we need to facilitate knowledge production taking place from many different subject positions. We need multiple ways of pushing back against hegemonic understandings of which kind of research is the most 'legitimate' or 'objective' form of knowledge production. If we want to fight the 'patent' to knowledge production currently held by the all-seeing eye/I (Haraway 1989) of the unspecified male, white, Western, straight, cis-, and able-bodied researcher, we need to stay with the trouble by tracing, and picking apart different threads (Haraway 2016) of the

fabrics of the power structures that lay under the academy. Thus, we must trouble the making and unmaking of knowledge production. In doing so, we must ask: Who are we currently orienting the universities towards? How and why are we orienting the universities in this way? If we dare to make such trouble, and trouble; ourselves, the research, and the research institutions, then we can start to re-orient ourselves *and* our institutions and thereby facilitate a change in perspective. This type of troubling can help us re-think who can produce legitimate knowledge; whose world perspective knowledge ought to include; and what knowledge production could and should look like in the future.

Overview of the contributions for this special issue

In this special issue, we start out with an interview with Professor of Political Science at Stockholm University and Honorary Professor at the Centre for Gender, Power and Diversity at Roskilde University **Drude Dahlerup**. Under the title of **"Feminist Research in Misogynistic Times"** she lays out her international perspective on the current political climate where politics of sexism, homophobia, and xenophobia are dominating the political stage inside countries such as USA, Brazil, the Philippines, Hungary and Poland. Dahlerup also brings her political analysis home to Denmark, where she speaks about the intersection between politics of gender equity and xenophobia politics in Danish politics. Finally, the interview touches on Dahlerup's take on the #MeToo movement, which she believes holds the potential to facilitate us in challenging old patriarchal structures and help renegotiate concepts of gender equality.

Following this interview, **Signe Uldbjerg,** PhD fellow at Aarhus University, addresses non-consensual sharing of intimate images or digital sexual assault in her article: **"Writing Victimhood – A Methodological Manifesto for Researching Digital Sexual Assault."** She captures the fact that victims often either are subjected to victim blaming or portrayed as 'broken' victims with little agency

or hope of redemption. Through an experimental methodology based on creative writing, Uldbjerg strives to help victims find different voices by constructing their own alternative and empowering stories of victimhood. With this methodology, she combines activism and research in order to investigate digital sexual assault – actively supporting victims in constructing progressive stories of victimhood; stories that, as activism, work in opposition to oppressive discourses, and as research, offer insights into complex experiences of victimhood.

Professor **Ana Prata** based at California State University Northridge describes what the reception of the international #MeToo movement has been like in Portugal. Her article uses a Black feminist framework and content analysis of newspaper data in order to trace the political process feminist movements engaged in when addressing gender-based violence. Her article **"Caught in the Wave? Sexual Harassment, Sexual Assault, and the #MeToo Movement in Portuguese Politics"** further analyses how the #MeToo movement contributed to the visibility and framing of the issues. She discusses which collective actions were pursued, and which outcomes were achieved. The findings show that the globalised #MeToo movement has contributed to revitalise the Portuguese feminist movement, and that this vitality has led to more inclusive and intersectional activism.

PhD fellow **Abeba Birhane** based at the School of Computer Science at University College Dublin, and Postdoctoral Researcher **Olivia Guest** based at Donders Centre for Cognitive Neuroimaging, Radbourd University, Nijmegen in the Netherlands, contribute with an essay entitled "**Towards Decolonizing Computational Science."** In this essay, they guide us to how we might begin our journey towards decolonising computational research fields. They argue that we need to gain an awareness about how the current system has inherited and still enacts, hostile, conservative, and oppressive behaviours and principles towards women of colour, and that the solution to these inherited

problems must be structural changes. With this essay they wish to advance a dialogue required to build both a grass-roots and a top-down re-imagining of computational sciences.

Elisabeth Bruun Gullach & **Maya Acharya,** who are the founders of (Un)told Pages, has written an essay entitled: **"Me, Who? (Un)telling Whiteness in Narratives of Sexual Violence,"** in which they draw attention to the ways in which white feminism has co-opted and 'whitewashed' the hashtag #MeToo, ignoring the original intention of Tarana Burke to create a collective space for Black and Women of Colour to share experiences of sexual violence. In criticising how the #MeToo movement has become indicative of white women's stories, Bullach and Acharya also show how Black, indigenous, and women of colour's experiences are erased or ignored in #MeToo. They also point to similar trends within the larger feminist movement, within literature, and other arenas. They argue that when Black, indigenous, and women of colours' stories are shared, they follow a specific narrative of violence and trauma which casts Black, indigenous, and women of colour in a submissive and inferior role.

Marion Näser-Lather is a visiting researcher at the Helmut Schmidt University Hamburg and a private lecturer at the University of Marburg, who writes about the collaborations between 'gender-critic' scientists and right-wing Christian activists in Germany. In her essay "**Academics against Gender Studies – Science populism as part of an authoritarian anti-feminist hegemony project,"** she uses discourse analysis to capture how 'gender-critic' scientists strive to lend 'scientific' authority to an authoritarian anti-feminist discourse which primarily is supported by male right-wing activists, Christian fundamentalists, and right-wing parties and movements. She argues that the scientists' choice to support pseudo-scientific claims in their attempt to preserve conservative gender values and traditional gender roles unfortunately ends up undermining science as a whole.

In activists **Liv Moeslund Ahlgren** and **Ehm Hjorth Miltersen**'s essay, entitled **"Overcoming the Implicit Resistance to Norm Critical Education"**, the authors describe their experiences with working for the Danish organisation "The Norm Stormers" (*Normstormerne*). The Norm Stormers teaches adolescents in Danish schools about how social norms are constructed and used to discriminate against LGBTQIA+ people and other minority positionalities. Working within an intersectional framework, the authors reflect upon the different types of resistances, both explicit and implicit, that they come up against in their work. They unpack how they work with students to identify norms in order to help them understand why and how we need to address and systematically change these social norms.

In author and consultant **Mads Ananda Lodahl**'s essay, he poses the following question: "**Is the Binary System a Biological Fact or a Social Norm?**" (translated into English by Ehm Hjorth Miltersen and edited by Lea Skewes). In this essay, Ananda Lodahl highlights the conflicting norms which transgender and intersex people come up against in the Danish healthcare system. The essay situates the recent history of transgender and intersex legislation and activism, including the interrelated (but different) histories of the continued pathologisations of the two groups. This text is inspired by Anne Fausto-Sterling's (2000) iconic work *Sexing the Body* in which she address how the biological body is physically molded to fit cultural gender norms and expectations.

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Feminist Research in Misogynistic Times

An Interview with Drude Dahlerup

by Lea Skewes
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Introduction

I met with Drude Dahlerup who is a Professor of Political Science at Stockholm University and an Honorary Professor at the Institute for Social Sciences and Business and the Centre for Gender, Power and Diversity at Roskilde University. She was one of the pioneers in the Danish Redstocking Movement, that kickstarted the second wave of feminism. Furthermore, she was part of establishing Women's Studies, which she describes as a flourishing, international, scientific discipline. Throughout her career, she has worked on the topics of women's political representation, gender quota systems and social movements including the history of Women's Movements. With the goal of empowering women and increasing women's political representation in countries all over the world, she has put her academic knowledge into practice in the role as international advisor for the United Nations, the Inter-Parliamentary UNION (IPU), the Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy to Bhutan, Egypt, Sierra Leone a. o. She has been a vocal, feminist researcher who has never been afraid to push controversial feminist agendas.

In this interview, she offers her personal experience with resistance to women in academia and feminist science in general, as well as her unique insight into Danish politicians' current approach to gender equality and the #MeToo Movement. She points out that, currently, Denmark is falling behind on gender equity measures, because we remain stuck in a focus on women's alleged shortcomings, rather than focusing on the patriarchal structures that hinder equal access to high status positions such as academia or political seats in parliament.

Situating Drude Dahlerup

Skewes: "I would like to start by asking you to situate yourself both as a feminist and as a researcher – what kind of labels would you take on?"

Dahlerup: "I would say that I'm part of the first generation of people who created Women's Studies, which later became Gender Studies. In the beginning, we were only one or two feminist researchers at each Institute, and we would not have survived if we had not been situated in the larger Women's

Movement, locally, nationally and globally. This movement was absolutely essential in order to handle the resistance we met within academia, because it convinced us that we were on the right track! The Redstockings Movement in Aarhus (the second biggest city of Denmark) was well known for being the most academic branch of the Redstockings Movement in Denmark. We presented our academic analyses of women's oppression in society throughout history in meetings and seminars in the movement. In fact, many of the university's first Women's Studies master theses started as movement papers! The other absolutely essential element which we as Danish feminists in political science or history needed to succeed in academia, was our Nordic colleagues. We started to compensate for the isolation at our institutes by making Nordic co-operations. We wrote the first Nordic comparative book on women and democracy called *Unfinished Democracy: Women in Nordic Politics* (1986), financed by the Nordic Councils of Ministers. That would also be my advice to younger scholars, if they feel isolated within their local academic community: go international! The newest academic trends within feminist studies are often presented at Nordic, European and international seminars and conferences – and it is here you may meet your future academic collaborators (see Dahlerup 2010c).

However, the new Women's Studies discipline was not considered a proper science in the beginning. But today, Gender Studies or Feminist Studies is an acknowledged international discipline. And I am so delighted to see that we now have Women's Research Centres, Gender Studies Centres, Gender and Diversity Centres and Gender Studies Networks everywhere in the world. We also see these types of centres and networks expanding rapidly in the Arab world, where I have worked a lot in recent years. Now, you can also find many international scientific Feminist Studies journals and you will find articles written from a gender perspective in almost all scientific journals today – even in natural and computer science journals. There is also an increasing number of PhD thesis that make use of feminist theory and perspectives. Women's Studies started out as a

discipline in which you would know almost all that was written in the field, but now, feminist/gender perspectives have been developed within almost all scientific disciplines and subfields. Of course, not everybody likes that, and most recently, Victor Orbán's government banned 'gender studies centres' in Hungary as part of a new conservative backlash against the increase in women's and sexual minority rights. You find a similar backlash dynamic in Latin America under the strange heading of 'anti-gender' or 'anti-gender ideology'. This reflects that the change is controversial and that there is a backlash, but change has taken place."

Resistance to a Feminist Perspective in Academia

Skewes: Can you offer some examples of the resistance to the feminist perspective you experienced when you first started in academia?"

Dahlerup: "In 1963, when I started studying political science, a relatively new discipline at the time, there were not a single female teacher employed. On top of that, we were only about 10% women amongst the political science students and not all of us were active in the Women´s Movement. This meant that if you put your hand up in order to ask a feminist question, then all your classmates would laugh at you because a feminist perspective was considered ridiculous. We did of course sometimes raise our hand to pose critical questions anyway, but most of the time we did not. I remember that sometimes, after daring to ask one of these questions, I would leave the class room trembling a little bit, and then I would think twice before I opened my mouth again."

Skewes: "So, even posing a feminist question was considered ridiculous?"

Dahlerup: "Yes absolutely! I also remember that the teachers were not pronouncing the word 'kvinde' (meaning 'woman' in Danish) properly in class, they would all pronounce it 'qvinde' which made a mockery of the category women itself. So, even

the social category of women was disrespected. This meant that we were left to study and write from a feminist perspective all on our own."

Skewes: "But that is really worrisome – you were not even allowed a voice! You were allowed to write but you couldn't verbalize what you were writing about in class!"

Dahlerup: "I would rather emphasize, that even though we were not 'allowed' we did it anyway. I remember one of my first essays in economics in which I chose to write about equal pay. The teacher wrote in the margin of the essay, whether we couldn't just give the women a small increase in pay rather than actual equal pay? A comment, which revealed that equal pay was a completely new concept or consideration for him.

Another example of the kind of resistance I experienced was from one of my colleagues who asked me 'why are you not doing research with a broader scope?' – which of course implied that focusing on women or gender differences was too narrow a scope, while focusing exclusively on men and men's work was not. Similarly, when I wrote my master's thesis. It was one of the first theses in political science written from a feminist perspective, and the external examiner, the famous professor of economics Jørgen Dich, wrote that this was a very good essay (I received the highest possible mark). But he still felt the need to add 'But I don't agree.' Since this was a 400 pages thesis that analysed the different political ideas about women's emancipation among 19th century French Utopian Socialists and German Marxists, this remark was puzzling to me. My interpretation was that he probably meant that he did not like the subject."

Skewes: "How did you manage this kind of resistance or critique of you and your field?"

Dahlerup: "I think you have to be stubborn and believe that you are on the right track in order to handle it. And you also need other people around you in order to survive. No doubt, my choice of research area contributed to the fact, that it took 15 years for me to get a tenured position, which was

unusual at that time. Feminism was not considered a good fit for the university, so tenure track positions were hard to come by.

Another example of early resistance was when I was part of establishing the Women's Studies Centre, CEKVINA, at Aarhus University. I remember how I told my colleagues over the lunch table that we had decided to open up the Centre to include other faculties than the Social Sciences and Humanities. To this information one of my male colleagues responded 'I also love when women open up.' And still to this day, I regret that I just walked out in anger. Later, however, I learned that a good colleague of mine had challenged him after I left the room. So, even though I did not take that fight a colleague did. Experiences like this has taught me that some people cannot be persuaded that gender equality should be taken seriously, and you just have to move around them and find other allies in order to achieve progress.

In general, when studying gender inequality in academia, I must conclude that the universities are the last bastion in society which has not yet realized, or only slowly have started to realize, that there is a gender structure we need to change in order to reach equal opportunities for women in academia."

Skewes: "Okay, so you think that most of the Danish society has caught on but that universities are not quite there yet?"

Dahlerup: "I would say that the rest of society has understood the gender equality message, but that the universities are the last institutions to realize that there is a gender structure embedded in the walls of the academic institutions. The reason for this is that the gender structure critique hits a nerve in those particular institutions because the universities have a self-perception of being meritocracies. They have always assumed that the people who get positions are the most qualified, and they have been blind to the built-in biases against women and against minorities. But we find biases at many levels, for instance in (a) who is encouraged to apply for PhD scholarships, (b) in narrowly formulated calls for new professorships,

and as newer research has shown (c) sometimes even in the distribution of external research funds. I do not think it is a coincidence that those of us who were in Gender Studies, did not do research on the universities themselves but rather studied gender structures *outside* the universities. But you, for instance, are now bringing feminist research on universities into academia, as I have done in Sweden. It is very important, but it is also burdensome to work on changing your own organization from the inside" (Dahlerup 2010a; Skewes, Skewes & Ryan 2019).

Skewes: "Yes, it creates challenging dynamics."

Dahlerup: "Yes, I like the word challenging dynamics."

Politics or Science – Struggles over Perceptions of Objectivity

Skewes: "What you are describing lays out both how you were received in academia and how feminist approaches to gender equality are not always being heard or welcomed. But do you personally think that your activism fuelled or conflicted with your research?"

Dahlerup: "I think it can be both positive and negative to combine activism and research. It was absolutely necessary to be part of an activist movement in order to overcome the resistance. So, in this sense the activism fuelled the research. But the flipside of that coin was that we were criticised for being 'political'. It worked against us that our feminist work spurred a negative gut feeling in many men. For instance, if you tried to start a scientific discussion, many male colleagues would answer talking about emotional experiences in their private life rather than about research - clearly misunderstanding what was being debated. One of the effects of this bracketing off of feminist research as just political ideology, was that the universities during the 1970s and 1980s simply did not offer any positions in Women's Studies. If you got a job at this time, it would be *in spite of* doing gender research, not

because of it. This reflected that our work was considered politics, rather than science. We had to prove that this was in fact a scientific discipline. In my very first article from 1974, which caused blood, sweat, and tears, I wrote that our critique of the assumed gender-blind science was not just a moral critique, but 'a critique, which attacks the scientific level of existing research and teaching, based on the opinion that a distorted and incomplete picture of reality has been given.' I pointed out that it was an example of low academic standards if you, for instance, considered 'family' and 'women' natural categories that were never changing."

Skewes: "So, you pointed out some of the scientific problems which arise from a male-centric perspective?"

Dahlerup: "Yes, but our response to the critique that gender studies was 'political' and 'ideological' was in accordance with all critical analyses of the time, that no science is value free. I don't adhere to any concept of *objective* science. What is important in science is that the values are made explicit. You should state the purpose and approach of your research openly. These standards are no different than if you work on the climate issue or health issue or any other subject matter. In a recent article entitled 'The Impact Imperative: Here Come the Women' by Sara Childs and Rosie Campbell, they talk about *the feminist imperative* which is the fact that we aim for change with our type of research. In this way, it is very similar to doing research on climate change or poverty in the world. If you do research on working conditions in an organization, then you want working conditions to improve, right? You want to observe and report on the current situations in order to change them for the better. So, in fact the hope of change is not unique to feminist science. Starting from this idea of the *feminist imperative*, Sarah Child and I move the discussion one step further in a recent article, by asking what effects feminist scholars, as change actors, actually have upon whom, when, and through what channels? In that article, we used our own experiences of

research and counselling about empowerment of women in politics as a case" (Childs & Dahlerup 2018).

Skewes: "So, the original critique was that it didn´t qualify as science?"

Dahlerup: "Yes, it was not considered a science in the beginning. But we did manage to get funding from the Research Councils in Denmark. And, like in all Nordic countries, cross-party networks of Danish women politicians during the 1980s made parliament provide money for centres, positions and projects, thus bypassing and even softening the resistance to gender research at the universities. Now it is an internationally expanding and acknowledged discipline, and there is so much going on in the field!

The Taboo of Quotas

Skewes: "You capture the many ways in which feminists and feminist science was marked as highly controversial within the universities. Are there any research topics that you have experienced particular resistance to?"

Dahlerup: "No, my research has not been as controversial as for instance research on topics like domestic or sexual abuse of women, as the Swedish-Norwegian scholar Eva Lundgren experienced. If the results of your research are unwanted, then you will be scrutinised extra on your research methods, as all feminist scholars have experienced. You just have to be good! In my own work, it is probably gender quotas, which have tapped into the greatest Danish taboo. When I translated my English book *Has Democracy Failed Women?* and made a Danish version, *Demokrati uden kvinder?* (Dahlerup 2018b), I expanded the chapter on gender quotas in order to invite Denmark into this global discussion, which, at the moment, we are not taking part in. This is an important discussion because, although controversial, quotas are one of the gender equality instruments which are being used more and more in political life all

over the world. Quotas are even slowly starting to be applied in recruitment of board members of companies.

Back in 2006, I edited the first global book about this new trend, after having invited researchers from all major regions in the world to a conference in Stockholm. My present research on quotas shows that more than half of the world's countries currently is using some kind of gender quotas in order to rapidly change unwanted gender inequalities in political life. The legitimacy and effectiveness of gender quotas in politics depends on three things: (1) how the problem of women's under-representation is diagnosed; (2) to what extend the type of gender quotas that are adopted matches the electoral system in place; and (3) the general discourse on women's position in a society (Dahlerup 2006; Dahlerup & Freidenvall 2010; Dahlerup & Antíc Gaber 2017). Gender quotas is an instrument which, when constructed in the right way and with sanctions for noncompliance, is highly efficient. I often think that at least part of the resistance to quotas is actually that it is so efficient! If you implement quotas correctly you will see changes, and not everyone wants to break male dominance."

Feminist Work in Misogynistic Times

Skewes: "What do you think it means for feminists and feminist researchers in particular that we currently have a misogynistic and homophobic American President? Do you think that this misogyny and homophobia spills over into international discourse?"

Dahlerup: "Absolutely! I have been writing about this because I do think that, in the future, we will see an increased polarisation between feminists of all genders and anti-feminists. I think that many people thought that after neoliberalism we would have some kind of leftism again. However, already then, I predicted that after neoliberalism we would have conservatism. Kuhar and Paternotte's important book aims to uncover the actors who are driving this very ugly conservative

mixture of sexism, homophobia, xenophobia and anti-immigrant movements. Donald Trump in America, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, Viktor Orbán in Hungary and Andrzej Duda in Poland represent this new trend, which without any doubt should be labelled anti-feminist. In this book, the authors uncover many reasons for this, one of them being the unholy alliance between extremist right-wing populists, Christian evangelists, and the conservatives in the Vatican. But there are also many other forces at play, Steven Bannon being one of them. Of course, these extremists are not the major global force, but unfortunately they can win elections. These authors also uncover that in many places in Eastern Europe, and, I will add, in Latin America – some right-wing movements today use the concept of 'anti-gender' in English to expose an alleged foreign origin of feminism. However, the term is very unspecific, what does anti-gender mean? Sometimes they claim that they are against 'gender', whatever that might mean. But there is no doubt that they see the feminist, queer and transgender movements as a threat to the traditional family and to male dominance. Which in a way is correct! Resistance to #MeToo and to the Black Lives Matter movement is part of the same trend.

Apart from these very resourceful right-wing movements, misogynists are very active on social media. This type of resistance is predominantly populated by marginalised men who are often called the 'losers of globalisation' in insecure job positions. Logically, they should be attacking the financial elite, but instead they attack women who are active in public life. Maybe because this is easier than attacking the powerful elite men. When I talk about a future increased polarization in my book *Has Democracy Failed Women?* (Dahlerup 2018a), it is because we also, at the same time, see that the women's movement has never been stronger, globally. This is illustrated by the Women's Marches and the #MeToo Movement, which shows that women are not going to give up or give in!

Some people, even some feminist researchers, claim that women are constructing themselves

as 'victims' when they protest in the #MeToo movement. I disagree. The feminist movement is a *political movement,* and claiming your rights does not make you a victim! You wouldn't argue that a labour movement demonstration for the eight-hour workday in the 1920s made workers into victims, would you?"

Skewes: "Why do you think there is this strong anti-feminist or 'anti-gender' rise now?"

Dahlerup: "I think that this is partly a backlash caused by the fact that women *are* claiming more space. Women *are* in fact becoming more visible in the public spaces and debates. We do have more women in politics, even if politics is still male dominated. But because male dominance has been the norm for thousands of years, many of these people interpret 20-30% women in politics as female dominance."

Skewes: "But where does that misperception that women are taking over come from?"

Dahlerup: "The Institute for Human Rights made a study which showed that 26% of men and 14% of women actually believe that we currently have gender quotas at elections in Denmark (Institute for Human Rights 2019); and we have nothing of the sort. In our new book on the Danish political gender equality regime, which I edit together with Anette Borchorst and Jørgen Goul Andersen we show almost identical results in the book's population survey. When it comes to academia, people observe that we currently have many women in higher education, and then they assume that this will give them access to power. But they overlook the fact that statistically, men have three- or four times better chances of rising to the top and of becoming professors than women do. So, in spite of this bias *against* women, people still have this feeling that women are taking over. I have met people all around the world saying that since we have 50-60% female students at the universities, women will soon dominate society, and only men will have gender equality problems in the future."

Skewes: "It is also what I find in my study in Danish academia where 11% reported to believe that there currently is reverse discrimination against men in academia" (Skewes, Skewes & Ryan 2019).

Intersections between Danish Debates on Immigration and Misogyny

Skewes: "How does Denmark fit into this climate of misogyny, homophobia and xenophobia?"

Dahlerup: "What we need to worry about in Denmark is the new neo-liberal explanations. Look at the motivation behind the former government's financial cut of KVINFO. It was led by politicians from Liberal Alliance (a small neo-liberal party in the Danish parliament) which in their programme explicitly writes that the State ought not to support institutions which 'support certain gender perceptions.' We have many of those institutions, not just KVINFO. We have an Equality Unit in the Ministry. We have the Equality Counsel (in Danish: Ligestillingsnævnet), we have the Institute for Human Rights, with its unit for gender equality. Imagine if we should remove all those institutions! This points to another conflict than the one with the extreme right abroad, because these are neo-liberal politicians with well-educated younger men as their main followers, and some women as well. They denounce any structural analysis and claim that it is women´s own choices that create the asymmetries that we currently do have."

Skewes: "I often meet this narrative in Denmark that it is women who *chose* to have less demanding careers and therefore less power. That women are just more drawn to taking care of children and therefore to working part time, so why should we prevent them from making those choices?"

Dahlerup: "That's what I refer to as the neo-liberal assumption that it is women's own choice. The right-wing populists, who are currently in power in Poland and Hungary, would say that women *ought*

to stay at home. They want old-fashioned family structures. But this Danish group is not traditionalists in that way. Instead, they deny that there are any structural barriers and are in general against state intervention in most policy areas"

Skewes: "Have you written about this academically?"

Dahlerup: "We are studying these different understandings of what gender equality mean in our new book. For this project, I have conducted a survey among the members of the Danish Parliament, which shows that one third of the Danish Parliamentarians believes that gender equality 'has by and large been achieved' or has 'gone too far'. I label this position 'Equality is a closed case,' inspired by detective novels. I found that most of male MPs from the bourgeois parties belong to this group (Dahlerup 2018c). And we also have a survey among the Danish population of attitudes towards gender equality and gender equality politics, where the results are even more discouraging. What did we feminists do wrong?"

Skewes: "You are in the best position to answer that question. What made us immune to the gender equality discussion in Denmark? Why are we not having this discussion?"

Dahlerup: "The Danes are not traditionalists. They don't want women back in the kitchens, not even the right-wing parties. I believe that part of the explanation of the present deadlock in the Danish gender equality debate is the harsh debate on immigration. Because at its core, feminism and gender equality is about the equal worth of all human beings, and this stands in sharp contrast to the Danish discourse on immigration. Even the Danish People's Party, who has voted against most gender equality legislation, now claim that gender equality is a 'Danish value'. They claim it is only the immigrants who are lagging behind. This discursive construction ensures that, with good conscience, you can vote against all gender equality policies while at the same time justifying that we regulate immigrants' behavior; for instance, by forcing people not to wear the burka. This political approach

achieves two goals: a) It ensures that we do not have to work on gender equality in Denmark for the 'real' Danes, and b) it redirects our attention to the immigrants that are cast as not being 'real' Danes.

Myths that Prevent Feminist Knowledge Sharing

Skewes: Besides our immigration debates, do you think there are other elements that stand in the way of the promotion of feminist values in Denmark?"

Dahlerup: "In Denmark, feminism is associated with the radical Redstockings, or rather the myths about the Redstockings Movement. In my work on social movement theory, which describes how all social movements have their ups and downs, I have added that, historically, after a high point in the Women's Movement there will be constructs of myths in the media about what the movement consisted of (Dahlerup 2013). You can see this in the way the newspapers write about the Redstockings Movement. For instance, that 'the Red Stockings hated men' or 'wanted to be like men'; I don't know if you can do both at the same time? But they are two co-exiting myths. These myths hurt the younger generation of women because they then have to distance themselves from the previous wave of feminism. In my generation, we were very scared of being like the Suffragists. The myths were that they were bourgeois spinsters who could not get a man. This meant that we had to invent a new kind of feminist movement to separate ourselves from that myth. I think these negative myths about the Redstockings Movement have been very powerful and destructive for the feminist environment in Denmark (Dahlerup 1986, 1998)."

Skewes: "The way you describe it, the myths work as a divisive, silencing mechanism which prevents information flow between generations."

Dahlerup: "Yes, because it casts the older generation in a negative light which the younger generation needs to distance themselves from. In this way, it prevents collective learning from one generation to the next. It is a great problem in the feminist movement."

Skewes: "It is so interesting that you say that because very early on in my academic career, I was warned about associating with some of the outspoken feminists at my university, women I wanted to network with."

Dahlerup: "I am sorry to hear this. Are you actually talking about being warned against contacting people? I almost can't believe it."

Skewes: "Yes, I was warned against associating with certain people. And now I have been told by several younger researchers that they have been warned against associating with me. I have a strong feminist brand because I founded and still coordinate the *Gendering in Research* network, so now upcoming researchers are being warned against associating with me. They are being warned that it might have a negative effect on their career to do so. This shows how learning between fellow feminists is being prevented through myths even within generations. It seems to be the small-scale version of what you are describing between generations."

Dahlerup: "Yes it sounds similar. One of the things you have to do to resist this kind of suppression of feminist networking and collective learning is to invite internationally well-known feminist scholars. You need to bring them into the university to debate these issues in the open."

Skewes: "I actively do that via *Gendering in Research*, but then even my superiors have experienced being confronted and asked to keep me in check and to ensure that I am better aligned with the university's non-feminist agenda."

