

Motivation, organisational gender equality work
and the postfeminist gender regime:
A feminist approach

Ea Høg Utoft

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A feminist approach

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Preface/Acknowledgements

‘So, then, dear, what is your thesis, as a whole?’

‘It’s a story. The story of my PhD.’

(Kara, 2013: 78)

My own PhD story already begins before my enrolment at Aarhus University, when I was a master’s student at the University of Southern Denmark in Odense (2013–15). I was rather inspired by one of my teachers, Christina Frydensbjerg, who opened my eyes to the idea of becoming a PhD by basing her classes on her own PhD research. As a student assistant at the Department of Marketing and Management at the time, I sought the advice of my then boss and department head, Jeanette Lemmergaard, who supported me and suggested that I ask Oana Brindusa Albu to supervise my master’s thesis – and to ask her to do so as if she were supervising a PhD. This proved sound advice and, after the defence, Oana encouraged me to pursue the PhD. I am grateful to these women. Without their support, I would not be where I am today.

Later, when I started working on my PhD application in 2016, I was recommended to not label my research ‘feminist’. The gist of the advice I received was that using the ‘feminist’ label in my PhD project description would not be palatable to the review panel. I decided to follow this advice and wrote my application in a manner that was presumably most appealing to those who would decide my fate. I used the label ‘gender research’ and was accepted, which now makes me smile (with just a tad of gloating). They had no idea what they were getting themselves into. Now, in the final manuscript, the word count of the various permutations of the ‘F-word’ is 1034.

This project could not have anything but feminist, because, as Sara Ahmed (2017) writes so beautifully:

Feminism is at stake in how we generate knowledge; in how we write, in who we cite. I think of feminism as a building project: if our texts are worlds, they need to be made out of feminist materials. Feminist theory is world-making. This is why we need to resist positioning feminist theory as simply or only a tool, in the sense of something that can be used in theory, only then to be put down or put away. It should not be possible to do feminist theory without being a feminist, which requires active and ongoing commitment to live one’s life in a feminist way. (p. 14)

I want to thank my team of supervisors for the freedom to take my project back to me, to what I believe in, to who I am. I am grateful to all my colleagues at

the Danish Centre for Studies in Research and Research Policy (CFA) for the support you have shown me in this choice, especially when I faced criticism and backlash elsewhere. Ahmed (2017) has famously stated that we learn about worlds through the resistance we experience trying to change them (p. 22). Mine have certainly been invaluable learning experiences both academically and personally, but I doubt that I would have been able to cope without my ‘CFA family’, including Asger Dalsgaard, Malene V. Christensen, Carita Eklund, Lise Degn, Alexander Kladakis, Andreas Kjær Stage, Jens Peter Andersen, Tine Ravn and, in particular, Emil B. Madsen – my rock. Special thanks also to Thomas K. Ryan, Mathilde Cecchini and Maria Lehmann Nielsen for your friendship and our collaboration on the ‘Gender and Networks in Early-Career Academic Advancement’ project. To the incomparable CFA student workers (none mentioned, none forgotten), many thanks to you too for your much-appreciated assistance in relation to my work. And Jane Frølund Irming, you are the heart of CFA – without you, nothing would work around here. Thank you for all of your help and consideration.

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knowledge and experiences with me. Moreover, I want to thank my sponsor from the company's North American branch, who enabled and facilitated my brief fieldwork in the US, which enriched my project significantly. I am thankful to the participants in my interview study, some of whom remain close and valued contacts, for trusting me to use their words in my research.

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Other important names that deserve mentioning here are e.g. Jannick Friis Christensen. Although we are not formally colleagues, I feel like we have undertaken the PhD journey together. Rebecca Lund, thank you for your advice and mentorship along the way. Thank you, Alison Pullen, for making a 'newbie' feel so welcome and included in Sydney, and for your fabulousness every time I see or hear from you. Marianne Kongerslev and Anne Bettina Pedersen, thank you both for your marvellously dark humour and unlimited feminist care. Many thanks also to Lea Skewes – Aarhus University is a better place because of the feminist work that you do, and I am honoured that you wanted me as part of the team behind your 'baby', the Gendering in Research network. I want to thank Banu Saatçhi for your friendship and for providing me with a space to literally shake it all off when PhD life was stressful. Lastly, a huge thank you to my parents, Anne Høg Sørensen and Hans Peter Utoft, for your love and always open doors, and to absolute #BossLadies, my sheroes; Line Høg Utoft, Ninna Stjernholm, Nina Ellekær, Ida Sørud, Susanne K. Svennesen, Otilia V. Mouridsen and Anne Sophie Byder – for your unceasing belief in me. And finally – thank you, Dani May, for always making me laugh, especially at myself, when I need it the most.

This dissertation may be the end of my PhD story, but graduating as a PhD is merely the key that (hopefully) opens the doors to a career in research. Looking back, I am keenly aware of the privileges afforded by my affiliation with the Danish Centre for Studies in Research and Research Policy. I am most grateful to former and present Centre Directors Niels Mejlgaard and Carter

Bloch for enabling me to see the world on my way to becoming an academic. I am not there yet. But luckily the world remains open to me, personally as well as professionally. So, on that note ...

Let the next chapter begin.

Ea Høg Utoft

Aarhus, January 2020

1. Introduction

1.1. Motivation to study motivation

Danish universities and large businesses (henceforth, knowledge-intensive organisations) are legally compelled to address gender inequality; that is, set gender targets for leadership and formulate a gender policy as a minimum (Danish Business Authorities, 2018). This legal requirement was enacted by the Danish Parliament in December 2012 and came into effect in April 2013. In a spot-check of a representative sample one year after the requirement's inception, however, the Danish Business Authorities (DBA) found that while two per cent of the affected businesses indicated that they already had gender parity¹ in their top leadership, 25 per cent of affected businesses did not live up to the requirement (DBA, 2014: 7). Two years later, the share of businesses not complying with the gender targets legislation was reduced to 11.4 per cent (DBA, 2018: 6).² As these compliance assessments were conducted in the early days of this legal initiative, one might argue that minor progress is still progress and that things take time. Nevertheless, they beg the question of why some organisations continue to refrain from acting in light of the fact that they must do so.

Furthermore, assumptions concerning the positive effects on performance which gender equality (GE) and diversity are presumed to yield are also widely accepted in the Danish context (European Commission (EC), 2012a). Following Rennison (2014), the reasoning behind the so-called 'business case' for gender equality concerns how 'failing to see women as good business is tantamount to a devastating loss of social, innovative and economic gains' (p. 46). In the corporate world, consultancies such as McKinsey and, in Denmark, the Boston Consulting Group have argued why 'women matter' (Devillard et al., 2016) and that 'gender diversity creates value for Danish companies' (Poulsen et al., 2016). Research unfolds the 'business case' for gender equality by arguing, e.g., that a) diverse perspectives lead to qualitatively better decisions (Carter et al., 2003); b) that more women in teams increases the equality of participation for all, which improves problem-solving (Bear & Woolley, 2013);

¹ At least 40% of the under-represented sex.

² Current share (2017) of companies that do not have gender parity in top leadership and have not established targets constitutes 3.8% (DBA, 2018: 6), and the share of companies without parity that have not developed a policy for parity in all leadership levels constitutes 17.4% (DBA, 2018: 8).

c) that the expertise of highly-educated women is utilised to a much greater extent in gender-balanced teams than in teams with a male majority (Joshi, 2014) and; d) that research publications written by women-majority teams often pose different questions and engage in different research topics than male-authored studies (Börjeson & Nielsen, 2016 cited by Nielsen et al., 2017). Building on the same arguments, the Danish Ministry of Education and Science (DMES) has similarly argued that halting the continued attrition of female researchers will lead to improved scientific quality (2015, 2019a). However, these literatures would appear to be based on the implicit assumption that an awareness or knowledge of this evidence pertaining to the gender equality → performance benefits-link will in and of itself lead organisations to act. In Denmark at least, this has not generally been the case.

Scholarship has long emphasised that good intentions alone will not improve gender equality and that actions are needed to ensure concrete changes (Hearn, 2000; Henningsen & Højgaard, 2006). Managerial and human resource management (HRM) interventions and practices are generally viewed as the most appropriate means of improving organisational gender balances (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; van den Brink & Benschop, 2012; Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace, 2017; 2019). Such practices may assume different forms, depending on how they conceptualise gender and (in)equality, and whether they target the organisation or individuals (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Lombardo, Meier & Verloo, 2009; Benschop & Verloo, 2012). Nevertheless, there appears to be some agreement as to which types GE interventions may be considered ‘best practice’ (DMES, 2009) or, in the words of the Boston Consulting Group, which may be considered ‘proven measures and hidden gems’ (Cuellar et al., 2017). At least, certain intervention types appear to be more widely employed than others, such as diversity trainings and mentoring programmes (Kalev, Dobbin & Kelly, 2006; Timmers et al., 2010; Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace, 2017; 2019). Adding our knowledge of the strategies that will most likely lead to the desired gender and diversity changes to the general acceptance of the benefits which such changes will deliver, we might again wonder why, for so many years, Danish businesses and universities have apparently been so reluctant to intervene to improve inclusion and the promotion of women in their respective workforces.

Roughly speaking, organisations presumably know how to improve equality, they generally believe that it will benefit them, and, since 2013, they have been compelled to pursue this path. While the legislation has prompted some progress, it has been slow (DBA, 2018; DMES, 2019a). Therefore, we may wonder whether there is something about motivation in the case of GE work in organisations, which we simply do not comprehend; or whether our tradi-

tional (or intuitive) understanding of motivation does not fully serve since neither the ‘stick’ nor ‘carrot’ (or in this instance, stick *and* carrot) appear to cover what is at work here (Dickens, 1994). These ruminations led me to formulate the following overall and very open research questions for this dissertation:

How are organisations motivated to engage in gender equality work?

Firstly, my aim was to map out which kinds of motivations I could identify as drivers for organisational GE work. Initially, I took ‘motivation’ to cover any kind of pressures or incentives that appeared to drive organisational action with respect to equality and diversity. This broad, preliminary conception served as an entry point into my qualitative explorations of motivation, which involved my search for all kinds of interpretations, rationalisations, meaning negotiations etc. that my research participants would draw on as important for why and how their organisations were addressing gender equality. My second research question therefore is:

How do organisations understand and navigate different pressures and incentives to engage in gender equality work?

As the idea of ‘motivation’ is new to the scholarly literatures on gender equality and GE work in organisations (at least as an explicit idea³), the purpose of this project is to examine motivation at various levels to see if we may think of it as something other than individual – as collective, organisational and/or societal. I therefore carried out three sub-studies; that is, the three empirical chapters of this dissertation (chapters 4, 5 and 6). By exploring the idea of motivation from different theoretical and methodological perspectives, I aim

³ Somewhat related, we find, e.g., the Grosser and Moon (2008) study on why companies engage in corporate social reporting on issues of gender equality in the workplace in the UK, or Dobbin et al. (2011), who explore external pressures and internal advocacy as determinants of corporate diversity programmes in the US. The word ‘motivation’ only appears in Grosser and Moon (2008), however, and is used with respect to ‘employee attraction, retention, commitment, motivation, and absenteeism’ (p. 180).

to generate various kinds of knowledge about motivation in an attempt to tentatively home in on how we may best understand it. A multi-level and multi-perspectival understanding of the phenomenon of motivation to engage in GE work is not only relevant to the concrete problem to which it relates: persistent gender inequalities in Denmark. It may further tell us something about the world of which it is a part, certainly at the local, organisational level, but also at the aggregate level (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2013); that is, Danish society more broadly. An improved understanding of organisational motivation relating to GE work is important, assuming that it is a necessary step if Denmark wishes to improve equality further going forward.

1.2. Why care about motivation?

Gender equality is often promoted as a defining, Danish cultural value (Danish Ministry of Culture, 2016; Dahlerup, 2018; Danish Ministry for Gender Equality, 2019b: 5), and as one of ‘the Nordics’, Denmark is generally considered to be among the spearhead, gender equal nations (Lewis, 2000; Lister, 2009). In this part of the introduction, I will take a critical look at the status of gender equality in Denmark. Indisputably, Denmark performs well on many GE indicators (Schwab et al., 2018; Equal Measures, 2019c). However, gender equality is not a ‘closed case’ (Dahlerup, 2018), even though this is a widespread narrative in the Danish context (EC, 2012a; 2012b; 2017). The ‘closed case’ narrative entails the view that gender discrimination has generally been solved and that gender equality is largely achieved. My critical examination of the status of equality in Denmark aims to unfold the concrete, real-world problem to which this dissertation speaks, namely, persistent gender inequalities in Denmark. As will become evident, the picture is rather complex and ambiguous.

1.2.1. Gender equality in Denmark

Due to longstanding traditions of labour mobilisation from below and welfare improvements across social classes, the literature argues that the Scandinavian countries have been more responsive to the demands made from feminist movements over time (Borchorst, 2004, 2009; Borchost & Siim, 2008). Danish women achieved the vote in 1915, but more substantial changes to the position of women in Danish society followed later. Although women had had formal access to universities since the late 1870s, Danish women only began entering higher education in substantial numbers approximately 100 years later (Rosenbeck, 2014). With education came access to work, and Denmark was already among world leaders with respect to women’s labour-market and political participation in the 1980s (Borchorst, 2004, 2009). Nevertheless,

Borchorst (2004) argues that it was the women's movement of this time (1960s–80s) that successfully broke with traditional ideas about the roles and positions of women and men in society, which also influenced politics (p. 127).

Three laws are considered particularly important with respect to gender equality⁴ in Denmark (Kalpazidou Schmidt et al., 2017a):

- The Act on Equal Treatment of Men and Women, which concerns access to employment (*Ligebehandlingsloven*, 1978)
- The Act on Equal Pay for Men and Women (*Ligelønsloven*, 1976)
- The Act on Entitlement to Leave and Benefits in the Event of Childbirth (*Barselsloven*⁵), which secures the right to leave and income maintenance.

More recently, however, the Act on Prohibition of Discrimination on the Labour Market (*Forskelsbehandlingsloven*) has been enacted (1996), which goes beyond a prohibition of direct and indirect discrimination on the basis of gender to also include race, skin colour, ethnicity, religion or faith, sexual orientation, national or social origin, political beliefs, age or disability (Ibid.: 17). The 'gender mainstreaming' concept (Council of Europe, 1998) has also been adopted into Danish legislation (2000), although its implementation and the actual practice of gender mainstreaming across state bodies and institutions appears sporadic at best, and the current legislation holds no possibilities for sanctions in the case of non-compliance (Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR), 2016: 30). Finally, as mentioned above, the gender targets legislation was reluctantly enacted in 2012–2013 to motivate private and state institutions and companies to address the gender imbalance across leadership positions. The so-called 'Danish model for more women in leadership' is based on a 'comply-or-explain' principle, where the affected institutions and companies (approximately 1600, as per 2016) are required to set 'suitable, measurable

⁴ In Scandinavia, the idea of 'gender equality' has historically resonated strongly with women's access to work. Some Scandinavian countries (Denmark to a lesser extent) have aimed for policy packages aiming not only for a dual-career/universal breadwinner model (Fraser, 1997) but for a dual-carer society; 'a society in which men and women engage symmetrically in employment *and* care-giving' (Gornick & Meyers, 2006: 3, cited by Lister, 2009).

⁵ Parental leave – or, more specifically, maternity leave – legislation in Denmark can be traced back to 1901. Progress to leave in relation to childbirth has been achieved through a combination of legislative steps and through the tri-partite, collective bargaining system in Denmark. Fathers gained the right to paternity leave in 1984, and 52 weeks of parental leave (which can be relatively flexibly divided between the parents) were secured by law in 2002 (Hansen, 2003).

targets and [to formulate] a GE strategy – or explain why they have not managed to do so’ (DBA, 2014; Kalpazidou Schmidt et al., 2017a: 17–18).

While legislation has undoubtedly been central to ensuring current levels of gender equality in Denmark, over time, the manner in which gender issues have been discussed in relation to policies has changed (Lister, 2009). For instance, childcare policies have been motivated by concerns for children rather than gender equality (Siim & Borchorst, 2008), and opposition to the idea of earmarked paternity leave has generally been framed as unwanted coercion and interference with the autonomy of the family (Borchorst, 2004). Furthermore, right-of-centre parties have championed the repeal of existing GE legislation. In 2015, the motion to limit the remit of legal requirements to gender-segregate remuneration data was passed (Danish Parliament, 2015a; see also Kalpazidou Schmidt et al., 2017a: 24),⁶ whereas the motion to repeal the gender targets legislation was dismissed (Danish Parliament, 2015b).⁷ In sum, formal gender equality exists in contemporary Denmark, and the changes that the legal steps described above have produced have undeniably contributed to the economic and social emancipation of Danish women. Nevertheless, gendered roles and expectations are constantly negotiated (Borchorst, 2009), and new gender disparities have emerged.

With respect to primary, secondary and tertiary education, Danish girls and young women have superseded boys and men. Girls achieve higher grade averages, and more girls than boys complete secondary and tertiary education (Sørensen, 2010; Statistics Denmark, 2019a). More men than women have no education beyond primary school (Nielsen, 2010). Furthermore, educational choices appear shaped by gender, as more boys than girls choose vocational training. Boys and girls also choose different vocational fields, such as motor mechanic or hairdresser (Ibid.). Young men are overrepresented in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), whereas women dominate in the arts, teaching and health sciences⁸ (Henningsen, 2010; Kalpazidou

⁶ The aim of this legislation was to increase transparency and to facilitate the monitoring of gender pay gaps in individual companies, as well as across industries (Holt & Larsen, 2011).

⁷ According to rumour, the target figures legislation was only preserved due to some political parties’ fear of *actual* gender quotas being enforced upon Denmark by the EU (i.e., based on a ‘lesser of two evils’ logic).

⁸ These statements obviously represent generalisations, as variation is noticeable within the STEM fields (women are represented in higher numbers in the ‘wet sciences’, such as biology and chemistry; and some fields in the humanities are also more gender-balanced at the under-graduate level, such as philosophy, linguistics and information science (Henningsen, 2010; 2008; University of Copenhagen, 2019).

Schmidt et al., 2017a: 59–60; DMES, 2019b). Unsurprisingly, gendered educational choices lead to gender-segregated labour markets. Thus, the Danish labour market is noticeably segregated by women primarily being employed in the public sector and men in the private sector (Kalpazidou Schmidt et al., 2017a: 69). In 2012, 74 per cent of all employees in the private sector were men, and 78 per cent of employees in regions and municipalities were women (Larsen et al., 2016: 12). Teigen and Skjeie (2017, citing Reisel & Teigen, 2014) argue that '[s]ome occupations have become more gender balanced, in particular as a consequence of more women entering these occupations, but very few women work in some of the most common occupations for men, and very few men work in some of the most common occupations for women' (p. 11). This way, some professions are implicitly seen as 'women's professions' (usually public sector jobs) and others as 'men's professions' (typically in the private sector) (Larsen et al., 2016 cited by Kalpazidou Schmidt et al., 2017a: 69). Most women would prefer a more gender-balanced workplace, however, which applies to women working both in fields in which they are the minority and majority (Confederation of Danish Trade Unions, 2019).

Vertical gender segregation is also evident. In 2015, only 14.2 per cent (less than one in seven) of the top managers in the largest 1,200 Danish companies were women (Larsen et al., 2016: 1), and the glass ceiling appears stable. Despite the gender targets legislation (aimed at increasing the share of women in top leadership positions), little has changed since 2013 (DIHR, 2015; DBA, 2018). Denmark has fallen from number 28 (out of 128) in 2008 (Hausmann et al., 2008) to number 38 (out of 149) in 2018 (Schwab et al., 2018) in terms of women's 'economic participation and opportunity' in the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index. With respect to women's representation among legislators, senior officials and managers, Denmark has dropped from number 73 in the Gender Gap Index in 2008 (Hausmann et al., 2008) to number 95 in 2018 (Schwab et al., 2018). These developments seem to suggest that the previously achieved progress in relation to women's opportunities and empowerment in business and politics may be in jeopardy.

Horizontal and vertical gender segregation in the workplace also affect the gender pay gap. According to Statistics Denmark (2019b), the overall gender pay gap in Denmark has decreased from 16 per cent in 2004 to 12.8 per cent in 2018. In 2006, Gupta, Smith & Verner (2006) found the gap to be widening in the higher part of the wages distribution (cited by Lister, 2009: 258). Even

after controlling⁹ for education, job function, seniority etc., an inexplicable pay gap between the male and female labour force persists (DIHR, 2016; Kalpazidou Schmidt et al., 2017a: 84; see also Danish Ministry for Gender Equality, 2019a: 15). Cultural factors may affect the inexplicable gender pay gap, such as the fact that women and men with comparable educations and jobs often perform different kinds of work and assignments (Danish Ministry of Employment, 2016: 18–19). The gender pay gap is smaller for 25–39-year-old women than for those aged 40–59, which may be explained by generational differences in educational attainment between women (Ibid.: 7–8). Still, in their report, the Danish Ministry of Employment (2016) stresses the need to solve the gender pay gap, as men achieve better returns on their education than women (p. 17). Moreover, the division of domestic labour in heterosexual households affects the gender pay gap. On average, Danish men have more professional experience than their female peers due to higher rates of absence among women in relation to childbirth and higher part-time employment rates (Cevea, 2016; Teigen & Skjeie, 2017). Following Nielsen, Simonsen and Verner (2003), women are subject to ‘a child penalty and they lose income increases, career chances, pay increase and pension for every child’ (cited by Borchorst, 2009: 8).

In other words, decisions made in the home have a significant impact on the opportunities available to Danish women at work. Heterosexual households appear to remain organised in ways that resemble the tradition model, in which men are the main breadwinner, whereas women, while also pursuing careers, assume responsibility for the lion’s share of care and household work (Borchorst, 2004). According to Eurobarometer (EC, 2017) 95 per cent of Danish respondents approve of a man doing his equal share of household work (p. T15/121). However, comparing 2000 with 2010, women generally spent only *a little* less time, and men *a little* more on unpaid work/domestic work, including household tasks and childcare (Kalpazidou Schmidt et al., 2017a: 42). Women still spend approximately one hour more per day on such work (Cevea, 2016: 4), and they also take the majority of leave days in relation to childbirth. In 2015, Danish mothers held on average 297.6 days of maternity leave, whereas Danish fathers held 30.8 days (Statistics Denmark, 2019c). The division of care work may be shaped by economic considerations and gendered differential earnings (Lister, 2009), but also by cultural perceptions. Parental leave is often perceived as ‘for women’ (Kalpazidou Schmidt et al.,

⁹ ‘The unadjusted gender pay gap represents the difference between average gross hourly earnings of male paid employees and of female paid employees as a percentage of average gross hourly earnings of male paid employees’ (Kalpazidou Schmidt et al., 2017a: 84).

2017a: 37), and work cultures may discourage men from asking for the paternity leave to which they are entitled and which many desire (Bloksgaard & Rostgaard, 2016). In 2014, the Danish Institute for Human Rights found that one in five male respondents to their study had taken less paternity leave than they wanted (DIHR, 2015). Also in 2014, 45 per cent of Danish fathers took only two weeks of paternity leave, while 18 per cent of fathers took no leave at all (Statistics Denmark, 2015). However, Niss et al. (2019) stress that fathers who take paternity leave are different from those who do not on a range of demographics, including level of education, age and employment situation. Other, less easily measurable dimensions that shape men's decisions to take paternity leave include attitudes towards fatherhood and gender equality (Ibid.).

Despite the gender discrepancies described above, including the underrepresentation of women in politics and corporate leadership, as well as persistent gender imbalance with respect to unpaid domestic work, the Danish context is characterised by the strong belief that gender equality has become the reality in Denmark (Borchorst, 2009; Dahlerup, 2018). According to the EC, in 2012, Denmark had the highest score of 'perceived gender equality'¹⁰ in the European Union, with 81 per cent of Danish respondents claiming gender discrimination to be rare or non-existent (2012b: 34). However, men are significantly more confident in the achievement of gender equality (Confederation of Danish Trade Unions, 2019).¹¹ This prevalent assumption appears to imply that Denmark also stands out as particularly reluctant to intervene actively to change gender dynamics. For instance, a staggering 61 per cent of Danes are against legal measures to ensure gender parity in politics, making Denmark the European 'high scorer' in this regard (EC, 2017: 53). Moreover, only 10 per cent of Danish respondents in 2012 opted for binding legal measures to ensure gender-balanced corporate boards, the lowest share of all surveyed European countries, with 54 per cent of Danes supporting the self-

¹⁰ 75% agreed that equality has been achieved 'in politics'; 68% agreed that equality has been achieved 'at work' (EC, 2017: 9); and 58% agreed that equality has been achieved 'in leadership positions in companies and other organisations' (Ibid.: 10).

¹¹ In a survey by the Confederation of Danish Trade Unions (2019), approximately every third male respondent rejected that gender inequalities exist in Denmark, whereas only one-in-seven female respondent expressed this view (p. 13). 42% of male respondents agreed further that, overall, there is a very high degree of gender equality in the Danish labour market, whereas only 16% of the female respondents agreed hereto (p. 11). Furthermore, every second male respondent compared to one-in-three female respondents agreed that gender equality is achieved on the domestic front (Ibid.).

regulation of companies to set their own gender targets (EC, 2012a: 43; see also Agustín & Siim, 2015).

Moreover, the previously strong Danish feminist movement gradually disbanded during the 1990s, leading to a weakening of the focus on women's issues in politics (Borchorst, 2009; Dahlerup, 2018). Despite the continued existence of sexual harassment in work contexts (Borchorst & Agustín, 2017; see also Deen et al., 2018),¹² more recent feminist social movements, such as #MeToo, have seemingly had less impact in Denmark than elsewhere (Askanius & Hartley, 2019; Reestorff, 2019). Danish culture is characterised by large degrees of informality between people and a general directness in communication, in addition to values of freedom of speech and a laid-back broad-mindedness 'in particular in relation to the body and sexuality' (known as *frisind*: a free spirit) (Danish Ministry of Culture, 2016). These cultural traits presumably give a certain leeway and leniency for 'cosy sexism' (*hyggesexisme*, i.e., sexism under the pretext of humour). Nevertheless, opposition to feminism remains widespread (Orange & Duncan, 2019), except with respect to gender equality among minority-ethnic groups of women. Whereas gender inequality is generally perceived to be a problem of the past for majority-ethnic Danish women (EC, 2012a; 2012b; 2017), the emancipation of (in particular non-Western, Muslim) female immigrants and refugees living in Denmark has received increasing political attention (Siim & Borchorst, 2008; Siim & Skjeie, 2008). Borchorst (2009) argues that this 'group is subject to much stereotyping, and [these women] are constructed as passive victims of oppression based in culture and religion' (pp. 8–9; see also Følner et al., 2018). In this way, the discussion around veiling in Denmark (finally leading to the so-called 'burka ban' in 2018) has generally been framed as protecting the defining Danish value of 'gender equality' (Dahlerup, 2018) and as liberating minority-ethnic women living in Denmark (see Rosenberger & Sauer, 2012).

Furthermore, Danish men top negative statistics such as low educational attainment (see above), suicide rates across all age groups (Centre for Suicide Research, 2018), and men are much more likely to engage in and be convicted of violence¹³ (Statistics Denmark, 2019d). Danish men also have shorter life expectancies than do women (Statistics Denmark, 2019e). The changes that have occurred to the position of women in society over the past 50 years or so have not been matched by significant changes to the roles and positions of

¹² The Confederation of Danish Trade Unions (2019) found that 22% of all respondents identified women's risk of being sexually harassed as the biggest barrier to gender equality at workplaces (p. 12).

¹³ Per 100,000: 238.1 men and 36.7 women (2018) (Statistics Denmark, 2019d).

men¹⁴ (Lister, 2009). Therefore, when political initiatives for women are discussed, politically or in individual workplaces, the trope that gender equality ‘has gone too far’ is commonplace in debates and discussions (Dahlerup, 2018) together with the view that men are at a disadvantage in the now supposedly ‘feminised’ Danish society (Larsen, 2001; Nielsen, 2010). For example, more men than women perceive the fact that men are now generally less educated than women as one of the most important contemporary GE challenges (Confederation of Danish Trade Unions, 2019: 13).

In sum, the above paints a complex picture of a context that has undoubtedly ‘come a long way’ in terms of improving equality for women (Borchorst, 2004: 116), but what constitutes ‘equality’ is constantly negotiated and contested through history, politics and culture. With these points, one could challenge Denmark’s reputation as part of ‘the Nordics’ as a global GE leader. At the same time, a recent report, Equal Measures¹⁵ (2019c) placed Denmark on top as *the* global GE leader. The report builds on 51 indicators across 14 of the 17 official United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and covers 129 countries around the world (please see appendix 1.5. below for full indicator list). In sum, Denmark is simultaneously falling behind and topping charts (Hausmann et al., 2008; Lister, 2009; Teigen & Skjeie, 2017; Schwab et al., 2018; Equal Measures, 2019c). In order to further explore this somewhat murky picture of Denmark’s position internationally, I therefore now turn to a comparative perspective. I focus on the most relevant dimensions to this dissertation, namely women’s empowerment at work and in politics, as well as cultural perceptions of gender and equality.

1.2.2. Denmark by comparison

The Equal Measures report (2019c) is interesting because it is more comprehensive than, for example, the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap

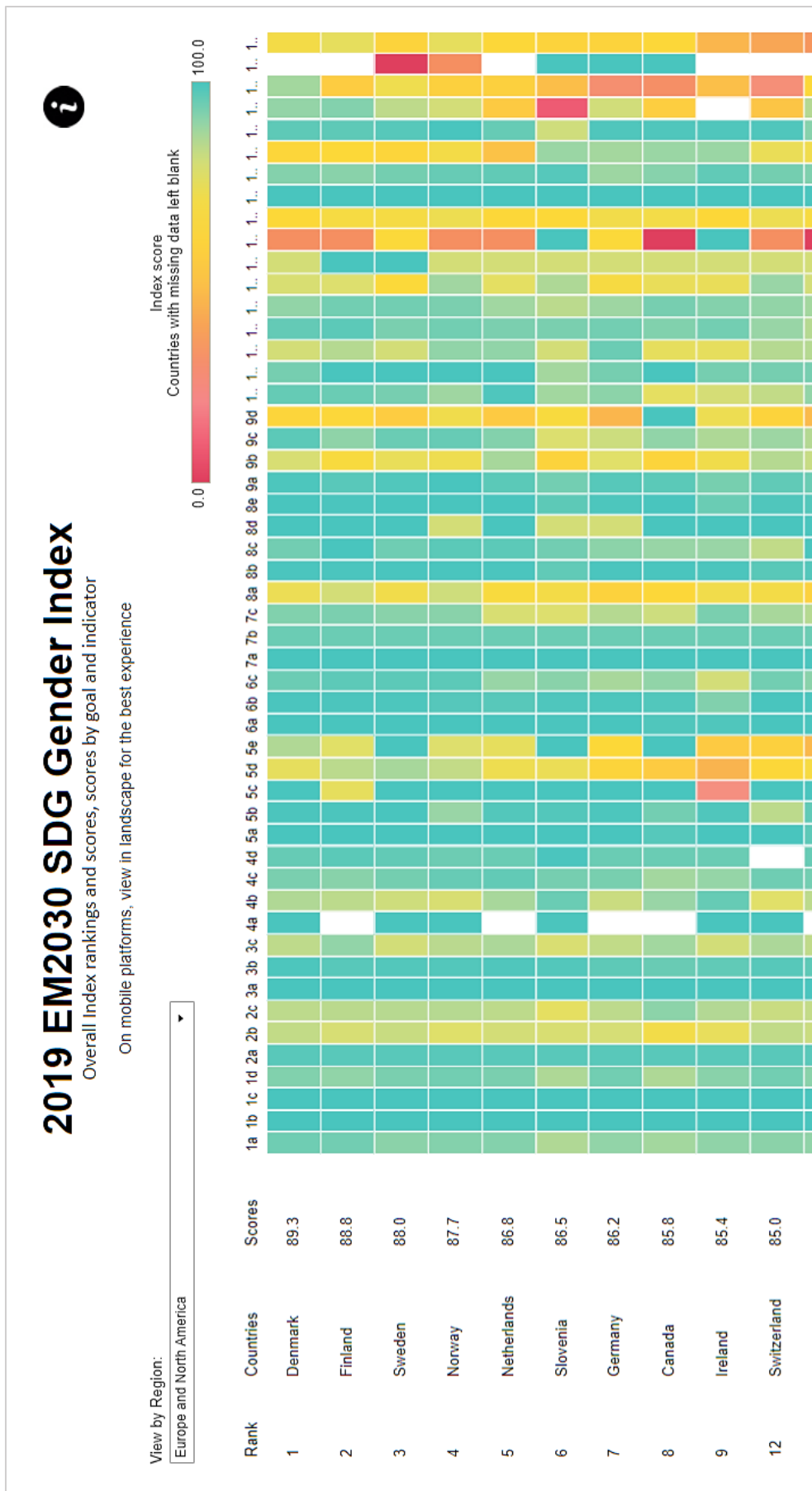
¹⁴ Nevertheless, masculinity ideals in Denmark *are* changing (see Bloksgaard et al., 2015; Følner et al., 2019).

¹⁵ Equal Measures 2030 is an independent regional and global, civil society and private sector-led partnership, which connects data and evidence with advocacy and action, helping to fuel progress towards gender equality. Its aim is to make easy-to-use data and evidence available that may guide efforts to reach the transformational agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 with a particular focus on gender equality. Partners include: African Women’s Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), Asia-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW), Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean for the Defence of Women’s Rights (CLADEM), Plan International and Women Deliver (Equal Measures, 2019a).

Index Report, which pertains only to economic and political empowerment. Equal Measures also includes important issues such as reproductive health, freedom from discrimination and women's general safety. It is therefore obviously a very positive achievement for Denmark to top a global ranking like the Equal Measures SDG Gender Index. Denmark undeniably performs well on parameters such as low levels of poverty (SDG 1) and hunger (SDG 2), good general health scores (SDG 3) and access to education (SDG 4).¹⁶ All of these positive scores may be attributed to the Danish welfare system, which includes universal healthcare, free education and social security (Stier et al., 2001; Borchorst & Siim, 2002; Borchorst, 2009). Denmark also scores high on areas such as water and sanitation (SDG 6), clean energy (SDG 7), worker rights (SDG 8) and overall social equality (SDG 10). However, the report concludes that 'every country in the world, even high-income countries, can improve their laws, policies, or public budget decisions to reach gender equality by 2030' (p. 19). This also applies to Denmark.