Dahlerup: "So, what they are really saying is that young scholars should not associate with these well-known scholars exactly because they are successful? Do they use the word 'feminist' when they warn you against affiliating yourself with these researchers?"

Skewes: "No they have been labelled as 'controversial researchers', yet again questioning the possibility of being both a feminist and a researcher."

Individual Choices or Structural Challenges?

Skewes: "There clearly is a lot of resistance to both feminist knowledge production in academia and feminist agendas in Denmark in general, but how could we change our approach to gender equity in Denmark in order to achieve greater changes?"

Dahlerup: "I don't think the political parties in Denmark are taking on enough responsibility for the problem. When I compared party programmes from Denmark and Sweden, I found a big difference in the diagnosis of the problem of women's underrepresentation. From around the turn of the millennium, both the Swedish left and the liberal parties began calling themselves 'feminist' and based their diagnosis of the problem on Yvonne Hirdman's concept of *the gender system* (in Swedish 'könsmaktsordning'). This meant a new focus on changing the structures and barriers in society. However, in Denmark most, parties left the problem undiagnosed (Dahlerup 2007, 2010b).

In Scandinavia, we have moved beyond the claim that the lack of representation is due to women being unintelligent! However, around the world you are still confronted with this argument. I have experienced women arguing that point too. When I was consulting in Cambodia for UNDP, I had a meeting with the female members of parliament. One of them said very early in the discussion 'I'm sure there will be more women in politics when women become more qualified and skilled.' What she was really saying, was that 'we' were the skilled elite, while the rest of Cambodian women were not qualified for politics. By turning the perspective, and asking these parliamentarians how and who recruited them, the old boy's network at work can be revealed. I experienced a similar eye-opener when I was invited to speak at a meeting for parliamentarians on quota adoption in the Ivory Coast. The parliament's highly respected female vice chair effectively stopped a discussion about women not being sufficiently qualified for political work by telling about all her personal difficulties years back, when she had to go from one powerful man to another for years in order to be nominated for a seat (Dahlerup 2018a, 47-48).

However, I think over all that there has been a change in the global discussion, a shift away from *blaming women* to *blaming structures.* This important shift arose out the Beijing declaration 'Platform for Action', which was adopted at the 1995 World Conference on Women. Some might think that such international declarations play no role, but I see time and again in my work as an international advisor on the political empowerment of women how local women's organisations make active use of these declarations. They can use these declarations and us as international advisors, to 'squeeze' their top politicians. Therefore, this declarational shift of focus away from *the individual women* to the *institutional structure* was essential. I have always worked from what we today label a feminist institutionalist perspective, which focuses on changing the structures of the political system rather than changing the individual women. It is these structural barriers which are still preventing women from moving into politics, not their lack of qualifications. I believe there are enough qualified women out there to fill all the parliaments in the world!"

Skewes: "I feel that this discussion of whether it is the women or the institutions which are at the root of the problem is still considered open for discussion in Denmark. What do you think?"

Dahlerup: "Individual parties always claim that they are looking for women for nomination but that they are simply not there. But at least in the abstract there is an understanding that there is a structural problem. However, in academia we have not successfully finished this shift from an *individual* to a *structural perspective*. I think it is this conflict between *self-perception* and *reality* which has delayed the change in the universities. But I think at least in the abstract, and maybe particularly outside of academia, people recognize

gender equality is an important principle. It is even a Danish value, right? 'Gender equality' is today part of the so-called *Denmark Canon* side by side with 'Christian values', 'tolerance', 'welfare state' and 'hygge' (a cozy atmosphere that by many Danes is considered important when socializing with friends).

Skewes: "But as you have shown in your study, gender equality is perceived to be a box we have already ticked off. Denmark is perceived to be a gender equal country, so there is nothing more to strive for on that front."

Dahlerup: "Absolutely, in Denmark we have not developed the thinking and taken the important discussion to a political level; in fact, the discussions have been weakened during the last two decades. So, Denmark has been left behind in a Nordic perspective. There is a connection between a weak discussion and the fact that Denmark, in contrast to the other Nordic countries, has refrained from using those gender equality policy instruments which have proved to make substantial change, such as criminalising the buyers of sex (Sweden, Norway, Finland), a minimum quota for women and men in company boards with sanctions for non-compliance (Norway, Iceland) and earmarking parental leave for the fathers (all other Nordic countries).

The MeToo Movement in Denmark

Skewes: "Another front where the discussion seems to have been stopped or stalled in Denmark is in relation to the MeToo Movement. Do you agree with my interpretation that Denmark has been relatively immune to the MeToo Movement? (The interview took place prior to Sofie Linde's kick start of Denmark's second wave of #MeToo). I think that in many other countries, it has spurred both discussions and initiatives aimed at achieving changes whereas in Denmark we have seemed quite immune to those discussions and particularly to the initiatives for change. Even in the case of Zentropa, it just led to temporary sanctions and

then everything went back to the former standards of conduct; no institutional learning was achieved."

Dahlerup: "I wouldn't use the word 'immune', but rather say 'less receptive'. An article in the journal *Nordicum* compares the reception of the MeToo Movement in Denmark and Sweden (Askanius & Hartley 2019). It shows how the MeToo movement was primarily painted in a positive light in Sweden, while it was primarily painted in a negative light in Denmark. This is a typical finding in Danish-Swedish comparisons, and in line with my own comparative discourse analysis of the two countries during my 18 years as professor at Stockholm University. I think two things happen, when we compare MeToo in Sweden and Denmark. Firstly, it stands out that the actions taken from the political parties and the government were much more efficient and powerful in Sweden. For instance, the Swedish minister of culture, Alice Bah Kuhnke, responded the day after 12 actors on the front page of the newspaper, *Dagens Nyheter,* accused Dramaten of sexual harassment. She called the leaders of the biggest theaters and asked them which strategies they were going to implement in order to prevent this in the future? It was even debated in the parliament. In contrast, as far as I know, it has never been debated in the Danish parliament. Mette Bork did not even do anything until she was pushed by the press to call a meeting. These actions and inactions are of course part of the legitimation or delegitimisation of this movement and that is one part of the problem. The other part of the problem is what Askanius and Hartley's article clearly shows, namely, that in Denmark there were many men from the cultural elite, and some outspoken women as well, who were using labels such as 'witch hunt' to describe the movement. In spite of the fact that very few Danish men have been named and exposed by the MeToo Movement. In Sweden they also used the term 'witch hunt', but here the primary focus remained on women's exposure to sexual harassment, rather than on men's exposure to accusations of sexual harassment. But I would not use the word 'immune' to describe the Danish reception of the MeToo Movement. I would rather say that the reception has been polarised. This

can be illustrated by the big hearing about MeToo at Roskilde University in March 2018, which I was part of organising. We invited some of the actors who had reported on sexual harassment problems to speak about their experiences. Several hundred people attended. This shows that many people do want to hear about these experiences. We have the 'Everyday Sexism' website, there have been many other hearings, and the law on sexual harassment has been strengthened somewhat, based on feminist research showing the malpractice. However, others do want to deny that sexual harassment even occurs. But, it is important to underline that the MeToo movement did achieve a lot in Denmark. Everybody has heard of the movement! Most young men have heard about it, and I believe many of them are influenced by it. And all women now know that they do not have to accept this kind of behaviour; that makes a great difference.

But the accusation of a witch hunt on men should be seen as an attempt to stop the discussion, when, what, we were in fact doing, was addressing and fighting sexual harassment and the lack of protection women have from sexual violence. The MeToo Movement has the potential to be revolutionary by changing thousands of years of patriarchal history where men have considered themselves entitled to women's bodies. But the expressed expectation is that not a single man ought to be hurt in the process of this revolution! Is that really a fair and reasonable expectation?"

Notes

[1] From a special issue on Women's Studies (kvindeforskning) of the journal *Politica*, see Dahlerup 1974, 13.

[2] See also the global quota website: www.quotaprojects.org, which I along with my research team at Stockholm University started in cooperation with International IDEA, which gives information to quota advocates all over the world.

[3] Anette Borchorst og Drude Dahlerup, *Konsensus og konflikt. Det danske ligestillingspolitiske regime*. Frydenlund Academics (in Danish).

[4] Anette Borchorst and Lise Rolandsen Agustín, *Seksuel chikane på arbejdspladsen. Faglige, politiske og retlige spor.* Aalborg University Press, 2017.

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Writing Victimhood

A methodological manifesto for researching digital sexual assault

By Signe Uldbjerg

Abstract

Non-consensual sharing of intimate images, here called digital sexual assault (DSA), has been a heavily debated subject in Denmark over the past few years. In the polarized public and academic debate, DSA victims are often either subjected to victim blaming or portrayed as 'broken' victims with little agency and hope of redemption. This article presents a methodology for working with DSA victims to construct their own alternative and empowering stories of victimhood.

Through an experimental methodology based on creative writing, I have included three young women in a process of collectively developing and exploring aspects of their experiences with DSA. With this methodology, I aim to combine activism and research in investigating DSA and actively supporting victims in constructing progressive stories of victimhood; stories that, as activism, work in opposition to oppressive discourses, and, as research, offer insights into complex experiences of victimhood. The article ends in a discussion of change as the prospect of activist research and experimental methodologies and concludes with a "manifesto for writing victimhood" stating activist aims that encourage and value social, personal and political change in and through research.

KEYWORDS: Digital sexual assault, image-based sexual abuse, victimization, activism, methods, ethics.

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"She can never have a normal life"
Ole Søgaard-Nielsen in Jensen and Ilsøe (2018)

"They have nothing to lose anymore. They have lost their name and reputation"
Miriam Michaelsen in Vestergaard and Jensen (2019)

These quotes are from prominent lawyers and advocates representing victims of non-consensual, sexual image sharing. They are part of a debate about digital sexual assault (otherwise known as image-based sexual abuse) that has been gaining recent attention. Since Emma Holten (2014), the first person in Denmark to become well-known after going public, published her story, there has regularly been new cases of digital sexual assault (DSA) surfacing in the national press. During this time, DSA has been an ideological and political battlefield. On one side, there are those who describe it as a problem mainly concerning young people's risky digital behaviour with child psychologist John Hasle being a prominent example:

> *"They should not be sharing anything. […] we must tell them that we don't feel sorry for them when their nude images have been shared – because we told them what consequences it [taking them ed.] could have."* (Sommerand, 2017)

On the other side are lawyers, activists and NGOs advocating for policies that take DSA seriously. The introductory quotes are examples of how they often frame the consequences of DSA. While there are other perspectives present in the public debate, e.g. those of educators and teachers, it often tends to be polarized between victim blaming and stories of ruined lives. Hence, victims are mainly offered two possible positions: Either they are seen as reckless, naïve teenagers and their victimhood unacknowledged, or they are seen as inherently damaged by the assault and thus deprived of agency in creating better futures for themselves.

The public visibility of this debate has affected academic interests as well. It is a common argument among scholars researching intimate digital practises that the victims' side has already been heard. For example, in a recent special issue of *MedieKultur* that focussed on digital intimacies, several articles unfold the argument that assault has dominated the debate on digital sexual practises so that other studies are now needed (Thorhauge, Demant, & Krogager, 2020). Ironically, none of them reference studies that present the side of victims through their own words.

While I certainly agree that multi-facetted knowledge of intimate sharing practises is important, I also think that the perspectives of victims have not yet been, and need to be, heard. Therefore, I wanted to explore alternative positions of victimhood, or rather, I wanted to build a research project that could support victims in developing and exploring such stories themselves. This article presents the methodological efforts behind this aim; I am not so much analysing victim positions as I am evaluating the methodological basis for their construction.

As an activist, I have met a large number of women who are living with the consequences of sexual assault, and I live with such experiences myself. I know how frustrating and painful it can be to find yourself stuck in a position where you have to choose between giving up your claim to victimhood and accepting the stigma of the 'ruined' victim. Therefore, I recognize the importance and vulnerability of negotiating victim-positions, and these negotiations are what current research on DSA

overlooks. This is also why, I hold on to victim instead of e.g. survivor; I wish to insist on victimhood as a position of authority, one that gives you a special insight when addressing sexual assault personally and politically. Further, the participants of this study openly preferred victim, referring to the term 'survivor' as something 'American' (and alienating) or not descriptive of assaults that essentially repeat themselves every time the images are shared.

The three women, who became my co-researchers and co-activists in this project, choose the pseudonyms Mathilde, Karen and Amalie; these names are references to historic Danish female writers (Mathilde Fibiger, Karen Blixen and Amalie Skram), and they thereby echo a history of women claiming a voice through writing. And writing, as the title indicates, was our methodological practise. In the participatory setting of the writing workshop, we used creative writing as a method for collectively developing a language to describe experiences of DSA different from those dominant stories mentioned above. The methodology does not assume that alternative stories of DSA victimhood already exist if we look the right places. Rather, it seeks to construct new and complex stories; stories with empowering and thus political potentials.

This article examines the possibilities and dilemmas of this methodology. First, I define a set of theoretical principles for doing feminist activist research. Elaborating on these principles takes me through the methodological and ethical reflections behind the project. The section 'Activist research must engage in problem-solving' suggests experimental and creative methods as a way to accommodate the need for more nuanced stories of DSA victimhood. The following two sections analyse ethical challenges inherent in this approach, and the next section discusses these ethical considerations in relation to victimhood specifically. The final session concludes by addressing the hope for change as basis for the above considerations and by proposing a "manifesto for writing victimhood" placing the research project in the context of a collective activist struggle.

In short, the article offers some answers to the complex question of how to do ethical and activist research on a highly sensitive subject that, like sexual violence in the context of MeToo, is vibrant with public opinion.

Activist research

By activist research, I mean a method through which we affirm a political alignment with an organized group of people in struggle and allow dialogue with them to shape each phase of the process (97)

These are the words of Charles Hale (2006) when reflecting on his own activist research practices. In his approach, inclusion is the key to doing activist research that represents oppressed perspectives respectfully and within their own regimes of truth rather than those of the stigmatizing majority. This logic is rooted in the idea that the victims of a specific struggle cannot only learn to understand their problems but also to provide sustainable solutions (Koirala-Azad & Fuentes, 2009). Therefore, the alignment that Hale mentions is crucial for activist research that seeks to pose realistic and viable solutions to social problems. Activist research, in other words, must be participatory.

Along similar lines, activist research must seek to engage in problem-solving. Reason and Bradbury (2008) argue that the strength of activist research is its ability to find social and political solutions based on knowledge and reflection. "Action without reflection and understanding is blind, just as theory without action is meaningless" (4), they state, calling for researchers to use theory for the purpose of action.

Addressing structural inequality, the proposed solutions must move beyond the individual to the collective level. Nancy Naples (2003) makes this point when discussing the potentials of individual victim stories as part of a joined struggle. While Naples argues that coming forward with individual stories of assault can be empowering and serve as a way to raise a feminist movement, she criticizes discourses that are either dominated by expert statements and ignore the voices of victims or become spectacles of individualized

pain without exposing the underlying, structural inequalities. Activist research must be collective.

However, engaging in collective, political struggles blurs the relation between the researcher, the researched and the research (Naples, 2003). Politics and research become inseparable and pose what Hale (2006) calls "dual loyalties" referring to how activist scholars "must embrace two quite distinct sets of objectives and forms of accountability, and they must negotiate the often considerable tensions between them" (105). These tensions, between academic norms of accountability and activist goals of political and personal change, result in activist research being evaluated on two different parameters: The researcher is accountable for the quality and reliability of the research and for its social and political impacts. Thus, activist research poses dual commitments.

A commitment that lies in the tension between activism and research is representation. How is it possible to represent victims respectfully within a research culture that has a history of objectifying women and minorities for the sake of the development of that very knowledge system (Naples, 2003)? One answer to this challenge, echoed in many works on feminist research, is the argument that empathy supports representation. Within participatory action research, Reid and Frisby (2008) advocate for empathetic dialogue as a method that encourages diversity because listening to others is the basis for understanding and representing their unique perspectives. The same idea is prevalent in the field of feminist care ethics; Carol Gilligan (2014) writes:

> [W]e need to hear and encourage the full range of voices within and around us by becoming a society of listeners. Active listening means asking, how might I call forth a voice that is held in silence, a voice under political or religious or psychological constraint? (104)

Gilligan's work originally criticized a research culture that did not represent women and girls. She posed a feminist ethics based on listening and care as a way to encourage diversity and aim

for representation (Gilligan, 1982). The idea of thinking with care as an ethical principle has developed into a broad field of feminist care ethics emphasizing the importance of relational obligations in research (Bellacasa, 2017; Held, 2014; Tronto, 1994). Hence, activist research aims for representation through care.

Finally, activist research provides hope, or in the words of Koirala-Azad and Fuentes (2009) it "provides a hope for change that traditional research and scholarship often lack" (2). This is, I suggest, the essence of activist research; it allows us to hope for, believe in and work towards change.

Activist research must be participatory. Activist research must engage in problem-solving. Activist research must be collective. Activist research pose dual commitments. Activist research aims for representation through care. Activist research provides hope. These statements structure the following reflections on methodology and ethics. Returning to the subject of working with DSA victims, I will elaborate on the impacts of these principles when balancing research and activism.

Activist research must engage in problem-solving

As described in the introduction, a problem that DSA victims face is the lack of available positions that both offer agency and acknowledge victimhood. This project's commitment to problem-solving therefore lies in constructing alternative knowledge on DSA victimhood. An aim such as this calls for a methodological framework that pays attention to the performative aspects of research methods and their ability to not just investigate but also create. Lisa Blackman (2012) points to how performative methodological experiments can bring "something into being that did not pre-exist the experimental encounter" (184). Likewise, others argue that experimental methodologies can help us imagine alternative futures and open up for unrealized potentials of action and understanding (Davies, 2014; Lezaun, Marres, & Tironi, 2016; Staunæs, 2016; Staunæs & Kofoed, 2015b).

An experiment, however, must be performed through specific practises. Sophie Hope (2016), working with what she terms practise research, elaborates on the intersections between creative practises and research. She distinguishes between research into practise, research that uses creative practises as methods and research that develops creative practises. In this case, the goal is to develop empowering practices among DSA victims through writing while these writing practices are also the method used to examine experiences of victimhood; this positions my methodology in the field between research through practise and research for practise. Research through practise shares traits with experimental methods as it emphasizes research as a constructive process. I would argue that in order to do an experiment, you need to build from a practise; here, writing is that practise.

Building on this tradition, I have designed a research process that functions as an experimental space fostering alternative knowledge production through collective and individual storytelling. This took place in four creative writing workshops, through continuous communication and finally follow-up interviews after the bulk of the research process was over. The figure illustrates this process.

In terms of data, this resulted in 23 creative writing texts and 105 pages of transcribed conversations and interviews. Out of the 23 texts, 11 were about DSA while the remaining texts were writing exercises with a pedagogical rather than empirical purpose. The first workshop started with an introduction to the research process and unstructured conversation, and at the end of the workshop, I introduced the first writing task. In workshops 2
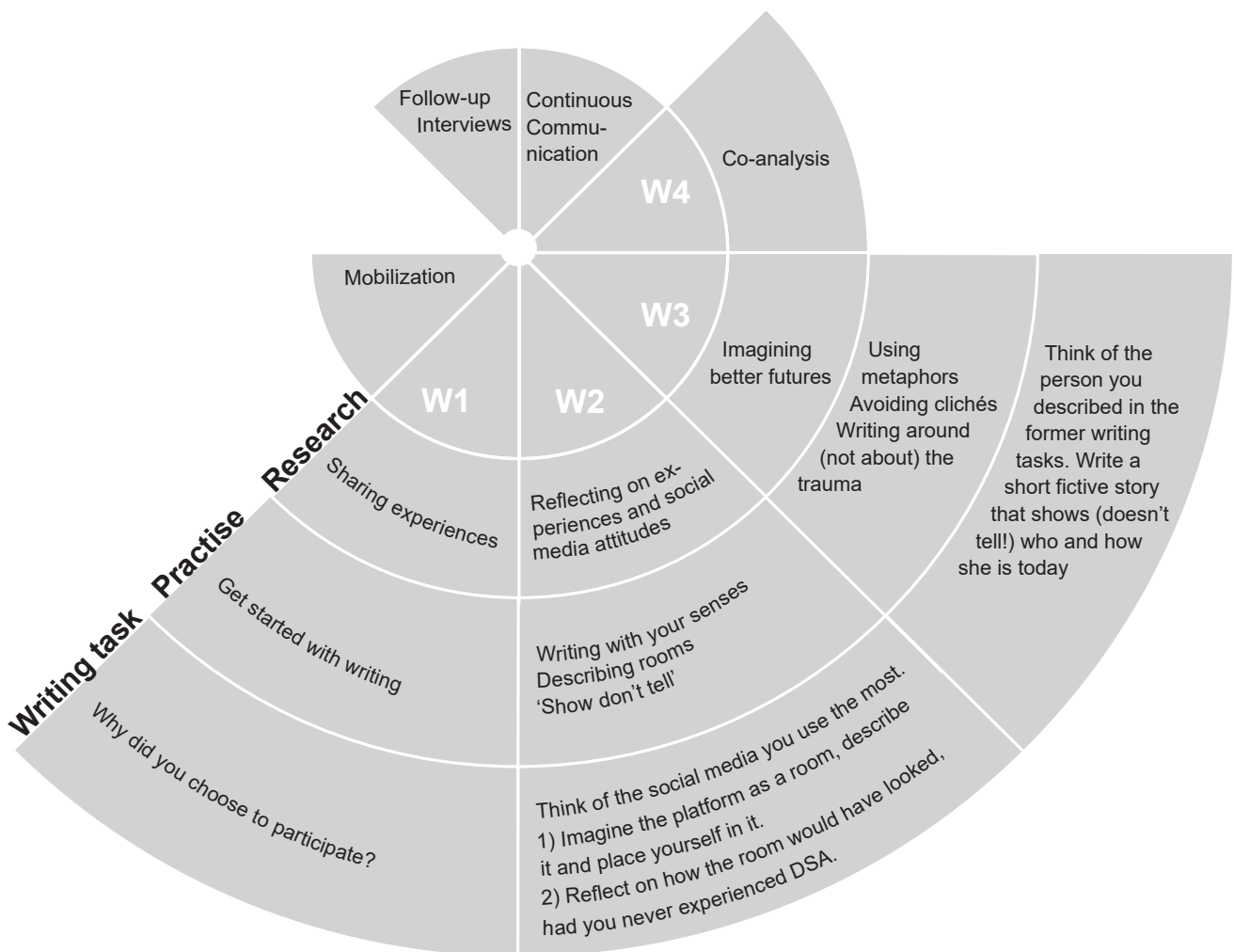

Figure 1: Research process

and 3, we first discussed the texts from the former workshops, then practiced writing and finally prepared for the next writing task. Workshop 4 started with sharing writing as well but was mostly spend on coding and analysing texts and transcriptions from the former workshops.

As indicated in the figure, each of the workshops had specific focus areas in relation to the research questions and the writing practise. The focus areas were combined in the main writing tasks, which draw on primarily two approaches to writing: Creative writing, as practised at Danish author schools, and therapeutic writing.

Therapeutic writing concerns caring for the participants, which I will return to in the following section. The creative writing approach offers the collective writing and reading workshop as a practise. These workshops consist of writing and reading texts to one another and collectively analysing and improving your writing (Lind, 2019). Creative writing offers both a method for working with writing in groups and a set of tools for designing and giving feedback on writing tasks that teach the participants a specific way of using language. Creative writing practitioners make it a point that writing is a way to see the world from new perspectives and gain new understandings through the creative breaking up and reshaping of everyday language (Llambías, 2015; Zola Christensen, 2005).

Altogether, experimental research can accommodate activist commitments to problem-solving in relation to DSA because research experiments can meet the needs of victims to construct alternative and oppositional truths. Having stated this connection between activist aims and research methods, in this case creative writing, I will now turn to the ethical dilemmas it implies.

Activist research poses plural commitments

While creative writing and experimental methods celebrate going beyond the well-known, they do not address the vulnerability of insisting on alternative truths. They pay little attention to the fact that staying within the normative often feels safer, even when this normative is as restraining as the narrow victim positions criticized here. This ethical concern goes beyond the dual loyalties between activism and research. Therefore, I wish to expand Hale's (2006) concept and instead talk about a plurality of commitments.

Phelan and Kinsella (2013), in their work on doing research with children, identify three ethical commitments that they name care, clarity and representation. Care is the here and now concern for the participants' well-being, clarity is the commitment to produce long-term beneficial knowledge, and representation is the obligation to represent the participants rightfully. Similar ideas are expressed by Staunæs and Kofoed (2015a) as the dilemma between long-term benefits and doing good here and now. They, in different ways, deal with the dilemmas between constructing good and useful knowledge and not sacrificing the participants' safety and dignity along the way. When combining these approaches with Hale's concept of dual commitment, three related categories of commitments appear:

1. The commitment to research clarity
2. The commitment to care
3. The commitment to activism, representation and change

In the above and following parts of this article, research and activism are the focus areas, but addressing vulnerabilities and care is important in order to understand the ethical complexity and precariousness of the process. I have no training in psychology or therapy, and I therefore needed an applicable way to minimize the risk of inflicting harm in the form of re-traumatization. Therapeutic writing offered a way to integrate precautions around care into the practise of my methodology.

There are different arguments within the field of therapeutic writing as to what writing and reading do. Some argue that the therapeutic potential in writing comes with gaining new perspectives through aesthetic engagement (Llambías, 2017; Steenberg & Ladegaard, 2017; Zwisler et al., 2017);

in this tradition, it is not important *what* people write about, but rather how they use writing to see the world in new ways. Others accredit the therapeutic potentials to finding new ways of reflecting on one's self and creating meaningful life narratives (Bolton, 2008; McNichol, 2016; Pennebaker, 1990); within this tradition, people are encouraged to write about themselves, and *what* they write is just as important as *how* they do it. Despite their differences, practitioners generally agree that the benefits of writing come from being confronted with something new and different, whether this is aesthetic forms and world-views or new perspectives on one's own story and thoughts. Not unlike creative writing, therapeutic writing seeks the potential of alternative truth in creative expression. McNichol (2016) specifically warns against writing processes that cause people to linger in their pain. She breaks the therapeutic writing process down into steps going from describing a trauma, to reflecting on it and finally moving on to write a new less restraining story. This process was incorporated into the progress of the writing tasks (see figure1).

The methodological approaches that I have drawn on all share a belief in the positive forces of the creative, as a way to gain new perspectives and develop alternative knowledge, and the new, as a way to heal trauma and change perceptions. But a dilemma that has haunted my conscience is on how to deal with the pieces of writing that are not 'good writing', in accordance with the creative writing principles, and do not tell alternative stories but instead dip into the usual, restraining discourses of DSA victimhood. Especially one text, by Karen, has troubled me:

> *She is vulnerable and a total security addict. When she has nightmares, hold her, be there for her […] She is convinced that she is difficult to love because of the things she has been through. She is so atrociously strong that it is indescribable. Show her that she is not difficult to love, and let her never believe she is.*
> *Be her rock through thick and thin.*
> *Promise never to break her heart.*

The text mirrors the story of broken lives surrounding DSA victims, and it draws on common figures indicating vulnerable girlhood. With this text, she paints a rather stereotypical picture of the vulnerable young girl in need of (male) care and protection. From an activist perspective, I have two concerns with this: First, it reinforces a gender pattern where women and girls are less in control of their own well-being and need a romantic connection to be safe. Second, it talks into the prejudices of DSA being mainly a problem concerning young, naïve girls with unrealistic romantic ideas. On the other side, I also see potential in openly sharing the voices of vulnerable girls and young women in a call for the world to take their lives and problems seriously. Several studies point to how the choices of girls are not taken seriously or even deemed risky, e.g. in relation to education and social lives (Driscoll, 2016), sexual expression (Lamb & Peterson, 2012), and cultural practices (Hickey-Moody, 2013). From a feminist perspective, this needs to change.

However, I also have to consider if it is responsible to make Karen a scapegoat for this political agenda; after all, she contributed to the project wanting to shed light on DSA experiences, and defending girl culture is my agenda – not hers. Using her story as an example of this might, if read by the wrong audience, undermine her authority and make the stigma of naïve girlhood stick to her.