¹⁶ Although Denmark only ranks fourteenth on SDG 4 Education, behind countries such as Georgia, Ireland, Japan, Kazakhstan, Lithuania and Slovenia, due to a lower percentage of young women who have completed secondary school and lower literacy rates amongst women (Equal Measures, 2019c: 17).

Fig. 1.1. 2019 Equal Measures SDG Gender Index



Source: Equal Measures (2019b).

Looking over Fig. 1.1, a few adverse indicators stand out (marked in olive-green and yellow), incl.:¹⁷

- 5d Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament
- 5e Proportion of ministerial/senior government positions held by women
- 8a Wage equality between women and men for similar work
- 9d Proportion of women in science and technology research positions
- 11c Percentage of women aged 15+ who report that they ‘feel safe walking alone at night in the city or area where [they] live’
- 16c Percentage of seats held by women on a country’s Supreme Court or highest court
- 17d Openness of gender statistics

As seen in Fig. 1.1, Denmark is not the only high-scorer¹⁸ facing these problems. 5d and e, 8a, 9d, 16c and 17d consistently constitute ‘thorny issues’, as they are labelled in the report (Equal Measures, 2019c: 19) across the top 10. These issues generally pertain to women’s economic and political empowerment, which is the specific focus of the World Economic Forum’s Gender Gap Index. This report can therefore be used for a deep dive into this topic. For example, zooming in on the ‘political empowerment’¹⁹ indicator cluster of Global Gender Gap Index (Schwab et al., 2018), Denmark ranks number 15, whereas its Nordic neighbours rank numbers 1 (Iceland), 3 (Norway), 6 (Finland) and 7 (Sweden) (see Fig. 1.2 below). In 2015, none of the Nordic countries had achieved full gender parity in their national assemblies. The Swedish parliament was the most gender-balanced (44% women) and the Danish parliament the least (37% women) (Teigen & Skjeie, 2017: 14). Strikingly, ‘Bolivia,

¹⁷ Others problem areas are:

- 9b Proportion of women who report being satisfied with the quality of roads in the city or area where they live
- 10c Proportion of ratified human rights instruments regarding migration
- 13a Extent to which the delegation representing the country at the UNFCCC is gender-balanced
- 13b (red) Extent to which a state is committed to disaster-risk reduction
- 13c Level of climate vulnerability.

¹⁸ Here, I have focused on Europe and North America: Finland, Sweden, Norway, Netherlands, Slovenia, Germany, Canada, Ireland and Switzerland. For the whole world, in addition to Denmark, the top 10 includes Finland, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Germany, Canada, Ireland and Australia.

¹⁹ This indicator cluster covers women in parliament, women in ministerial positions and years with female head of state (last 50).

Namibia, and Senegal (and over a dozen other countries in the index) have higher percentages of women in parliament than Denmark' (Equal Measures, 2019c: 19). Nevertheless, the Danish score remains well above the European average (Teigen & Skjeie, 2017: 7, building on data from the European Institute for Gender Equality, EIGE).

Denmark also falls noticeably behind with respect to 'economic participation and opportunity'²⁰ in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index (see Fig. 1.2). Here, it ranks number 38 in comparison to Sweden, Norway, Iceland and Finland, which rank 9, 11, 16 and 17, respectively (Schwab et al., 2018). For example, women's representation among executive leaders has long been modest (Teigen & Skjeie, 2017: 16). Nevertheless, the presence of women on corporate boards across the Nordics has only increased over the last decade, particularly in Norway and Iceland as a consequence of the introduction of gender-balance regulations (see Fig. 1.3 below) (Ibid.). Denmark's non-binding, soft gender targets legislation, on the other hand, appears to have produced little change on this score (DIHR, 2015; DBA, 2018), which leads me to a characteristic of Denmark that seems to set it apart from the rest of the Nordics.

²⁰ This indicator cluster covers: Labour force participation, wage equality for similar work, estimated earned income, legislators, senior officials and managers, professional and technical workers.

Fig. 1.2. 2018 World Economic Forum global gender equality rankings

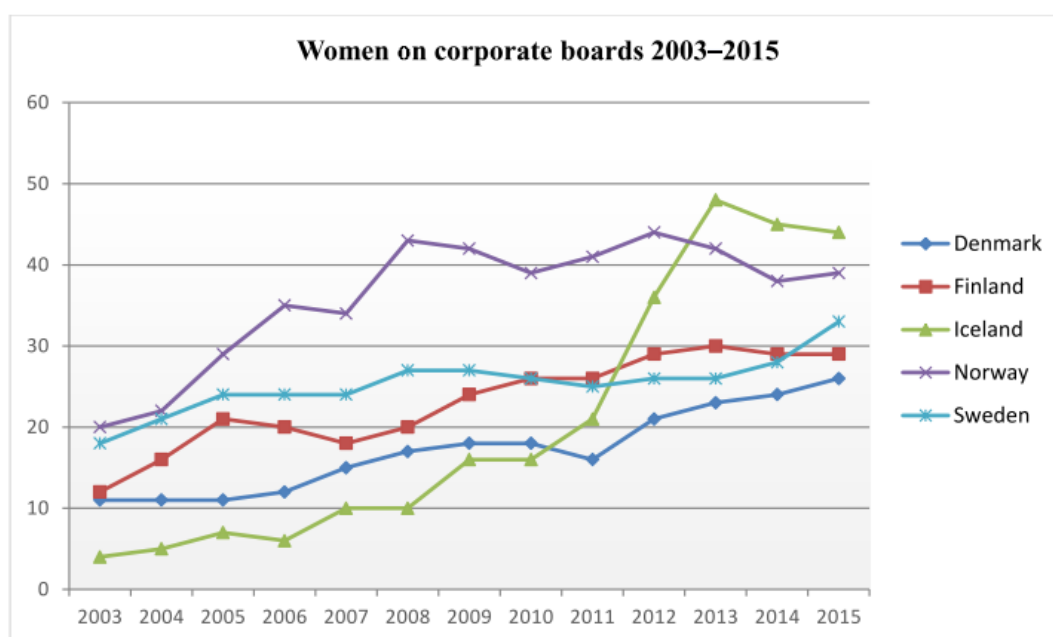
Table 3: Global rankings, 2018

Country	GLOBAL INDEX		ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION AND OPPORTUNITY		EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT		HEALTH AND SURVIVAL		POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT	
	Rank	Score (0–1)	Rank	Score (0–1)	Rank	Score (0–1)	Rank	Score (0–1)	Rank	Score (0–1)
Iceland	1	0.858	16	0.793	39	0.999	121	0.968	1	0.674
Norway	2	0.835	11	0.806	41	0.999	95	0.972	3	0.563
Sweden	3	0.822	9	0.808	52	0.998	115	0.969	7	0.512
Finland	4	0.821	17	0.786	1	1.000	60	0.977	6	0.519
Nicaragua	5	0.809	69	0.679	36	1.000	1	0.980	2	0.576
Rwanda	6	0.804	30	0.743	109	0.961	90	0.973	4	0.539
New Zealand	7	0.801	23	0.761	1	1.000	107	0.970	9	0.472
Philippines	8	0.799	14	0.801	1	1.000	42	0.979	13	0.416
Ireland	9	0.796	43	0.725	57	0.996	111	0.970	8	0.493
Namibia	10	0.789	12	0.804	42	0.999	1	0.980	20	0.375
Slovenia	11	0.784	15	0.795	29	1.000	1	0.980	22	0.361
France	12	0.779	63	0.685	1	1.000	78	0.974	10	0.458
Denmark	13	0.778	38	0.734	1	1.000	100	0.971	15	0.406
Germany	14	0.776	36	0.734	97	0.976	85	0.973	12	0.418
United Kingdom	15	0.774	52	0.705	38	0.999	110	0.970	11	0.421
Canada	16	0.771	27	0.748	1	1.000	104	0.971	21	0.365
Latvia	17	0.758	10	0.807	1	1.000	1	0.980	42	0.246
Bulgaria	18	0.756	50	0.708	87	0.989	42	0.979	25	0.346

Source: Schwab et al. (2018: 10).

Denmark appears particularly unwilling to legislate on gender issues, as also hinted at above. Iceland, Norway and Sweden, on the other hand, continue to push for gender equality change through legislative measures. In 2002, Norway became the first country in the world to introduce a 40 per cent gender quota for boards of directors in companies (Birkvad, 2016). In 2016, Sweden's self-professed feminist government ensured Swedish fathers at least three months' paid paternity leave (Sweden.se, 2018). In Denmark, despite Danes being overwhelmingly supportive of fathers taking childcare leave (EC, 2017: 33), earmarked paternity leave has been a highly contested issue (Borchorst, 2004, 2009; Teigen & Skjeie, 2017), as already mentioned. Also, Danes seem to prefer that companies have the freedom to address gender disparity in corporate boards individually (EC, 2012a: 43). Denmark also has the highest levels surveyed across Europe with respect to opposition to legal measures to ensure gender parity in corporate boards (Ibid.: 46)²¹ as well as in politics (EC, 2017: 53).²²

Fig. 1.3. Women on corporate boards in the Nordic countries, 2003–2015 (%)



Nordic Council of Ministers (2016) <http://norden.statbank.dk/lab08>

Source: Teigen & Skjeie (2017: 16).

²¹ Although Danes support 'because it is a matter of equal rights for women and men' and 'because it would make a difference in the way companies are run' as key arguments for promoting gender balance in corporate leadership (EC, 2012a: 37).

²² At the same time, 44% of Danes indicated that they felt that there ought to be more women in politics (EC, 2017: 49).

Iceland, as the speedy latecomer, has now ‘complete[d] a full decade in the [World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap] Index’s top spot’ (Schwab, 2018: 18). This might partly be due to its GE policies. To the newspaper the Guardian, Rósa Guðrún Erlingsdóttir (head of the equality unit at Iceland’s welfare ministry) explained that equality

won’t come about by itself, from the bottom up alone. Our experience is that you need legislative measures to move things forward. People accept that; we saw it with mandatory quotas for women on company boards. If politicians want to wait until no one opposes it, it will never happen. (Henley, 2018: online, no page number)

Perhaps following the same logic, as the first country in the world, Iceland now legally enforces equal pay requiring employers to document that they remunerate women and men carrying out comparable work the same (Marinósdóttir & Erlingsdóttir, 2017).²³ The Icelandic ‘Equal Pay Standard’ (enacted in 2018) is a tool to ‘enforce the letter of law from 1961’ and to make ‘the salary system more transparent and, moreover, it moves the responsibility for respecting the law from the employee to the employer’ (Marinósdóttir, 2019).

Rósa Guðrún Erlingsdóttir’s quote above speaks to differences in approach and culture. Culture shapes widely held assumptions about gender and equality, which in turn shape whether and how inequality is addressed politically and managerially in work organisations. As already mentioned, Danish culture is very informal and characterised by this particularly free-spirited liberality (the aforementioned *frisind*) (Danish Ministry of Culture, 2016). This free-spiritedness expresses itself in, for example, the trope of ‘Swedish conditions’ which regularly appears in public debates relating to especially (anti-) immigration (e.g., Kjærsgaard, 2017; Skaarup, 2017). To Danes, ‘Swedish conditions’ captures a sort of stifling, overly politically correct culture, which in the name of sensitivity and consideration for others prevents free debate and the open acknowledgement of ‘real world’ problems (see Hedetoft, 2006; Andersson & Hilson, 2009). The Danish fear of ‘Swedish conditions’ also extends to gender equality and feminism. For instance, in Denmark, one in four disapprove of a man identifying as feminist, compared with just 11 per cent of Swedes. One in four Danes also disapprove of men reproaching their friends for making sexist jokes, compared to just 4 per cent of Swedes (EC, 2017: 34). The differences between Denmark and Sweden on this score have been particularly pronounced in relation to the #MeToo movement (Askanius & Hartley, 2019; Reestorff, 2019). Askanius and Hartley (2019) found that, in the Danish

²³ The UK has followed with a similar initiative; see chapter 6.

media, #MeToo was mostly pejoratively framed as an expression of a ‘grievance culture’ (*krænkelleskultur*) and a ‘regime of political correctness’ (p. 28). Interestingly, in its report, the Danish Ministry for Gender Equality (2019b) states that ‘[t]he #MeToo movement has gained significant momentum in Denmark’ (p. 19). It further declares that ‘massive media attention’ (p. 8) and a newfound ‘higher awareness’ led the Danish Government to act ‘promptly’ by introducing new legislation (e.g., raising the compensation levels for harassment in the workplace) and targeted initiatives (e.g., codes of conduct) (p. 19). As such, there seems to be exist two divergent versions of events pertaining to the impact of the #MeToo movement in Denmark.

In sum, I have explored in the above how Denmark fares internationally, and the overall picture is undeniably positive. There is much progress to celebrate. When making comparisons to the nations closest to us and with whom we usually compare ourselves, however, the picture becomes less clear. There seems to be a need to nuance Denmark’s image as unequivocally part of ‘the Nordics’ as world gender equality spearhead nations. When it comes to gender equality, the Nordics are characterised by ‘shared histories but separate ways’ (Askanius & Hartley, 2019: 23). To stress this point, there is one further and fundamental dimension which distinguishes Denmark from the rest of the Nordics and which is crucial for policymaking and implementation:

While gender equality issues in some (Nordic) countries are addressed as important societal and democratic issues, it appears that in Denmark, focus on gender equality is a method for improving the general economy, research quality and innovation, or Denmark’s position in a globalised world in general, rather than an independent goal, desirable in itself. (Kalpazidou Schmidt et al., 2017a: 44)²⁴

This is particularly evident in the public and political debates around the issues of women in leadership and among top researcher positions in academia. These are the topics to which I now turn.

1.2.3. Gender and business

As I have already argued above, the Danish labour market is highly gender-segregated across sectors. Women mainly work in the public sector, whereas most men work in private businesses (Kalpazidou Schmidt et al., 2017a: 69; Larsen et al., 2016: 12). It is therefore hardly surprising that women are also underrepresented in corporate leadership. According to a status report and action plan published in 2017, 17 per cent of the approximately 346,000 top

²⁴ See also Nielsen, 2014b.

executive positions on corporate boards and in company directorates were occupied by women (Danish Ministry for Gender Equality, 2019a). As made evident in both the Equal Measures report (2019c) and in the Global Gender Gap Index (Schwab et al., 2018), women's absence from corporate power constitutes an indicator with adverse effects for Denmark's overall GE performance. Still, while changes over time are minor (DIHR, 2015; DBA, 2018), the numbers are improving. With the introduction of the gender targets legislation, the proportion of women on boards in the largest publicly listed companies has increased from 20.8 per cent in 2012 to 30.7 per cent in 2018 (Danish Ministry for Gender Equality, 2019b: 21–22). For all publicly listed companies, the proportion of women on boards has increased from 9.6 per cent in 2012 to 15.9 per cent in 2017 (Ibid.).

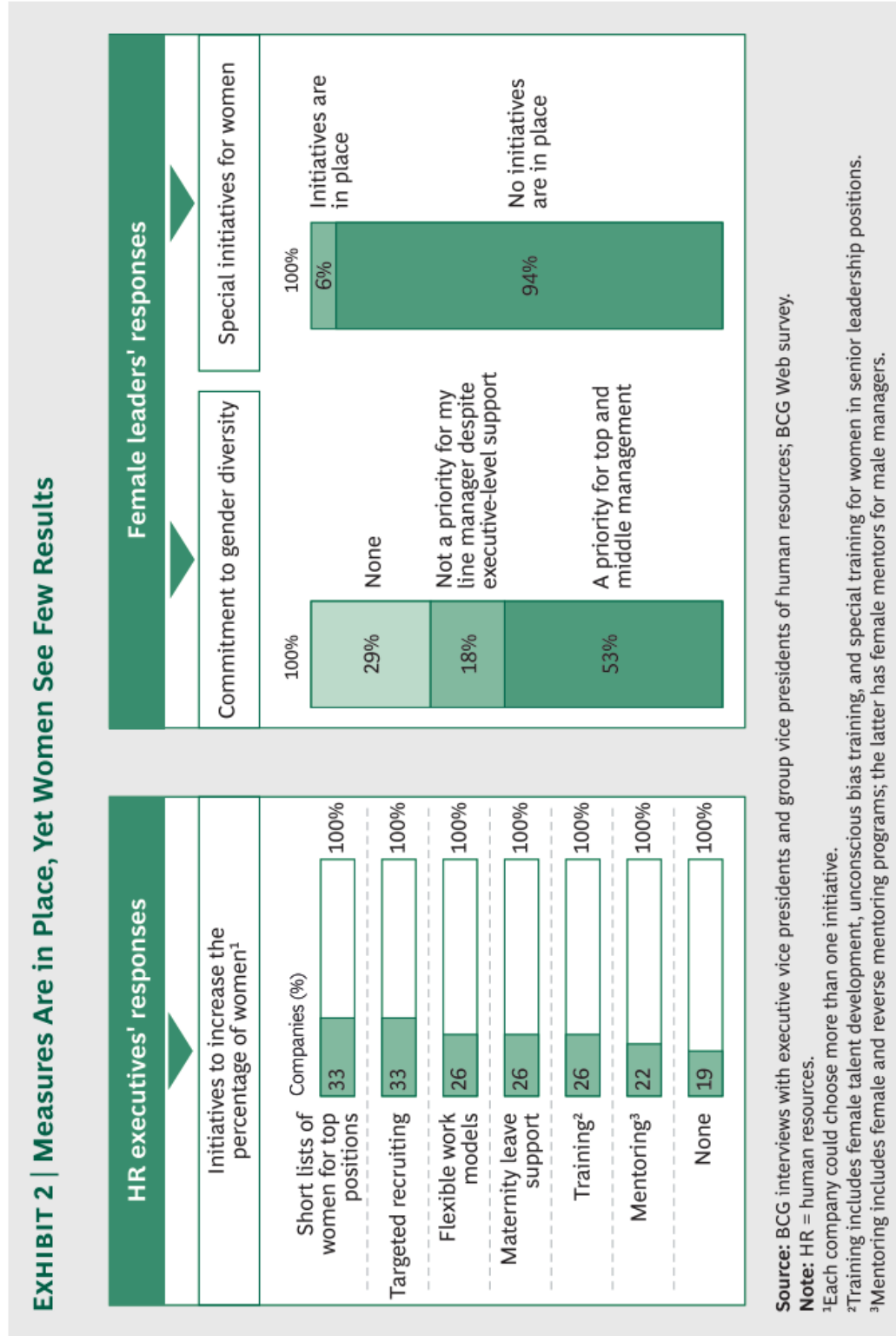
However, the quantitative indicator 'women in leadership' can only tell us so much about the gender disparity in companies. Conversely, recent qualitative studies on the topic provide insights into why the corporate landscape appears to cater more to men's careers than to those of women, including the work of the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) in Denmark. Poulsen et al.'s (2016) report points out the prevalence of highly gender-stereotypical assumptions among their interview participants.²⁵ In particular, the view that women presumably have limited interest in leadership roles surfaced, which resonates with the astounding finding of the EC (2012a), which found that every second Danish respondent agreed that 'women are less interested than men in positions of responsibility' (p. 12). Importantly, in the BCG study, this belief was voiced by HR executives, whereas female leaders said 'that they either were actively seeking a promotion or were recently promoted' (Poulsen et al., 2016: 6). Conversely, the women mentioned barriers such as the organisation not valuing 'feminine leadership styles', the women not seeing any 'natural next [career] steps' ahead (pp. 7–8), or not being included in succession