While I do not want to share a text that can expose or even ridicule Karen, and potentially contribute to a discourse that dismisses the importance of DSA as a 'girls-problem', I find the text analytically interesting. Put in contrast to Karen's other contributions, it points to how complicated assault experiences can be on one side needing to break out of limiting positions and on the other side finding comfort within them. Karen otherwise comes across as an incredibly strong victim. She is fighting for her case in the court and on a number of public platforms, and I need to accept that she wanted to show an aspect of her experience that does not match my ideology or her public 'mask', as she called it.

Negotiating this illustrates the dilemmas of plural commitments between research, care and

representation. Even when integrating methods that encourage alternative stories and take precautions around care, ethical dilemmas like these arise when activist and methodological agendas meet people in their complex realities. The ethical challenges of bridging the personal and the political are the focus of the next section.

Activist research must be participatory and collective

Looking back at the workshop process a year later, Mathilde noted, "It is nice to see that it can be used for something real, for change". I asked her how she felt that she had contributed to this change, and after a moment of thinking in silence, she answered:

> *"With experiences. Not a lot of people had come forward with it at that time […] If people don't understand how it affects you, it is difficult to offer specific help and to know what kinds of efforts are needed."*

With this reflection, Mathilde places individual stories at the core of inflicting social and political change. Elaborating on the role of personal stories in political struggles, Nancy Naples (2003) writes:

> *Feminist allies must continue to recognize the value of speaking out and of personal testimony by survivors for processes of personal empowerment. Personal empowerment is the necessary stepping stone toward building a more inclusive movement. (185)*

By pointing to personal empowerment as stepping stones, she connects the individual experience of claiming your own story with a political potential of creating a collective movement. In her account, the shift from individual pain to collective meaning making is essential to political processes, hence, the potential of individual assault stories in activism and research is their ability to expose the underlying, sexist or violent discourses by which these experiences are structured.

Naples also emphasizes the need for progressive discourses to come from victims themselves stating that victims must be "authors of their own lives" for their stories to stand "in opposition to oppressive expert discourse" (185). There are weaknesses in this notion since not all victims of sexual assault draw on oppositional discourses to frame their experiences, as Karen's example from above illustrates. However, there is something essential in the idea that a movement capable of inflicting change must be inclusive in the sense of listening to personal victim stories as a basis for collective political struggle. Letting victims define the essence of their struggle and the use of their stories is a participatory approach.

Participatory research overlaps with activist research as they both seek to include the subjects of the research into the research process. However, while participatory research often aims for total inclusion and research processes lead and designed by the participants from start till end (Bell et al., 2004; Bergold & Thomas, 2012), activist research allows more researcher structured processes facing the challenge that participatory ideals are often compromised in practise (Borg, Karlsson, Kim, & McCormack, 2012).

As this project evolves around storytelling, I have aimed to support the participants in defining which stories should be the outcomes and prospects of the research process. I offered the workshop as a space and writing as a practise, but the participants decided what to bring to that space, how to interpret it and often how to assess its values. In other words, within the experimental workshop space, they played the role of co-researchers as well. This convergence of perspectives (Bergold & Thomas, 2012) took place as the participants started to see themselves as not just informants but co-researchers and activists contributing to research in the pursue of social and political change. Amalie addressed this position when stating that "knowledge is power, and the better we are at knowing and documenting the devastating consequences of digital sexual assault for the victims, the better we can get at making a difference." Here, she writes from a position of a 'we' that is both politically motivated

and is in a position to create reliable and powerful knowledge, which is by essence the position of a researcher (Naples, 2003).

Amalie even addressed how working with writing as a medium of expression had given her a feeling of being in control of her own story. She puts this experience in opposition to contributing to news articles, saying, "I don't think your experiences are actually really being heard. It is more like they just want some sort of quote that they can use in an article".

There is irony to using a quote like that here – in an article. With this statement, Amalie criticizes the press as institutions that put the economic value of the good story over listening to victims. A similar dilemma is prevalent in participatory processes within the context of academic institutions; after all, these institutions have had enormous power in shaping the status quo of our knowledge systems. Further, institutional interests easily become built into the participants' perspectives (Mosse, 2001); when they start to see themselves as co-researchers they gain greater influence on the project, but they also accept the interests of the institution and the premise that academic knowledge is indeed important to political change.

In this way, ethical participation involves balancing between integrating participants into institutions that can legitimize and support their political aims, and the institution's interests in e.g. exploiting the stories of the vulnerable or strengthening their own claim to truth.

Activist research aims for representation through care

Now, I have elaborated on ethical tensions between care, clarity and representation, and I have considered the ethics of participation in relation to political movements and representation. Here, I wish to discuss these ethical dilemmas in relation to victimhood specifically.

Colvin (2019), working with victimhood in post-apartheid South Africa, shows how a strong belief in the power of victim stories can create reconciled victims who loose political agency because their trauma is considered healed as soon as their story is told. Similarly, Naples (2003) warns against a depoliticization of victimhood through individualization. Others, considering the well-being of the victim, points to how self-absorbent stories of victimhood can be harmful (McNichol, 2016; Pennebaker, 1990), or how the stigma of victimhood can marginalize people in their communities (Søndergaard, 2008). What they all warn against are positions of victimhood where the victims loose personal and political agency.

As stated in the section on activist research, care ethics address the challenge of managing representation without objectification. Feminist care ethics has been framed as a practice of listening to and encouraging unheard voices (Gilligan, 2014), a moral theory of respectfully meeting the needs of others (Held, 2014), an ethical practice of negotiating and criticising power structures (Tronto, 1994) and an approach to understanding the relational structures of co-dependence and power in human and non-human relations (Bellacasa, 2017). All these approaches share an awareness of the ways researcher and researched are entangled in relational structures of dependence. With an understanding of relations of care, it becomes clear how timid this research process is when seeking to include a group of people who are in need of care and representation but are also particularly vulnerable to objectification through the potential stigmas of victimhood.

One approach to this challenge is to listen to the needs of others as they appear in each unique context of relations. Amalie, for example, was at times very clear about what kind of care she was willing to accept. She insisted on being acknowledged as a victim in the justice system while also resisting others' encouragements to make her story into a spectacle of pain. She said:

> "I think it is important to tell your story. But it was also because I wanted to tell it from a different perspective than just 'it is really hard'. […] I didn't want to talk about how I felt, only about how I had been treated by the public institutions that I had contacted."

Here, she points to how talking as a victim should allow you to criticize a system unfit to handle DSA related crimes. "I think being victimized by some things make you see a lot of stuff in society that is just fucking unfair," she adds arguing for a position of victimhood that gives social authority in addressing the struggles of DSA victims.

This shows how Amalie negotiates the idea of victimhood and allows it to frame aspects of her experiences while still resisting the misunderstood notions of care attached to the story of the 'ruined' victim. Listening to her story means understanding it as an emergent construction rather than fitting it into recognizable tales of victim-/survivor-hood. In this kind of listening, what Davies (2014) terms emergent listening, lies the potential of change. According to Davies, change becomes possible exactly when we stop listening for stories that confirm the status quo – the victim positions that we already know – and start listening for the possibility of the new. When we do so, victimhood with agency and without stigmatization becomes possible.

Activist research provides hope

Since DSA is a publicly debated subject, representation and diverse victim stories are central to shaping general opinions and allowing victims to exist on their own terms. I have argued that creative and experimental research methods are ways that research can support activist aims of broader representation by creating alternative knowledge. Alternative knowledge is central because one of the problems that DSA victims face is a lack of resources for shaping their own positions of victimhood personally and politically.

However, there are ethical challenges in taking on a political commitment to problem solving. I have discussed the plural commitments and potential dilemmas between caring for participants, producing useful data and meeting activist aims of representation and change. Similarly, I discussed some of the ethical challenges of balancing between participation as a necessity for knowledge production that inflict positive change, and participation as a gateway to exploiting the tragedies of the vulnerable or strengthening potentially oppressive institutions.

Finally, I discussed representation through care as an approach to balancing these ethical dilemmas by listening to victims and allowing them to define their own victimhood. I argued that these methods and ethical considerations are necessary for facilitating emergent listening and making it possible to construct alternative victim positions with agency and without stigmatization.

The article has presented a mixture of academic and non-academic methods, and it has led to the point of concluding that experimental research can and should help victims of sexual violence to construct stories and positions that are more representative and more nuanced than those often found in the context of e.g. lawsuits and news media.

But what are the impacts of the specific project, you might ask. I know that the research process helped the participants find new ways of living with DSA (see author), but I can't say to which extend there is an effect beyond our group. This is where the hope for change becomes central. As activists, we can rarely prove change as a direct result of our work; instead, activism – and activist research – must maintain the hope for change by making change possible. Mathilde, Amalie and Karen are now taking their co-constructed stories out in the world, to their peers and to the organisations and groups that they interact with in their professional and activist work. Another aspect of activist research is that its dissemination is not on the academic alone and therefore my own activism and advocacy is only a small part of it – this makes its impact stronger, but also harder to trace.

This article too is part of the network of ways that these ideas spread. Therefore, to nourish them further, I wish to propose a "manifesto for writing victimhood". It is my hope that this manifesto will inspire future work on victimhood in the context of DSA and beyond; it is my hope that if we – activists, academics, peers and citizens – listen to people as they shape their own becoming as victims (and survivors), we will indeed change to world.

I WILL LISTEN TO VICTIMS
I WILL NOT FORCE VICTIMHOOD, OR A SPECIFIC KIND OF VICTIMHOOD, ON ANYONE
I RESPECT THE COMPLEXITY OF ASSAULT EXPERIENCES, even when they don't fit into my political and theoretical agendas

I AIM TO DEVELOP PROGRESSIVE METHODOLOGIES
I WILL SUPPORT VICTIMS IN FINDING THEIR OWN VOICES by introducing creative and participatory practises
I ENGAGE IN ALTERNATIVE KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUCTION through experimental methodologies
I ACKNOWLEDGE THAT INSISTING ON ALTERNATIVE TRUTHS IS A VULNERABLE POSITION
I adhere to an ethics of care

I RESPECT THAT CARE IS RELATIONAL AND REQUIRES OPEN LISTENING

I VALUE, BELIEVE IN AND WORK TOWARDS CHANGE
I KEEP THE HOPE FOR CHANGE CENTRAL and I aim to develop methodologies that make change possible
I BELIEVE IN THE IMPORTANCE OF INDIVIDUAL SURVIVOR STORIES AS PART OF A COLLECTIVE STRUGGLE, and I take responsibility for the ways my work becomes part of this struggle

I FIGHT FOR A WORLD WHERE VICTIMS ARE LISTENED TO AND DO NOT HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN DIGNITY AND JUSTICE

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Caught in the wave?

Sexual harassment, sexual violence, and the #MeToo movement in Portugal

By Ana Prata

Abstract

The reception of the international #MeToo movement in Portugal has been complex and controversial. Issues of injustice regarding sexual harassment and sexual violence were always central to feminist organizations in Portugal, but the salience of these issues increased when women started to share their personal stories under #MeToo, the country's favorite soccer star was accused of rape, and after some polemic court rulings. This paper uses a Black Feminist Thought approach and content analysis of newspaper data, to trace the political process feminist movements engaged in regarding gender-based violence. It also analyzes how #MeToo movement contributed to the visibility and framing of the issues, what collective actions were pursued, and what outcomes were achieved. The findings show that the globalized #MeToo movement has contributed to revitalize the Portuguese feminist movement. New, younger, and more diverse members have joined its ranks, new feminist organizations were created, new frames were applied, and several collective actions organized, mostly in protesting court decisions. This vitality led to a more inclusive and intersectional activism, but also to an increasing awareness of sexual harassment and sexual violence as targets of personal, collective, and institutional change.

KEYWORDS: #MeToo movement, sexual harassment, sexual violence, Portuguese feminist movement, black feminist thought.

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Introduction

The #MeToo movement has had a far reaching impact in addressing the legacy of injustice regarding sexual harassment and sexual violence.[1] But the movement has not been immune to criticisms and it has been perceived, and received, very differently across the world. In Europe, several countries have adopted the #MeToo by directly translating it to the country's language (Spain's *#YoTambién)* or creating their own hashtag, such as, France's *#BalanceTuPorc* (DenounceYourPig). Underlying this hashtag activism are processes of adaptation, modification, expansion, and innovation of the #MeToo movement (Jouët 2018; Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller 2018), that expand beyond the # and where activists utilize specific tactics to bring visibility to gender violence in their own way, and in their own country.

In Portugal, the reception of the international #MeToo movement has been complex, controversial, and has evolved considerably since 2017. Two focusing events mark how the #MeToo movement unfolded in the country. The first one, was Cristiano Ronaldo's accusation of rape by Kathryn Mayorga, the second one, a court trial and its sentencing in Gaia. Both focusing events, led public discussion on the #MeToo movement and on gender-based violence to gain an unprecedented salience in the country.

The use of #MeToo is to date one of the most prominent examples of digital feminist activism in the country, but what makes Portugal an interesting case to analyze is that while the reception by the public and by the media to the #MeToo movement was significant, politically the movement did not garner much support (Garraio et al. 2020), it did not produce mass mobilizations, and it did not help create new legislation. Nonetheless, important political outcomes were still derived from the #MeToo movement in the country. Mostly, its impact on feminist movement organizations and an increasing awareness of sexual harassment and sexual violence as gender inequality issues.

This paper aims at tracing the political process that feminist movement organizations engaged regarding gender-based violence since the #MeToo. It also analyzes how the international #MeToo movement contributed to the visibility and framing of the issues, what collective actions were pursued, and what outcomes were achieved. I draw on data from newspaper articles focusing on the #MeToo movement in Portugal, to better understand the political process in which the movement unfolded. Therefore, I ask how is the discourse about the #MeToo movement being constructed, re-interpreted, and evolving in Portugal? What specific collective actions seemed connected to the movement? And finally, what was the reception and the impact of the #MeToo movement in feminist organizations in Portugal?

The #MeToo Movement

The origins of the #MeToo movement are connected to its founder, Tarana Burke, who in 2006 launched MeToo, a non-profit that provided a space for women to talk about their sexual assault and rape experiences. Burke called it a movement of "empowerment through empathy" (Hill 2017). A decade later, on October of 2017, the MeToo hashtag began trending on social media. The #MeToo gained widespread attention when actress Alyssa Milano used it as a Twitter hashtag in connection to allegations of sexual assault by Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein. Milano asked the public to join in order to demonstrate the pervasiveness of the problem of sexual violence and sexual harassment. The hashtag captured both public and media attention and was used 12 million times in the first 24 hours and trended in at least 85 countries (Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller 2018; Choo et al. 2019). While the movement started by Burke focused mostly on supporting survivors, it has become increasingly multifaceted. Including, sharing personal accounts of gender violence on social media platforms, outing the actions of perpetrators (Jaffe 2018), and even making demands for legislation in several industries. Overall, the #Me Too movement has been able to "mobilize millions of people around the world" (Rottenberg 2019) and has been described as a 'watershed moment' for sexual violence (Gill and

Orgad 2018; Cobb and Horeck 2018; Jaffe 2018). Still, the movement has been amply criticized.

Some of the criticisms to the #MeToo movement are regarding the dangers of curtailing due process and personal and sexual freedoms, as well as the struggle with transforming itself from a movement of personal stories (shared on social media) to an effective political action movement. The movement has also been problematic because it has espoused and reinforced inequities in power dynamics related to race, gender, class, and sexuality (Fileborn and Loney-Howes 2019; Onwuachi-Willig 2018; Jaffe 2018). An example of this is how the movement initially failed women of color, by vastly ignoring their specific experiences with sexual harassment and sexual violence, which deemed the movement's original audience - women of color, almost invisible (Onwuachi-Willig 2018; Andersen 2018; Leung and Williams 2019). According to Leung and Williams the movement has nonetheless, made some gains and it has "evolved to address intersectionality as part of its overall goal to combat sexual assault and harassment."(2019, 349). For that to occur, the movement also needs to incorporate religion, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation and economic status, since these 'intersect' in a multidimensional way, making someone more or less vulnerable to sexual harassment and sexual violence (Crenshaw 1989). Furthermore, others have argued that the movement has been fairly accommodating of existing power structures and not, at all, disruptive. Gill and Ogard argue that the corporate policies produced by the #MeToo movement have been so far "capitalism, neoliberalism and patriarchy friendly" (2018, 1320). Overall, one can agree that #MeToo movement has led to both complex and contradictory developments, but the movement has also presented a unique opportunity for advancing anti-sexual violence activism, and to be a transnational consciousness-raising movement (Ghadery 2019).

The emerging literature on the #MeToo movement is recent but very prolific, and it addresses some of the contradictory developments mentioned above. It mentions the need for the movement to be more inclusive of racial minorities,

intersectionality, and men, and it also covers the movement's legal and practical repercussions on specific sectors, such as, medical, educational, corporate, etc (Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller 2018; Choo et al. 2019; Fileborn and Loney-Howes 2019; Onwuachi-Willig 2018; Jaffe 2018; Rodino-Colocino 2018; Rottemberg 2019; Tippett 2018).

Since its inception the #MeToo movement has also contributed to discussions of hashtag activism and cyber activism (PettyJohn et al. 2018; Manikonda et al. 2018; Lindgren 2019). Most of this literature has highlighted the conflicting ways in which the viral sharing campaign contributed to help (or hinder) the movement and feminist politics. While the movement has struggled to keep its momentum after its initial impact, and "noise, antagonism, and sloganization" have creeped into the campaign (Lindgren 2019, 418), other studies have shown that such expression of digital feminism has been able to create community, connections, and solidarity (Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller 2018, 244; Dejmanee et al. 2020; PettyJohn et al. 2018). These communities are supportive of feminist views by clarifying the pervasiveness of sexual violence within patriarchal culture and contribute to feminist "personalized politics" (Dejmanee et al. 2020; Andersen 2018). This personalization of politics and mobilizing practices have been part of feminist history and theory even prior to digital activism (Munro 2013). The second wave feminists introduced "the personal is political", and as Andersen points out, the phrase emphasizes sexual freedom over women's bodies and how "patriarchy and sexism influence all aspects of women's lives, both private and public" (2018, 22). There is a continuity of the fourth wave of digital feminism with the second wave, since the "personalization is politicized" and becomes an integral part of protest, online and offline. Women are aware in their hashtag posts and conversations on social media that they are engaging in a "call to action". They connect their feelings to the use of specific hashtags, validate their own experiences of harassment or violence with one another, make claims for political and social justice outcomes, and envision the value of their participation as a way to facilitate political action and social support

(Dejmanee et al. 2020; PettyJohn et al. 2018; Andersen 2018).

So far, the research on the #MeToo movement in Portugal is still incipient. A few examples are Pinto-Coelho's (2018) study of opinion makers, Almeida's master thesis on media coverage of the movement (2019), Garraio's et al. (2020) case study of Ronaldo as the "unimaginable rapist", and studies on feminism and sexual harassment legislation that only briefly mention the #MeToo movement (Brunsdon 2018; Marques 2018). Pinto-Coelho's study (2018) on opinion makers shows that discourse on the movement had an elitist character, constructed mostly by those with a frequent presence in the media, thus contributing to the invisibility of activists and their preferred frames. From Almeida's research (2019), we find that media coverage on sexual violence spiked after October 2017, connected to coverage of #MeToo movement, and continued for about a year. Almeida also shows that news coverage was mostly focused on international cases and the only exceptions were, Ronaldo's rape case, and a couple of courts cases in the north of Portugal. The most recent study is from Garraio et al. (2020) and focuses on Ronaldo's rape accusation case, showing some of the dynamics at play with the media coverage and the reception of the movement within the country. The authors main argument is that Ronaldo is seen as "*the* role model" of the country, and the key bond that exists between Portuguese society and its soccer star is an expression, and a performance, of "banal nationalism". This contributed to sideline the discussion of the key issues of the #MeToo movement[2], and led instead to the "dismissal of hashtag feminism and to the activation of pervasive rape myths" (Garraio et al. 2020, 37).

Also lacking in the #The MeToo movement literature are theoretical perspectives that could be useful in explaining the emergence and development of this particular movement. Suovilla et al. make an important contribution in this area by using Habermas concept of public sphere, deliberative democracy, and rational communication to see how the Habermasian ideals of public debate are realized in the age of digital media when applied to #MeToo movement. One of their main findings is that while the public sphere became more inclusive, "digital media has also made public debate and political discussion more polarized and antagonistic of the movement" (Suovilla et al. 2020, 213). While this approach has its merits it still focuses mostly on outcomes, and it is theoretically less pertinent to grasp the processes of emergence and development of the movement. On this regard, I propose using Patricia Hill Collins black feminist thought approach to understand how the movement developed.

Hill Collins argues "Black feminist thought consists of ideas produced by Black women that clarify a standpoint of and for Black women" (1986, 16). I assert that the same approach can be applicable to understand both the emergence and development of the MeToo movement. Firstly, underlying Hill Collins working definition is the fact that the structure and thematic content of thought is directly connected to the lives of its producers. The #MeToo movement emerged and developed directly linked to the lives and experiences of the producers of that thought - victims, mostly women, accounting for their *own* experiences of sexual harassment and sexual violence. Secondly, Hill Collins's definition assumes that "Black women possess a unique standpoint on, or perspective of, their experiences and that there will be certain commonalities of perception shared by Black women as a group" (1986, 16). Victims/survivors that experienced sexual harassment and sexual violence also have a unique standpoint on their experiences, and the "commonalities of perceptions" are found, and become "profound", in the sharing of those experiences with one another, leading women to see themselves as a group, and as a "metoo". Lastly, Hill Collins argues that despite the commonalities of outlook produced by living a life as Black women, there is still diversity of class, age, sexuality, etc, and that diversity shapes those lives, those experiences, and results in "different expressions of these common themes."(1986, 16). This is relevant for discussions of intersectionality within the #MeToo movement where universal themes (toxic masculinity, women's empowerment, etc) included in the standpoint of

victims, are experienced and expressed differently by distinct groups of victims/survivors.

Hill Collins asserts that "People experience and resist oppression on three levels: the level of personal biography; the group or community level of the cultural context created by race, class, and gender; and the systemic level of social institutions. Black feminist thought emphasizes all three levels as sites of domination and as potential sites of resistance" (1990, 557). I argue that Collins' work fits particularly well with the #MeToo movement because the movement represents and reflects both oppression and resistance, and such duality has been expressed in the movement since its beginning. In fact, expressing oppression can become an instance of resistance. First, the movement has used personal biographies in social media platforms under #MeToo to show the vast personal cases of sexual harassment and sexual violence, and sharing these stories is both an expression of oppression and resistance. Second, the movement was started by women and for women, and the movement has used gender both as community and as a communal expression of women's experiences of sexual harassment and sexual violence. The movement has also made claims, since its emergence, that social institutions perpetuate the domination and oppression of women, and therefore resistance needs to happen beyond the individual level, but also at the systemic, institutional level. Examples of that are the challenges made in Portugal to the whole judicial system, following specific court rulings deemed as unfair by women and feminists alike. Feminist institutionalists have long recognized how courts, as formal institutions, are gendered and reflect in various ways gender norms and "patriarchal practices" (Krook, M., and Mackay 2011, 2).

In terms of resistance, Hill Collins argues that black feminist thought "speaks to the importance that knowledge plays in empowering oppressed people… its insistence that both the changed consciousness of individuals and the social transformation of political and economic institutions constitute essential ingredients for social change."(1990, 553). Resistance in the #MeToo movement has happened first at the level of

individual consciousness. For example, according to the German magazine *Der Spiegel*, which broke the Cristiano Ronaldo alleged rape case, Kathryn Mayorga spent hours in front of the computer reading testimonies of other women who had been sexually abused by celebrities, which motivated her to move forward with her story.[3] Other victims have also underscored that coming forward about their abuse resulted from the knowledge of other personal stories and individual cases (Dejmanee et al. 2020, 3952). This can change victims/survivor's self-definition and empower them. Hill Collins states that "Offering subordinate groups new knowledge about their own experiences can be empowering. But revealing new ways of knowing that allow subordinate groups to define their own reality has far greater implications." (1990, 553). At this level, the #MeToo movement has already produced both individual and social change, in which, the site of domination (the abuse) has now also become a site of resistance (the posting, the sharing). Personal stories about "sexual abuse, shame, victim blaming, social injustice, sense of empowerment, and resistance" (Dejmanee et al. 2020, 3952) gained visibility, and with that comes a level of individual consciousness and new knowledge. As Hill Collins points out, traditional accounts of power, that take domination as operating from the top down, fail at explaining the sustained ways victim's resist. But black feminist thought highlights the power of 'self-definition' and 'consciousness' as spheres of freedom and power to resist oppression (i.e. not silencing the abuse) (Hill Collins 1990).

In the #MeToo movement, the resistance at the individual level also becomes intertwined with the cultural context. Hill Collins argues, "each individual biography is rooted on several overlapping cultural contexts - for example, groups defined by race, social class, age, gender, religion, and sexual orientation." (1990, 557). These cultural components, as interlocking systems, give meaning to experiences of oppression and resistance. For women that experienced sexual harassment and sexual violence, the #MeToo community exposes the overlapping context of gender, formed through experiences shared with other women, in which

meanings are created through group membership. But the overlapping cultural context of race (as it intersects with gender), has also been part of the #MeToo movement from its beginning. These cultural components are what Hill Collins defines as "thought models" used in the acquisition of knowledge and as standards to evaluate thoughts and behavior (1990). This women's culture of resistance, or subjugated knowledges to use Hill Collins terminology, are women's accounts of sexual harassment and violence that have been developed in intersecting cultural contexts and are, nevertheless, controlled by them, the oppressed group: minority women. Hill Collins asserts in referencing Black Women's culture, but also applicable to the #MeToo movement: "While efforts to influence this dimension of an oppressed group's experiences can be partially successful this level is more difficult to control than dominant groups would have us believe." (Collins 1990, 558). While dominant groups might want to replace the subjugated knowledge of women with their own specialized thought in order to exert control, the voices of victims/survivors on social media platforms attest to a culture of resistance, sustained by voicing their experiences, and the difficulty in eliminating the intersecting cultural contexts as a fundamental site of resistance. The voices on social media also show the lack of control of dominant groups over that subjugated knowledge that the oppressed group creates and spreads.

Finally, the third level of domination and resistance occurs at the social institutional level. When domination is experienced at work, in school, in courts, in parliament, or in other formal organizations, it is controlled by the dominant group. According to Hill Collins, these institutions expose individuals to the specialized thought corresponding to the dominant group standpoint and interests and tend to involve the passivity of the oppressed group in those institutions (1990, 558). The #MeToo movement has challenged such passivity by having victims voicing their experiences and expose how certain social institutions operate. Feminist institutionalists have also looked at the way's institutions are structured to see how they contribute to violence against women.

In institutions, rules, procedures, norms, and expectations are gendered, and understanding that is an essential step in tackling issues of violence against women (Collier and Raney 2018, 448). For example, in British politics, female politicians, staff members, and journalists have challenged passivity and compliance by voicing their own experiences, which led to the resignation and party suspension of male Cabinet ministers and Members of Parliament (Krook 2018, 65). Collier and Raney assert "As women around the world continue to document their experiences of violence in political workplaces, multi-dimensional strategies will be required that can tackle patriarchal attitudes about women and gender relations societally, and the institutional contexts that reinforce the perception that women do not belong in male-dominated workplaces." (2018, 450). This means challenging the passivity and the climate of silence or toxic masculinity that exists in institutions, which led to underreporting of sexual harassment and the existence of non-disclosure agreements (NDA's).

In conclusion, empowerment within the movement implies rejecting the dimensions of personal, cultural, and institutional knowledge that perpetuates the dehumanization and silencing of victims/survivors, but uses self-definition and consciousness to carve their own spaces of, and for, resistance.