²⁵ 'We interviewed human resources (HR) executives at 30 of Denmark's largest companies to understand their perspectives on gender diversity, the activities they have launched to increase the number of female leaders in their companies, and the obstacles they have faced. (See the Acknowledgments for a full list of companies). We also conducted an online survey of nearly 500 female leaders working for Danish companies in various roles ranging from middle manager to C-level executive. The sample covered various functions, with the biggest number of participants coming from marketing (17%), operations (17%), and HR (14%). The survey responses came from a variety of industries, including the consumer goods sector, health care, industrial goods, financial services, energy, and retail. The respondents' average tenure in their current leadership position was three years' (Poulsen et al., 2016: 4).

planning as suggested by this quote: ‘The interesting jobs at higher levels are already predetermined. We can’t apply for them’ (p. 6).

More than 80 per cent of the 30 organisations that the BCG investigated had programmes in place specifically aimed at supporting women (Ibid.: 4). This is hardly surprising, as many of these companies are probably affected by the Danish gender targets legislation, including the requirement to develop GE policies. However, it would appear as though at least some of these programmes may be ‘window dressing’. The interviewed female leaders are critical about the GE work of their organisations, to say the least (see Fig. 1.4 below): 94 per cent of female managers stated that their company had no programmes specifically for women (p. 5); 29 per cent of the women indicated that their company was not committed to gender diversity (the BCG’s terminology); and 18 per cent reported that gender diversity was not a priority to their line manager (p. 7). It is obviously possible that the interviewed women do not know of GE initiatives in place, such as short lists for top positions or targeted recruitment, as indicated by Fig. 1.4 Such HR measures are typically not communicated beyond HR and decision-makers.

Fig. 1.4. Boston Consulting Group, ‘Measures are in place, yet women see few results’



Source: Poulsen et al. (2016: 6).

In addition, trade unions are and have always been important in promoting gender equality in Denmark. ‘Denmark has a history of strong social partners²⁶ negotiating employment conditions for employees’ (Kalpazidou Schmidt et al., 2017a: 23), including salary and parental leave rights. Although membership is decreasing, Denmark still has one of the highest degrees of unionisation according to OECD figures (Andersen & Wilken, 2019). The union movement therefore has considerable weight to influence politics and individual industries, which they exercise by organising a range of different activities, groups and campaigns (Kalpazidou Schmidt et al., 2017a: 23). For example, the Confederation of Danish Trade Unions organises an annual campaign in November called ‘Women’s last workday’ (*Kvindernes sidste arbejdsdag*). The message is that ‘if there is a gender pay gap at 16%–18%, then women should take the rest of the year off’ (Ibid.: 24). More recently, the Danish association for students and graduates in Law, Business Economics and Political and Social Sciences (*DJØF*) launched its Gender Equality Pledge (*ligestillingsløftet*), which encourages politicians to commit to work actively to promote gender equality in order to improve Denmark’s equality performance, at least to the level of our Nordic neighbours (DJØF, 2019). The pledge focuses on six pivotal areas throughout the lives of girls and women contributing to gender disparity: Gendered socialisation concerning the ambitions and skills of girls, performance pressures and stress for young women, increasing paternal participation in childcare, flexible career patterns, more women in leadership, and inequality in pensions and savings. DJØF states that it will monitor and report on these indicators and hold signatories accountable to their commitment. Finally, unions have the capacity to monitor gender pay gaps among their members, which for example the Association of Engineers (*IDA*) has done (Association of Engineers, 2018a), this way informing political debates.

For this final part, I will focus on engineering, as the case organisation in chapters 5 and 6 is an engineering company. Overall, women constitute 24 per cent of the engineering workforce (Association of Engineers, 2018b: 2). In recent years, there has been a slight increase in the share of female engineering

²⁶ ‘Danish social partners include the Confederation of Danish Trade Unions (Fagbevægelsens Hovedorganisation), the Danish Confederation of Salaried Employees and Civil Servants (FTF), the Danish Confederation of Professional Associations (AC), the Danish association for students and graduates in Law, Business Economics and Political and Social Sciences (DJØF), the Danish Association of Masters and PhDs (DM), the Confederation of Danish Employers (DA), the Danish Employers Association for the Financial Sector (FA), Local Government Denmark (KL), Danish Regions, the Agency for Modernisation Ministry of Finance (Moderniseringsstyrelsen)’ (Kalpazidou Schmidt et al., 2017/2017a: 19).

graduates (Kalpazidou Schmidt et al., 2017a: 59), including in newer engineering programmes with a broader contextual approach, such as biotechnology, architecture and design, and global business (Du & Kolmos, 2009). The assumption is that with more female engineering graduates, the gender balance of the overall professional group will increase. Over time, this should lead to more female leaders in engineering – the ‘pipeline’ logic. Men are currently significantly overrepresented as leaders in the profession; however, the share of leaders among each gender also varies. That is, 15 per cent of male engineers are leaders compared to a mere 9 per cent of female engineers (Association of Engineers, 2018b). This fact stresses the fallacy of the pipeline argument. Although organisational cultures change alongside societal culture, engineering is often considered a traditionally masculine field (Kamp, 2005). This may express itself in how women’s competences are systematically undervalued and that they (as tokens) may feel conspicuous and vulnerable (Ibid.). Nielsen’s (2008) research participants, female engineers, describe how they are constantly interpreting and negotiating gendered codes and ideals to which they must adapt in order to be perceived as legitimate engineers (p. 183). For female engineers, being tokens thus implies that their self-awareness increases concerning how they are met and read by others in the organisation *as women* – an emotional burden from which male engineers are spared (Ibid.).

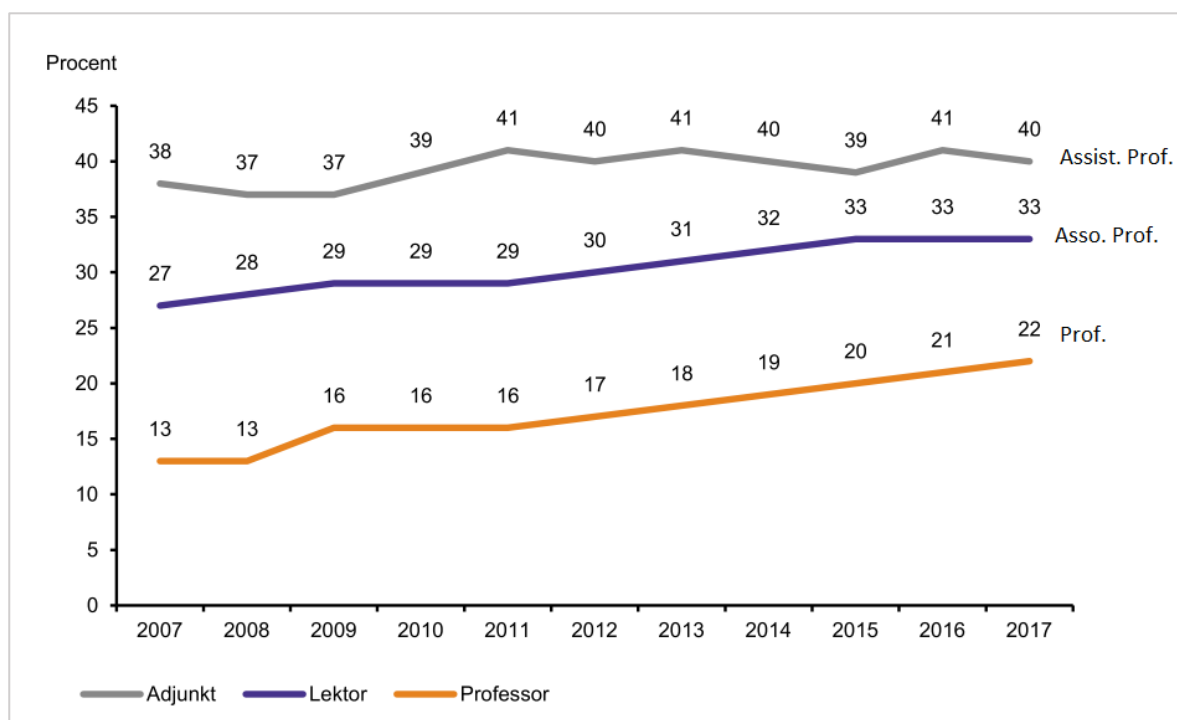
As the extensive feminist literature on organisations and leadership indicates, the above-described dynamics are not unique to the engineering field (see, e.g., Kanter, 1977; Acker, 1990, 2006; Lorber, 1994). Gender dynamics are naturally more or less pronounced, or play out in different ways, depending on the specific organisational context in question. I will therefore now turn to the other context under study in this dissertation. In the following, I unfold what characterises Danish academia in terms of gender and how inequalities are addressed.

1.2.4. Gender and academia

According to the Equal Measures (2019c) report, the indicator ‘proportion of women in science and technology research positions’ stands out as an area with adverse effects for Denmark. In its second rendition of the so-called ‘Talent Barometer’ report, DMES (2019a) stated: ‘Women leave research and the academic career track more often than men. There exists neither clear nor unambiguous explanations for, why this is the case’ (p. 10; my translation). While 59 per cent of all graduates are women, women make up 49 per cent of the PhDs across all fields, 40 per cent of postdocs and assistant professors, 33 per cent of associate professors and 22 per cent of all professors (2017 numbers; DMES, 2019a: 12). In total, there are almost twice as many male researchers

than female. This implies that there are very few role models for female university students and early-career researchers (DMES, 2015). While the share of female professors has increased steadily since 2007 (from 13%), the increase of female assistant and associate professors has stabilised in recent years at current levels (see Fig. 1.5 below) (p. 16). If this stabilisation continues, increased numbers of female professor may likely follow suit in the future.

Fig. 1.5. Share of female assistant, associate, and full professors at all Danish universities, 2007–2017

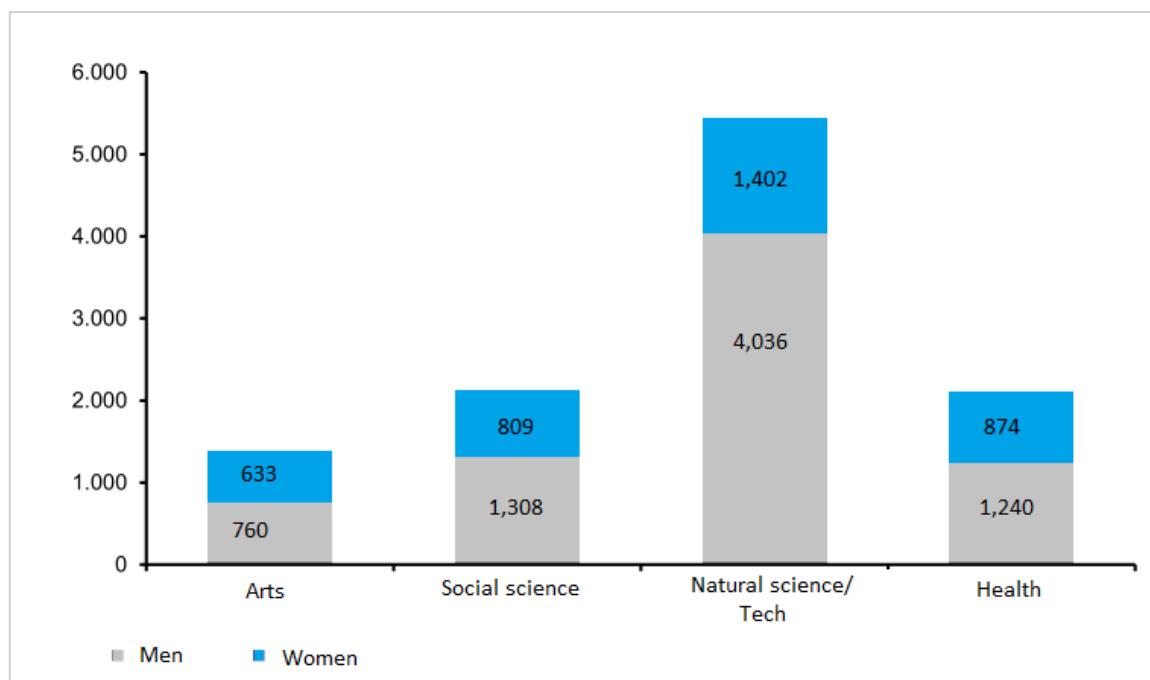


Source: DMES (2019a: 16).

Across the academic main areas, major differences are evident. When gender inequality in academia is discussed, focus is often on the presence and attrition of women in the natural and technical sciences, as these are the fields in which the share of women among researchers has always been lowest. Nevertheless, all of the other main areas face inequality problems and high female attrition rates. For example, women make up almost 70 per cent of the undergraduate students in the humanities (Universities in Denmark, 2018: 24). The share of female humanities professors is significantly higher than the share of female professors in the natural and technical sciences (27.5% compared with 11 and 7%; Kalpazidou Schmidt et al., 2017a: 78). However, the attrition of women in the humanities is greater than in the natural and technical sciences, with the biggest loss of women occurring between the master degree and PhD level, where the gender ratio drops to approximately 50–50 (DMES, 2015: 19).

Still, between 2007 and 2017, the number of female researchers across seniority levels in the humanities increased by 54 per cent, compared with just 5 per cent for men in this period (DMES, 2019a: 41), which is of course a striking development.

Fig. 1.6. Research staff across main scientific areas, all Danish universities, total population 2017



Source: Adapted from DMES (2019a: 40).

In international comparisons, as in the business sector, Denmark ranks below the other Nordic countries but above the European average with respect to female representation in research. In 2016, Danish female researchers (incl. PhDs) reached 44.5 per cent, as compared to Iceland (53.1%), Finland (48.4%), Norway (48.2%) and Sweden (44.9%) (DMES, 2019a: 12). The EU average was 42.4 per cent (EC, 2018). Furthermore, university leadership is also characterised by noticeable gender discrepancies. When the ‘Talent Barometer’ report was published (March 2019), women made up just 18 per cent of university directorates, and two universities had no women in their directorates at all (DMES, 2019a: 13). In other words, Danish universities are failing to advance women into top positions within their administrative bodies as well as in research. As mentioned above, women’s high attrition rates in academia constitute a highly complex problem,²⁷ the roots of which can be traced all the way back to the emergence of the modern sciences (Rosenbeck, 2014).

²⁷ See also Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace, 2017; 2019; Palmén & Kalpazidou Schmidt, 2019.

Below, I will focus on some of the gendered barriers characterising contemporary academic life. Still, building on Rosenbeck's work (2014), we can understand the role of gender in research as an interplay between structural, organisational, cultural and historical circumstances, which, in different ways, pose barriers for female academics (p. 129). I will highlight a few.

In terms of culture, academia's unfaltering championing of meritocracy²⁸ obscures how scientific quality and qualifications are understood and identified in people, which serves to reproduce the gendered status quo (Henningesen & Højgaard, 2006). The literature points to how ideas of 'talent' and 'academic excellence' are highly gendered notions (Lund, 2015; Herschberg et al., 2015; Nielsen, 2017), which increases the risk that female researchers are assessed below male peers despite comparable qualifications (DMES, 2015; 2019a). The masculine connotations of 'academic excellence' are rooted in the close link between research practice and masculine practice (Rosenbeck, 2014: 121–122); that is, the values surrounding 'the rational and competitive pursuit of knowledge' (Knights & Richards, 2003: 214). Furthermore, the academic world is also often considered an '(old) boys' club' (Benschop, 2009; van den Brink & Benschop, 2013). Nevertheless, as the share of women staff increases, the 'boys' club' dynamic inevitably changes, but the literature still indicates that the career opportunities of female researchers are hampered by their lack of access to networks (Ibarra, 1992; Smith-Doerr, 2004; Benschop, 2009; van den Brink & Benschop, 2013). While Danish universities are required to publicly advertise job vacancies, even before a job advertisement is published, networks influence how the advertisement is written and which individuals are assigned to the assessment panel (Rosenbeck, 2014: 209). Occasionally, the desired candidate is already identified beforehand (Ibid.; Nielsen, 2015). Network dynamics may be part of the explanation for why 38 per cent of the scientific jobs that were filled in Danish universities in 2015–2017 after being publicly advertised had no female applicants (DMES, 2019a: 13). Networks are also important determinants of access to research collaborations and international experience, which are considered crucial to academic career progression (Nielsen, 2016; Uhly, Visser & Zippel, 2017).

Other cultural dimensions include a highly competitive research environment (Schiebinger, 1999) linked with increasingly precarious working conditions (Herschberg et al., 2018; Taylor & Lahad, 2018), which have led to a 'punishing intensification of work' (Gill, 2009). In one survey of Danish researchers, female respondents generally felt less comfortable and lonelier in the workplace than the men. They also felt less included in collaborations and less recognised for a job well done (Nielsen, 2017: 143–144). The existence of

²⁸ See also Cech & Blair-Loy, 2010; Castilla & Benard, 2010.

sexist attitudes and explicit expressions of sexism towards women (Skewes et al., 2019) may also be part of the reason for female researchers having such feelings. These are the kinds of factors that affect the overall wellbeing of researchers at work and may cumulatively drive some out academia.

In addition to a lengthy period of insecure employment after the PhD, of consecutive short-term contracts with no guarantee of tenure in the end (DMES, 2015; Gleerup et al., 2018), international mobility has also become a prerequisite for a research career (Ackers, 2004; Uhly, Visser & Zippel, 2017). Both of these factors appear to deter women disproportionately from the research career track, as the insecurity and instability that they produce are believed to clash in particular with motherhood and traditional female family responsibilities (Ibid.; Basset, 2005; O’Laughlin & Bischoff, 2005; DMES, 2015). As Nielsen (2017) showed, however, female attrition in research cannot be exclusively explained by them agentically ‘opting out’ due to, for example, the precarious working conditions described. Academic leaders also attribute traits to women, such as an unwillingness or incapacity to make ‘the necessary sacrifices in their private life to succeed in an academic career’ (p. 145). Such gendered stereotypes very likely influence how managers assess the eligibility of female researchers in relation to recruitment, promotion and funding allocation. DMES (2019a) identifies a gender disparity in research grants awarded in the public Danish research and innovation foundations, with women making up 20–38 per cent of all grantees in 2017. The success rate when applying tends to be higher for men.

Gender inequality has been on the political agenda since the 1990s (DMES, 1997; 2005; 2015; 2019a), and political action has mostly concerned *encouraging* Danish universities to implement initiatives and interventions to raise the share of female researchers. Today, all universities have GE policies and have taken action to promote gender equality (DMES, 2019a). Universities have been free to decide which steps to take, which has led to very different GE initiatives across institutions. At the University of Copenhagen (UofC), for example, GE activities have been organised through consecutive programmes consisting of a variety of actions. Most significantly, the UofC was noted when it implemented an initiative in 2008 through which faculties were awarded financial bonuses for hiring female professors (University of Copenhagen, 2013). This initiative generated significant levels of controversy²⁹ and was discontinued (Striebing et al., 2019: 68). The focus since then has instead been

²⁹ ‘[A] professor from Copenhagen University reported the intervention to the Minister of Research as well as to the Tribunal for Equal Treatment for being discriminatory towards men. However, the complaints were dismissed in both instances’ (Striebing et al., 2019: 68).

on accountability through reporting and monitoring (Ibid.). Recently, Aarhus University awarded DKK 600,000 to five ‘Gender Bias in Research’ research-and-action projects within the university, which have provided input for upcoming GE efforts (Aarhus University, 2019). Furthermore, in 2017, the University of Southern Denmark formalised a specialised GE team under Human Resources which, as part of its activities, undertakes significant communicative and branding efforts with respect to gender issues at the university (University of Southern Denmark, 2019). The recent progress in terms of female representation is generally attributed to increased levels of attention to gender issues at Danish universities (DMES, 2015). Moreover, based on the mandatory GE reports that the universities submit to the ministry biannually, the universities would appear to have strengthened their efforts to address gender inequalities (DMES, 2017: 84).

Doing GE work may be even especially difficult in academia, however, because the prevalence of the meritocratic ideal forecloses attention to gender stereotypes and biases, thereby rendering the idea of gendered barriers illegible and illegitimate (Egeland, 2001; Nielsen, 2016). This trait of the academic culture, likely in combination with persistent sexism (Skewes et al., 2019), often leads to significant opposition and resistance to GE interventions (Palmén & Kalpazidou Schmidt, 2019; Benschop & van den Brink, 2014). A recurrent argument of this opposition is that hiring women through GE interventions will be at the expense of better-qualified men which, in turn, jeopardises research quality (van den Brink & Benschop, 2013). Gender equality and GE work are, in other words, highly contested topics in academia, which also pertains to varying understandings of what they actually mean (Lombardo et al., 2009). Therefore, below, I clarify what *I* mean when I use these terms in this dissertation.

1.3. Conceptual clarifications

1.3.1. Gender

In the literature, we find a plurality of theorisations of the concept of ‘gender’, including liberal and radical feminist, socialist, postmodernist and queer feminist conceptualisations (Calás & Smircich, 2006; 2008). Here, I follow the tradition that construes gender as social processes (e.g., West & Zimmerman, 1987; Lorber, 1994; Poggio, 2006; Martin, 2001; 2006) with material consequences for individuals. Through the negotiation of the naturalised categories of male/masculine and female/feminine (Acker, 1992), social processes ‘locate/fix us as gendered beings, within certain norms, structures, discourses

and pressures' (Jalušič, 2009: 54). Through a historical, hierarchical relationship, 'the female or femininity becomes a position of deficiency' vis-à-vis the masculine leading to inequalities in different ways (Lund, 2015: 15; Ronen, 2018). I further conceptualise organisations as constituted through ongoing processes of *organising* (e.g., Alvesson, 2004; Ashcraft et al., 2009; Schoenborn & Vásquez, 2017). Understanding organisations, like gender, as social processes implies that processes of organising between people cannot be separated from gendering processes (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2003). This does not mean that gender is always explicitly at work 'as a meaning-maker and constituent of social order' (Staunæs & Søndergaard, 2008), but that organisations are implicitly and fundamentally gendered and that the 'ideal worker' is produced in masculine terms (Acker 1990, 1992; Lund, 2015). I am well aware that work organisations are not *only* gendered. Recent developments in feminist organisation studies stress the need to study workplace inequalities from an intersectional perspective (Acker, 2006; 2012; Holvino, 2010; Ahmed, 2012). This position resonates with the critique from black feminism, queer feminism, and postcolonial feminism levelled against mainstream (white) feminism; that is, that it denies processes of racial differentiation when fighting for the liberation of a unified 'women' category (hooks, 1981; Crenshaw, 1991; Butler, 1990; Mohanty, 2003). From this perspective, gendering occurs at the intersection of multiple identity markers, meaning that gendered experiences and manifestations of oppression vary according to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age etc.

Nevertheless, I privilege gender as an analytical category in this dissertation for pragmatic and empirical reasons. I talk about 'women' because my research participants generally talk about women, even when they champion diversity and inclusion over gender equality.³⁰ I am not naïve about doing so. For me, a lack of reflexivity about this point implies the risk that this project will simply be another white, middle-class, straight, able-bodied, ciswoman dealing with the same old white, middle-class, straight, able-bodied, ciswoman problems (women in positions of power) in the same old white, middle-class, straight, able-bodied, ciswoman (exclusionary) ways. You may justly suggest that I ought to know better. I am aware that just because my research participants do not address race, for example, race is constantly in question.

³⁰ In a similar way to Staunæs and Søndergaard (2008) citing Staunæs (2006): 'The diversity project was interesting because of its focus on different socio-cultural categories, but the categories were perceived and addressed as separate and not mutually intersecting, which made, for instance, gender appear as an ethnically and racially unmarked category, although the invisible norm for women at the top was indeed ethnically and racially marked as white and ethnic Danish' (p. 136).

‘Whiteness’ is constantly negotiated by the lack of explicit reference to race. In the same way that ‘male’ and ‘masculine’ are the implicit norm as a state of ‘non-gender’ in organisations, so too is ‘white’ as a state of non-race. The same applies to heterosexuality. The notion of ‘gender equality’ is generally implicitly heteronormative; that is, women’s liberation is taken for granted to occur in the context of heterosexual, romantic relationships, as argued by Butler (1990; 1995). However, exploring how whiteness or heteronormativity are constituted has not been part of my analytical project, because my focus is not on how my research participants constitute themselves or others as gendered or otherwise subjects. Nor do I aim to critique how GE and diversity work can be exclusionary due to, for example, hegemonic whiteness or heteronormativity (see, e.g., Ahmed, 2012; Romani et al., 2018). Rather, my analytical focus is on how my research participants understand and navigate the pressures and incentives facing the organisation, which have sparked GE work. It may be argued that gender – men and women – remain relevant concepts because they exist as pervasive categories that structure the world (Gunnarsson, 2011). My research participants use these concepts to interpret this structuring, which affects how they understand and approach GE work (which is where my interest lies). They are therefore of relevance to my research.

1.3.2. Gender (in)equality

Gender inequality constitutes a highly complex, multifaceted issue (Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace, 2017; 2019). Generally, the literature emphasises individual, cultural and structural factors which traverse the private and public spheres. In combination, these factors operate and limit women’s life options and career advancement (Fagenson, 1990; Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace, 2019). The individual perspective generally takes a ‘sameness’ feminist standpoint in that it highlights gender differences in terms of features such as psychological characteristics, personality, socialisation and/or career orientation (Nentwich, 2006; Simpson et al., 2010). The cultural perspective pertains to gender bias and stereotypes based in the history, culture and policies of broader society that, as subtle discrimination, affect organising processes posing certain hurdles or barriers to women (Fagenson, 1990; Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace, 2019). Finally, the structural perspective suggests that organisational hierarchies, procedures, and formal and informal rules create divergent advantages and disadvantages for different groups of people, which in turn shape the actions, emotions, meanings and identities in everyday organisational life (Kanter, 1997; Acker, 1990; Fagenson, 1990; Meyerson & Kolb, 2000). In this dissertation, I follow Timmers et al. (2009), who argue that these perspectives should not be viewed as mutually exclusive, but rather as

complementary, as they all add to our understanding of the complex dynamics of gender inequality (p. 720). Nonetheless, it is important to recognise that different conceptualisations of the nature of inequality lead to different perceptions of ‘the goal’.

In the literature, in consultancy, as well as in practice, concepts such as ‘gender equality’, ‘gender equity’, ‘diversity’, ‘inclusion’ and many more are used indiscriminately. This produces extensive confusion. To some, ‘gender equality’ resonates with a liberal-feminist agenda of creating equal opportunity through equal treatment within the existing system; in other words, a sameness perspective (Rees, 1998; Walby, 2005;). Conversely, ‘gender equity’ appears to involve more of a ‘difference feminist’ perspective by rejecting the possibility of equal opportunities, aiming instead for equal outcomes through differential treatment or affirmative action (Phillips, 2004; Simpson et al., 2010). Diversity generally intends to cover more demographic differentiators than only gender, such as race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, age and (dis)ability. In this way, it presumably resonates with the position championed by intersectional feminists, namely that gender cannot be understood in isolation from other identity markers (Longman & De Graeve, 2014). However, while intersectionality implies a critical analysis of the exclusion of groups of people, the operationalisation of diversity in organisations widely involves creating images of ‘happy diversity’ simply by including (or rather *adding*) people who diverge from the white, able-bodied norm (Geerts et al., 2018). In this manner, diversity becomes something ‘attached’ to specific bodies, and organisations therefore become diverse by housing such bodies (Ahmed, 2007; 2012). In other cases, scholars or practitioners use the label ‘diversity’ while in fact only addressing gender, because diversity appears to have superseded gender equality as the now more legitimate, up-to-date label (see, e.g., Meriläinen et al., 2009; Danish Diversity Council, 2019). As mentioned above, the Boston Consulting Group in Denmark consistently uses the term ‘gender diversity’ (Poulsen et al., 2016; 2019). However, they are not talking about diverse understandings of gender, including queer, non-binary and trans-people; they are still talking about men and women. The complexities relating to the question of ‘what to call anti-discrimination’ was also evident in my ethnographic work. The case company changed the name of its (...) programme repeatedly from ‘women in X company’ to ‘the diversity programme’, to ‘the inclusion programme’ and then back again, finally deciding on ‘the equality, diversity, inclusion programme’.³¹

³¹ Özbilgin (2009) writes about the concepts equality, diversity and inclusion; that ‘each of these terms adds a different and unique dimension to the study of relations

I use the term gender equality consistently, because I have no pretence about this study. The concrete problem to which this dissertation speaks is the persistent gender inequalities between men and women. While ‘gender equality’ inarguably does not sufficiently capture the multifaceted layers of individual subjectivity (Nielsen, 2014a) that lead to incomparable experiences and manifestations of oppression (hooks, 1981; Crenshaw, 1991; Butler, 1990; Mohanty, 2003), I return to the purpose of this research project: I do not aim to study how gendered subjectivities are constituted – racialised, binary or otherwise. I study organisational motivation to engage in GE work. By following Timmers et al. (2009), who argue that individual, cultural and structural causes of inequality should be understood as entwined, I opt for a comprehensive conceptualisation of ‘gender equality’. Although raising the share of women in positions of power in organisations, leadership and among tenured researchers in academia would ideally be the outcome, getting there will require changes to policies, structures, processes and cultures via multi-level approaches (Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace 2017, 2019). At their basic level, gender labels should not pose restrictions on how individuals live their lives. As gendered subjectivities are constituted by and through expectations, opportunities and obstacles which blur the separation between the public and private spheres, organisations cannot solve the problem alone. As Lorber (1996) argues, improving gender equality requires changing ‘several social systems such as kinship, intimate relations, sexuality, parenting, friendship, workplace relations and the division of labour’ (cited by Nentwich, 2006: 500). However, when politicians are reluctant to legislate on gender, as is currently the case in the Danish context, organisations can lead the way and set an example, such as by ensuring that the structural access of fathers to paternity leave is made easy and that absence due to childcare is culturally naturalised for fathers. In other words, GE policies and initiatives in organisations play an important role in bringing about change. I now turn to how organisations are trying to do so.

of power at work. While the term “equality” allows for a comparative reading of relations of power in the workplace, the term “diversity” draws attention to the multiplicity of strands of difference and the term “inclusion” adds a purposive and strategic dimension to the investigation of interventions to relations of power at work. These subtle differences aside, equality, diversity and inclusion are also used in interrelated ways, reflecting their interconnectedness at the level of theorisation and practice’ (p. 2).

1.3.3. Gender equality work

As I also unfold the concept of ‘gender equality work’ (GE work) in the empirical chapters, I will only briefly introduce it here. Like Keisu and Carbin (2014), I opt for the label ‘gender equality work’. Although van den Brink and Benschop (2012) use the term ‘gender equality practices’, I follow their definition of the phenomenon. In this dissertation, GE work thus refers to:

[T]he policies and processes that aim to bring about gender equality [in organisations]. In other words, gender equality practices aim to undo gender inequality. The intentional gender policies and feminist intervention strategies that have been developed over the years (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Kirton & Greene, 2005; Walby, 2005) fall under this category, as do organization processes that change unequal gender relations as an unintended effect. (p. 74)

When I talk about individual sub-types of GE work, I use ‘interventions’, ‘actions’ and ‘initiatives’ interchangeably. I study GE work by observing and talking with the people involved in this work, to whom I refer as GE practitioners or occasionally workers.

GE interventions may assume different forms depending on their conceptions of inequality and interpretations of gender equality (Lombardo, Meier & Verloo, 2009; Benschop & Verloo, 2012). Following the above introduction, causes of inequality are often categorised as individual, cultural and structural (Fagenson, 1990; Timmers et al., 2009), and the GE objective is typically distinguished as either equality of opportunities through equal treatment (sameness feminism) or equality of outcomes through differential treatment (difference feminism) (Nentwich, 2006; Simpson et al., 2010). Finally, interventions may target either the organisation or people in their change efforts (Benschop & Verloo, 2012).

As has often been critiqued, understanding inequality as exclusively based on individual traits tends to lead to a focus on changing women to fit a pre-given set of masculinised, organisational norms and standards (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Squires, 2005 cited by Nielsen, 2014a: 21). Concrete intervention types from the individual perspective include, for example, leadership training or mentoring schemes for women. However, critics point out that actions targeting individual women alone will not lead to sustained change, as they fail to address the gendered-ness of organisations (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Benschop & Verloo, 2012). The cultural perspective is built on the assumption that the value of traditionally, stereotypically feminine values, activities and skills – including communality, care and communication – should be revalued by society as being equal to masculine values and skills (Ely & Meyerson, 2000). We see such attempts in organisational efforts to change people’s views

of the ‘ideal leader’ from a manager or supervisor to a mentor or coach. However, this approach risks reproducing counterproductive gender essentialism by tying presumed feminine qualities to female bodies, which fails to account for how male leaders can enact feminine leadership styles and yield better returns from them than women (Calás & Smircich, 1993; Adkins, 2001; Alvesson & Billing, 2009).