Contextualizing the issues in Portugal

By 2017, Portugal had already bounced back from the economic recession that hit the country. During the 2008-2014 crisis, women reported much more than men that the economic crisis had a negative impact on them (Karamessini and Rubery 2013; Durbin et al. 2017). The term 'She-Austerity' was crafted to convey that it was among Southern European women that most of the severe impacts of the crisis were felt (Alcañiz and Monteiro 2016). Some of these impacts, with implications to the #MeToo movement' agendas, were an increase in violence towards women, more precariousness in the labor market, and an overall greater compliance with traditional gender roles (Prata, Freire and

Serra-Silva 2020). The legacy of the crisis was one of increased gender violence and inequality, but the new center-left coalition government seemed to favor more gender-friendly policies and programs (Monteiro and Ferreira 2016).[4]

Another political development that could influence the reception of the #MeeToo movement, is the resurgence of nationalism and populism throughout Europe. So far, Portugal has been mostly immune to these movements (Salgado 2019; Lisi, Llamazares, and Tsakatika 2019), but it could still be reproducing some of the anti-genderism discourse seen in other countries. As Suovilla et al. (2020) research shows, the public debate of the #MeToo movement happening in the digital media, has led to an increasing polarization and antagonism towards the movement. In Europe, this antagonism includes anti-gender movements and complex networks of actors targeting gender and sexual equality. Those include far-right groups, anti-abortion groups, nationalists, religious groups, and others (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017, 259; Lilja and Johansson 2018, 84). Portugal might not be immune to *all* of these potential influences; therefore some degree of anti-genderism could be occurring in the reception of the #MeToo movement in Portugal. For example, Garraio et al. (2020) research mentions that one of the most shared newspapers articles about the #MeToo movement, was written by a center-right politician, stating that the movement was a "forum for sexual misunderstandings and the persecution of sexuality". For Garraio et al. (2020), this was a clear sign of a backlash against the #MeToo movement, following the construction of a 'narrative of immunity' for Ronaldo that unfolded both in traditional and social media.

In terms of the two key issues within the #MeToo movement - sexual harassment and sexual violence, we find that legally Portugal had criminalized those before the #MeToo movement, and since then no legal developments have occurred. The most serious forms of street harassment were criminalized in 2015 in the aftermath of the Istanbul Convention[5], through the Law No. 83/2015 of Article 170 of the Criminal Code.[6] In Portugal it is also illegal to sexually harass or intimidate a

person, and violation of the law is punishable by up to one year in prison or with a fine up to 120 days, and this punishment increases to three years if the victim of harassment is younger than 14 years (Brunsdon 2018, 50). What is less clear from the literature is how the laws are being implemented, how complaints are being processed, and what credibility is given to victims denouncing situations involving gender-based violence.

Regarding sexual violence, Portugal still lacks basic rights for victims, as some of the controversial court rulings of the last few years have shown. One of the most notorious was the ruling by Porto's Court of Appeal in 2018, regarding a victim raped while unconscious at a club. The sentencing of both perpetrators did not include any jail time, which raised protests in the streets and caused a wave of indignation. At the core of this indignation was the reasoning presented by the Court for the suspension of the sentence. The judges alleged that "the guilt of the defendants is mild, it happened at the end of a night with too much alcoholic beverages" and in an "environment of mutual seduction", thus considering that the unlawfulness of the acts was not "high".[7] Feminist movement organizations took the lead in the public indignation and organized several protests following the sentencing (Garraio et al. 2020).

Despite controversial court rulings, as the one illustrated, there are signs that the Ministry of Justice intends to follow the recommendations of the Istanbul Convention and has proposed amendments to the Criminal Code regarding sexual offenses. The police (GNR) has also organized several "awareness-raising actions regarding violence against women, which aim to alert society to the various cases of violence, namely cases of sexual abuse or harassment, physical and psychological abuse."[8] Moreover, three care centers have been set up in the last couple of years for victims of sexual violence, but activists have pointed out that the number of care centers are still insufficient to meet the demands.[9] Also underway is a project with public administration professionals dealing with victims/survivors in order to understand the perceptions on sexual violence in intimacy relationships, and to raise awareness about

the stereotypes that undermine a correct case evaluation.[10]

Feminist movement organizations have had many political actions both in creating awareness regarding issues of sexual violence, in contesting court rulings, and in demanding change. An example of that, was a Sunday March organized on the 25th of November in several cities in the country. The goal was "to eliminate all forms of violence against women" and the backdrop were "fears of setbacks in women's rights with the rise of the extreme right in the world"[11], thus showing the concern of feminist movement organizations with anti-genderism creeping into the country.

Methodology and Data

The methodological approach starts with the assumption that researching mainstream news media is still relevant in today's hybrid mediascape (Askanius and Artley 2019), since it reflects diverse discussions about social movements organizations, reveals the political process of how issues unfolded, and how discourses were framed. The approach draws attention to the importance of timing and sequencing, enabling the identification of key points of change and key actors. In analyzing feminist movement organizations, the research draws specifically on the political process approach (Goodwin and Jasper 1999) and a multi-institutional politics approach, which is shown to be particularly helpful in explaining the rise of new transnational consciousness-raising movements (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008; Ghadery 2019). The focus is "on how power works across a variety of institutions; how activists interpret, negotiate, and understand power; and how and why activists choose strategies and goals." (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008, 93).

The study draws on a qualitative content analysis of 53 articles regarding the #MeToo movement in Portugal, for over a year, and gathered from four newspapers. The news media selected were: *Público, Diário de Notícias, Observador,* and *Expresso.* These four newspapers (print and online) are considered references in the national

mediascape, covering a broad spectrum in political ideology (from center-right to center-left), and include three dailies and one weekly. The period chosen for the qualitative analysis extends from October 2017 to December 2018. I decided to explore the media coverage over a 15-month period, to see how coverage evolved over time.

It is important to note that #MeToo is often discussed as a general movement with many actors involved, but my sample was selected in order to include articles mentioning social movement activity around the #MeToo movement and the issues of sexual harassment and sexual violence. For that, I devised a coding framework that addresses references to #MeToo movement in Portugal. I searched news articles for key search terms: #MeToo, sexual harassment, sexual violence, demonstrations, protest, activists, feminists, women's organizations, and feminist organizations. A sample of 53 articles was selected, including news articles, interviews with academics and activists, and a few opinion pieces. The sample was coded for genre, source, main themes, and language, focus of the article, main issues addressed (diagnosis), and the types of solutions offered (prognosis). This allowed me to gain a better insight regarding the collective actions' activists engage in and the political process of which they are part. The coding was established through the researcher's subjective perception of the texts and all translations from Portuguese to English were done by the author. The content analysis was done by thematic categories extracted directly from the data related to the issues and actors which were given precedence in the coverage. The second level consisted of conducting a discourse analysis by examining the content with respect to the concept of 'framing' of the issues.

#MeToo Movement – Hashtag-activism, Court Rulings, and the Ronaldo Case

The international #MeToo movement was received in Portugal with a mix of support and concern, in

media, in politics, and by the public. The initial reception to the #MeToo movement was characterized mostly by hashtag-activism and the news media focus on international cases surrounding the movement. Portugal, like other countries, had recently embraced feminism into the mainstream culture (Rottenberg 2019), which helps contextualize most of the initial positive reception of the #MeToo within the country. Portuguese women vastly shared their personal stories of abuse under the #MeToo on social media. And although there are no specific figures regarding how many posts on sexual harassment, sexual violence, or gender discrimination were shared under the specific hashtag, traditional media pointed out that Portuguese women did catch the wave of the movement both in posting, in sharing, and in liking.

Regarding digital activism in the country, Professor Ines Amaral mentions how there is much more solidarity than just information sharing. Such solidarity has been able to establish links also with feminist struggles in Spain and Latin America, where the contours of violence against women have cultural similarities (#NiUnaMenos, #JustiçaPatriarcal).[12] While hashtag feminism as a tool to denounce social injustice is still weak in Portugal, there are signs that it is gaining some traction. An example of that is the campaign started by Marcella Castellano, a University of Lisbon student and survivor of gender-based violence, who set up posters with the inscription #WhyIDidn'tReport in university bathrooms. Marcella wanted to encourage victims of sexual violence to share their testimonies, which she later transcribed and shared anonymously on Twitter.[13] Although, this campaign was localized, it is an example of victims/survivors taking the reins in voicing the abuse, giving it visibility, and by doing that, generating empathy online and expressing women's subjugated knowledges.

By 2018, two main focusing events changed the impact of the #MeToo movement in Portugal: the rape allegation against Cristiano Ronaldo by Kathryn Mayorga and the Court Trial of a rape case in Gaia (Porto district). While the rape allegations against Ronaldo corresponded to "the peak of public engagement with the #MeToo in Portugal"

(Garraio et al. 2020), the Court Trial in Gaia and the sentencing that followed, represented a unique moment of mobilization for feminist organizations. Several researchers have highlighted the importance of sudden, attention-grabbing "focusing events" that can generate increased attention to public problems (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Birkland 1998). The suddenness of such focusing events can create conditions that give less powerful groups in society an opportunity, or an "important advantage," in driving these issues into the public arena (Birkland 1998). Both focusing events contributed to increase the political saliency of gender-based violence in Portugal. However, the trial in Gaia and the sentencing that followed, created a unique opportunity for feminist movement organizations to mobilize, recruit new members, and put forward new framing strategies based on what was perceived as a Draconian sentencing. The Gaia trial grabbed the attention of movement actors, news media, judges, and the public, to the problem of gender-based violence and to the judicial system as a misogynist institution.[14]

The Gaia protests coincided with the #MeToo movement and with a series of similar protests that had occurred in Spain following similar court rulings that angered feminists on both sides of the border. Garraio et al., remind us of the "feminist outcry at some controversial verdicts involving rape and domestic violence were informed by the international context of empathy with victims of sexual violence and condemnation of sexism that was encouraged by the #MeToo" (2020). There was undoubtedly a renewed visibility and empathy paving the way for feminist protest, and potentially for a feminist agenda on sexual harassment and sexual violence. However, focusing just on the increased visibility of the issues can also be problematic. There were signs even before 2017 that sexual violence and sexual harassment had gained some salience in legislation and within the collective actions of Portuguese feminist organizations.

Sociologist Anália Torres, one of the authors of the study on 'Sexual and Moral Harassment in the Workplace in Portugal,'[15] stresses that when the #MeToo appeared, it contributed to the

understanding of the issue of harassment at work, but this change was one that was already under-way. The law on occupational harassment (sexual and moral) was amended in the summer of 2017, and both their study and the law had a great weight to circumvent those still reluctant to recognize the problem. Torres argues, "When a person changes the law, it affects people's lives", but as important, is the effective implementation of the law, the obligation to "create more respectful environments".[16] The #MeToo movement contribution in raising awareness regarding the ubiquity of gender-based violence and the need for empathy and empowerment through its victims/survivors, could have contributed to have more of these "respectful environments". In a similar way, Nora Kiss, the president of the *Portuguese Youth Network for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men* (REDE), argued that there were already signs of the political salience of sexual harassment and sexual violence before #MeToo movement. In June 2016, there were protests regarding the case of a Brazilian adolescent victim of a collective rape. And as early as 2011, Portugal joined the *Slutwalk* ('Marcha das Galdérias'), to fight against street sexual harassment, sexual violence, and victim blaming. Nora Kiss alludes to the potential influence of the #MeToo movement in Portugal:

> *"It had relevance and great visibility practically all over the world, and it influenced the way we talk about these matters… but …in Portugal, the effect was not as visible as in other countries. The fight in the streets against sexual harassment and violence was in no way dormant here. In recent years, in addition to the usual gatherings on symbolic days of struggle for women's rights, there have been several demonstrations of solidarity with women who were victims…"[17]*

Nora Kiss is referencing the demonstrations in the north of the country that gathered feminist organizations in joint actions to protest some of court judgments of rape cases. These protests were organized to show solidarity with victims/survivors and challenge the justice system. The feminist organization *Union of Alternative and Responsive Women* (UMAR) took the lead in organizing several feminists' groups and engaging in collective actions in Porto, Coimbra and Lisbon, following the Gaia trial.[18]

While one can argue that the debate on social and print media on sexual harassment and sexual violence gained considerable visibility with the #MeToo movement, Maria José Magalhães - a researcher at the University of Porto and the leader of UMAR, cautions that such visibility might not necessarily translate into more reporting of these crimes or an increase politicization of the issues by activists. Magalhães argues,

> *"Speaking in your own voice is not a habit in Portugal… the dimension of reporting crimes may not have been appropriated in the same way in Portugal [as in other countries]. To begin with, here - even on issues such as domestic violence, where the recognition of the problem is widespread - it is rare for victims to go public."[19]*

Besides the issue of under-reporting, both Nora Kiss and Magalhães have alluded to the difficulty of a movement with the contours of #MeToo movement to gain strength in Portugal. Magalhães stated that only a few activists like to publicly speak about the causes they defend, "many women do not like public exposure, even if they are not victims."[20] Overall, there seems to be an acknowledgment that the reception of #MeToo movement in Portugal could have been stronger, as expressed by activists, journalists, and researchers. Garraio et al. (2020) mention that the impact of the movement in Portugal varied from "incipient" at first, to a "strong backlash" after the Ronaldo scandal. Illustrating this point is also Paula Cosme Pinto, a journalist, and an opinion maker of the most read weekly newspaper in the country. She referenced a national television debate addressing the #MeToo movement and the Ronaldo scandal.

> *"Portugal is a country where machismo, prejudice and lack of empathy for the pain of others are deeply rooted. (…) it was so*

painful to watch the debate…We are wrong, for example, when we claim that the #MeToo movement draws attention away from class struggles, which are considered more important. And we are in a bad place because this signals that we do not want to understand that all of this crosses over: gender violence, in this case sexual violence, are both intrinsically linked to economic disparities and to access to power. To minimize the importance of one fight over the other, when in fact they are linked, and both can help one another by increasing visibility, it reveals a lack of ability to look at the problem as a whole."[21]

Pinto mentions some of the reasons why the #MeToo movement reception was not favorable, namely machismo, prejudice against victims, but more significantly a reluctance from certain sectors of society to see the #MeToo movement through an intersectional lens. The main problem, as the journalist highlights, is how the movement was accused of distracting from "class struggles", as if focusing on gender and sexual violence implied the exclusion of a conversation about the unequal distribution of economic resources and power, when in fact these issues intersect.

Additionally, the #MeToo movement in Portugal also had challenges into transforming online support into a sustained mobilization offline. Inês Amaral, a professor at the University of Coimbra, argues that "online mobilization is much greater than offline", in part, because the "collectives that go to the street are more politicized, and that still keeps some people away."[22] Using Collins approach we see that expressing oppression and resistance at the personal and group-level online seems to happen more often than at the systemic level of challenging institutions or protesting in person. Both Magalhães and Amaral mention the reluctance of some Portuguese women to be involved more politically but highlight the dimension of the personal and group-level resistance online. Regarding the latter, Amaral says "online women create membership not just hashtags, there is much more solidarity".[23] This solidarity being created online is part of an awareness of a group-level oppression based on common gender and cultural standpoints, and acknowledging this, is in itself, resistance.

"[women online] create bridges with the struggles in Spain and Latin America, where the contours of violence against women have cultural similarities. #NiUnaMenos, # JustiçaPatriarcal, # ViolênciaMachista, #LaManadaSomosNosotras and #YoTeCreo, these are slogans of indignation can be read on posters of both the gigantic Spanish and Argentine demonstrations as well as the small Portuguese ones."[24]

While Portugal might not have seen the mass mobilizations other countries experienced, one cannot neglect that the feminist movement in the country still saw a revival in vitality and mobilization after 2017. Almeida argues that while the #MeToo movement in Portugal did not lead to a wave of denunciations as seen elsewhere, "the impact of the movement should not be delegitimized" (2019, 54). Likewise, activist Patrícia Martins[25] describes it as a "Feminist Spring" and activist Luísa Barateiro[26] recognizes that the #MeToo movement contributed to bring visibility to the Portuguese feminist movement and its collective actions.[27] While some activists highlight how the me #MeToo movement contributed to revitalize the feminist movement, other activists see the influence of #MeToo more as negligible. What seems to be more consensual, is how the visibility of the issues contributed to changes in recruitment of its members. When thinking about the evolution of the feminist movement in the country, activist Lúcia Furtado from the *Djass - Association of Afro-descendants*, underscores the "plurality of movements" that are emerging, as well as, the more cultural and racial diversity of the Portuguese feminist movement.

"The feminist movement in Portugal was very strong at the time of the decriminalization of abortion - it linked feminist associations to political parties, to individual activists. Then it was dormant. But with this 'Feminist

Spring', with movements emerging in Argentina, in the United States, in Brazil, we started to see a rejuvenation of the struggle, which is bringing together many different people, and calling many young people." [28]

"[we see] a wave of young people that has come from Brazil in recent years, to study or work, they have given both the black movement and the feminist movement a huge boost, because they have a long history of activism and activism in areas that we don't have." [29]

"It was after meeting some Brazilian colleagues studying in the city that four students from the Faculty of Arts of the University of Porto (FLUP) decided to create the first Feminist Collective of the Porto Academy. Having learned that "most [Brazilian] colleges have feminist collectives, and that they are a very big factor in uniting", Carolina Alves, one of the founders… [had] the purpose of 'creating a space for discussion, reflection and debate on the issues of feminism and women'." [30]

One of the most exciting outcomes of the #MeToo movement and the increasing visibility it brought to the issues of sexual violence and sexual harassment is that it opened the Portuguese feminist movement to an audience of younger members and to new movement organizations. This led to the inclusion of new groups of people into to the feminist movement who were more ethnically and racially diverse. The result is a feminist movement that is more active, more international, more inclusive of African, African-descendants, and also Brazilian members. The previous quotes also show how the influx of new members to the feminist movement brought different ways of organizing and acting in distinct areas. These were welcomed changes since the feminist movement had a history of being far less diverse than Portuguese society. Ironically, this is one of the main criticisms that scholars have pointed out to the #MeToo movement in the United States, how it marginalized and excluded the experiences of

women of color, which are much more vulnerable to harassment, assault, and rape (Onwuachi-Willig 2018, 107). In Portugal, the opposite seems to have happened, on the one hand, celebrities were far less involved in the movement compared to other countries[31], so the movement never had the experiences of celebrities with sexual harassment or sexual violence overshadowing the overall narrative on the issues (in detriment of recognizing the experiences of most women). On the other hand, the visibility of the court cases involving young women, some of them minorities and women of color, did contribute to ground the perception of the issues as something that affects *all* women, but impacts vulnerable groups even more. The injustices of these court case rulings were a catalyst in creating awareness and in bringing more people (and more diversity) into the movement and in creating empathy. Activist Patrícia Vassallo e Silva argues,

"hundreds took to the streets in May following a suspected case of sexual abuse on a bus in Porto, or even the protests in October against a court ruling by the Porto Court of Appeal, in which a woman victim of domestic violence was censored and the aggressor's guilt was minimized due to the victim's extramarital relationship. In 2018, another ruling by the same court also led to more protests. "Justice in Portugal is not following a social conscience regarding crimes of gender violence", concludes the activist." [32]

The perceived unfairness of court rulings became a salient aspect in mobilizing new members into the movement, but also in framing the judicial system as one of the main institutional culprits in perpetuating gender-based violence. The sentencing of perpetrators of domestic violence, sexual harassment, and rape, had been on the radar of feminist organizations for a few years, but as the #MeToo movement unfolded in Portugal, it raised the visibility of gender-based violence and increased the empathy towards victims. Feminist organization UMAR, together with other movement organizations, saw these judgments as a

political opportunity to mobilize and to frame the courts, the judges, and the judicial system, as "promoting the re-victimization of the victims", and their rulings as something that "legitimizes sexual violence against women…and an incentive for aggressors to harass/assault/rape because nothing will happen in court."[33]. The Portuguese judicial system, following the Istanbul Convention, should be harmonizing the law with the prosecution of gender-based violence cases, but these Draconian court rulings were inconsistent with that. Therefore, that created a political opportunity for feminist organizations to expose how the judicial system failed to protect victims, while protecting the perpetrators. Judges and courts were framed as oppressors that kept re-victimizing women who already had been sexually victimized, and male judges were targeted and framed by UMAR activists as misogynists.[34] The Association of Portuguese Union Judges came out in defense of the ruling stressing that the courts "have no political or social agendas, nor do they decide according to expectations or to please militant associations of causes".[35]

The judicial system was targeted by activists as a central source for institutional change, since it was viewed as perpetuating the victimization process through its unfair rulings. UMAR claimed that such court rulings "normalize sexual violence", place the blame on women as opposed to men, and men are still perceived as "unable to control their sexual desires".[36] Feminist discursive institutionalists have shown how gender ideologies are part of both institutional discourses and institutional rules, and those are embedded in ideas about men and women, masculinity and femininity (Krook and Mackay 2011). But changes in institutions can happen internal or externally, hence change in ideas about gender relations are predicted to change institutions. Culturally, the Portuguese judicial system is increasingly at odds with what activist Vassallo e Silva describes as "the social conscience regarding crimes of gender violence". Women in Portugal are gaining an awareness that in order to tackle gender violence, institutional change has to occur, and protesting courts decisions and questioning male judges is part of that process of awareness and empowerment. Researcher Tatiana Mendes and activists Barreteiro and Silva also highlight this,

> "But we still have to free society from patriarchy, to change the way it is organized' she adds. And the justice is one of the sectors that needs reform from head to toe: 'After all, how are we going to want a boss to respect a worker if the justice [system] doesn't respect the woman?"[37]

> "When …asked where the country continues to fail, the activist has the answer on the tip of her tongue: 'It is in the justice system.' 'Society has to change. And it has already changed, in terms of sensitivity. But if the justice system supports the rapist, things will not go forward. We are not protected' And how is this done? 'The woman must show that she is aware of these situations, that she is not indifferent to them. And if you are outraged, you must show that you are. Without fears. That means going to the street, to the public space. But also speaking up inside your home"[38]

> "Among police stations, health services, courts, there is a common denominator, pointed out by both field technicians and researchers in the area: the lack of preparation of professionals.

> 'There is much to be done in the training of police professionals, in medical emergencies, and also in the justice system', without this specialization, 'it will not be possible to reduce secondary victimization'. 'Professionals are not aware of this type of violence. There has to be an extensive work of training and specialization for there to be the necessary social change"[39]

All of these quotes share a common denominator, while there are some signs that in recent years society has become more "sensitive" to the issues of sexual harassment and sexual violence, activists highlight that we still live in a patriarchal society,

where the struggle to bring about social change involves *multiple levels* - protest in the streets, 'speaking up at home', and addressing how social institutions like the judicial system need to change. But that implies that *all* of us gain awareness of gender violence, including the professionals that deal with victims, otherwise, re-victimization occurs. These findings also seem to show that #MeToo has been able to present itself as a transnational feminist phenomenon (Ghadery 2019), which allowed feminists groups in Portugal to carve their own version of #MeToo. Journalist Pinto, nicely summarizes this point by stating that we all need to have a better understanding of victim's trauma, but also "pass an eraser on the historical distrust - both judicial and social - that falls on victims of rape for centuries".[40] Several activists alluded to this uphill battle when referencing Ronaldo's rape case. In the public debate, men accused women of 'a witch hunt' and the 'slut shaming' of Mayorga (Ronaldo's accuser) was common. Both Magalhães and Garraio et al. contextualize the debate within the misogynist culture of our country that tends to blame and silence victims/survivors, while protecting our "male idols". The UMAR leader argues that the path to recognize sexual violence in Portugal has been long and gradual, but she denotes a positive outcome: "when something is established, there is no going back".[41] It seems undeniable that this increasing awareness was driven, even if only in part, by the #MeToo movement. This is seen particularly among the youth, which tend to have a clearer understanding of sexual harassment, sexual violence, and consent. Nonetheless, gaining awareness on these issues might come at a cost. Activist Barreteiro states,

> "With #MeToo, the feminist movement has gained visibility…But at the same time, society has become polarized. Today's sexist is more proud, and more aware. If before we had a kind of lack of knowledge - now we have people who are completely radicalized"[42]

This might be signaling that some anti-genderism is creeping into the Portuguese political context. For example, in the occasion of a collective action on November 25th to celebrate the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, several movement organizations declared that "We are concerned about the setbacks in the rights… of thousands of women in countries where extreme right-wing and ultra-conservative governments are gaining more and more ground. We denounce in Portugal a worrying trend towards backward, moralistic and inadmissible judicial decisions".[43] It is still uncertain if these early signs of polarization on gender issues and on gender violence, will change the political environment in which feminist organizations operate. Nonetheless, most signs are positive. Firstly, Portuguese women, and youth in particular, have now a greater awareness of gender-based violence, observed also in steady rises in reporting.[44] Secondly, the feminist movement got re-energized by the #MeToo movement and by a more diverse membership. This contributed to a clear understanding that both oppression and resistance operate on multiple levels, and that women, activists, and movement organizations, need to tackle all of these to be empowered.

Conclusion

I argue that the now globalized #MeToo movement has helped revitalize the Portuguese feminist movement. New, younger, and more diverse members have joined its ranks, new feminist organizations were created, new frames were applied, and several collective actions were organized, mostly to protest court decisions. This has led to a more inclusive and intersectional activism within the movement. Whether these changes were an exclusive result of the #MeToo movement is harder to ascertain, as there were other internal processes occurring at the same time.

Feminist activism in Portugal has been showing signs of vitality and resilience, while still maintaining its own identity. Gains on the issues of sexual harassment and sexual violence have been very gradual, but have happened organically, from the bottom-up. In Portugal, celebrities never took over the narrative on gender-based violence, and

while some might interpret this as a lack of impact or support towards the #MeToo movement, it also allowed the feminist movement to control the narrative. In Portugal, many women had already shared their individual stories under the #MeToo, building communities online, and also joining in the wave of solidarity with young women that had been raped, had their cases on trial, or in challenging unfair court rulings.

Survivors of gender-based violence resisted online by telling their own stories, other victims recognized themselves in those stories and that created a 'thought model' and a 'group validation'.

This woman-centered perspective resists by creating a gender-based community and a 'subjugated knowledge' that is not easily controlled by dominant groups. In Portugal, not all that resistance translated easily from online into the streets, but for some, it was the indignation towards the justice system that served as the catalyst for political protest. Resisting gender-based violence in Portugal implies tackling it at the multiple levels at which it occurs: individual, cultural, and institutional. Although that process had already started, it was reinforced by the #MeToo movement.

Notes

1   The term sexual harassment and sexual violence are used in this article interchangeably with the umbrella term "gender-based violence". These terms apply to cases in which most victims/survivors are women and the violence has a gender or sexual component, such as, sexual harassment, rape, sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and similar aggressions. It refers to harm, or threat of harm, perpetrated against a person based on her/his gender and it is rooted in unequal power relationships between men and women, thus women are more commonly affected (Rosario-Lebrón 2019, 5). This definition is inclusive of trans women and men, non-binary identifying individuals and others on sexual margins (Andersen 2018, 13).

2   For Garraio et al., the key issues of the #MeToo movement that needed to be addressed were sexual harassment at work, the complex reasons that discourage women from reporting, and the "gray zones' of sexual abuse (2020, 37).

3   Gomes, J., Simões, S., and Oliveira S. 2018. Acusação de violação nos EUA. 20 perguntas e respostas para perceber o que pode acontecer a Ronaldo. Observador. October 4. [Accessed 6 June 2019]. Available from:https://observador.pt/especiais/acusacao-de-violacao-nos-eua-20-perguntas-e-respostas-para--perceber-o-que-pode-acontecer-a-ronaldo/

4   According to Monteiro and Ferreira, in Portugal more progress was made via the center-left than the center-right parties. These confirms similar findings that show that changes "towards governments of the left constitute moments in which political opportunity structures open up and are more favorable to women's movement campaigns and state feminism" (2016, 475).