Finally, various approaches have been proposed to challenge the gendered-ness of structural hierarchies, procedures and rules. For example, gender mainstreaming involves a consistent analysis of the distorting effects of organisational decisions, policies, structures and processes with respect to gender. Based on such analyses, decisions, policies, structures and processes can be redesigned (Bohnet, 2016; Benschop & Verloo, 2012) collaboratively, experimentally and incrementally to improve gender equality. However, the success of gender mainstreaming and related types of interventions, such as the ‘post-equity’ approach (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Benschop & Verloo, 2012), heavily rely on long-term commitment and smooth collaboration between actors. In other words, the consistent implementation of gender mainstreaming has proven difficult (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; McGauran, 2009; Benschop & Verloo, 2006). As gender inequality constitutes a highly complex, multifaceted issue, GE work must also take a complex, non-linear approach, which ‘includes multiple strategies, lines of actions, and agents of change (see Glouberman, 2001; Glouberman & Zimmerman, 2002), designing a tailored and dynamic blend of measures at the individual, cultural, and structural levels’ (Karpazidou Schmidt & Cacace, 2019: 3).

In sum, fixing a complex problem requires complex action. However, to this equation we can further add complex organisational and societal contexts, to which I now turn.

1.3.4. Knowledge-intensive organisations

In this dissertation, I use the concept of ‘knowledge-intensive organisations’ to facilitate my discussion of motivation to engage in GE work across the two different contexts in which the empirical studies were carried out, namely academia and a private engineering company. Knowledge-intensive organisations produce and offer ‘sophisticated knowledge or knowledge-based products’ or services to the market (Alvesson, 2004: 17). Knowledge and knowledge work are associated with considerable prestige and symbolic value (Ibid.: 88–89). Professional service and research and development (R&D) consultancies represent key examples of knowledge-intensive organisations, including law firms, accountancy, management, and engineering consultan-

cies. While much can be said about what renders private companies and academia fundamentally different settings (e.g., political governance and control, as well as market powers), here I want to focus on what they have in common (for limitations hereto please see 8.3.).

Characteristics of knowledge-intensive organisations include high levels of expertise, innovation, worker independence and accountability (Makani & Marche, 2009). Some work requires close collaboration with clients (or funders), whereas workers are left in other cases to their expertise and to deliver a product by the end of a project. Some knowledge-intensive organisations are very loosely structured to carry work out flexibly in an ad hoc, project-based manner, whereas knowledge-workers (e.g., at universities) are generally subordinated heavy bureaucracies (Alvesson, 2004: 11). The fact that knowledge-intensive organisations employ substantial numbers of people with extensive theoretical education and individual experience, working with complex tasks that call for creativity, analytical skills, autonomy and the use of judgement, generally renders traditional forms of labour control inadequate (Alvesson, 2004). Employers therefore increasingly achieve and maintain control over employees through ‘normative control’ (Kunda, 1992) and the subjectivities of employees (Alvesson & Deetz, 1996). Normative control refers to how organisations reinforce common beliefs and values with the aim of developing, maintaining and influencing a shared organisational identity. By strengthening an organisational identity through feelings of cultural cohesion and community, organisations simultaneously influence the ideas, expectations and identities of individuals (Alvesson & Deetz, 1996). At universities, identity is often very local, pertaining to specific academic fields and disciplines. However, this may also be said of multi-service consultancies such as the case company of this dissertation, in which individual departments were quite independent except when cross-department matrix-teams were created for tasks and projects. In academia, the institutional identity or culture very much stresses individual achievement, including individual publications and research grants which contribute to personal self-actualisation and reinforce perceptions of expertise from the self as well as others (Gill, 2009; Lund, 2015; Taylor & Lahad, 2018). In companies, achievement and performance may be more collaboration-based and communal.

Similarities which render reasonable the grouping together of businesses and academia as knowledge-intensive organisations further include the kinds of gendered perceptions and biases – and, thus, the manifestations of inequality existing in these organisations – as well as the remedies suggested in the literature. The attrition of women in leadership levels applies as much to private businesses as to universities (DIHR, 2015; DBA, 2018; DMES, 2019a). In

universities, however, the same dynamic pertaining to the gradual disappearance of women at each vertical career step also concerns researcher positions (DMES, 2015; 2019a). In both the private and public sectors, the refrain of *'We only hire the best candidate!'* resounds. Irrespective of whether hiring and promotion are presumed to be based on 'talent' (Rennison, 2014; Poulsen et al., 2016; 2019; DMES, 2005; 2009; 2019a) or 'scientific excellence', such notions are vague, open to subjective interpretation, and often biased against women (Lund, 2015; Herschberg et al., 2015; Nielsen, 2017). Furthermore, with the increasing neoliberalisation or corporatisation of academia, market logics have been transferred into university governance systems affecting research practices, leading to, for example, the 'publish or perish' paradigm, as well as researchers' subjectivities (see Gill, 2009; Lund, 2015; Taylor & Lahad, 2018). Finally, Danish companies and universities exist within the same cultural, discursive context, which I, in this dissertation, construe as a 'postfeminist gender regime' (see chapter 3), which pervades organisations regardless of whether they are private or public.

As such, attentive to contextual differences, I use the concept of knowledge-intensive organisations cautiously, not to make grand, generalising claims, but to address what I can say based on and across the three empirical chapters of this dissertation.

1.3.5. Postfeminism

The concept of postfeminism has been employed in multiple research fields and disciplines as an object of study as much as an analytical lens. The 'post' in postfeminism has been used to designate, for example, a temporal 'moving on' from (second-wave) feminism (Gamble, 2004) or a backlash against it often linked to the third wave of feminism (e.g., Roiphe, 1994; Denfeld, 1995). Postfeminism is more complex than either of these understandings, however, because what seems to be particular about contemporary gender discourses is the so-called 'double entanglement' (McRobbie, 2009; Gill & Scharff, 2011). This idea covers people's simultaneous celebration of (the success of) feminism and their disavowal of it. The double entanglement was first observed as a set of prevalent narratives and female archetypes in films, television shows and literature (Tasker & Negra, 2005). The prominence of postfeminist narratives and representations of femininity in culture and media has contributed to the diffusion of postfeminist logics into all aspects of contemporary societies (Gill, 2008; Gill et al., 2017), such as the workplace, which led organisation and management scholars to adopt the concept. We may think of postfeminism as a set of recurrent, complex and often contradictory discourses

around gender and equality, as well as the co-existence of multiple and incongruous forms of feminism. Prevalent postfeminist discourses include

a focus upon empowerment, choice and individualism; the repudiation of sexism and thus of the need for feminism alongside a sense of ‘fatigue’ about gender; notions of make-over and self-reinvention/transformation; an emphasis upon embodiment and femininity as a bodily property; an emphasis on surveillance and discipline; a resurgence of ideas of sexual difference. (Gill et al., 2017: 227)

Postfeminist discourses build on what may be regarded as ‘broadly feminist sentiments in order to justify certain behaviours or choices, but these sentiments have become severed from their [feminist] political or philosophical origins’ (Whelehan, 2010: 156). As I will unfold fully in chapter 3, through hegemonic discourses (incl. those mentioned above), postfeminism renders structural–cultural gender discrimination unintelligible and GE policies and interventions superfluous. As postfeminism is closely linked with neoliberalism (Banet-Weiser et al., 2019), it should be understood as governmentality in the Foucauldian sense (Foucault, 1991a; Gill, 2017). This means that postfeminism is not simply something ‘out there’. Rather, it moulds people’s thinking, attitudes and behaviours towards gender and feminism with material effects in our lives (Gill, 2008; Lewis & Simpson, 2017).

In this dissertation, postfeminism refers to neither a period nor moment in time. Nor will I refer to any kind of ideological, political feminism as postfeminism. Postfeminism has no political movement (Blue, 2013). Rather, understood as a ‘critical toolkit’, postfeminism enables scholarship to capture and make sense of a particular patterning of social life (Gill, 2016; 2017). I opt for the concept of the ‘postfeminist gender regime’, as it brings the governance dimensions of postfeminist discourses to the fore (Lewis et al., 2017). I further argue that the notion of ‘regime’ facilitates the translation of insights from research on postfeminism at the micro level (e.g., of how postfeminist femininities are performed or how individuals navigate the complexity of postfeminist discourses; see chapter 4) into sociological studies of postfeminism at the macro-societal level. I figuratively conceptualise the postfeminist gender regime as the backcloth or canvas upon which the complexity and ambiguity of the entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist ideas play out. Still, postfeminism cannot be equated with an absolute disavowal of feminism (Lewis et al., 2017). Instead, what is spurned is ‘excessive feminism’ characterised by a critical or radical orientation to gendered structures, cultures and power dynamics, and a collectivist spirit (Lewis & Simpson, 2017). Such dynamics are detectable in contemporary mainstream feminisms, including empowerment feminism (Banet-Weiser, 2018) and neoliberal feminism (Rottenberg, 2018b), which generally urge women to ‘internalise the revolution’ (Sandberg, 2013:

11). Alongside the simultaneous celebration and rejection of feminism, it is the co-existence of multiple and incongruous feminisms which contributes to the complexity of the postfeminist gender regime.

1.4. Outline of the dissertation

In this introduction, I have described the background and puzzle of this PhD dissertation: Namely, how legislation and assumptions of the ‘performance benefits’ of gender equality have not been able to drive much action in Danish organisations – even though the literature offers some guidance on how to go about engaging in the improvement of gender equality. As neither stick nor carrot (or rather stick *and* carrot) appear able to drive organisational GE work, in this dissertation I explore what then can. In the above, I have also unfolded why achieving an improved understanding of how knowledge-intensive organisations are motivated to engage in GE work is important. If Denmark is to live up to its reputation as a global gender-equality spearhead nation, action is needed. And as long as politicians remain reluctant to push this agenda, it will fall on organisations to lead the way. As I have also emphasised, however, doing GE work is hardly straightforward. Depending on how individuals conceptualise gender and understand the nature of inequality and the ‘goal’ (i.e., what equality looks like to them), different types of GE interventions are appropriate. GE work, in other words, requires considerable negotiations between stakeholders, not least for cultural reasons. The widespread postfeminist conviction that ‘gender equality is achieved’ in Denmark perhaps especially constitutes a barrier that faces organisational GE practitioners in their work.

I now turn to what awaits readers ahead. This dissertation is a compilation thesis consisting of eight chapters in total (Fig. 1.7). The three empirical chapters are embedded in an extended frame which, besides this introduction, comprises a methods chapter (2), a theory chapter (3), the discussion (7), and conclusion (8).

Fig. 1.7. Overview of dissertation chapters



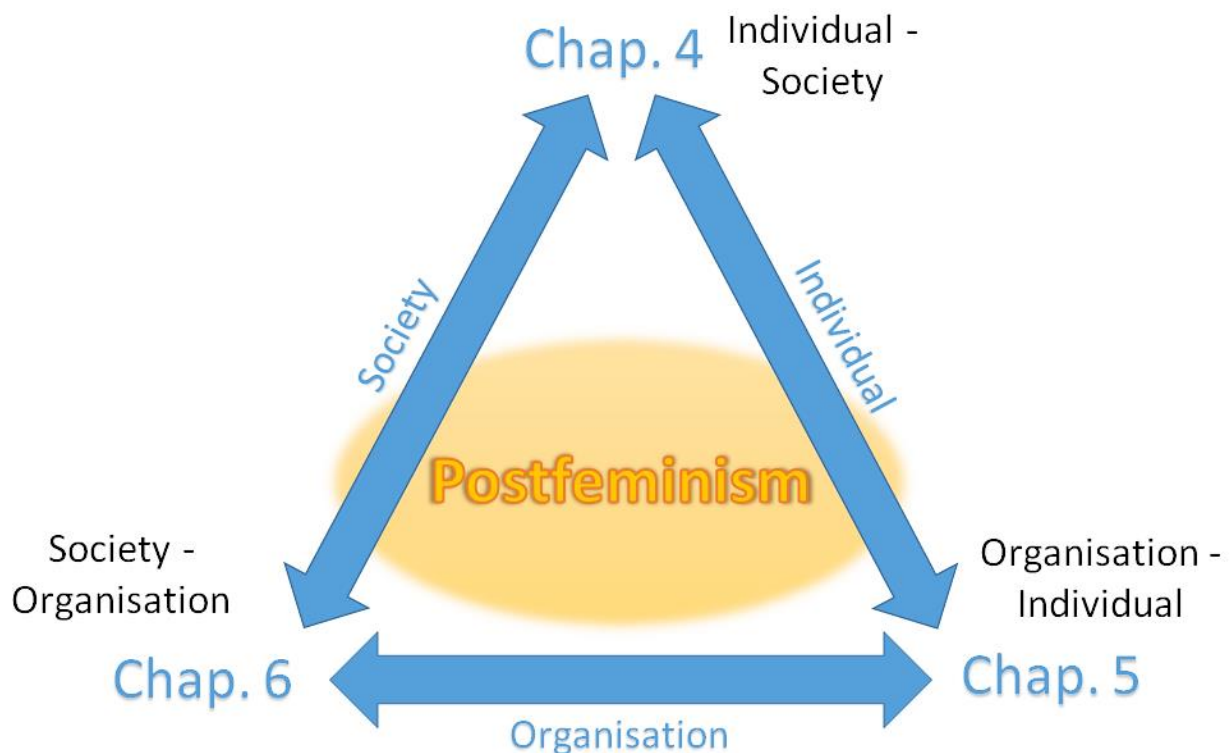
In the methods chapter (2), I aim to go beyond the description of my methods, which may be found in the individual empirical chapters. I have operationalised my overall research question in three sub-studies exploring organisational motivation to engage in GE work at multiple levels and from multiple methodological and theoretical perspectives. Ethnography constitutes the principal research method of this dissertation, but interviews have also been employed. My approach is anchored in feminist epistemology, which is explicitly political and stresses the embodied and relational nature of research which, in turn, aligns with my use of ethnography and interviews. Central to the approach taken is that I embrace the ‘messiness’ entailed in doing qualitative, interpretivist research (Lambotte & Meunier, 2013; Donnelly et al., 2013). In the methods chapter, I unfold in-depth the richness of this mess in order to discuss the methodological considerations associated with doing organisational ethnography and semi-structured interviews more generally, as well as the challenges and limitations of my methodological choices relating specifically to the empirical studies of this dissertation. Such challenges and limitations include issues of sampling, the approach to observations and writing field notes, interview techniques, navigating field roles and relationships,

access, as well as the ethical considerations and critical self-reflexivity required in relation to all of this. I discuss all of these aspects in chapter 2 through ‘tales of the field’ (van Maanen, 1988) and the methods literature.

In chapter 3, I outline my reading of the theoretical perspective ‘postfeminism’. Although I only explicitly use postfeminism in chapter 4, it constitutes the theoretical foundation of the entire dissertation and a ‘red thread’ that runs through the empirical chapters, the discussion and my conclusions. I trace how postfeminism emerged as an empirical phenomenon in culture and media studies, and how it has been translated into the field of organisation and management studies as both an object of study and theoretical lens through which to understand empirical observations. I develop a framework which I label the ‘postfeminist gender regime’. As a gender regime, I understand postfeminism as a backcloth or canvas upon which a set of recurrent, complex and often contradictory discourses around gender and equality co-exist, as well as multiple and incongruous forms of feminism, leading to material consequences for people.

Fig. 1.8 below illustrates how the empirical chapters of this dissertation link different levels of analysis. Chapter 4 explores individual motivation in relation to the societal level; chapter 5 focuses on organisational motivations as accounted for by individuals; while chapter 6 explores organisational and societal motivations. However, most importantly Fig. 1.8 serves to illustrate how each empirical chapter should be understood in the context of postfeminism. As I will argue in chapter 3, postfeminism is as much ontology as epistemology. At the level of ontology, postfeminism exists as a cultural phenomenon we can study. As epistemology, it has shaped the questions I have asked and the interpretations I have reached. And postfeminism will take us on from here through its capacity to highlight and illuminate the nuances and contradictions between the ‘gender equality is achieved’ narrative and the continued existence of inequalities, particularly those affecting women.

Fig. 1.8. Postfeminism as the theoretical backdrop of the empirical chapters



The first empirical article, chapter 4, is based on semi-structured interviews with GE practitioners and policymakers in Danish academia. Based on an interview study, the chapter explores how GE practitioners manoeuvre within significant ambiguity and opposition in their work to create gender change in Danish universities. It is the practitioners' critical reflexivity and knowledge of gender issues which enable them to manoeuvre. I unfold this discursive manoeuvring through the lens of postfeminism (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009). The GE practitioners in the study occasionally fall into the traps that the postfeminist common sense pertaining to gender and equality poses for them, which generally is not conducive to gender change. However, it would appear as though it is not their reproduction of postfeminist discourses which hampers the progress towards gender equality in the Danish academy. Rather, progress appears to be hampered in the meetings between practitioners, GE work and other stakeholders, who are unreflexively absorbed in the postfeminist gender regime. Chapter 4 addresses 'motivation' at the individual level. The chapter shows how GE practitioners generally possess and maintain high levels of personal motivation and commitment to contribute to improving gender equality, despite the ambiguity and opposition they encounter and manoeuvre in their work.