5   The Istanbul Convention, is a human rights international treaty of the Council of Europe, intended to combat domestic violence and violence against women through the protection of victims and the elimination of impunity of aggressors. It was first opened for signatures on 11 May 2011, Portugal ratified the treaty in 2013 and went into force in the country in 2014. The Council of Europe started since the 1990s to take several initiatives to promote the protection of women against violence, but it became clear over the years, for the need to set legal standards to ensure that victims anywhere could benefit from the same level of protection. Sources: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/210/signatures>; https://www.euronews.com/2020/07/27/istanbul-convention-what-is-the-domestic-violence-treaty-and-has-it-had-an-impact>

6   It states: "anyone who harass another person by practicing before him acts of an exhibitionist nature, formulating proposals of sexual content or constraining her to sexual contact is punished with impri-

sonment for up to one year or with a fine of up to 120 days (…)". Pires, C. 2018. O assédio sexual não é trivial nem normal: é violência! Público. August 6. [Accessed 6 June 2019]. Available from:https://www.publico.pt/2018/08/06/p3/cronica/o-assedio-sexual-nao-e-nem-trivial-nem-normal-e-violencia-1840199

7   Oliveira, M. 2018. Para esta vítima a condenação dos seus violadores soube-lhe a absolvição Público. October 14. [Accessed 20 June 2019]. Available from:https://www.publico.pt/2018/10/14/sociedade/noticia/uma-condenacao-que-para-a-vitima-de-violacao-soube-a-absolvicao-1846604

8   Salvador, J. 2018. "Dia Internacional para a Eliminação da Violência Contra as Mulheres lembrado em Portugal e no mundo". November 25. [Accessed 4 August 2020]. Available from:https://expresso.pt/sociedade/2018-11-25-Dia-Internacional-para-a-Eliminacao-da-Violencia-Contra-as-Mulheres-lembrado-em--Portugal-e-no-mundo

9   Faria, N. 2018. Mais de metade dos violadores são familiares ou conhecidos das vítimas. Público. October 14.[Accessed 4 June 2019]. Available from: https://www.publico.pt/2018/10/14/sociedade/noticia/mais-de-metade-dos-violadores-sao-familiares-ou-conhecidos-das-vitimas-1847169.

10   Flor, A. 2018. #MeToo em Portugal? Temos "uma forma mais formiguinha" de fazer a luta. Público. October 5. [Accessed 6 June 2019]. Available from: https://www.publico.pt/2018/10/05/sociedade/noticia/metoo-em-portugal-temos-uma-forma-mais-formiguinha-de-fazer-a-luta-1846328

11   *Ibid*.

12   *Ibid*.

13   Neves, S. 2019. Marcella colou papéis nas casas de banho da faculdade para mostrar que as vítimas de violência não estão sozinhas. Público. February 22. [Accessed 6 June 2019]. Available from: https://www.publico.pt/2019/02/22/p3/noticia/marcella-papeis-casas-banho-faculdade-1863067

14   Santos, N. 2018. UMAR acusa juizes de misoginia no caso de violação em Gaia Público. September 25. [Accessed 6 June 2019]. Available from: https://www.publico.pt/2018/09/25/sociedade/noticia/umar-acusa-juizes-de-misoginia-no-caso-de-violacao-em-gaia-1845195

15   This study is part of the Interdisciplinary Center for Gender Studies (CIEG) at the University of Lisbon.

16   Flor, A. 2018. Assédio no trabalho: "Quanto mais visível, mais casos é possível resolver". Público. October 5. [Accessed 6 June 2019]. Available from: https://www.publico.pt/2018/10/05/sociedade/noticia/assedio-no-trabalho-quanto-mais-for-visivel-mais-casos-e-possivel-resolver-1846280

17   Flor, A. 2018. #MeToo em Portugal? Temos "uma forma mais formiguinha" de fazer a luta., *op. cit*.

18   Santos, N. 2018. UMAR acusa juizes de misoginia no caso de violação em Gaia, *op.cit*.

19   *Ibid*.

20   *Ibid*.

21   Pinto, P. 2018. Mas as virgens ofendidas somos nós. Expresso. [Accessed 20 June 2019]. Available from: https://expresso.pt/blogues/bloguet_lifestyle/Avidadesaltosaltos/2018-10-16-Mas-as-virgens-ofendidas-somos-nos

22   Flor, A. 2018. #MeToo em Portugal? Temos "uma forma mais formiguinha" de fazer a luta., *op. cit*.

23   *Ibid*.

24   *Ibid*.

25   Patrícia Martins is a 30-year-old Porto activist involved in several organizations, including the *Coletiva* organization and the Porto LGBT Pride March.

26   Luísa Barateiro is 18 years old Biology student and activist from the organization of the Feminist Festival, linked to Democratic Movement of Women (MDM) and to the Union of Women Alternative and Response (UMAR).

27   Pinto, B. 2018. Um ano depois do #MeToo, como vai o feminismo português?. Público. October 4. [Accessed 6 June 2019]. Available from:https://www.publico.pt/2018/10/04/p3/noticia/um-ano-depois-do--metoo-como-vai-o-feminismo-portugues-1846257

28   *Ibid*.

[29] *Ibid*.

[30] Afonso, M. 2018. Porque "não está tudo feito", elas criaram o primeiro grupo feminista da Academia do Porto. Público. May 1.[Accessed 6 June 2019]. Available from: https://www.publico.pt/2018/05/01/p3/noticia/porque-nao-esta-tudo-feito-elas-criaram-o-primeiro-grupo-feminista-da-academia-do-porto-1815851

[31] Caetano, M. 2018. #metoo em Portugal. "Os homens têm muito a aprender". Diário de Notícias. October 5.[Accessed 20 June 2019]. Available from:https://www.dn.pt/pais/metoo-em-portugal-os-homens-tem-muito-a-aprender-9957750.html.

[32] Pinto, B. 2018.Um ano depois do #MeToo, como vai o feminismo português?, op. cit.

[33] Santos, N. 2018. UMAR acusa juizes de misoginia no caso de violação em Gaia, *op.cit*.

[34] *Ibid*.

[35] *Ibid*.

[36] *Ibid.*

[37] Pinto, B. 2018.Um ano depois do #MeToo, como vai o feminismo português?, *op. cit*.

[38] *Ibid*.

[39] Faria, N. 2018. Mais de metade dos violadores são familiares ou conhecidos das vítimas., *op. cit*.

[40] Pinto, P. 2018. Mas as virgens ofendidas somos nós, *op. cit*.

[41] Magalhães argues "Although we do not have this media boom, we have a more incremental way, step by step, to solidify the groundwork. This is our fight." Flor, *op. cit.*

[42] Flor, A. 2018. #MeToo em Portugal? Temos "uma forma mais formiguinha" de fazer a luta., *op. cit*.

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Towards Decolonising Computational Sciences

By Abeba Birhane & Olivia Guest

Abstract

This article sets out our perspective on how to begin the journey of decolonising computational fields, such as data and cognitive sciences. We see this struggle as requiring two basic steps: a) realisation that the present-day system has inherited, and still enacts, hostile, conservative, and oppressive behaviours and principles towards women of colour; and b) rejection of the idea that centring individual people is a solution to system-level problems. The longer we ignore these two steps, the more "our" academic system maintains its toxic structure, excludes, and harms Black women and other minoritised groups. This also keeps the door open to discredited pseudoscience, like eugenics and physiognomy. We propose that grappling with our fields' histories and heritage holds the key to avoiding mistakes of the past. In contrast to, for example, initiatives such as "diversity boards", which can be harmful because they superficially appear reformatory but nonetheless center whiteness and maintain the status quo. Building on the work of many women of colour, we hope to advance the dialogue required to build both a grass-roots and a top-down re-imagining of computational sciences — including but not limited to psychology, neuroscience, cognitive science, computer science, data science, statistics, machine learning, and artificial intelligence. We aspire to progress away from these fields' stagnant, sexist, and racist shared past into an ecosystem that welcomes and nurtures demographically diverse researchers and ideas that critically challenge the status quo.

KEYWORDS: decolonisation, computational sciences, cognitive sciences, machine learning, artificial intelligence, anti-Blackness, misogynoir, tokenism

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The most powerful weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.

Biko (1978)

In this article, we tackle two related stumbling blocks for the healthy and safe progression and retention of people of colour in general in the computational sciences — fields including but not limited to machine learning (ML) and artificial intelligence (AI), as well as data and cognitive sciences within the Western context. We intersectionally shed light on the perspectives and experiences in the computational sciences of both cis and/or binary (men and women) as well as queer, trans, and non-binary people of colour, and we especially focus on women of colour and Black women (Combahee River Collective 1983; Crenshaw 1990). Firstly, we provide an overview of the conservative and hostile status of these fields to people of colour and especially to Black people. The present scientific ecosystem sustains itself by rewarding work that reinforces its conservative structure. Anything and anyone seen as challenging the status quo faces systemic rejection, resistance, and exclusion. Secondly, we explain how centring individual people, as opposed to tackling systemic obstacles, is a myopic modus operandi and indeed part of the way the current hegemony maintains itself. Fundamental change is only possible by promoting work that dismantles structural inequalities and erodes systemic power asymmetries.

As we shall explain, "our" current scientific ecosystem is so potent, pervasive, and forceful that even Black women can become assimilated, or at least project assimilationist viewpoints (i.e., integrating into and upholding the status quo). As such, the current Western computational sciences ecosystem — even when under the guise of equity, diversity, and inclusivity — reinforces behaviours (even in Black women) that can be useless to or even impede the healthy progress of (other) Black people within it (Chang et al. 2019; Okun n.d.). Black women, through years of training and enculturation in a white supremacist and colonialist system, are conditioned to internalize the status quo. They may thus be unable to describe and elucidate the systems that oppresses them. Even

when Black women are able to reckon with their oppression and marginalisation, because their experience is misaligned with the academic value system, they might lack the language to articulate it. Furthermore, they might be subject to corrective punishment, or at least coercion, to cease further "rebellion" (Agathangelou & Ling 2002).

We plan to unpack all the above with an eye towards a collective re-imagining of the computational sciences. To do this, we implore computational scientists to be aware of their fields' histories (Cave & Dihal 2020; Roberts, BareketShavit, Dollins, Goldie, & Mortenson 2020; Saini 2019; Syed 2020; Winston 2020) and we propose that through such an awakening we can begin to forge a decolonised future. We also hope our article encourages researchers to consciously avoid repeating previous mistakes, some of which are crimes against humanity, like eugenics (Saini 2019). Ultimately, our goal is to make inroads upon radically decolonised computational sciences (cf. Birhane 2019; Cave & Dihal 2020).

The computational sciences ecosystem

What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? It means that only the most narrow parameters of change are possible and allowable.

Lorde (1984)

Computational and cognitive sciences — fields that both rely on computational methods to carry out research as well as engage in research of computation itself — are built on a foundation of racism, sexism, colonialism, Angloand Euro-centrism, white supremacy, and all intersections thereof (Crenshaw 1990; Lugones 2016). This is dramatically apparent when one examines the history of fields such as genetics, statistics, and psychology, which were historically engaged in refining and enacting eugenics (Cave & Dihal 2020; Roberts et al. 2020; Saini 2019; Syed 2020; Winston 2020).

"Great" scientists were eugenicists, e.g., Alexander Graham Bell, Cyril Burt, Francis Galton, Ronald Fisher, Gregory Foster, Karl Pearson, Flinders Petrie, and Marie Stopes (Bernal Llanos 2020).

The Western cis straight white male worldview masquerades as the invisible background that is taken as the "normal", "standard", or "universal" position (Ahmed 2007). Those outside it are racialised, gendered, and defined according to their proximity and relation to colonial whiteness (Lugones 2016). People who are coded as anything other than white, have limited to no access to the field, as reflected in the demographics from undergraduate courses to professorships (Gabriel & Tate 2017; Roberts et al. 2020). In other words, the current situation in the computational sciences remains one of de facto white supremacy, wherein whiteness is assumed as the standard which in turn allows white people to enjoy structural advantages, like access to (higher paying) jobs and positions of power (Myers 2018). Mutatis mutandis for masculine supremacy: men enjoy structural benefits and privileges, as reflected in the (binary) gender ratios throughout the computational sciences (Gabriel & Tate 2017; Hicks 2017; Huang, Gates, Sinatra, & Barabási 2020).

Academia, and science specifically, is seen by some as a bastion of Leftism and so-called "cultural Marxism" (Mirrlees 2018), operating to exclude conservativism (Heterodox Academy 2020). However, both in terms of its demographic make-up and in terms of what are considered "acceptable" and "legitimate" research endeavours, science is conservative, even within broader Left-leaning ideologies and movements (Mirowski 2018). This is especially apparent when we consider that many positions of social and political power reflect the broader demographics of the societies in which scientific institutions are embedded, while these same scientific institutions lag behind in terms of representation. For example, in terms of political power, 10% of MPs in the UK are minoritised ethnic, reflecting the 13.8% of people in the UK with a non-white background (Uberoi 2019). Similarly, in the USA, 27.2% of the members of the House of Representatives are minoritised ethnic while 23.5% of the USA population

identifies as such (Uberoi 2019). Science's ability to grant positions of power to minoritised people is abysmal in comparison. In 2017, there were only 350 Black women professors in the UK across all fields, making up less than 2% of the professoriate and five out of 159 University Vice Chancellors (3.1%) are Black (Khan 2017; Linton 2018).

Relatedly, Black women's writings are systemically omitted from syllabi and Black women have to work extra hard — producing higher levels of scientific novelty — to get the equivalent recognition and reward to white men (Hofstra et al. 2020). Historically, Black women, even more than women in general, have been erased making evidence of their pioneering work and leadership within computational sciences, like Melba Roy Mouton (see Figure 1), difficult to find (Hicks 2017; Nelsen 2017). Both soft and hard power within academia is afforded disproportionately to white people, especially men, and to those who are aligned with the current hegemony.

Due to computational sciences' history — especially our lack of institutional self-awareness, which protects hegemonic interests — white and male supremacy continues to sneak (back) into even ostensibly sensible research areas. For example, under the guise of a seemingly scientific endeavour, so-called "race science" or "race realism" conceals much of the last two centuries' white supremacy, racism, and eugenics (Saini 2019). Despite a wealth of evidence directly discrediting this racist pseudoscience, race realism — the eugenic belief that human races have a biologically based hierarchy in order to support racist claims of racial inferiority or superiority — is currently experiencing a rebirth, chiefly aided by AI and ML (e.g., Blaise Agüera y Arcas & Todorov 2017).

Computational sciences in general, and AI and ML specifically, hardly examine their own histories — apparent in the widespread ignorance of the legacies of research on IQ and on race studies from the fields of statistics, genetics, and psychology (e.g., Bernal Llanos 2020; Cave & Dihal 2020; Laland 2020; Prabhu & Birhane 2020; Syed 2020; The Cell Editorial Team 2020; Winston 2020). Junk "science" from areas such as face research is revived and imbued with "state-of-the-art" machine
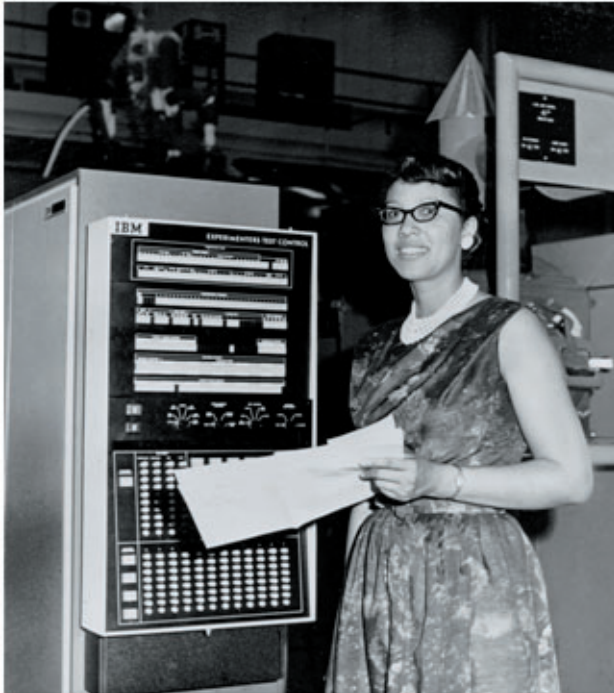
Figure 1. "Melba Roy Mouton was Assistant Chief of Research Programs at NASA's Trajectory and Geodynamics Division in the 1960s and headed a group of NASA mathematicians called "computers". Starting as a mathematician, she was head mathematician for Echo Satellites 1 and 2, and she worked up to being a Head Computer Programmer and then Program Production Section Chief at Goddard Space Flight Center." (photograph by NASA, released to the public domain, Black Women in Computing 2016)

learning models. This results in (at least partially) successfully masquerading pseudoscience as science by use of vacuous and over-hyped technical jargon. The downstream negative impact of such work is rarely considered and thus, digitized pseudoscience is often packaged and deployed into high-stake decision-making processes, disproportionately impacting individuals and communities at the margins of society (Buolamwini & Gebru 2018). To wit, AI and ML are best seen as forces that wield power where it already exists, perpetuating harm and oppression (Kalluri 2020).

In the present, harmful discredited pseudoscientific practices and theories like eugenics, phrenology, and physiognomy, even when explicitly promoted, face little to no pushback (Chinoy 2019; Saini 2019; Stark 2018). Springer, for example, was recently pressured to halt publication of a physiognomist book chapter. Scholars and activists wrote an extensive rebuttal which was then signed by over two thousand experts from a variety of fields (Coalition for Critical Technology 2020). No official statement was provided condemning such work by the editors or publishers, despite being explicitly called on to condemn this type of pseudoscience. Regardless, Springer continues to publish pseudoscience of similar magnitude. At the time of writing, for example, we identified 47 papers published

this year (2020) alone by Springer, all claiming to have built algorithmic systems that "predict gender", even though the very idea of predicting gender has been demonstrated to rest on scientifically fallacious and ethically dubious grounds (Keyes 2018). This event — halting publication of a physiognomist book chapter by Springer — exemplifies how seemingly progressive actions function as figleaves obfuscating and preserving the system's conservatism, white supremacy, and racism. This also demonstrates how the effort to quality control and sift out Victorian-era pseudoscience is left to the community (of affected peoples) that are not afforded the financial means or structural support for such time-consuming and effortful work.

The lack of field-wide, top-down critical engagement results in an uptick in publications that revive explicit scientific racism and sexism (Birhane & Cummins 2019; Prabhu & Birhane 2020). Tellingly, such ideas are defended not via deep ideological engagement or coherent argumentation but by appealing to rhetorical slights of hand. In the rare cases where papers are retracted following outrage, it is the result of a large effort often spearheaded by researchers who are junior, precarious, and/or of colour (e.g., Gliske 2020; Mead 2020). A much higher energy barrier is needed to be overcome to get such flawed work expunged

from the academic record than to slip such work into the literature in the first place. Unfortunately, the retraction of a few papers, in a publishing culture that fails to see the inherent racist, sexist, and white supremacist, foundations of such work serves only as a band-aid on a bullet wound. The system itself needs to be rethought — scholars should not, as a norm, need to form grassroots initiatives to instigate retractions and clean up the literature. Rather, the onus should fall on those producing, editing, reviewing, and funding (pseudo)scientific work. Strict and clear peer review guidelines, for example, provide a means to filter racist pseudoscience out (Boyd, Lindo, Weeks, & McLemore 2020). Ultimately, it is the peer review and publishing system, and the broader academic ecosystem that need to be re-examined and reimagined in a manner that explicitly excludes harmful pseudoscience and subtly repackaged white supremacism from its model.

In the present, white supremacism, racism, and colonialism are promoted through (increasingly) covert means and without the explicit consent of most research practitioners nor human participants. White supremacist ideological inheritances, for example, are found in subtle forms in modern academic psychological, social, and cognitive sciences (Roberts et al. 2020; Syed 2020; Winston 2020). Many of the conclusions about the so-called "universal" human nature are based on the observations of people from societies that are described as Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD; Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan 2010). Although this appears as an obvious form of white supremacy — where a select few are deemed representative of the whole human experience — nonetheless, practitioners have often been oblivious until the default way of collecting data has been described in explicit terms.

In a similar manner, colonialism in academia does not take on the form of physical invasion through brute force (Birhane 2019; George, Dei, & Asgharzadeh 2002). Instead we are left with the remnants of colonial era mentality: coloniality (Mohamed, Png, & Isaac 2020). There is no mainstream direct advocacy for (neo-)Nazi propaganda, for example, but there is facilitation of the CIA's

torture programme (Soldz 2011; Welch 2017). Additionally, there are prominent and/or tenured academics who promote anything from support of the status quo to palingenesis (return to an idealised past; Griffin 2018), collectively known as the Intellectual Dark Web (IDW), e.g., Jonathan Haidt, Sam Harris, Christina Hoff Sommers, Jordan Peterson, Steven Pinker, and Bret Weinstein (Parks 2020; Ribeiro, Ottoni, West, Almeida, & Meira 2020). These researchers use their academic credentials to promote conservative to alt-right ideologies to their large public following, including the notion that science is actively hostile to their ideas while subsequently calling for "civility" in the face of hate (Heterodox Academy 2020). According to the IDW, leftism and liberalism are the dominant frameworks in science. This is a useful rhetorical device for upholding the status quo, akin to a systemic-variant of a tactic called DARVOing: deny, attack, and reverse victim and offender (Harsey, Zurbriggen, & Freyd 2017).

A tale of two academias

> *When confronted with something that does not fit the paradigm we know, we are likely to resist acknowledging the incongruity.*
>
> *Onuoha (2020)*

Academia's oppressive structures are invisible to those in privileged positions — the matrix of oppression (Ferber, Herrera, & Samuels 2007) is rendered transparent, undetectable. This holds, in some cases, even for minoritised scholars who are trained in fields like the computational sciences where oppressive forces and troubling foundations are not the subject of scrutiny. Concepts and ideologies set out by a homogeneous group of "founding fathers" or "great men" are presented as "objective", "neutral", and "universal", seemingly emerging from "the view from nowhere" and obscuring the fact that they embody the status quo. This is particularly pertinent within computational sciences where a select handful of influential Western white men are put on a pedestal, perceived as infallible

and objective, and worshipped akin to deities. Interrogating the history and underlying assumptions of concepts such as "objective" are often seen as political and/or ethical and, therefore, outside the purview of scientific enquiry. This blocks the attempts of Black women — whose experience is not captured by so-called universal concepts — to carve out an academic home.

For those who satisfy, and are satisfied with, the status quo, academia is "comfortable, like a body that sinks into a chair that has received its shape over time" (Ahmed 2014). Noticing how the chair might be uncomfortable for others is a difficult task even when its uncomfortableness has been explicitly demonstrated.

The recent #BlackInTheIvory hashtag on Twitter (Subbaraman 2020) illustrates how dramatically painful the Black academic experience is:[1]

#BlackintheIvory As faculty member in an institution, guard wouldn't let me in the library. Showed my faculty ID, [with] my photo. "Is that really you?"

Mario L. Small (@MarioLuisSmall)

The confusion on your [students'] face, at the start of every semester when you walk into a classroom, with the realization that a black [woman] will be teaching them. #BlackInTheIvoryTower

Abeba Birhane (@Abebab)

To white/non-[Black, Indigenous, and people of colour] folks in academia asking yourself if you ever contributed to the things being discussed in #Blackintheivory, let me assure you that the answer is yes. It was probably just something so inconsequential to you that you don't even remember it.

Naomi Tweyo Nkinsi (@NNkinsi)

On the rare occasions (before I knew better) that I shared my #Blackintheivory experiences

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[1] Tweets quoted with permission and modified very slightly for readability.

[with] colleagues who were not Black, it usually led to invalidation and gaslighting. So to see this out in the open is incredible, but it surfaces pain that I continually suppress to survive.

Jamila Michener (@povertyscholar)

The #BlackInTheIvory hashtag demonstrates that despite operating within the general umbrella of "academia", Black scholars face radically different treatment compared to their non-Black counterparts — they inhabit a dramatically more hostile environment. They are under constant scrutiny, evaluated according to divergent, more stringent, standards (Spikes 2020). This hostile parallel environment otherises minoritised academics and remains imperceptible, even unimaginable, to privileged academics.

Oftentimes, Black women's attempts to describe their lived reality and their request for fair and just treatment is met with backlash typically from white, cis, male, etc., academics, both in senior and junior positions. Black women exist under a near constant threat of misogynoir, the intersection of sexism and anti-Blackness (Bailey 2018). From being labelled "angry", "loud", and "nasty", to being demeaned with phrases such as "it is a subjective experience, not an objectively verifiable claim" (Walley-Jean 2009). Black women are even more obviously gaslit, i.e., their concerns are discarded systematically, leading to them doubting their reality and judgements of the toxicity of the system (Davis & Ernst 2017). On the one hand, individual cases of racism are dismissed as one-off instances that cannot be evidential for structural racism. On the other hand, overarching patterns of racism are deemed irrelevant on the basis that specific cases cannot be characterised based on aggregate data. These two rhetorical devices allow for undermining Black women and for explaining away misogynoir. When those in positions of power accept anecdotal evidence from those like themselves, but demand endless statistics from minoritised groups, no amount of data will suffice (Lanius 2015).

Computational scientists who are both Black and women face daily mega- to microaggressions

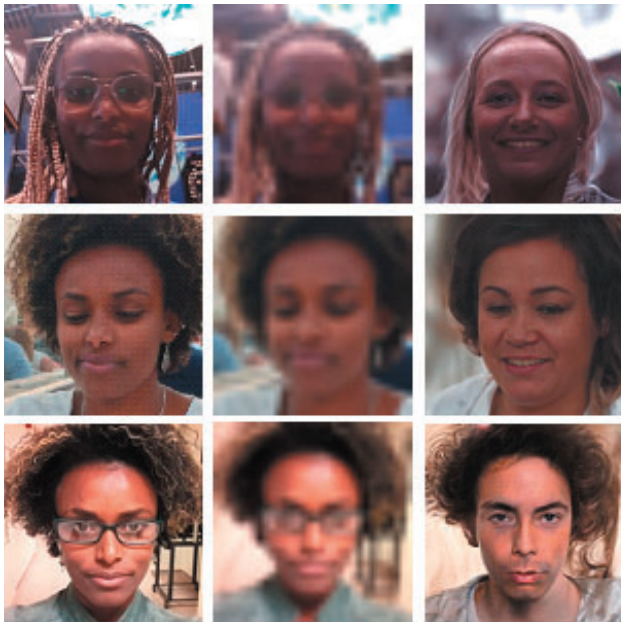a) ground truth   b) blurred input   c) output

Figure 2. Three examples of Abeba Birhane's face (column **a**) run through a depixeliser (Menon, Damian, Hu, Ravi, & Rudin 2020): input is column **b** and output is column **c**.

involving their intersectional position (Sue et al. 2007). Take this seemingly banal algorithm that depixelises images , for example. When confronted with a Black woman's face, it "corrects" her Blackness and femininity, see Figure 2. This type of erasure exemplifies the lack of a diverse team, the lack of a diverse testing-stage userbase, and a deep dearth of understanding about how imposing digital whiteface constitutes harm, i.e., is a(n micro)aggression (Sloane, Moss, Awomolo, & Forlano 2020). But more fundamentally — and far from being an isolated incident of lack of proper testing and imagination — this is a symptom of the subtle white and male supremacy under which the computational fields operate, which assume and promote whiteness and maleness as the ideal standards.

White women are part of the problem

> *White feminism is the feminism that doesn't understand western privilege, or cultural context. It is the feminism that doesn't consider race as a factor in the struggle for equality.*
> *Young (2014)*

Perhaps unsurprisingly, diversity cannot realistically be achieved by merely focusing on gender diversity. When the existence of oppressive systems is acknowledged within the computational fields, it is common for institutions to assemble "diversity and inclusion boards", often composed of white women. The reasoning behind this typically amounts to "women are victims of an oppressive academic system, therefore, their active involvement solves this problem". Such discourse is reflective of the institutional ineptitude at thinking beyond individualised solutions and towards systems-level change. This oversimplified approach is naive, and even harmful (Chang et al. 2019). The assumption that, cisgender heterosexual ablebodied Western, white women represent all women is misguided (Ahmed 2007).

White women are beneficiaries of all the advantages that come with whiteness — white supremacy, coloniality, Orientalism, and Anglo- and Euro-centrism. White feminism, i.e., feminism that is anti-intersectional, cannot address these issues (Young 2014). White feminism is a one-size-fits-all ideology that decries centring issues other than (a narrow definition of) patriarchy, claiming that such deviations are divisive. For example, white feminism is loathe to, and indeed not equipped to,

discuss the coloniality of the gender binary (Lugones 2016). Importantly, although white feminism is mainly advanced by its beneficiaries — white women — it it not limited to being enacted purely by white women. It can be inherited and internalized regardless of racialisation, which means that white feminism has to do more with the ideology than gender, race, or ethnicity (Nadar 2014). One might be a white feminist without necessarily being white and a woman (Young 2014). By the same token, it is possible for a white woman to escape her indoctrination into white supremacist feminism.

As we discuss in the previous section, oppressive structures are difficult to see and understand for people who do not occupy a certain racialised and politicized space — "where the chair is not made in their mould". White women are often unable to detect white supremacist, Anglo- and Euro-centric, and colonial systems. This has implications for progress or rather, it hiders progress. The centring of white women, especially those who explicitly advance white feminism, does not remedy structural problems — no single individual can. White feminist actors also monopolize, hijack, and even weaponise, these spaces, deflating multi-dimensional and hierarchical intersectional issues, e.g., misogynoir, and reducing them into a single dimension, stripped of all nuance, of the oppressive system they face: the patriarchy (Eddo-Lodge 2018). This manifests in defensiveness and hostility, like the use of canned phrases such as "not all white women", when Black women point out oppression beyond the patriarchy. Ultimately, we all need to ask ourselves: "How can decades of feminist epistemology and more recently Black feminist epistemology and research practice enhance research practice in general and not just the practices of those who selfidentify as feminists?" (Nadar 2014, p. 20)

Tokenism and its discontents

One way of excluding the majority of Black women from the knowledge-validation process is to permit a few Black women to acquire positions of authority in institutions that legitimize knowledge and to encourage them to work within the taken-for-granted assumptions of Black female inferiority shared by the scholarly community and the culture at large.
Collins (1989)

Many Black women, as many people generally, arrive at the computational sciences without much formal training in detecting and tackling systemic oppression. Once inside the system, they are pressured to acquiesce to the status quo and cultivate ignorance or at least tolerance of systemic oppression. Black women are rewarded for capitulating to racist and misogynist norms, while also getting punished, often subtly, for minor dissent or missteps (Collins 1989). These select few Black women are tokenised by the selfpreservation mechanisms of the system. They are allowed access to positions of power, although often merely impotent ceremonial roles, in order to appease those who request equity, diversity, and inclusivity. "Those Black women who accept [the system] are likely to be rewarded by their institutions [but] at significant personal cost." This does not mean that Black women are passive recipients of systemic injustice. Far from it, many actively oppose and push back against it. Nevertheless, "those challenging the [system] run the risk of being ostracised." (Collins 1989, p. 753)

The structural and interpersonal components of computational sciences make it difficult (if not impossible) for Black women to describe (let alone navigate, survive, or flourish in) their environment. This results in confusion, abuse, and confusion about abuse: a form of systemic-level gas-lighting. Ultimately, it can also lead to Black people making a Faustian pact in order to ensure their individual survival within this ecosystem: trade any pre-existing principles they have — or adopt the white man's principle as their own (Freire 1970) as the academic ecology trains them not to know any better — thus, aligning them with male and white supremacy. This results in the almost bizarre case wherein the few, highly tokenised (both with and without their consent and realization), Black women are not in any way directly contributing to the dismantling of the forces which keep

their fellow Black women excluded (Collins 1989). In other words, if not trained in critical race studies and other critical fields, a Black computational scientist risks producing the same oppressive, hegemonically-aligned work, as any other, e.g., white, scientist. Black women face a challenge, a dilemma, between:

a) telling their truth (i.e., challenging the orthodoxy) and facing silencing, exclusion, and censorship at the institution and system levels (i.e., through the marginalisation of their work); or *b*) working to maintain the status quo which overtly rewards them yet covertly coerces them into supporting a system that devalues their humanity (Collins 1989).

Privileged people are left unscathed by the nuanced and system-level issues we touch on herein. Furthermore, these issues are difficult to acknowledge for those in power — they are seen as a sideshow, a political/politicised distraction rather than an essential element of good (computational) science. Alas, even when acknowledged the common mitigation is the creation of so-called diversity boards, which are often composed predominantly of white women. And as we discuss above, white women can be part of the problem, especially when they enact white feminism. This results in (further) tokenisation of Black women and other minoritised groups. Compounding these issues even further, although the active inclusion of Black women can be part of the solution, we argue that it can also be problematic, even leading to further exacerbating problems. For two reasons:

a) it gives the illusion that the inclusion of individuals can alone solve structural and deep-rooted problems; and *b*) the selected individuals themselves, although from a minoritised group, might not be equipped to recognize and tackle systemic oppression due to their academic training, harming both themselves and other minoritised groups that they are supposed to represent and help. In other words, we oppose the prevalent individual-centred solutions to systemic problems. In considering the lack of Black women, a shift is required in the core questions we ask ourselves — from the misguided "why are Black women not entering computational sciences?" to questions like "what should the field as a whole, and computational departments specifically, do to create a welcoming and nurturing environment for Black women?"

The active inclusion and respectful representation of Black women is key to their safe progression in academia. We all need to "recognize the scale and scope of anti-Blackness" within the computational sciences (Guillory 2020). However, promoting representation and/or inclusion, without acknowledgement of how white supremacy, racism, and coloniality work and without challenging structural inequalities, is doomed to fail. And as we saw, Black people themselves could be victims, unable to see outside their conditioning, and predominantly thinking in a manner that benefits white supremacy. A representative demographic makeup should be seen more as the side-effect, the byproduct, of a healthy system and not an ingredient by which to bring such a system about. Visible representation matters, but only if the ecosystem is set up to welcome and retain minoritised groups without exploiting them (Berenstain 2016; Sloane et al. 2020).

Conclusion

> *Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift.*
> *Freire (1970)*

Individual-level issues such as interpersonal displays of racism are not the cause but a side-effect, symptomatic of a much deeper problem: structural, systemic, social, and institutional racism and sexism — ideals and values set in place purposefully a couple of centuries ago (Saini 2019). Individual acts would be punished, or least outlined as things better avoided, if the current academic system was aligned with decolonisation instead of white supremacy. Indeed part of the longevity of the system of promoting whiteness and masculinity to the detriment of Black women is exactly this: only those who support masculine and white hegemony "float" to the top. Any members of minoritised groups, e.g., Black women, are often

specifically selected (through systemic forces) to be trainable into upholders of the status quo — conditioned to uphold currently extant kyriarchal (Schüssler Fiorenza 2009) structures. Those Black women who "make it" without buckling under pressure, face interpersonal and systemic abuse. And any work they do contribute to, any scientific progress they lead or take part in, is also systemically erased, forgotten — disallowing them in large part from even becoming role models for others, for example, see Figure 1 (Nelsen 2017).

The continuity of history is apparent both in terms of current research themes as well as in terms of present-day fieldwide demographics. Present-day academic oppression is often nuanced, covert, even imperceptible to most, including minoritised groups. To some extent, we are all products of an academic tradition that trains us to conform to the status quo, almost by definition. Continued critical engagement and enrichment of our vocabularies are necessary to articulate our oppressions and experiences, allowing us to overcome conditioned and internalized white supremacy, racism, and coloniality. Re-evaluating our understanding of our fields' histories is paramount — both the good (e.g., Black women such as Melba Roy Mouton, see Figure 1 and Black Women in Computing 2016; Nelsen 2017) and the bad (e.g., eugenics and race science, expelling women from computational sciences and the tech industry, etc., Hicks 2017; Saini 2019).

Academia produces work that predominantly maintains the status quo. Those who push back against this orthodoxy are met with hostility, both at systemic and individual levels. Majoritarian and minoritised people alike, who conform to the core values of racism, colonialism, and white supremacy are rewarded. The promotion of people who are ideologically aligned with the current hegemony is how the system sustains itself — both directly through the tenure system and generally through who is allowed into science and which roles and opportunities are open to them (Gewin 2020).

Ultimately, decolonising a system needs to go handin-hand with decolonising oneself. Structural obstacles (through the form of racism, coloniality, white supremacy, and so on) which prevent Black women and other minoritised groups from entering (and remaining in) computational sciences need to be removed. At minimum, this requires the beneficiaries of the current systems to acknowledge their privilege and actively challenge the system that benefits them. This is not to be confused with asking those in positions of power to be generous or polite to Black women nor are Black women passively asking for a "handout" or special treatment. The healthy progression of computational sciences is one that necessarily examines, learns from, and dismantles its historical and current racist, colonialist, and oppressive roots, albeit through a gradual process. This includes the active exclusion of harmful, racist, and white supremacist pseudoscience from the academic discourse; structural incentives and rewards (not punishment) for those that challenge harmful junk "science" and the status quo generally; and the willingness to acknowledge the current conservative ecosystem and the call to push back against it. Such a journey is beneficial not only to Black women but also to science in general. Nonetheless, it is paramount to acknowledge the present ecosystem of the computational sciences for what it is and obtain our liberation from our conditioned internalized coloniality, white supremacy, and Anglo- and Euro-centrism. These demands need to necessarily emerge from within. "The liberation of the oppressed is a liberation of [people], not things. Accordingly, while no one liberates [themselves] by [their] own efforts alone, neither [are they] liberated by others." (Freire 1970)

Acknowledgements

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Me, who?

(Un)telling whiteness within and beyond MeToo

By Elisabeth Bruun Gullach & Maya Acharya
founders of (un)told pages, a Copenhagen-based
literature festival featuring only Black, Indigenous
and People of Colour authors

"What would it look like to leave the house and not be afraid of being bashed? what would it mean to leave the house and not be bashed? what would it mean to leave the house and not be harassed? what would it mean to leave the house and not be objectified? what would it mean to leave the house and not be gendered? what would it mean to no longer be forced to do the work of gender? what would it mean to my own body? what would it mean to have a self beyond my body?"

(Vaid-Menon, 2017)

Since we're in the business of words, let's start there. #Metoo. A worldwide hashtag that has radically changed the public conversation around sexual violence. Two short syllables that hold so much information about positioning, power and narrative.

'Me too'. Me contains specificity - a definite pronoun - a whole, full-fleshed individual, unique in their complexity and experience. Me is personal. Me is particular. The adverb 'too' functions as an adjunctive – added to the former to imply an addition, a reflection, an expression of unanimity. But what or who is being amplified? Who is speaking and who is responding?

The 'Me Too' hashtag started as a grassroots campaign, a rallying cry, founded by a Black woman in the US, Tarana Burke, to support Black and women of colour who were survivors of sexual violence. A way for these women to share their stories and find spaces and resources of support. Burke was doing this work a full decade before rich, white, cis Hollywood celebrities became the mainstream faces of the movement packaged as a hashtag. It should come as no surprise that Me-Too became a household name only after it was whitewashed and co-opted by a powerful elite. This is part of a long history of the erasure of Black women and femmes who, historically, have been at the forefront of movements for social justice. Moreover, we know that sexual violence is perpetrated disproportionately towards Black trans women[1]; sex workers[2]; and economically marginalised women and non-binary BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Colour)[3].

This selective narrative is symptomatic of white feminism, how feminism is *made* white (Ahmed, 2007) before it can become palatable, before it can 'go viral', before its concerns and

efforts are validated by a broader public. This is a feminism that purports to be about liberation but which is premised on eradication, on serving the interests of a particular kind of woman (usually white, cis, straight, thin, able bodied, middle class) while neglecting those who don't fit into its framework. None of this is new. Audre Lorde was writing on the duplicity of white women and the importance of acknowledging difference in feminist movements half a century ago — on the importance of holding apart in order to bring together (Lorde, 2017).

Feminism does not take place in a social and political vacuum. What we should be paying attention to is how these stories get spun, when they are legitimised, who become the protagonists and who get delegated to the background.

In literature, the space we found comfort in growing up as mixed-race women in Scandinavia, the landscape is much the same. Books, which meant so much to us, were emblematic of the way in which whiteness was a lens through which stories had to be filtered in order to make sense, in order to become valid, in order to be deemed 'relatable'. Whiteness was the norm within which everything was assumed, and when there were stories featuring BIPOC characters, they were shrouded in pain and trauma; stories of forced marriage, of kidnapping and assault, of backwards Brown and Black families, of poverty, of struggle. Or otherwise they would fit neatly into racist caricature: loyal sidekick, villain, oracle, or one of the many exhausted tropes that are allocated to BIPOC. The main characters, the nuanced characters, the characters allowed more than a footnote, were the white ones. These characters (never explicitly described as white, they just were) were afforded a rich inner life, could embody contradictions, while the few BIPOC characters (their non-whiteness somehow warranting explicit mention) either faded into the backdrop or functioned as two-dimensional props.

Reality reflects fiction. Just as white faces saturate pages, MeToo is emblematic of whiteness being positioned front and centre, becoming the premise for stories that are deemed worthy of attention. This is true of MeToo and it is true of art. When it comes to the representation of sexual violence in literature, it is not only that stories are overwhelmingly white, but that they are assumed to be for a white audience. When BIPOC *are* given the chance to tell their stories, they are expected to divulge trauma in order to legitimise their experiences. A confessional to satiate the white palette. This requires so much from BIPOC writers — a constant negotiation of gaze and agency — of being denied the creative freedom that white authors are granted, because the conjecture will be that you are speaking 'on behalf of'. The risk is that your personal experience will be hijacked and wielded against you, or that your creativity will be distilled into personal experience and autobiography in the first place. As Vivek Shraya pertinently writes:

"I have always been disturbed by this transition, by the reality that often the only way to capture someone's attention and to encourage them to recognize their own internal biases (and to work to alter them) is to confront them with sensational stories of suffering. Why is humanity only seen or cared about when I share the ways in which I have been victimized and violated?" (Shraya, 2018).

We want there to be a turning, a movement; meaning both mobilisation – a campaign such as MeToo – but also a shift, a different orientation, a striving towards a new focus, an alternative version of the tale. One where BIPOC authors are not forced to embody a specific trauma or character. We turn to the story in which BIPOC, especially those who are queer and trans, are given the space to encompass full narratives. To be acknowledged as unabridged, nuanced beings with a multitude of experiences and life forms. To be independent of the white, cis barometre that determines the extent to which their feelings can be 'universalised'. A story where a Black woman creates a hashtag that is not hijacked by whiteness before gaining widespread support. Where those coopting the work of Black trans and gender non-conforming people acknowledge the shoulders on which they stand, the groundwork laid for them. Turn, as in change.

Notes

1   https://www.transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/usts/USTS%20Full%20Report%20-%20FINAL%201.6.17.pdf
2   https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3987574/
3   https://www.transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/usts/USTS%20Full%20Report%20-%20FINAL%201.6.17.pdf

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Academics against Gender Studies

Science populism as part of an authoritarian anti-feminist hegemony project

By Marion Näser-Lather

Abstract

In Germany, knowledge production by gender researchers has been under attack not only from male rights activists, Christian fundamentalists and right-wing parties and movements, but also from scientists in various fields. Based on a discourse analysis of their publications (2009-2017) and a media reception analysis, this essay analyses arguments used by 'gender'-critical scientists and the socio-political backgrounds to where they position themselves. I show that their arguments do not belong to scientific discourse, but can be interpreted as a form of science populism which lends 'scientific' authority to the formation of authoritarian, anti-feminist discourses that aims to reify 'secure' knowledge about 'gender'. Accordingly, 'gender-critical' scientists are read mainly by non-scientific publics, including right-wing and Christian fundamentalist media and actors. As I will show, the phenomenon of scientists taking action against 'gender' can be situated in historical antifeminism, as well as contemporary discourses on the crisis-like character of the dynamics regarding gender knowledge and societal conditions.

KEYWORDS: anti-feminism, anti-genderism, science, populism, crisis, feminist knowledge production

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Introduction

In recent years, the hostility to Gender Studies has become increasingly intense. In Germany, gender scholars are being attacked by men's rights activists, conservative Christian movements like Demo für alle, and right-wing parties such as the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD). Within the scientific community, Gender Studies in Germany are supported by the German Ministry for Education and Research, as well as by scientific associations and university managements (e.g., see Berliner Rektorenkonferenz 2014, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie 2014), but even so the relevance of gender-related topics to research and teaching is increasingly being questioned in universities, with individual subjects resisting integrating gender perspectives into teaching and with equality measures being challenged (Marx/Kotlenga 2017, 13, 18). Moreover, scientists from different fields have positioned themselves against 'gender'.[1] Until now, attacks on Gender Studies by scientists have not been comprehensively investigated. Frey et al. classified researchers who oppose 'gender' as 'science guards', their term for a subgroup of anti-feminist actors (Frey et al. 2014a: 17f.). Manfred Köhnen (2014) exposed arguments of the blog "Science Files" as unscientific. By investigating scientists arguing against 'gender', the potency and popularity of contemporary antifeminist discourses can be demonstrated.[2] In this article I will show how 'gender-critical' scientists are invoking unscientific arguments lacking in validity that are nonetheless being received by certain (sub)public spheres for which they have enhanced interpretative power. This is because the scientific level of discourse still functions as the final authority in everyday discourses.

In the following, I briefly outline gender-critical arguments based on my previous discourse analysis (Jäger 2009) of their publications (2009-2017) before illuminating their arenas of discourse. Finally, I offer a tentative contextualization of their arguments by classifying them and their reception as an effect of current anti-diversity tendencies that are impacting on gender, following Ilse Lenz (2013).

Of the ten scientists selected for this analysis, one third come from the natural sciences, the remainder from the humanities and social sciences. Most of them have high potential interpretative power in different publics. Some are renowned in their fields, such as the sociologist Gerhard Amendt and the biologists Ulrich Kutschera and Axel Meyer, while others hold professorships or are emeriti, like the economist Günter Buchholz, the Christian social scientist Harald Seubert and the neuroscientist Manfred Spreng. Some are influential in professional societies and associations, like the Christian social scientist Manfred Spieker, consultant to the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, and the Christian philosopher Hanna Barbara Gerl-Falkovitz, Vice President of the Edith Stein Society Germany. Others run influential right-wing blogs, like the sociologist Heike Diefenbach, or are prominent authors of right-wing online-journals, such as the philosopher Alexander Ulfig (see Näser-Lather 2019: 117). Although some of these figures have published on topics that fall within the scope of gender research, such as Amendt (2006), Diefenbach (e.g. 2010) and Gerl-Falkovitz (1988), the others do not have any expertise in this topic.

Discourses of Devaluation and Demonization

The arguments of these scientists resemble those of anti-feminist actors, there being two main strands of discourse: (a) devaluing Gender Studies as unscientific; and (b) demonizing Gender Studies as a danger to society.

The discursive strand of unscientific work includes the 'gender' critical scientists accusations that gender researchers are ideologists (e.g. T1[3], T2; T7, 5; T4; T8, pos. 5355; T9, 263, T10, 56): from the notion of the situatedness and context-dependence of knowledge, this approach charges that Gender Studies' search for knowledge is influenced by financial and political ends, such as lobbying for women's interests and university positions and indoctrinating students: 'Partisanship becomes an important principle of scientific work.

This paves the way for the extensive instrumentalization of science for political purposes' (T13, 14).[4]

Gender Studies are also accused of claiming that cultural influences are the only relevant factors in gender and gender relations and of ignoring the significance of the body accordingly. In this view, Gender Studies are concerned to 'deny the often considerable influence of our biological heritage on many aspects of human life' (T8, pos. 135; also see T1; T3; T6, pos. 2022; T7, 200). Furthermore, 'gender-critical' scientists argue that the 'radical' constructivism they ascribe to Gender Studies makes knowledge impossible because, if everything is assumed to be constructed, the truth of statements cannot be verified (T9, 258; T13, 14f.).

Moreover, 'gender' is presented as dangerous to men, women and families: 'the attempt to prevent identity formation in favour of an individualistic society without "real fathers and mothers" is therefore a danger to the individual organism and above all to the family' (T11, 70; also see T10; T3). In addition, Gender Studies endanger children by promoting 'early sexualisation' and paedophilia (T7, 388; T10; T11, 72) and destroy society because they lead to a loss of values and norms (T6, pos. 2141; T7, 327; T9, 258; T10, 64), for example, because homosexuality and heterosexuality are regarded as ethically equal (T6, pos. 2141; T10, 40).

In addition, it is claimed that science is being endangered by Gender Studies because of the appointment of gender professorships and the growing influence of gender theories. Gender Studies threaten freedom of research and teaching, ideologize subjects (T4; T5, 92; T7, 96, 121; T8, pos. 5355-5361; T9, 268; T13, 130-132) and deprive other subjects of resources. Moreover, science generally is suffering a loss of reputation as a result of gender research (T7, 399): 'Gender Studies harm science, especially the social sciences' (T5, 85).

Yet, the question remains whether or not these accusations are actually more applicable to the publications of gender-critical scientists themselves.

Unscientific 'Guardians of Science'

It can indeed be argued that the texts of 'gender-critical' scientists, albeit to varying degrees, do not meet scientific standards themselves. Some of them combine criticism in the sense of content-related arguments with defamation, rhetorical tricks and ideological messages.

Misleading or even false representations are used in order to impugn Gender Studies. Strawman arguments are used about Gender Studies by attributing claims to them which scholars in the discipline would not support: 'Everything is "socially constructed", even the anatomy of the sexual organs, is the [...] credo of the gender believers' (T7, 200).

'Gender-critical' scientists also employ inappropriate analogies and false correlations (T1, T2, T10, T13), such as associating Gender Studies with creationism (T7, 7) or communism (T7, 44). Conspiracy narratives are used to fuel fears of 'gender ideology' (e.g. in T4; T7, 5, 27, 44-47, 399; T8, pos. 5484; T3; T10; T6, pos. 2141): for instance, the discipline was accused of planning to promote homosexuality, attack Christian values and abolish gender at the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing (T7, 44-47; T10, 11, 37), and T2 even goes so far as to suspect a 'state-feminist complex'.

Some texts use derogatory terms and defame 'gender' with negative associations, insults and pathologies (T3, T5, T6, T8, T10), for example, when insinuating that gender researchers suffer from 'penis envy' (T1) or referring to them as 'childless and lesbian [...] butch women' (T7, 398). By making this connection with devalued subject positions, the knowledge of gender researchers is condemned as invalid.

Another rhetorical trick is to scandalize the normal: Gender Studies are accused of unjustifiably situating the category of gender at the centre in order to satisfy certain interests: 'If, on the other hand, women's and gender studies are seen as a special science policy context and exist as such, then this only makes sense with regard to an unspoken preconception, to a guiding ideology, which from the scientific point of view, however,

should not play a role' (T3; also see T5; T12). The fact that different research perspectives illuminate their subjects by adopting a specific focus is scandalized and interpreted as an epistemological fault.

Some authors draw false conclusions from which they derive impermissible generalisations, for instance, deducing the extent of female violence from 'the countless anecdotes about wives with the frying pan behind the door' (T1). Others commit naturalistic fallacies, inferring from a momentary state of things to a moral imperative by demanding that we make socio-political decisions on the basis of biological 'facts' or 'facts' given by the order of creation (T7, 93; T8, pos. 128; T10, 61).

Some texts contain hardly any scholarly references (e.g. in T8) resorting instead to inaccurate quotations and dubious sources: in discussing the decisions of the World Women's Conference in Beijing, for example, the official UN documents are not cited, but rather the notes of the fundamentalist Catholic thinker Dale O'Leary (T7, 44-47; T10, 37).

In view of these shortcomings, it can be argued that some of the scientists who criticize 'gender' and Gender Studies do not fulfil the scientific criteria they themselves claim to observe. Their texts are thus situated at the intersection of non-scientific inter-discourse and special scientific discourse. They also use their professional status to express their views on social policy. This is problematic because they position themselves as representatives of the scientific community by calling their publications 'reference books' or 'science blogs' and by referring to their academic titles and publications while at the same time lacking scientific rigour.

As Bourdieu (1991, 7) notes, in the academic field social authority is legitimised by presenting itself as strictly professional, while status authority modifies social perceptions of professional ability. This also seems to apply here: because of their symbolic capital as representatives of their respective disciplines, 'gender-critical' scientists are accorded authority in the sense of secular scientific capital in areas they do not in fact represent.

Influence in (Sub-)Publics

The arguments of these scientists are used in public discourses as a means of interpretation. As supposed experts on gender issues, they have an impact especially on conservative, right-wing and Christian fundamentalist publics.

These scientists are all cited as experts on 'gender' in media and online platforms, such as right-wing media like *Sezession*, *Freie Welt* or *Compact* magazine, and on Christian platforms like kath.net (see Näser-Lather 2019, 117). 'Gender-critical' scientists are also invited to be interviewed by actors on the conservative, right-wing, Christian fundamental spectrum, such as the Congress of Christian Leaders and the Christian-right conservative movement Demo für Alle. For example, Gerl-Falkovitz was commissioned by the German Bishops' Conference to assess gender theories, and she was invited by the renowned Konrad Adenauer Foundation, which is close to the Christian Democratic Party CDU, to give a lecture at a conference they organized. The programme flyer stated that Prof. Dr. Ulrich Kutschera had proved that Gender Studies were unscientific (see ibid.). The arguments of 'gender-critical' scientists have also been adopted by the right-wing AfD party in minor inquiries in state parliaments and the German federal parliament (kleineanfragen.de 2019). On online platforms and right-wing blogs in particular, these critics' arguments are used to lend anti-feminist and anti-Gender Studies arguments the appearance of scientific authority as a way of legitimizing them.

Localization and Discursive Background

This use of academic knowledge in anti-feminist arguments has historical parallels in the beginning of the twentieth century, when the emancipation efforts of the women's movement were countered by naturalizing gender characteristics in a way that was justified both scientifically and religiously (Planert 1998, 14-20). Then as now the scientific level of discourse functions as an

instance of final justification, of establishing a discourse position that carries authority, in what is an ideological counter-movement against the liberalisation of gender orders.

Following Ilse Lenz (2013), it can be argued that the gender order is on a path towards flexibilization, which implies a transformation of gender roles and the increased presence of non-normative ways of life. Paula Irene Villa (2017, 100) draws attention to a loss of normality, of naturalized stabilizations and 'natural' subjects and identities. This loss of certainties can result in fear and disorientation and can cause a rejection of this transformation (Chmilewski/Hajek 2017), as well as a need for reliable gender knowledge. The positive reception given to 'gender-critical' scientists can be explained by the fact that they meet this need. Their arguments are especially well aligned with the world views of right-wing conservative and fundamentalist religious actors, who, as Birgit Sauer (2018) has pointed out, fight against the threat and uncertainty of gender identities and reject the notion of the pluralization of life forms. Thus, anti-feminist arguments function as a symbolic toolkit that unites right-wing, conservative, ultra-religious movements and groups (Kováts/Põim 2015, Kemper 2014), being part of a socio-political authoritarian-regressive project that is fighting for hegemony and rejecting any questioning of the alleged binary gender order (see Fritzsche/Lang 2019).

Conclusion

The analysis shows that the texts written by 'gender-critical' scientists defame Gender Studies by denouncing them as unscientific and as a danger to society, while they themselves employ unscientific techniques such as false or distorted representations, defamations, false conclusions, impermissible generalisations and conspiracy narratives. Nonetheless, these texts are positively received, especially by fundamentalist Christian and conservative/right-wing publics, because their arguments are well aligned with their struggle against a more diverse gender order. Thus, 'scientifically' legitimized and ennobled positions are still attributed some interpretive power in these publics. Unfortunately, however, only 'scientific results' that confirm a certain type of closed world view seem to be accepted. This problem is further exacerbated because of the general tendency towards the socio-intellectual segregation of 'mainstream' publics, media and science, whereby populist/right-wing publics consider science to be 'leftist' and untrustworthy. The only chance for Gender Studies to counter these 'gender-critical' discourses is to try to communicate science accurately and adequately. There is still a 'silent majority' of society that has not yet disappeared into an ideological filter bubble. In striving to reach this 'silent majority,' it is important that we insist upon maintaining high scientific standards in our scientific communications. We must also insist that both Gender Studies itself, like other scientific disciplines, are held to such standards in order to reinforce confidence in science communication and discourse.

Notes

1   In the texts of these authors, the word 'gender' is used as an empty signifier under which different phenomena, such as equality feminism, difference- and queer feminism, gender mainstreaming, gender studies and the liberalisation of gender relations, are subsumed (see Näser-Lather 2019, 107).

2   In this context I define anti-feminist discourses, following Lang and Fritzsche (2018, 340), as those which oppose the liberalization and denormalization of gender relations, deny feminist critiques any justification and are partly misogynous and homo- or transphobic – positions which also appear in most of the texts I have analysed (e.g.T1; T9, 116, 337; T11, 131; T13, 40), while others only express gender-conservative views (e.g. T8).

3   As the focus of my analysis is on patterns of argumentation, I do not refer to authors, but to texts (T1… Tn; see list of sources).