Chapter 5 focuses on motivation at the organisational level using ethnography as the method of inquiry. More specifically, the chapter explores how cultural narratives may serve in different ways as support factors for the design and implementation of GE work. The successful design and implementation of GE initiatives require the adaptation of strategies to the specific context in question. Based on this premise, the chapter focuses on organisational culture as a contextual factor for GE work. The ‘historicity’ concept (e.g., Dalsgaard & Nielsen, 2013; Maclean et al., 2016; Hirsch & Steward, 2005) highlights how cultural narratives are important in terms of how they give sense, direction and shape to GE work, by guiding people’s actions in the present and expectations of the future. In chapter 5, I argue that the linkages between two cultural narratives pertaining to the past of the case company, which emerged from the field, and GE work in the present are not straightforward. The one narrative concerns the story of the founders of the company and the values that they instilled in the company. The other narrative pertains to a relatively recent GE initiative which seems to have faded out and has gradually become forgotten. Both narratives harbour factors that may be supportive as well as unhelpful to create gender change. As such, mobilising the supportive potential of cultural narratives with respect to GE work requires the qualitative mapping of cultural dimensions to make explicit what may be learned from previous, less successful, GE initiatives. Some cultural narratives may further need significant reframing to serve as support factors for GE programme design and implementation. This chapter is published in the journal *Evaluation and Program Planning*.

Finally, chapter 6 investigates the motivations to engage in GE work in a broader sense. This chapter relates most directly to the puzzle and overall research question of this dissertation. In contrast to the two previous empirical chapters, chapter 6 studies motivation in a more explicit sense and looks for motivations within but also beyond the organisation. This chapter is based on the same ethnographic study as chapter 5. The study was both deductive and explorative. I entered the field with ideas as to what might constitute motivations, some of which did not turn out to play a significant role in driving GE work in the company, whereas others turned out to drive this work differently than expected. In the chapter, I identify four categories of motivations, legislation, market logics, feminist movements and corporate social responsibility, which I discuss based on a typology of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Ryan & Deci, 1985; 2000) to understand how they work in driving GE work. The study shows that market logics originating from the case company’s North American and British branches and markets appear to be particularly important drivers of GE work, whereas the Danish context apparently holds little

motivation to engage in this work despite the existence of legislation in this area.

On this background, chapter 7 discusses the characteristics of the North American and British contexts vis-à-vis the Danish context in order to better understand the interesting findings in chapter 6. Because of Denmark's reputation as a world leader in gender equality, it may seem surprising that the US and UK outperform Denmark on some GE indicators and that the motivations from these contexts seemingly influence the decision to engage in GE work in a Danish company. I build my discussion of this apparent contradiction on the literatures on welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1990; 1999), the so-called Scandinavian 'gender equality model' and the notion of the 'Nordic paradox' (Lister, 2009; Borchorst, 2009; Teigen & Skjeie, 2017). In chapter 8, I conclude by tying all the strings together with a particular focus on outlining how, based on this dissertation, we may understand organisational motivation to engage in GE work, what the implications of this research are, and how post-feminism may play a key role in taking us on from here.

The scholarly contribution of this dissertation is twofold: I contribute to the literatures on gender equality and GE work in organisations by exploring the question of how organisations are motivated to engage in GE work. As an explicit idea, the motivation to engage in GE work (as something other than merely personal and individual) is new. In the empirical chapters, I therefore explore motivation at different levels of analysis (individual, organisational and societal) and from different theoretical and methodological perspectives to produce various kinds of knowledge about it in an attempt at tentatively honing in on how we may best understand it. Chapter 4 suggests that the personal motivation of GE practitioners is not hampered despite widespread opposition to GE work. Chapter 5 finds that to leverage the motivational potential of cultural narratives, organisations must pay careful attention to how such narratives align with or oppose gender change. Finally, chapter 6 maps out different categories of motivations, internal and external to the company, in Denmark as well as abroad. It subsequently discusses the potential of each motivation to drive GE action. Postfeminism implicitly, and in chapter 4 explicitly, runs through the three empirical chapters as a red thread, and they are also bound together through their anchoring in feminist epistemology. In this manner, this dissertation in its entirety offers new knowledge about motivation to engage in GE work, the contexts in which motivations may be found, and why this is so. A better understanding of motivation to engage in GE work may prove valuable to policy- and decision-makers if Denmark has an ambition of once again living up to its reputation as an international GE spearhead nation in the future.

Moreover, I contribute to the literatures on postfeminism by offering my reading of the postfeminist gender regime based on an extensive literature review. The literatures on postfeminism are characterised by extensive definitional debate. With chapter 3, I partake in this debate, but I do not claim to provide any final answers. My aim in outlining the postfeminist gender regime is first and foremost to create a dynamic framework that will be helpful in answering the research questions posed in this dissertation. I believe that postfeminism should remain a work in progress and that definitively fixing a definition risks hampering its potential as a ‘productive irritation’ (Fuller & Driscoll, 2015) with constantly moving and changing contours (Gill et al., 2017: 230). Nevertheless, the importance of my theoretical work extends beyond scholarly debates and literatures, as I employ my framework, the postfeminist gender regime, in my efforts to understand the complex and ambiguous Danish contexts with respect to equality and ever-changing gender relations. Postfeminism has not been widely applied in empirical research about Denmark, and this dissertation therefore holds the potential of shedding new light upon and offering new understandings of persistent gender inequalities in this context. Through its inherently ambiguous and contradictory nature, postfeminism has the capacity to bring nuances to the foreground. Denmark has unquestionably come a long way, but gender equality remains an unfinished project, and the Danish context stands out as immensely complex in this regard. A better understanding of this complexity may enable us to progress with respect to persistent as well as emergent gender inequalities, and postfeminism may prove key hereto.

1.5. Appendix

Full list of Equal Measures SDG indicators³²

SDG 1 Poverty

- a. Poverty
- b. Social assistance coverage
- c. Laws on women's land rights
- d. Women's views on food affordability

SDG 2 Hunger & Nutrition

- a. Undernourishment
- b. Obesity among women
- c. Anaemia among women

SDG 3 Health

- a. Maternal mortality
- b. Adolescent birth rate
- c. Access to family planning

SDG 4 Education

- a. Girls' primary school progression
- b. Girls' secondary education completion
- c. Young women not in education, employment or training (NEET)
- d. Women's literacy

SDG 5 Gender Equality

- a. Child, early, and forced marriage
- b. Perceptions of partner violence
- c. Legal grounds for abortion
- d. Women in parliament
- e. Women in ministerial roles

SDG 6 Water & Sanitation

- a. Basic drinking water access
- b. Basic sanitation access
- c. Women's satisfaction with water quality

SDG 7 Energy

- a. Access to electricity
- b. Access to clean fuels and technology
- c. Women's satisfaction with air quality

SDG 8 Work & Economic Growth

- a. Wage equality
- b. Women in vulnerable work
- c. Collective bargaining rights in law
- d. Laws on women's workplace equality
- e. Women's ownership of bank accounts

SDG 9 Industry, Infrastructure & Innovation

- a. Women's use of digital banking
- b. Women's satisfaction with roads
- c. Women's internet access
- d. Women in science and technology research

SDG 10 Inequality

- a. Palma income inequality ratio
- b. Freedom from discrimination
- c. Migration treaty ratification

SDG 11 Cities & Communities

- a. Women's views on housing affordability
- b. Air pollution
- c. Women's perceptions of personal safety

SDG 13 Climate

- a. Women's representation in climate change political process
- b. Commitment to disaster risk reduction
- c. Climate vulnerability

SDG 16 Peace & Institutions

- a. Coverage of birth registration systems
- b. Female victims of homicide
- c. Women justices on high courts
- d. Views on state openness and legitimacy

SDG 17 Partnerships

- a. Government spending on social assistance
- b. Tax revenue
- c. Disaggregation of national budgets
- d. Openness of gender statistics

³² Equal Measures, 2019c: 50–51.

2. Methods

2.1. Introduction

2.1.1. Two contexts, two approaches

In this chapter, I describe the research methods of this PhD dissertation. As each empirical chapter also encompasses an individual methods section, I here aim to elaborate on those sections. Chapter 4 is an interview study, and chapters 5 and 6 are based on an organisational ethnography. The present chapter is therefore divided into several sub-sections addressing the process of generating empirical material relating to each of these approaches, the methodological considerations that went into them, and their implied challenges and limitations. The decision to employ two different approaches to the studies rests on the purpose of this PhD project. As described in the introduction, my overall research question is:

How are organisations motivated to engage in gender equality work?

As the idea of ‘motivation’ is new to the scholarly field of gender equality (GE) in organisations and GE work in organisations (at least as an explicit idea³³), the purpose of this project is to study motivation from different angles and perspectives in an attempt to home in on how we may best understand it. I have clarified that I focus specifically on knowledge-intensive organisations (see also 8.3.). I follow Ravn (2017) in her argument that, for generally uncharted phenomena, ‘we need to address contextual factors and the dialectics of micro-macro relations in the research design in order to be better equipped to explore and gain a more comprehensive and holistic insight’ into the phenomenon in question (p. 58). I therefore operationalised my study of motivation into three sub-studies to examine whether motivation might also be something other than personal and individual; that is, whether we may think of it as collective, organisational and/or societal. Fig. 2.1 provides an overview of the three empirical sub-studies.

³³ Please see Introduction, 1.1.

Chapter 4 explores individual motivation in relation to the societal context. Connecting these two levels of analysis enables me to study how individual GE practitioners manoeuvre between hegemonic, macro-level discourses vis-à-vis marginal and potentially subversive discursive positions in their work to create organisational gender change. In chapter 4, the societal context is understood through the theoretical lens of ‘postfeminism’ (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009) and my construction of Danish society as a postfeminist ‘gender regime’ (Acker, 2006; Dean, 2010a). However, postfeminism constitutes a red thread that underlies and runs through all of the empirical chapters. Chapter 5 focuses on organisational motivations by investigating how GE practitioners interpret and navigate the organisational culture which, in different ways, works with and against GE work. Chapter 6 maps out organisational and societal motivations and discusses their potential to drive GE work. Importantly, the distinction between levels should by no means be viewed as definitive; it merely serves to emphasise the three different thematic and analytical foci in each of the three sub-studies (Ravn, 2017: 60).

Fig. 2.1. Overview of empirical chapters

Chapter	Level	Method and data	Empirical context	Research question(s)	Thematic focus	Journal
4	Individual / Societal	Interviews (secondary)	Academia	<p>1. How do gender equality practitioners make sense of, e.g., the causes of inequality and potential solutions?</p> <p>2. How do gender equality practitioners make sense of and accommodate other people's responses and opposition to their work</p>	Exploring gender equality work in academia in relation to the discursive, societal context in Denmark, which I construe as a 'postfeminist gender regime'.	Gender, Work & Organization
5	Organisational / Individual	Ethnography (primary)	Engineering company	<p>1. How do research participants engage cultural narratives in relation to gender equality work?</p> <p>2. What are the implications of engaging cultural narratives for gender equality work?</p> <p>3. How may the potential of cultural narratives as support factors for gender equality work be mobilised?</p>	Exploring gender equality work in relation to the specific organisational context through the concept of 'historicity' which shows how history and culture shape actions in the presents and expectations of the future.	Evaluation and Program Planning
6	Organisational / Societal	Ethnography (primary)	Engineering company	How is the case company motivated to engage in gender equality work?	Mapping internal (organisational) and external pressures and incentives to engage in gender equality work, and analysing the potential and capacity of each to drive this work through the experience of the specific case company.	Scandinavian Journal of Management

My aim to explore organisational and societal motivations warranted a comprehensive empirical approach capable of capturing dimensions beyond what was related to me through interactions with my research participants. Ethnography therefore constitutes the principal method of inquiry in this dissertation. Chapters 5 and 6 are based on the organisational ethnography (Ybema et al., 2009) of a Danish, multinational engineering company. My collaboration with the company spanned more than two years (summer 2017–winter 2019/20). I conducted two on-site field studies, one of four months in Denmark and another of one week in the United States, both involving participant observation (Kristiansen & Krogstrup, 2009; Waddington, 2004; Moeran, 2009). In relation to the field studies, I carried out 26 semi-structured interviews (Kvale, 1996; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015) along with countless informal conversations, which I documented through extensive research journaling (Burgess, 1982a; van der Waal, 2009; Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). A comprehensive collection of organisational documents was also compiled.

In chapter 4, on the other hand, interview data constitutes the main empirical material. The chapter is based on 11 semi-structured interviews with GE practitioners and policymakers in the academy in Denmark. Interviews were appropriate for chapter 4, because it focuses specifically on individual motivation rather than organisational and societal motivation, as in chapters 5 and 6. Still, I argue that chapter 4 may be viewed as ethnographic due to my personal participation in activism revolving around the issue of gender equality and diversity in academia (i.e., the topic of the interviews) (see 2.3.3. below). Through my activism, I engage in ethnographic observations of this topic on more or less a daily basis, which strengthens the chapter by providing valuable contextual knowledge and, thus, limiting the risk of my inferring social or organisational action from verbal accounts alone (Jerolmack & Kahn, 2014).

The central premise of this chapter is that due to the embodied nature of doing ethnography and interviews, research constitutes an inevitably ‘messy’ process (Lambotte & Meunier, 2013; Donnelly et al., 2013). Whereas the scientific article format does not allow for delving into the richness of this mess, the present chapter offers an appealing space for unfolding those fascinating aspects of my research that mainstream scholarly outlets largely require me to edit out, such as obstacles, back-and-forth, screw-ups, relationships, emotions, politics, self-doubt and vulnerability (Kara, 2013; Donnelly et al., 2013; Pullen, 2018; Weatherall, 2019). I share Donnelly et al.’s (2013) view that much can be learned from the often ‘untold stories’ of research. Openness about such untold stories is further crucial in terms of challenging those systems of power and control that determine what counts as legitimate academic writing

(Pullen, 2018; Weatherall, 2019), which widely excludes, for example, feminine writing (which rejects the rational, detached, masculine authorial voice of most academic writing and embraces a multitude of affectual voices, cf. Pullen & Rhodes, 2015), as well as feminist writing (Burton, 2018). I now turn to the latter below.

2.1.2. A feminist epistemological point of departure

Here, I focus on those tenets of feminist epistemology that have in particular informed this specific research project; namely, the embodied nature of research, attention to power dynamics in the research process, reflexivity, and an orientation to policy, practice and activism. All of these tenets are anchored in the work of feminist scholars such as Donna Haraway (1988, 1994) and Sandra Harding (1987, 1991). These writers, alongside many others (e.g., Ring, 1987; Longino, 1989; Alcoff, 1989), critiqued the hegemony of the positivist paradigm first and foremost for its belief in the possibility of objective research (e.g., Durkheim, 1938) – or ‘disinterested’ research in the Mertonian tradition (Merton, 1977). Positivism argues that data is directly detectable through bodily senses, which seems paradoxical in the light of how positivism denies the presence of bodies in making claims of scientific validity (Sprague & Kobryniewicz, 1999: 28). In other words, it builds on a sharp distinction between the knower and what is known (Ring, 1987). In positivism, the researcher is understood as merely reporting neutral findings (Farganis, 1986). Despite disagreements between Haraway and Harding,³⁴ their work also aligns on various points, including their insistence on the accountability of science and researchers. By aiming to erase the role of the subject in the research process, positivist research comes to appear as if scientific knowledge is perceived through a ‘view from nowhere’ (Haraway, 1988). In this manner, scientific knowledge appears disembodied. Haraway (1988) stresses the need to reinsert the scientific view into the researcher’s body and to recognise the position from which the researcher speaks, because each subject is specific, located in a particular time and place (Sprague & Kobryniewicz, 1999: 27). The

³⁴ Harding’s work resonates with the feminist standpoint tradition, incl. assumptions of the generalised interests and emancipation of ‘women’ as a unified category and the view that ‘women’ hold a privileged epistemological vantage point from which to understand ‘reality’ and oppressive social systems in particular. Haraway’s position, on the other hand, is more aligned with postmodernism by stressing the ‘situatedness’ of all knowledge production, incl. feminist research. However, she distinguishes herself from postmodern feminists by maintaining objectivity as a scientific ideal (called situated knowledges) and a realist ontological stance (Lykke, 2008; 2010).

view that research constitutes an embodied practice is crucial to this dissertation. Ethnography as well as interviews presuppose the physical (co-)presence of bodies in knowledge production with all the challenges that this implies for the research process, including awkward encounters (Koning & Ooi, 2013), relationships (Beech et al., 2009), conflict (Mikkelsen, 2013), intersubjectivity (Højgaard, 2010) and ‘deference effects’ (Kane & McCaulay, 1993). I return to these challenges below.

The premise that research constitutes an embodied practice further implies that political interests will always permeate the research design and process (Harding, 1991). Harding (1987) notes how ‘there isn’t such a thing as a problem without a person (or groups of them)’ (p. 6). Researchers must therefore assume a ‘reflected political standpoint’ (Lykke, 2008: 133) to understand how the values and practices of the knower contribute to shaping the knowing (Sprague & Kobryniewicz, 1999). Haraway (1988) goes even further when positing that partial, objective accounts of reality are possible (although in her reformulated version, ‘situated knowledges’) as long as the ‘position from which the embodied researcher subject speaks is accounted for, theoretically as well as politically and ethically’ (Lykke, 2010: 134). Haraway’s position forces us to recognise the constructivism–realism dichotomy as false (1988; Delanty, 2005) and that it is possible to achieve credible and trustworthy accounts of the social world through a constructivist epistemology. This means that while reality is always defined, it nonetheless remains real (Hastrup, 1992 cited by Ravn, 2017). In keeping with Haraway and Hastrup’s transgression of the constructivism–realism dichotomy, I assume a realist ontological point of departure in this dissertation while pursuing a constructivist–interpretive epistemology. My onto-epistemologic positioning thus assumes that ‘motivation’ exists as something which I can study – but that there is no one right way of doing so. This dissertation therefore explores the idea of motivation on multiple levels, from different methodological and theoretical perspectives, and provides different kinds of knowledge about how organisations are motivated to engage in GE work.