4   All direct quotes have been translated by myself.

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Questioning Normal

Overcoming implicit resistance to norm critical education

By Liv Moeslund Ahlgren & Ehm Hjorth Miltersen

Sunlight creeps in through the blinds in the classroom window. We just finished writing our names and pronouns on the blackboard, and we now turn to face the twenty-three 7th-graders in the room. We present ourselves, briefly explain how to use our pronouns, and say that we're from an organization called *Normstormerne* ("The Norm Stormers"):

"Have you heard anything about what we're here to do together with you today?" we ask, and the teenagers are quiet for a few moments, either shy or hesitant. One raises a hand.

"You're here to talk about bullying."

Another adds: "We heard some gays were coming."

Indeed, Normstormerne's work deals with both bullying and gay people – but this is just a fraction of the topics we adress. Normstormerne is a norm critical and intersectional organization offering workshop-based education at schools and for adults working with children and youth. In our workshops we demonstrate how social norms create the foundation for discrimination and oppression, especially related to LGBTQIA+ identities. That's where the "bullying" and the "gays" come in. Our aim, however, is not just to talk about how LGBTQIA+ people overcome bullying. We are

not here to share a personal story about what it is like to be a LGBTQIA+ person. Rather, we discuss how norms are the reason why LGBTQIA+ people – and other marginalized groups – become a minority group in the first place, and how norms affect the way this minority group gets excluded from the 'us' and the 'normal,' thus creating a platform for bullying. Moreover, Normstormerne also teaches how norms are social constructs that can be affected and changed by human beings. We do this through various exercises so the pupils get an age-appropriate, concrete and hands-on understanding of the concepts. The project has the activist purpose of enabling young people to both identify norms, but also provide specific tools for changing the norms that contribute to oppression and discrimination.

Normstormene has existed since 2012 and teaches at schools mainly in and around Aarhus and in Copenhagen, but also in other parts of the country. The pupils are often interested in our knowledge, methods, and perspectives and participate actively in the workshops, and many teachers tell us that they're excited and glad that Normstormerne exists. But sometimes we meet resistance from both pupils and teachers. Generally, this resistance takes two different forms: Explicit and implicit resistance. The explicit

resistance comes from teachers or students who explicitly disagree with our values or methods and argue against us. This type of resistance is probably well known among activists. Just as relevant, though, is the implicit resistance that comes from those who already support feminist progression – teachers who have invited us to come and enthusiastically participating pupils. In general, they want to make a positive change, but object towards making radical changes to the status quo. This implicit resistance is possibly well-meant, but ultimately reinforces existing norms and structures. In this essay, we take a look at how this plays out in the classroom, how it reflects society at large, and how we as activists tackle it all.

The gay zoo

The implicit resistance meets us at the beginning and throughout each teaching session. It starts as soon as we ask the pupils what they have heard about us and our work: It may or may not be that their teacher has told them that we're "gays" coming to "talk about bullying", but either way, the fact that the pupils have this perception reflects the norms for doing diversity and inclusivity work in schools. Often, teaching about diversity becomes more about learning to *tolerate* minority groups rather than questioning why they are minoritized in the first place. In tolerance-based inclusivity education, the idea is that tolerating (or even "accepting") someone is a kind and welcoming action, but in practice, it means minoritized people become people who aren't a part of an "us". The notion is created that some people are "normal" and others are not, and it is the privilege of the "normal" people to tolerate the others. The minoritized people become othered, because to tolerate someone is to acknowledge that they are not like you and, implicitly, that this gives you the power to accept or reject their existence. Tolerance is a way of reinforcing power dynamics that gives the majority the right to define who is included. The idea of tolerance is one of the major forms of implicit resistance we meet. It is well-meant, but it doesn't challenge any underlying structures.

Many teachers – kind and well-meaning teachers who want to show their pupils that everyone deserves respect – want to teach about LGBTQIA+ topics by inviting a gay or trans person into the classroom and have them talk about themself and their life. The teachers want to show the pupils an example of a gay or trans person, because, the assumption is, they won't encounter someone like that elsewhere. Introducing LGBTQIA+ identities like this – *The Special Guest of the Day for this very Special Topic* – just emphasizes for the LGBTQIA+ pupils in the classroom that they are indeed the Others, the odd-ones out, the exceptions. The classroom becomes a zoo where the "normal" pupils can learn about the Other and be told that they should tolerate this Other and treat them nicely. When the guest has left, everything can go back to "normal" and the pupils don't have to think about "the gays" anymore if they don't want to.

This way of thinking is not restricted to the classroom. As people with minority status are Othered, we also become more noticeable simply because we are seen as "special". It's what happens when a group composed of 30 women and 70 men is seen as female-dominated. Or when portrayal of same-sex couples or transgender people in media is seen as "shoving their identities and sexualities in people's faces". When nonbinary people are accused of the same just by existing, period. Or when persons with non-Danish ethnic background cannot speak out against discrimination or comment on related topics (or, often, any topic) without being dismissed as being biased. When a niqab is seen as a barrier preventing interpersonal contact, but sunglasses and a face mask are not. When trans women are kept out of women's restrooms while risking assault in the men's, perceived as intruders in both spaces. When fat people see their doctors for an unrelated medical issue and are told to lose weight before anything else, often resulting in mis- or undertreatment. When fat people are scolded for eating fatty foods ("you're making it worse") or diet foods ("who do you think you're kidding?"). When transgender people are told they're too feminine or masculine, just reinforcing gender stereotypes, or not feminine or masculine enough, because then

how can they really be trans? When any minority person expresses anger. The list goes on and on. People with minority status are perceived as taking up more space than we do, even when we barely have room to exist at all. We are seen as guests in the majority's space. We may be tolerated, but it is not our space to claim.

No one should be reduced to this. We, Normstormerne, do not want LGBTQIA+ people to be merely guests in the classroom – when we leave, we don't want our existence to leave with us. Instead of our visit being a brief respite from "normal", we want to teach the pupils that they are partaking in *creating* – and thus can *change* – normal. Instead of focusing on the Other, we want them to look at normal – and be critical of it. Why is this normal? Couldn't it just as well have been anything else? Should this be normal? Should anything be normal – is that even a positive thing to create and uphold? What can we do to change it?

The implicit resistance we meet here stems from the idea that LGBTQIA+ identities are not already present in the classroom, and that these identities should be introduced and at best tolerated. It possibly (though not necessarily) comes from a place of goodwill but ends up reinforcing the division between "us" and "them" and leads to the exclusion of LGBTQIA+ persons from the "normal". Even if the point is presented that "they (we) are (a kind of) normal, too", this upholds the idea some things are "normal" and others are not, and that Normality is good and desirable. All of this is something that Normstormerne strive to challenge and change.

Spotting the norms

The workshop is getting properly started, and all of us, both pupils and Normstormers, are sitting in a circle. We're doing an exercise where one of us reads aloud a series of statements, and the pupils are to stand up and swap seats if they agree with the statement, or stay seated if they disagree.

We're at one of the last statements of the exercise: "I'm used to seeing people who use wheelchairs in the media."

The pupils shift in their seats, some mumble to each other. They seem confused. We give them a moment before asking what that statement makes them think.

One pupil comments that there are much fewer people who use wheelchairs than people that don't, so it's silly to expect them to show up in the media. We ask if they think the kind of people usually seen on TV and in advertisements – white, thin, cis, and able-bodied – are really overwhelmingly the most common type of person. If the proportion of this kind of person seen in the media matches the proportion in the real-life population.

Often, the pupils seem convinced that the media landscape really does match reality, even as we argue that the numbers are skewed. Eventually they may admit, "Maybe not." Then they might go on: "But still. You can't put every type of person in a movie." We ask back: "Why?"

This is another type of implicit resistance we meet – the idea that some things are a certain way "just because", and that there is no reason to further explore why. The fundamental idea that Normstormerne wants to present is that "normal" is made up of power structures and norms, assumptions and expectations. For example, the lack of media representation is a direct consequence of the ideology of the people in power. Norms are powerful because they are invisible, and we all grow up in a society organized by these invisible norms. In the classroom, we discuss the fact that it can be harmful to never see someone who looks like yourself in the movies, TV shows, advertisements and other media you consume. The resistance the pupils exhibit towards this idea often comes from a lack of personal experience. We know that because individual pupils with minority status and very diverse classrooms in relation to race, religion, (dis)ability, class etc., are often much quicker to catch on. They have personal bodily experience with underrepresentation and the consequences of breaking social norms due to marginalization, and can often more easily spot why other minoritized groups experience the same.

The implicit resistance described here mirrors what takes place in society in general. Since minority groups are perceived as taking up

excessive space, the disproportionate amount of space the majority occupy in positions of power goes unnoticed. The first step towards change is to recognize that this inequality is neither fair, nor representative of the actual population. It can be a hard point to drive home for both teenagers and adults alike. You have to start searching for things that you are used to being indiscernible.

The implicit resistance we meet here is the idea that "normal" is nothing more than just "normal". When confronted with this, we try to explicate just how norms – exactly by being invisible – control, for example, who gets represented in the media. We want to make the norms visible by questioning the "normal" and repeatedly responding by asking: "Why?"

Can the norms be changed – and should they?

We are about halfway through the workshop. The sunlit window has been opened to let in some fresh air to fuel our brains after almost an hour of thinking, discussing, and getting used to new ideas. The pupils have been hard at work, but after a short break we are ready to move on to the next exercise. We present a short case story and ask the class to discuss how the different characters in the story might act in order to improve the situation. The stories revolve around a specific instance of oppression, discrimination, or microaggression: A new player on the football team experiences his coach yelling homophobic slurs as encouragement; a pupil is kicked out of either gendered bathrooms because of their appearance; a class throws a party but the venue is on the 3rd floor with no elevator, barring a pupil using a wheelchair from attending.

"She should just pick one or the other bathroom," a pupil exclaims, "or go at home. Stop being a bother."

"If there's nowhere else to throw the party, that kid will just have to not come. Too bad. They can attend the next party", another argues.

Explicit resistance like this pops up regularly in our classroom discussions. Some people are just going to have a harder time than others, the argument goes, and if they want to improve their conditions, they'll have to work to achieve it on their own. The gay kid on the football team needs to "man up"; the trans or gender nonconforming kid has to keep their head down; the kid using a wheelchair will have to do the work of throwing their own party at an accessible venue. The majority of the pupils won't necessarily outright exclude them if these kids manage to claw their way into a normative-esque state – but they won't do anything to help, either. Equality is too much work to be worth striving after; not everyone can be accommodated.

Luckily, it's not always like this. Lots of pupils are kind and sympathetic. But despite the support, we still meet the idea that some things just cannot be changed, and that individuals are responsible for solving their own problems. This is yet another form of implicit resistance we are met with.

"The teachers have their own bathroom," someone says, "so the pupil can be allowed to use that one."

"Do you think it might feel a little lonely or even embarrassing to be the only one who has to use an entirely different bathroom from everyone else?" we ask.

"Well, if he or she doesn't like it, there aren't many options left."

Where the resistance in the earlier exercise came from being unable to see the ruling norms, the resistance here is due to not seeing how or why those norms should be changed. The pupils may acknowledge that gender norms are present and that they make life difficult for some people – but more often than not, they don't draw the conclusion that the best solution is to actually change these problematic norms.

"That's just the way things are", they say.

People are generally used to being told "how things are", so their line of reasoning might stop there. If they do try to rationalize it, they might appeal to biology or evolutionary theory to explain discriminatory structures, or they'll argue that the world is what it is, and it's up to the individual to overcome their difficulties through hard work. When you have lived in a world that seems

to be a certain way for your whole life, especially if that world treats you quite well, it can be more appealing to explain why it's naturally like that rather than acknowledge that it's a product of continued reproduction of norms and in fact could be different. If the world "just is" a certain way, each person is only responsible for their own happiness, or perhaps for that of the ones closest to them. But because we are all continuously responsible for maintaining harmful norms and structures, then we all have a duty to change and create change.

The pupils usually agree with the fundamental humanist ideology that everybody is worth something and should be treated as equals. But what they are resistant towards is the possibility of changing the structures instead of changing the behavior of individuals. Our job at this point is to present the idea that norms can be changed. We can make all the bathrooms gender neutral, we can accommodate everyone's dietary needs and preferences, we can make an agreement that all parties are held at accessible venues. When the pupils accept this idea – that it is possible to make up new agreements, new norms – they can reach a solution to the case story we brought them. If they are quick, we might push them a little – variants of the case stories are harder because the norms in them are even more integrated and harder to imagine changing. A case about gendered changing rooms rather than gendered bathrooms is met with more resistance, for instance. Both norms are rooted in the idea that facilities that involve some degree of undressing requires gender segregation, and both can be rebutted by references to places where this isn't the case (bathrooms in private homes and many workplaces are rarely gender specific, and unisex shared changing rooms do exist e.g. in many Danish winter swimming facilities) and by arguing that differentiating between bodies of different genders is neither as straightforward or crucial as it may seem. But most people still more readily accept unisex bathrooms than unisex changing rooms. The norm that different genders must hide their naked bodies from each other is stronger than the norm that those bodies must tend to their needs

in separate bathrooms. But while the norms are of different strengths, both serve to marginalize transgender, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming persons.

The key is the idea that norms and structures, not individuals, are responsible for much of the hardship that minority groups (and in many cases majority groups, too) experience. It is not enough to convince single prejudiced individuals not to bully minority people. The structures of society need to change. It's an abstract idea that can be hard to grasp. But it can help to be provided with some specific tools and strategies for changing the harmful norms.

How to change the norms

For the last exercise, the pupils are working in groups to find a solution to the case stories we gave them. We have assigned different roles to the groups. One group has to figure out what the person from the case story can do about their situation. Another group plays the role of the classmates, yet another take on the role of the parents or other adults, and one group is the teacher and the school board. The last group is society at large – politicians, the media and the general public.

"The pupil can ask the school to install gender neutral bathrooms" the first group says after discussing the case story about the pupil getting kicked out of the bathrooms.

"But what if the pupil is embarrassed? Or if the school doesn't care?" we ask.

"Well, then there is not much you can do."

It can be tempting to give up once the established system and norms stand in the way of a proposed solution. But in another case story these suggestions comes up:

"The classmates can go together and demand that the party should be held in an accessible venue," says the group that portrays the classmates.

"Right," we say, "That would solve the problem for now. But what about next time?"

They ponder for a moment.

"Oh! Then we can make a rule about it."

"And what would the consequences be in the future?"

"Then we would get used to it. We would learn that many people use wheelchairs and of course it should be able to fit in the room."

Two important things happen when we do this exercise with the pupils. First of all, it becomes clear that one individual facing a problem cannot necessarily solve it alone. However, with the combined effort of the whole class, very much can be changed. It is easier to demand fair treatment of yourself and others through cooperation and solidarity, empowering each other's voices. Secondly, the pupils start figuring out solutions that could prevent the problem from arising in the first place and thereby actually *changing the norms*. They start to realize that it's not enough to just solve the problem once. They also figure out, and this is perhaps more important, that it is actually not that difficult to prevent the problem from occurring at all. Making a rule about wheelchair accessibility for school events or a policy about not using homophobic language is straightforward enough for teenagers to tackle – and this rule directly challenges the problematic "normal" and thereby works to change the norms.

The solutions that the pupils come up with recognize how discrimination is based on invisible norms and that discrimination therefore has to be fought against by changing these very structures. Moreover, they are solutions that the pupils believe are possible. They have realized that norms can be changed by human beings – including themselves.

It sounds so easy when the pupils say it like that at the end of our workshop, but this realization means the pupils have come a long way. We don't always reach this state with each class, either – sometimes we make do with planting a seed and hoping the pupils will get the full idea some time down the road. If you have lived the first thirteen-to-fifteen years of your life thinking that the world has one, natural state that everyone has to accept, one ninety-minute workshop won't necessarily turn that upside down. But we can present the idea that we, as human beings, define the norms, and that Normality isn't necessarily a perfect ideal worth striving for. We can then hope that the pupils will want to make the spaces they are part of, including society as such, as accountable, inclusive, and caring as possible.

Changing the world one classroom at a time

In many ways, implicit resistance is as hard to tackle as its more explicit counterpart. Direct sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism are not easy to counter, but at least the enemy is right there in front of you in the form of hateful convictions or oppressive legislation. But when we meet implicit resistance from people who already believe they are equal and fair, we have to change larger structures and worldviews. We need to go from "tolerating and accepting the Other" to "questioning the Normal". Counter-intuitively, we need to have a conversation with those who claim they're already on our side about the fact that in reality they're not – and what they have to change to actually get on our side.

This happens in the classroom and in society at large. The methods for change are the same: dialogue, reflection, critical analysis, solidarity, and striving for social justice. Most importantly, an insistence that there's no "natural order of things" and that norms creating platforms for discrimination can and should change. An insistence that we can make that change. In Normstormerne, we are convinced change starts small and early. Children and youth should grow up with the conviction that they are capable agents in the world we live in. That they all deserve fair treatment and equal rights, and that they can and should work and contribute to ensure that. That they should always ask questions when they're told "that's just how things are" and when they meet injustice – no matter whether that injustice is explicit hate or implicit, biased norms leading to hate. By teaching children and youth to question harmful norms, we can contribute to creating a world of human beings who will fight all levels of injustice when they encounter it.

Is the Gender Binary System a Biological Fact or a Social Norm?

Modified chapter from the book "Inappropriate Behaviour" (Upassende Opførsel)

By Mads Ananda Lodahl
Translated from Danish to English by Ehm Hjorth Miltersen

I went to a plastic surgeon and asked if they could give me flappy ears. I've wanted that since 4th grade. They said they were able to do that. But they wouldn't. "We only make people more beautiful," the lady in the reception said. At that point I got a bit contrary. There was a table in the reception with breast-shaped silicone implants in six different sizes on display, so I asked if I could have a pair of those inserted, but they wouldn't do that either. "That's only for people who already have breasts. We're not allowed to do anything resembling gender reassignment surgery," the secretary said. "We are also not allowed to remove breasts, like they did with Caspian."

Caspian is a transgender man, who had his breasts removed at a private hospital at the age of 15 in 2011 (Raun 2016). His parents paid for the procedure, and he is still happy with the result. His surgery, however, caused great debate in the media (Raun 2016), and on October 18th 2011, the Danish People's Party (*Dansk Folkeparti*) asked the Minister of Health if that sort of thing wasn't an outrage. And on November 16th 2012 the Danish Health and Medicines Authority tightened the rules so that it became illegal for surgeons to perform that kind of procedures without permission from the Sexology Clinic (*Sexologisk Klinik*) (SC). No matter the patient's age. No matter if you pay for it yourself.

In Denmark, transgender people cannot decide for themselves which treatment they get. The Sexology Clinic decides that, and they have a very bad reputation. Rumour has it that they do not treat transgender people with respect and dignity, and that it is easier for a camel to get into heaven than for a transgender person to convince the SC that they are really transgender and should have access to, for instance, gender affirming surgery or hormone therapy.

In 2014, Elvin Pedersen-Nielsen had his breasts removed at his own expense in the German city Troisdorf. The surgeon performing the surgery told him that she removes the breasts of 40-50 Danish trans men every year. Elvin, who is an activist in 'Trans Political Forum' (*Transpolitisk Forum*), estimates that around 100 Danish transgender persons undergo surgery at their own expense abroad every year. He doesn't dare estimate how many are buying hormones on the black market without regulation and medical check-ups because the public system rejects them.

All of this makes me wonder what it's all about. My funny idea of asking for the flappy ears I've always wanted led me to a place where I discovered just how far the government is willing to go in order to preserve the idea that there are only two genders.

The Pressure of Gender Norms Begins at Birth

The whole thing starts at birth, where we are all assigned a gendered CPR ("civil personal registry"[1]) number based on what the doctor or midwife can see between our legs. If the last digit in the CPR number is odd, you are a man. If it is even, you are a woman. You cannot be something in between. The assumption is that if you are not one option, you are automatically the other. This is called the *gender binary system*. The trouble starts when some people don't fit into the standard of what a man or a woman is. Transgender people don't. They don't identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. How they identify varies from person to person, but they all disagree with the doctor´s or midwife´s assessment of their gender at their birth.

From September 1st 2014 and onwards, it became possible for transgender people to change their legal gender and CPR number without medical assessments, but many transgender people also want to change other things. Many want hormone therapy, some want surgery on their upper body, genitals, or both, but the medical interventions are only available with approval from the SC. And that approval is very hard to obtain.

It is all very complicated and full of legal details, but the important part is that it is impossible for most transgender persons to receive the treatment they need in Denmark. Even if they are adults. Even if they are willing to pay for the treatment. Because without approval from the SC, nothing can legally be done. So, I called Vibe Grevsen, who is the former spokesperson for LGBT+ Denmark, and asked her what it would require for the SC to approve someone's application for gender confirming treatment. She told me that some people bend over backwards to live up to the demands of SC:

"… there are examples of both applicants and practitioners describing [the applicants'] life stories, clothing etc. as more gender stereotypical [than it really is] in order for the sex change to be approved. In this way, the

assessment process can cause applicants to change their behaviour, withhold information, or otherwise prevent free dialogue between practitioner and applicant. The applicant can become more focused on fulfilling the practitioner's perceived expectations than on making well-considered decisions."

Gender Norms Have Great Consequences

In sum, there are certain gender stereotypical norms that need to be fulfilled for the practitioners at the SC to acknowledge that the applicant is truly transgender and subsequently approve the applicant's wish for gender affirming treatment. One of the people who have attended such a consultation is Aske (Amnesty n.d.). In an interview, he tells Amnesty International that he contacted the SC in 2013, when he was 18 years old, because he wanted to start hormone therapy (n.d.). They asked to see pictures of him from his entire childhood, and when they saw that he had long hair on a picture from the 5th grade, they took that as proof that he was "a very feminine child" and therefore had "a female gender identity" and that he therefore wasn´t the boy he thought himself to be (n.d.).

Amnesty, who in a report from 2014 forthrightly calls the treatment of transgender people in Denmark a violation of human rights (Amnesty 2014), writes:

"Only five minutes into the first consultation with a psychiatrist at Sexology Clinic, Aske is asked about his weight. The psychiatrist notes that he seems underweight – something he has been since he was a child. He elaborates: "I have a BMI of 17, and it ought to be 18. That was enough for her to be close to deny me further consultations. There was an unpleasant atmosphere from the beginning, and at one point when we talked about a rape I experienced, she said, "Actually, I think you enjoyed it". It was insanely inappropriate and an extreme violation of my boundaries. As if the starting point for her was that I was not

transgender, and that they would rather avoid treating me" (Amnesty n.d.).

"I would just like for them to understand that you don't need to be super feminine to be a woman, or super masculine with a big full beard and a plaid shirt to be a man," he says in another interview with the news outlet *Modkraft* (which is a left-wing online media outlet) to the question of what he thinks of the gender stereotypical norms at the SC (Preston 2015).

Informed Consent

Linda Thor Pedersen, who is the current trans political spokesperson for LGBT+ Denmark, says in the same interview with *Modkraft*:

"The demands which are posed at Sexology Clinic to obtain treatment with e.g. female sex hormones are demands that even modern ciswomen would have trouble living up to. The Sexology Clinic is stuck in an outdated gender perception" (Preston 2015).

One of the major problems with the assessment process at the SC is that it can take years before you get an answer to whether you will be offered treatment or not. This is problematic because the assessment process is experienced as an enormous burden. Linda Thor Pedersen explains to *Modkraft* that international experience shows that the long assessment processes can cause major damage, because they leave the transgender person in an unresolved situation (2015). This can have serious psychological consequences, which can lead to depression and ultimately suicide. "Our stance is that informed consent is enough. No research supports a long assessment process," (2015) she says, Linda thereby aligns herself with the recommendations in Amnesty International's report, and Elvin Pedersen-Nielsen and others in Trans Political Forum, who started a campaign for an informed consent model in September 2014.

Of course, we are all subject to gender norms, but if transgender people applying for permission to receive treatment at the SC fall just slightly outside the norms, this might result in them being denied treatment. Vibe Grevsen maintains that the transgender person's agency is important:

"It is important that the applicants are in control, so they do not feel under pressure. In the debate about castration in 2014, human rights organisations asserted that it is comparable to coercion when it is demanded of transgender people that they undergo castration before their gender identity can be acknowledged," she says.

Vibe refers to the fact that up until 2014, changing one's CPR number and legal gender required castration thereby removing the possibility to reproduce. That procedure stems from the so-called castration law from 1929, which enabled the state to castrate people whose genes it was considered undesirable to pass on. This group of people included sexual offenders and so-called mentally deficient people. Homosexual and transgender people have also been castrated under this law. The law is still in effect, but castration is no longer a requirement for juridical gender reassignment.

The Castration Law

In 1929 eugenics was popular in large parts of Europe, and I asked Vibe if there was a correlation here. She pointed out that transgender people were only written into the castration law much later, so if you were to discuss eugenics in relation to transgender people, it would be much more relevant to look at the debate in 2014, when it was discussed to drop the castration requirement. Here, several voices in the debate argued for keeping the requirement, because it was not known what kind of children trans people would give birth to. "Is that eugenics?" I asked. "Yes, you could say that it is," Vibe replied.

Over the past years, the trans legislation in Denmark has been changed several times, and once this text is published, it has probably been changed again. Currently, the castration requirement has been abolished and it has been made

easy to change your juridical gender. But new regulations have also been introduced, which gives the SC monopoly of assessment and treatment of transgender people, which in turn has led to a significant reduction in agency for trans people, who prior to this, had several other options for medical treatment outside SC.

From January 1st 2017, being transgender has been removed from the list of mental illnesses, and on January 15th 2017, the Minister of Health said to the newspaper *Information* that yet another new set of guidelines for assessment and treatment of transgender people should be made, which ought to reflect that they are no longer seen as mentally ill (Sindberg, Kristensen & Madsen 2017).

Fighting for Rights

I remember talking to one of my transgender friends as early as in 2011, when the Danish trans revolution was set off by the legendarily respectless TV-host on *TV2 Østjylland* (a local TV news station). The host called a transgender woman a "freakshow." This caused trans people and their allies to grab their keyboards in a confident and uncompromising way, never seen before in trans people in Denmark. The debate was further fuelled in October the same year, when the young Caspian went on the TV-show *Go' Morgen Danmark* ("*Good Morning Denmark*") with a what-is-the-problem-really-attitude. "It's going to move fast now," I told my friend. "Before long, you will be able to change your legal gender, name, and CPR number with NemID (NemID is a shared log-in solution for all Danish net banks and health services), and then it won't be long before you can decide for yourself what medical treatment you want. There might be a charge for some of it like there is on other kinds of medicine, but if you don't have enough money, you will be able to apply for support at the social service department just like when you apply for housing support." The first part has already come true, but there are still some bumps in the road for my second prediction. For my part, I've talked to around twenty transgender persons who are

still unhappy with the treatment that the Danish healthcare system (does not) offer. They are all seeking treatment outside the system. Some are in their apartments shooting themselves with hormones they've bought on the internet. This is not as irresponsible and lonely as it sounds, because transgender circles have a tradition of doing their research thoroughly and consulting each other, exactly because the system won't help.

Returning to the gender binary system, transgender people get into trouble because they won't affirm the gender they were assigned at birth. But there is also another group that is in conflict with the gender binary system. This is intersex people. From birth, they do not – biologically – fit into either of the two genders. I have talked to many people that don't believe intersex people actually exist, but the remarkable thing isn´t that they exist, but rather how they are treated.

Born Outside the Binary System

Intersex people have chromosomal, genital, or hormonal characteristics that makes them diverge from the standard for boys and girls. There are over 40 different types of intersex conditions, and according to the biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling's classic work on the topic, *Sexing the Body*, they make up 1.7% of the population. They are as common as redheads. Intersex people are a very diverse group. Some have ambiguous outer genitals; others have ambiguous inner genitals. Some have hormonal deviations that means they need hormone therapy to survive; others can lead an entirely ordinary life and may never discover that they are intersex. It is very hard to find much good information on the topic, but in 2017 Amnesty International wrote a report on this topic.

Torture and Abuse

Amnesty's report confirms the numerous rumours I found on the internet about intersex infants being subjected to "normalizing surgery" on their genitals. The procedures have often damaged

the otherwise healthy genitals permanently and, among other things, eliminated the possibility for sexual pleasure. In this way, it is similar to the female genital mutilation that is common in some countries. Both are culturally conditioned and medically baseless:

> "It is the case that children are operated on for cultural reasons, because the parents must have a child that can be identified as a boy or a girl throughout its upbringing. And it is of course the easiest way, considering the norms of our society. It's hard for the parents to do otherwise," says gynaecologist Ditte Trolle to Information (Thorup 2017).

In relation to the report being published, and in the report itself, midwife Camilla Tved shares the following story from her time as a student, where she encountered a new-born with ambiguous outer genitals:

> "The child had what was denominated an enlarged clitoris, comparable to a small penis, and as I had never experienced a case like it and the midwife present at the birth hadn't either, we had to search for instructions about what we should do" (Amnesty 2017, 21).

One of the instructions Camilla found was a scale to measure the child's genitals:

> "It stated that if a clitoris was more than 0.9 cm, I think it was, it should be considered a micro-penis. At a seminar recently I heard that this scale still exists, it is still in use, and a penis on a small infant cannot be smaller than 2.5 cm. I found it so disconcerting that you could just hold up a ruler and say: 'This child has an anomaly', so it kind of piqued my curiosity" (21).

> "The parents were informed that the child was neither a boy nor a girl, and that it was 'something in between' – these were the actual words. They recommended further examinations. However, the parents were told

> by the paediatrician a couple of hours after the birth … that they recommended surgery within the first month (…) The parents were extremely shocked and worried and at first feared that there was something else wrong with the child, that it might have a syndrome or something else. As they put it, that it had "something else that should be examined", and which they recommended [should] be corrected (…). I asked the paediatrician a few weeks later, when I had the chance, and was told that the child had gotten an appointment for surgery two months later. For a clitoris reduction" (21).

They just chopped it off. The doctors. There was nothing medically wrong with it, but they thought it was too long to be a clitoris and too short to be a penis, so they just chopped it off. The parents were perplexed and nervous, but the doctor said it was the best, so what could they do? Many intersex people and their parents experience that they are simply told at the birth of the child that something is wrong, but that it can be fixed. "Should we fix it?" the doctor impatiently asks two hours after the birth, and then it's hard to say "no."

Other intersex people have their gonads removed, for instance, if they have been assigned a male CPR number but have ovaries in their abdomen. When you remove the gonads, the body loses its ability to produce hormones on its own, and the intersex person becomes dependent on lifelong hormone therapy. Additionally, in Denmark hundreds of boys are born with the urethra slightly further down on the shaft of the penis, which some consider an intersex condition. They are subjected to risky operations solely to obtain the result that "the boy pees standing up, i.e. normally", as a surgeon at the National Hospital states in Amnesty's report. The surgeries are most often done on very small children. They are often medically unfounded, and more recent research shows that significant pain in early childhood, e.g. in connection with circumcision or other surgeries, stays in the body as trauma that can last throughout life, even if the patient has no cognitive memory of the surgery.

Amnesty International calls the treatment of intersex people a violation of human rights and refers to the fact that multiple organizations within the UN and the EU have expressed great concern calling the treatment both "torture" and "abuse." The newspaper *Berlingske* sums it up as follows:

> *The EU's Agency for Fundamental Rights says that surgery on intersex people should be avoided. The Council of Europe is of the opinion that the surgeries risk disturbing the identities of the children, while the UN's Children's Commission is worried that children are subjected to unnecessary surgical treatment. The World Health Organization (WHO) criticizes the interventions because they can have physical and psychological consequences, while Malta prohibited the interventions in 2016 as the first EU country to do so (Holst 2017).*

Unimaginable

Normally, abortion is only allowed until the 12th week of pregnancy, and permission to get an abortion beyond this point is only given if there is something severely wrong with the foetus. However, on July 7th 2012 the newspaper *Politiken* revealed that 13 intersex foetuses had been aborted after this boundary in 2011 (Korsgaard & Heinskou 2012). Yet, the intersex diagnoses don't necessarily mean that the children will be worse off than other children. They just didn't live up to the standards for boys' and girls' bodies. And that is also eugenics. An article in *Information* on September 26th 2015 claims:

> *"Denmark is one of the 21 membership countries in the EU that, according to a report from the Union's Agency for Fundamental Rights, permits what the agency considers discriminatory and gender normalizing surgeries and treatments of children with so-called intersex variations without the consent of the children" (Thorup 2015).*

In Denmark it is recommended, that gender normalizing surgery is performed on children before they reach 15-18 months of age, because it is believed that it is "unimaginable that a child in Denmark will be able to develop psychologically without unambiguous outer genitals," as it is written in current instructions from Skejby Hospital.

A Powerful Need

In the press release for the report, Amnesty said that they rarely had experienced as much difficulty carrying out their reports, as they had, writing the one on intersex people. They stated that it was very hard to find information, and the intersex persons themselves, too, experienced that they had trouble obtaining medical journals and information about the treatments and procedures they had been subjected to as children. The topic is surrounded by extreme taboo and secrecy on the part of the healthcare system and the authorities. It's not something people want to talk about. I phoned and wrote to the hospitals myself in 2015 to get more information, and I couldn't reach any of the doctors working with intersex people. But I did reach Grete Teilmann, who is a paediatrician at North Sealand's Hospital in Hillerød, who "knows something in theory about intersex people", but who also stressed that she does not have anything to do with intersex people in her own work. She hadn't heard the stories about intersex people being treated against their will. She confirmed that occasionally gonads will be removed on intersex children if there's a risk of them developing into cancer cells, but that it's done with great care and much discussion before operating. I asked if procedures are done that are not medically motivated, and then she told me about intersex girls who can become very tall:

> *"If, for example, there are girls who are expected to become more than two meters tall, then some [of these] girls will want to reduce their end height. Then you'll destroy the growth plate so that the bone will stop growing in length. And you need to do that early in puberty, so she still has some time to grow before the bone closes."*

If the girl is older than 15, she'll decide for herself if she wants the surgery. If she's under 15, the doctor can get consent from her parents in council with the girl. But is there any medical reason to stunt growth?

> *"There's nothing medically wrong with being two meters tall of course. It's psychologically and socially, and you can call that cosmetic, but for the girls in question, it's something very powerful,"* Grete Teilmann says.

It's probably very similar to how many transgender people feel when they want gender affirming treatment. Caspian was also 15 years old when he decided to get his surgery. Why is it that his decision is not taken seriously, while the 15-year-old intersex girl's decision is taken seriously?

Aligning Gender Codes

I feel a little foolish, because I started out with my simple anecdote about how I was at the reception of a plastic surgeon and tried to get flappy ears. I already knew a lot about trans politics back then, but it was still a wake-up call for me when I actually stood in front of a person who had the power to tell me "no." "No, you cannot do what you want with your body! It's not something you decide for yourself." The message was, "that here we work according to standardized beauty ideals and with the government's codified and legally binding rules, so the only gender related procedures we deal with here are normalizing procedures that enhance the bodily signs people already carry. You can have your penis enlarged. We can make your mother´s breasts perky again. Your father can have the hairs on his back transplanted onto the top of his head. We can make your sister's lips as large as slugs. However, modifying your body so it challenges binary gender perception is beyond our repertoire." That anecdote seems so banal now, because I know that transgender people are subjected to normalizing surgery and treatment when the government forces them to make everything add up in their binary system. A female CPR number must be accompanied by a female name, female genitals, breasts, long hair, a high voice, a dress, high heels and the use of makeup. The gender codes cannot be messy. Everything needs to align.

These things happen to real people, and some of them are people I know and care about. The government, the Danish Health and Medicine Authority, the Sexology Clinic, and the hospitals in Denmark in the year 2017 are conspiring against vulnerable minorities. It is kept secret that an extra effort is made to impose unhealthy regulation and disciplining of healthy, but deviant, bodies. It's not a question of neglect or apathy. It's not because transgender and intersex people are forgotten. Quite the opposite. Time and resources are actively spent on making and enforcing legislation meant to keep them in line and prevent their deviations from the binary gender system from being expressed. Medical guidelines have been carefully formulated in order to normalize them out of existence. Solely because they do not fit into a gender binary system.

Conclusion

In the eyes of the system, transgender people do not fit into the gender binary because they want to break free from the gender they were assigned by the doctor at birth. Gender affirming treatment is not something the Danish healthcare system wants to support. In fact, the healthcare system will go very far to prevent this wish from being fulfilled. For the intersex people, it's the other way around. From birth they are born with bodies that do not fit into the binary boxes, and they are therefore subjected to the opposite treatment. Before they are even old enough to consent, they are actively sought out by the healthcare system and, according to the EU, UN, WHO, the Council of Europe, Amnesty International, and intersex activists, pressured or forced into medical treatment. All to ensure that their bodies and identities can fit into one of the two binarily constructed boxes: man or woman. It is not a medical necessity. It is not natural. It is not in the patients interests.

Notes

[1] Denmark's registry for social security numbers.

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Mapping the movements against "gender ideology" across Europe

Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte (Eds):

Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality

Rowman and Littlefield, London, 2017, pages 302. Price 41,95 $ (paperback)

By Molly Occhino

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Kuhar and Paternotte's 2018 anthology maps the resistance across Europe to political and social movements relating to women's equality and reproductive rights, anti-discrimination policies, LGBTQIA+ rights, sex education in schools, the academic field of gender studies, and "gender ideology" more broadly. In consolidating resistances against the aforementioned initiatives under an overarching umbrella of "anti-gender" movements, the editors demonstrate "how an academic concept such as gender [...] has become a mobilizing tool and the target of massive social movements" (16). In this way, "gender", they argue, becomes an "empty signifier" (23) for anything that could be tied to gender theory that is perceived as a new and threatening danger to traditional national and family values. Moreover, "anti-gender" has become the "symbolic glue" binding together right-wing populist movements, the Catholic Church and other religious organizations, anti-gender "scholars", and concerned citizens, who otherwise might have diverging goals, to work together against the larger threat of "gender ideology."

The anthology focuses on the period starting in the mid-1990s after the first international conferences on gender equality took place in Beijing and Cairo (9), but especially draws attention to the mid-2000s when "gender ideology" policy initiatives (particularly same-sex marriage) started taking root in Europe. The book includes contributions looking specifically at the manifestations of anti-gender movements within the national contexts of 12 European countries: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Russia, Slovenia and Spain. Each chapter provides insights into the specific national contexts, recent political histories and traces the specific local mobilizations against "gender". While there are national specificities in terms of the people/groups involved, national influence, international alliances, timing, involvement of religious institutions, and the specific aims of resistance movements (which are too technical to relate here), the authors contributions together show that there are some overarching guiding trends and principles. That is, there is "a shared discourse, a traveling repertoire of action

and similar strategies" (253). Specifically, anti-gender movements rely on a shared call of universal truths regarding the traditional family (and family values), sex, and reproduction.

In terms of shared strategies and truths, the anthology discusses at length how the Catholic Church, anti-gender "scholars" and Far-right figures from both other European countries and the U.S. have come together and developed new strategies of mobilization in protecting traditional family values, and the "natural" essentialist gendered order. Indeed, the introduction to the book relates the overall political weight the Catholic Church has historically held within Europe, and also shows the Church's role in coining the negatively connoted "gender ideology" (appropriated from gender theory), and the subsequent spread of the term across Europe. The different contributions from the contributing authors engage in-depth with the role of the Church in each country's anti-gender movement.

While the prevalence and role of the Church is different in each national context (i.e. stronger in Croatia, Italy, and Poland, and weaker in states like Belgium, Germany, Slovenia, and Spain), the authors show that the more moral and political authority the Catholic Church has within a given context, the more visible it is within anti-gender initiatives (267).

Interestingly, the contributors also show how anti-gender figures and work from one country has helped influence movements in other countries. For example, the work of Manif pour Tous in France has been used by figures in other countries like Italy to try to spark local satellite movements in their own national context, translating and using the French material and strategies in Italy (151). Though the authors clearly trace the transnational spread and dissemination of anti-gender initiatives and knowledge production, on the other hand, the contributors also demonstrate how rhetoric in local anti-gender campaigns relies on the overall notion of "gender" as something imported, "foreign" and forced upon people from political elites (14, 33). In this clever move, movements position the traditional family, heterosexuality, and essentialist gender-roles, children and themselves as victims of gender ideology.

Moreover, by pushing back against ideas of national anti-gender movements as an isolated occurrence happening only within a particular national context, (4, 271), Kuhar and Paternotte's anthology demonstrates that anti-gender movements are part of a larger transnational trend. Furthermore, in teasing out these transnational trends, the book does an excellent job of not only capturing how anti-gender discourse has circulated, but also how anti-gender campaigns have often also been linked with other populist movements, for example, that of racial prejudices, xenophobia, and particularly anti-Islam movements.

Lastly, in the comparative analysis Kuhar and Paternotte, draw attention to the fact that there is no defining trend between Eastern and Western European countries. Dismissing East/West dichotomies draws more attention to the pervasiveness and interconnectedness of such movements across not only Europe, but also Latin America and North America (253).

Kuhar and Paternotte also draw attention to the fact that while LGBT rights was one of the main areas attacked by anti-gender activists, transgender rights in particular were generally left untouched (257). This leaves me with questions about *why* trans rights have remained a peripheral concern to anti-gender advocates, and more largely how and to what extent transgender rights within each individual country's context are framed and discussed.

Reviewing this work for a Danish feminist journal, this anthology furthermore leaves me with questions about the national and/or regional specificities of anti-gender movements within the Nordic countries (which were not included in this anthology), especially when taking into consideration the uniqueness of the Nordic Welfare State models and ties to Lutheranism rather than Catholicism.

Overall, this book is an important contribution and very relevant work to read for anyone working with contemporary European populist movements within history and the social sciences, as well as anyone working within feminist/gender studies in Europe as it not only helps shed light on the kinds of resistance feminist knowledge production and initiatives are facing, but also demonstrates that anti-gender movements are not at all anomalous national phenomenon, but rather a part of an intricate web of global actors.

The Uses of Use

Sara Ahmed:

What's the use. On the uses of use

Duke University Press, 2019, pages 296. Price 26,95 $

By Camilla Sabroe Jydebjerg
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What's the use from 2019 is the completion of a trilogy in which Sara Ahmed "follows words around, in and out of their intellectual histories." To Ahmed, "Thinking about the use of words is to ask about where they go, how they acquire associations, and in what and whom they are found" (p. 3). The trilogy starts with 'the promise of happiness' from 2010 and is followed by 'Willful subjects' from 2014. In a sense this third book about use is a meta-book as use has been an underlying concept of all three books. In the first book it was the uses of happiness at play. In the second, the uses of will, and finally in this third installment it is the uses of use that is being investigated. In all three books Ahmed shows how words are performative in the sense that they make us orient ourselves toward the emotions that they entail. Being happy. Being willful. Being useful.

The book also writes itself into Ahmed's larger work and grapples with many of this works reoccurring themes such as embodiment, orientations, diversity-work, complaints, fitting and misfitting, etc. In her work Ahmed shows us how

"phenomenology helps us explore how the familiar is that which is not revealed. A queer phenomenology shows how the familiar is not revealed to those who can inhabit it" (Ahmed 2010b, p. 3). Instead it is up to the estranged, the strays, the misfits, the wretched, the queers "and other others" to be killjoys and reveal the familiar. "This is why being a killjoy can be a knowledge project, a world-making project" (Ahmed 2010b, p. 3). Together the trilogy is a beautiful killjoy project making it possible for us to reflect on our affective attachments to happiness, willfulness and usefulness accentuating how emotions are never just a private matter "but that they create the very effect of the surfaces or boundaries of bodies and worlds" (Ahmed 2004a, p. 117).

Where the earlier books focus on words that "seem to reference a subject", an important point of this book is how use and usefulness are intimately connected to things (p. 5). Ahmed shows how use is "a contact zone". A matter of how we come "into contact with things" (p. 40). In an impressive tour de force of things, through the book we become

acquainted with a postbox now functioning as a bird's nest, a worn out back-pack, letters, used books, an empty tube of toothpaste, pathways and doorways, a puddle, multiple signs, a broken cup, and a pot figuring in Silas Marner by George Eliot. Through these encounters Ahmed shows how our relationship to things leave an impression that is as intimate as it is social. Things can make life easier for some and harder for others. On her blog Ahmed explains that scholarship in disability studies was a primary source of inspiration in writing the book "since reflecting on usability is to reflect on who a world is built for" (Ahmed 2019, para. 2). Through the encounters with things Ahmed shows how "worlds are built to enable some to fit, and not others" (p. 224). Ahmed further demonstrates how the use of things can form a normalizing path. A way for us to orient ourselves towards particular uses and less so against others. Using something a specific way makes other uses of the same kind easier. "The more a path is traveled upon the clearer it becomes" (p. 120).

Ahmed ties use and the uses of use to utilitarianism and its history and shows how the inheritance of utilitarianism has left us with a notion of disuse as a form a degeneracy. If an arm is not lifting it becomes a degenerate arm. It becomes useless. Ahmed also shows how the imperative to be useful befalls some bodies more than other bodies and how this is connected to both class and colonialism. Utilitarian thinkers were involved in educational projects e.g. the creation of monitorial schools for children of the working classes as well as children in the British colonies. Use thus became an educational technique directing children towards useful ends and "justifying colonialism as increasing happiness" (p. 10). Occupation of lands and bodies "can be narrated as taking care of things" (47). "Sympathy itself can be repurposed as tool" (p. 106). This also applies to adults who must also be steered away from vacancy, idleness, and unemployment.

This part of the book had a special resonance for me as I am currently doing research concerning Danish unemployment legislation. A utilitarianist mindset is not hard to spot here. The law contains an activation measure called utility jobs. These are jobs that are explicitly deemed useful for society. Unemployed people must commit to these jobs as a condition for receiving their benefits. It is further a requirement that you take on precarious temporary work. If you work less than 225 hours a year your benefits will be deducted. The rules treat people receiving benefits "as the limbs of a social body, as being for others to use" (p. 11).

Ahmed further demonstrates how utilitarian thought was deeply involved in shaping the modern university showing how neo-liberal thought is tied to a longer history of utilitarianism. Being a university worker involved in education I find Ahmed's analysis very compelling as she beautifully shows how uses shapes both thoughts and doings. "Institutions are built from small acts of use from uses of use, from how building blocks put together, over time, become walls, walls that enable some bodies to enter, stay put, progress, others not", as Ahmed explains (p. 191). This may also leave a potential for putting the blocks together differently. This is what Ahmed's phenomenological analysis opens up for. The possibility of putting the blocks together differently by becoming aware of and questioning our own familiar grounds.

In the book's hopeful conclusion, Ahmed calls for thinking about use in other ways. For a queering of use. "Queer use might refer to how things can be used in ways other than how they were intended to be used or by those other than for whom they were intended" (p. 44). I recommend that everyone reads this book (as well as Ahmed's other books) as a call for a solidary querying and queering of use. "Solidarity involves commitment, and work, as well as the recognition that even if we do not have the same feelings, or the same lives, or the same bodies, we do live on common ground" (Ahmed 2004b, p. 189). Let us all become killjoys together! Being a killjoy is a responsibility that should not only be shouldered by some. It should be carried by everyone – all of us - living on common ground whether this ground feels familiar or less familiar underneath our feet.

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Did misogyny win the 2016 american election?

Kate Manne:

Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny

Oxford University Press, 2018. 368 pages. Price: 289,95 DKK

By Sidsel Jelved Kennild

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Down Girl has been called a new feminist classic. This can be ascribed to Kate Mannes's objective to unearth the seemingly persistent misogynistic patterns in allegedly post-patriarchal parts of the world, specifically focusing on the US and Australia. It is however also an attribute of the moment of publication in which feminists and liberals were wondering why an experienced woman like Hillary Clinton lost the election in favour of notorious pussy-grabber Donald Trump. Manne's answer: Misogyny caused Clinton to lose (255, 278).

Coming from the tradition of analytical philosophy, Manne's vantage point lies at the conceptual level. From this basis, she conceptually scrutinize misogyny and advances to the ameliorative project of conceptual ethics and engineering (33) as well as to critical engagement with current events, cultural productions, media, legal cases and the Isla Vista Killings. Thus, she argues against "the naïve conception" in which misogyny primarily is "a property of individual agents (typically, although not necessarily men) who are prone to feel hatred, hostility, or other similar emotions

toward each and every woman, or at least women generally, simply because they are women" (33). According to Manne, the naïve conception renders misogyny marginal in any context, because most people have mothers, sisters and/or women friends whom they love, and therefore they cannot harbour true misogyny. Instead Manne proposes an ameliorative account of misogyny as "primarily a property of social systems or environments as a whole, in which women will tend to face hostility of various kinds *because they are women in a man's world* (i.e. patriarchy), who are held to be failing to live up to patriarchal standards" (33). Manne then understands misogyny in terms of what it does (20), and she shifts the focus from the internal, psychological attitude of the individual to the effects of the structural, social, political as well as *moral* levels of society.

In fact, *Down Girl* is largely an account of the gendered moral relationship and the numerous junctures between law, justice and morality. The focus on morality is evident when Manne contrasts sexism and misogyny. In Manne's account, sexism

is "scientific (20)" and "wears a lab coat (80)". Misogyny is "moralistic (20)" and "goes on witch hunts (80)". While sexism rationalises, justifies and builds the ideological strand of the patriarchal social order, misogyny polices and enforces these governing norms. This explains the progress of some women, while other women face backlash. Obedience is rewarded; overstepping is punished. According to Manne, this definition also "builds in space" for intersectional insights (13). Though she goes a long way to recognise the benefits of intersectionality to moral thinking, she chiefly employs it as a disclaimer.

Misogyny understood as a moral relationship stands most clear when Manne proposes to evaluate misogyny from the perspective of its victims – to consider them as moral subjects (246). She argues against the humanist tendency to think of oppression in terms of dehumanisation and objectification of victims: Oppressive acts in order to make sense depends on the humanity of the oppressed (164). For one, it takes human comprehension to understand degradation. In this, Manne attempts to overturn the moral economy of misogyny which she characterizes as an exchange in which women (*human givers*) are assumed to owe men (*human beings*, that is, moral subjects), moral goods like emotional, social and political support, sex, care, unpaid housework as well as sympathy (106-113). She coins the neologism 'himpathy' to highlight the puzzling phenomenon that many people feel sorry for the compromised futures of convicted rapists such as golden boy Brock Turner and police officer Daniel Holtzclaw (201, 219). The moral economy of misogyny sympathises with the humiliation of men who are deprived of their entitled moral authority, and it exonerates men like Trump in cases of (sexual) violence and misconduct for instance in relation to their ex-wives. Women on the other hand cannot claim the things men are entitled to (authority, money, moral subjectivity, or presidencies) without being deemed nasty.

This is why Clinton lost (249-278), and the driving force behind *Down Girl* seems to be Manne's gloominess about it. She wants to scrutinize the unjust morality that prompted Americans

to vote, not for a capable woman, but for an incompetent man whom Manne more than once describes as narcissistic (128, 266). In so doing, she defeats her own aim to go past psychological framing and thereby she depoliticises the political engagements of Trump and his voters. Misogyny probably did play a part in Clinton's defeat, but perhaps many people also wanted Trump's politics? Even if those politics were lewd. Another that keeps crossing my mind: Trump is not the only president to benefit from the moral economy of misogyny. What kind of moral exchange and sexual agency were at stake in the case of Monica Lewinsky and Bill Clinton? An analysis of Clinton's technical definition of intercourse that did not include the blowjobs he received from Lewinsky as well as of Hillary's support of her husband could have progressed Manne's claims beyond obvious antagonisms.

Manne's account has some nuance to it, when she almost arrives at reading #Yesallwomen, Incels, and the rise of the Trump-administration as parts of the same dialectic (e.g. 36, 53, 101f). However, her analysis lacks historical inquiry into the shifting meanings and conditions that form patriarchy and misogyny. Thereby she culturally, historically, and conceptually universalises both occurrences, not to mention that she bypasses theoretical traditions such as Marxism, Marxist feminism, as well as Simone De Beauvoir (mentioned only once, 135) that already discuss asymmetrical giving. It is peculiar that Manne does not relate her account of misogynistic moral economy to the Hegelian ethics of De Beauvoir. In De Beauvoir's reading of the master-and-slave-dialectic, the historical condition of woman lies beyond it – as a non-dialectic being – the absolute other whose consciousness cannot transcend. She is not even slave, only a supportive bystander in the existential project of consciousness belonging to man.

From within the tradition of moral philosophy, *Down Girl* adds a perspective on the gendered moral relationship to read along with the vast literature on reproductive work (asymmetrical giving) and existentialist feminist philosophy. I enjoy Manne's open-ended attitude in her continuous

invitations for the reader to fill in the gaps. She writes straightforwardly and appealing. In purpose of reaching readers beyond peers, this is particularly refreshing. As a new framework for thinking about misogyny, I find it wanting, but Manne raises

awareness to interesting discussions, and she insists on employing philosophy to think about contemporary times. I applaud this. Even if I find her cases cherry-picked.

Is Democracy a Rule by and for Men?

Drude Dahlerup:

Demokrati uden Kvinder

Translated by the author from English "Has Democracy Failed Women?" Polity Press Ltd.

U Press, 2018, pages 173. Price: 175 DKK

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Drude Dahlerup´s book "Has Democracy Failed Women?" elegantly introduces the reader to the academic and public debate concerning the representation of women in political institutions. Based on her own as well as other scholars work, Dahlerup analyzes and discusses the process of including women in the democracy from suffrage was first introduced until today. The book gives a historical as well as global perspective on the lack of inclusion of women in political institutions and decision- making processes, and thereby provides a gender perspective on one of the core issues within political science namely representation. Throughout the book, the focus is on how formal and informal institutions shape the inclusion process both by reproducing existing power relations, but also by creating change via the introduction of such mechanism as gender quotas.

What is representation?

What does it actually mean that women are represented in political institutions and decision-making processes? In the book, Drude Dahlerup draws on the distinction between descriptive and substantive representation. Descriptive representation concerns the presence of women in political bodies, and is thus a question of the number or share of women in legislative bodies. Substantive representation is a question of whether representatives actually represents the interests of women.

Descriptive representations (referred to as numeric or social representation in the Danish version of the book), is the focus in the first part of the book (chapters 1-3), where the author discuss the development in the share of women in parliaments through time and across countries. The global perspective is particularly interesting, because it illustrates how progress towards gender parity in parliaments can be assisted by institutional arrangements such as gender quotas. Some "young democracies" in the global south have succeeded in reaching a high numeric representation of women in parliaments much faster than the "old democracies" questioning the idea of the "step-by-step model" where the representation of women

slowly increases over time. Instead, these young democracies represent a "fast-track-model" where the introduction of gender quotas have supported the process of including women in political institutions. Drude Dahlerup further devotes a chapter about the effect of gender quotas and provides a thorough introduction to the various types of quota systems that exists and discusses their effects on the numeric representation of women in political institutions.

Representing women's interests

In the latter part of the book, Drude Dahlerup address the issue of substantive representation and the relation between descriptive representation and substantive representation. This is a central debate in the literature on gender and politics not only because it relates to fundamental theoretical discussions about the ontological status of "gender" and "woman", but also because it is – on a less abstract level - a question of whether descriptive representation matters. Do female politicians promote the interest of the female constituency?

Drude Dahlerup raises some interesting and crucial questions in this part of the book: Does it make sense to talk about women's interests? Is it possible for women across ideological standpoints to find common ground and promote women's interests? What are the dangers of gender mainstreaming and the bureaucratization of gender equality policies? The author analyze and discuss these questions based on the literature, and

her argumentation is clear and convincing. However, I think the book would have benefitted from elaborating further on the current political events such as the MeToo-movement (which is briefly mentioned) and how anti-feminist movements shape the debate of women's interest and collaboration across political boundaries.

A democratic deficit

Drude Dahlerup concludes the book by arguing that we still have a democratic deficit when it comes to the representation of women and minorities today. Women are still under-represented in political institutions and in higher positions within political organizations. Moreover, she argues that current political events (such as Trump being elected and the rise of anti-feminist movements) also remind us that "backlash" can occur.

Overall, the book introduces the reader to the issue of women's inclusion in the political sphere in an easily accessible manner, and covers the historical as well as global aspects of the topic. Drude Dahlerup shifts between presenting and discussing research findings and providing small stories from her own work as an international consultant and researcher. This combination works very well, and "brings life" to the many tables of the book. It is therefore an obvious book for higher education students dealing with issues of political representations as well as equality and diversity, but could also be of interest to a broader audience following debates on gender equality and quota systems.