To inhabit a reflected political standpoint like Harding champions or an explicitly partial point of departure (in Haraway’s words) thus requires that researchers demonstrate reflexivity about their positionality in order to ensure transparency and accountability. Transparency about positionality may take the form of a disclaimer like the one I included in the introduction to this dissertation: For me, a lack of reflexivity implies the risk that this project will simply be another white, middle-class, straight, able-bodied, ciswoman dealing with the same old white, middle-class, straight, able-bodied, ciswoman problems (women in positions of power) in the same old white, middle-class, straight, able-bodied, ciswoman (exclusionary) ways. However, as reflexivity

implies questioning the unconscious models or worldviews that guide our decisions, it should not only be a retrospective exercise or an add-on in the writing phase (Kara, 2013). There are obviously limitations to our reflexivity (Ahmed, 2012), and claiming a reflexive practice does not ‘magic away’ our privilege and power (Gouldner, 1971 cited by Murray, 2018). Nevertheless, throughout the research process, the important thing is for the researcher to ‘ask the question of what factors influence her construction of knowledge and how these influences are revealed in the conduct of research activities and the writing up of the research’ (Mikkelsen, 2013: 36). I would add hereto an attentiveness to what these factors may cause us to overlook.

As hinted at in the preface, for me, feminist politics first and foremost influence my construction of knowledge. Returning to Sara Ahmed’s (2017) point that, as feminists, feminism permeates all aspects of our lives and, thus, inevitably ‘is at stake in how we generate knowledge; in how we write, in who we cite’ (p. 14). It is of course crucial that feminism does not create – what I think of as – a ‘gender tunnel vision’, a point echoed by Alvesson and Billing (2009: 8). It is too easy to simply cry ‘white supremacist, capitalist, cishetero-patriarchy!’ by default. Following Hartsock (1981), feminism should be ‘a mode of analysis [...] rather than a set of [pre-given] political conclusions about the oppression of women’ (p. 35). In other words, I did not make any conclusions up front. My research is empirical and I am interested in what my data can tell me, especially when it offers new and surprising knowledge which may take us forward, and when it requires me to reconsider my presuppositions.

Feminist epistemology should further work as ‘oppositional research’ that interrogates the dominant paradigms of the disciplines within which feminist scholars work (Hawkesworth, 2012: 92), including gender studies. Doing oppositional research requires that feminist scholars are well versed in those mainstream ‘modes of analysis, investigation, and interpretation [which are generally] accredited within their fields’ (Ibid.). As a minority in my context (with my background in the humanities and business studies, and as a feminist researcher), working around and with, for example, economists, scientists, sociologists, but in particular political scientists, I am constantly confronted with the marginality of my approach to research and must often negotiate its ‘epistemic status’; that is, whether its output is considered ‘proper knowledge’ (Pereira, 2012). Such regular negotiations undoubtedly sharpen my critical reflexivity about my own methods and claims to knowledge, but they also increase my determination to challenge hegemonies.

Theoretical decisions also warrant reflexivity. Our unconscious schemas leave us prone to pursuing those routes at which we arrive almost automatically while we plan and do research. We must therefore consider why these

routes appeal to us and what the alternatives are (Schwarz-Shea & Yanow, 2013: 19). When I first discovered the literature on postfeminism, the concept immediately spoke to me. It resonated with dynamics I was observing in my personal life and in Danish society more broadly. In such cases, my decision to employ postfeminism as the central, theoretical backdrop for this dissertation required even more convincing, scientific justification. I use postfeminism because the concept enables me to engage in rich analyses, especially by highlighting the parallels and ‘red thread’ that runs through the empirical chapters. Moreover, as postfeminism has generally been overlooked in research empirically focusing on knowledge-intensive organisations in Denmark, my use of it and, in this way, this dissertation holds the potential of shedding new light upon and offering new understandings of persistent gender inequality in this context (please see chapter 4).

Reflexivity was also part and parcel of my considerations around positionality and relationships in the field. For example, how my HR background and my implicit understanding of HR concepts and practices (in combination with my status as a first-time ethnographer) often led me to forget to ask the crucial probing and elaborating questions that may enable research participants to articulate their understandings more fully (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Or how I struggled to balance the roles of professional researcher and passionate feminist activist in the field, especially when I interacted with women who expressed feminist sentiments (see Easterday et al., 1982). The fact that such challenges are very much relational in nature leads me to the third tenet of feminist epistemology, which has informed this PhD research. Historically, feminist scholars have argued that the principles of objectivity and detachment of positivism created unequal power relations between the researcher and the participants in an inquiry (Harding, 1991). For example, Oakley and Cracknell (1981) argued that the research process often constitutes ‘one-way traffic, in which researchers extract information from the people being studied and give little or more usually nothing in return’ (cited by Bryman & Bell, 2007: 30–31). Feminist research practices should therefore be anchored in values of collaboration and openness allowing for mutual learning. As in much interpretivist research, the aim is usually to achieve an in-depth understanding of people’s everyday sense- and meaning-making processes, and on this basis to interpret their actions and their social worlds (Bryman & Bell, 2007: 20). To achieve this aim, the researcher must allow participants to ‘raise and explore issues that they find to be relevant’ (Brinkmann, 2016: 529) and to challenge the researcher’s assumptions. In relation to analysis and writing, the researcher should ensure a balance between first- and second-order perspectives by reporting the voices of both informants (i.e., the terms, themes and logics that they employ) as well as the researcher (incl. theoretical categories,

concepts and interpretations) (Gioia et al., 2013: 18, building on van Maanen, 1979). This approach has the further advantage that it makes the links between empirical material and interpretation – the researcher’s *sense-giving* – more transparent (Gioia et al., 2013). In other words, the point is not that the researcher, through interpretation, invalidates the views of research participants. Interpretation must inevitably transcend research participants’ first-order, life-world descriptions (Giddens, 1993 cited by Ravn, 2017) in order to achieve the goal of constructing new knowledge about the social phenomenon of interest.

The final feminist, epistemological tenet that I want to highlight in this part of the chapter overlaps with both of the above points; that is, reflexivity towards my feminist, political positionality, and a collaborative orientation to knowledge production. Historically, ‘women studies’ was considered ‘the academic arm of the women’s movement’, Koertge (2012) informs us³⁵ (see also Weber, 2006: 156). It is therefore hardly surprising that many feminist scholars champion the relevance of their research to practitioners, policymakers and activist communities as an important scientific quality criterion. Feminist scholars are often active in these communities themselves, because they have a desire to contribute to solving the social problems that they study. In other words, their scholarly and activist identities overlap (Weber, 2006). In my case, my feminist activist identity preceded my researcher identity. This fact implied that my researcher identity inevitably became a ‘feminist scholar-activist’ identity. Although I obviously have my specific scientific interests which my research participants may not share, I have often found that we had our commitment to feminism in common (although not all would use that specific word), which has led them to be very generous with their time, information and assistance in different ways (Pereira, 2017: 14). We would not necessarily agree on how we understood the nature of gender inequality or what actions we individually deemed most adequate to create change. Nevertheless, as our overall goals generally align (i.e., improving gender equality in organisations), and since the problems we face in achieving these goals are the same (i.e., opposition towards GE work or doing research about this work), I recognise my responsibility towards my research participants (Lee, 2018). I especially acknowledge how my selection and use of theory and my interpretations shape the representation of the people who have kindly consented to be studied (Haynes, 2011). I therefore follow Maria do Mar Pereira’s approach (2017: 15, building on Davis, 2010 and Suchman, 2008) in recognising the work of my research participants as ‘an important feminist project’ (Davis, 2010: 148).

³⁵ Although this relationship has not been consistently felicitous; see, for example, Whelehan (2010) or Gillis and Munford (2004).

Consequently, while I aim for an honest and critical account, my analysis is never meant as judgemental, nor does it intend to ‘call out’ any particular individual. A ‘respectfully critical’ (Suchman, 2008) analysis is justified when it adds to our understanding of the phenomenon under study (here, GE work), and the problem to which this phenomenon relates, namely persistent gender inequality in Danish knowledge-intensive organisations.

2.2. Ethnography

In the following, I describe the methods employed in relation to chapters 5 and 6. These chapters are based on the four-month organisational ethnography of a Danish, multinational engineering company. The fact that ethnography tends to become shaped by the discipline within which it is engaged renders it difficult to define (Pink & Morgan, 2013). In the anthropological tradition, ethnography constituted the method through which cultural anthropologists would study (exotic) cultures with the aim of understanding another way of life from the native point of view (Spradley, 1979 cited by Lune & Berg, 2017). However, since the days of Malinowski (1922, 1935), Evans-Pritchard (1937, 1973) and Whyte (1955, 1956), ethnography has, alongside other sociological methods, undergone considerable changes (Ellen, 1984; Agar, 1996). Van Maanen (1982: 103) suggests that ethnography has become the method ‘that involves extensive fieldwork of various types including participant observation, formal and informal interviewing, document collecting, filming, recording, and so on’ (cited by Lune & Berg, 2017: 109). The idea of fieldwork, with all of the research practices it entails, this way places the researcher in the midst of whatever is studied. The methods mentioned by van Maanen are generally undertaken to ‘capture the situated and relational character of social life and construct analyses that untangle the relationship between sentiments and acts’ (Jerolmack & Kahn, 2014: 199). In this dissertation, ethnography refers to my ‘observing and analysing real-life situations, [and] studying actions and activities as they occur’ (Burgess, 1982b: 2). The objective is to capture meaning-making and action relating to GE work in situ in order to understand ‘when and how both discursive and tacit schemas/frames shape behavior’ (Jerolmack & Kahn, 2014: 194). Importantly, ethnography situates accounts and actions in the interactive context in which they take place (*bid.*), incl. that which concerns the researcher–researched relationship. Central to achieving this contextualisation is the notion of ‘thick descriptions’ (Geertz, 1973), which aim to paint a complete picture of the setting of a given ethnography, ideally leaving readers with a sense of being in the field themselves. Therefore, some researchers (e.g., Humphreys & Watson, 2009) posit that ethnography is just

as much the textual output of research as the methods of empirical data generation, because writing ethnography entails conveying ‘tales of the field’ (van Maanen, 1988). Ethnography must therefore also entail a degree of autoethnography; that is, the dialogical engagement with the self, situated in a specific social context, in relation to theory (Haynes, 2011).

Traditional perceptions of research design imply that research unfolds in a linear manner: Pose a research question, select a case, conduct research, analyse data and report findings. In contrast hereto, in ethnography, decisions about research design, generation of empirical material and analysis take place simultaneously and iteratively (Burgess, 1982c). In ethnography, the researcher herself is the main research ‘instrument’, and data generation depends on her relationships with the research participants. Despite my compliance with recognised research integrity protocols and codes of conduct (Danish Ministry of Education and Science, 2014; All European Academies, 2017), the inherently embodied and relational nature of ethnographic research (Beech et al., 2009; Koning & Ooi, 2013) means that difficult questions about methodology and the ethics and politics of doing research are bound to emerge throughout the research process (Burgess, 1982b). In other words, ethnography is the prime example of ‘messy research’ (Lambotte & Meunier, 2013; Donnelly et al., 2013).

I initiated my ethnography as a novice fieldwork researcher, and I had done my best to prepare (using, e.g., Ybema et al., 2008 and by taking a PhD course on organisational ethnography hosted by the University of Southern Denmark, August 2017). However, I quickly found that when faced with the everyday life of my case company, many decisions had to be made haphazardly and ‘on the go’. ‘Access’, for instance, is not simply about being allowed to enter the organisation. Rather, participation in meetings, recruiting interviewees and access to documents are determined on an ongoing basis throughout the fieldwork (Mikkelsen, 2013). Furthermore, while I might have had intentions and expectations about my role in the company and the degree of my participation, these dynamics were constantly negotiated in different situations and interactions with people (Gosovic, 2018). These are likely some of the interpersonal dynamics which have led van Maanen (2011) to label fieldwork ‘one of the most impressive ways yet invented to make ourselves uncomfortable’ (p. 219). Gulick (1977) notes that on top of all the feelings that our lives normally entail (elation, boredom, embarrassment, anger, joy, anxiety etc.), fieldwork further necessitates that the researcher learns the language, routines and cues of the field setting, which leads to a heightened awareness of the self (p. 90, cited by Burgess, 1982b). Navigating insider vis-à-vis stranger positions in an attempt to become immersed while not ‘going native’ (Ybema & Kamsteeg,

2009; Alvesson, 2009; Moeran, 2009) doubtlessly contributes to making ethnographic fieldwork equally exciting and emotionally exhausting (Vincett, 2018).

As I also describe in chapters 5 and 6, in Koning and Ooi's words (2013), my ethnography is 'a more mobile version of classical anthropological long term being there' (p. 18). Although my fieldwork was relatively short and discontinuous (Whyte, 2013; Nycyk, 2018), the field was constantly ruminating in my mind, even when I was not physically present in the field (Wulff, 2002). The actual fieldwork occurred over just four months (November 2017–February 2018). However, my contact with the company has spanned more than two years; from when I initially reached out (summer 2017), to a follow-up meeting eight months after the fieldwork (autumn 2018), and to a field visit in the company's North American branch (May 2019). Throughout this period, I remained in contact with my research participants and followed the company's activities closely in the media, via its webpage and on social media. I have also reached out to set up a final follow-up meeting which will hopefully take place in spring 2020. I agree with Ybema et al. (2009) that distance to the field is equally important to ethnography as is closeness to reduce the risk of 'going native'. I also agree with Knoblauch (2005) that 'immersion' can be achieved in alternative ways, such as in the analysis phase of ethnography. Still, I find that the richest data of my ethnography came from my 'being there'. Looking back, I would wish that I could have invested more time in the fieldwork.

Below, I zoom in on a few (out of many) important aspects of doing organisational ethnography, which for format and space considerations had to be left out of my empirical articles (chapters 4 and 5). I will unfold the following part of the chapter using a combination of first-person narrative, building on my fieldwork journal and the literature on ethnographic methods. In using first-person narrative in the style of autoethnography, I am attentive to the risk of falling into the trap of incessant self-analysis and self-disclosure (Finlay, 2002: 212). Nevertheless, as ethnographers use the 'self' (senses, bodies, feelings, subjectivities, their whole being) (Ellis, 2004) to engage with the lives of others, they also must be willing and able to engage with their own lives (Haynes, 2011: 143). Autoethnographic writing is useful by enabling me to explore my experiences, identity and location within the research process (Haynes, 2006). What is important is that this exploration must involve the dialogical inquiry of the self in relation to theory (Ibid.); and finding a balance between the two (Kara, 2013). In Haynes' (2011) words: 'Too much passion risks the autoethnography being critiqued for self-indulgence. Too much theory obscures the richness of the personal experience' (p. 139).

2.2.1. Initial phase

Choosing the case company

The purpose of this PhD project is to explore the organisational motivation phenomenon to engage in GE work. This means that I was looking for an ‘instrumental’ case (Stake, 2005 cited by Ravn, 2017), because I aimed to advance understandings of a phenomenon external to any specific case organisation. However, the characteristics and particularities of the company, which I finally chose, ended up being ‘intrinsically’ interesting and very rich in and of themselves (Ibid.). In this manner, the case company and data I generated spoke to so much more than I anticipated, which chapter 5 illustrates and is a product of. The point of departure for my case selection was the assumption that motivation (whatever it turned out to be) would only be found in an organisation which was already engaged in GE work (a ‘most likely case’ cf. Flyvbjerg, 2010). If a company was not addressing and engaged in gender equality, I assumed that motivation was absent (a ‘least likely case’, Ibid.). I focused my search on those companies which stood out in the Danish context, assuming that the more GE work a given company had done or was doing, the more it was motivated. To find such a company, I used the online Danish database, InfoMedia, which contains articles by national, regional and local newspapers, magazines, trade journals, news agencies and web sources to see to what extent different companies had appeared in the media in relation to GE issues. I also investigated whether companies had participated in some of the leading GE initiatives in Denmark (of that time), such as having been ‘gender certified’³⁶ and being signatories to a previous political initiative known as ‘The charter for more women in leadership’³⁷. Based on these steps, I narrowed the number of suitable companies down to around 10 and subsequently assessed them based on the degree to which gender equality appeared on their websites and whether gender was mentioned as a key priority in corporate communications, such as public strategies and CSR reports. I ranked the shortlist of potential case companies based on my assessment of the degree to which gender appeared a high-priority topic and started contacting the companies on the list from the top down. After a few initial rejections, an engineering company³⁸ responded positively to my inquiry. After a few phone calls

³⁶ In Denmark, the equality–diversity–inclusion consultancy company Living Institute offers gender certification through workshops, courses etc.

³⁷ For more information: www.kvinderiledelse.dk

³⁸ Please see appendix 5.6. of chapter 5 for more information about the case company.

about the potential conditions of a collaboration, a meeting was set up in August 2017.

In this first meeting, I spoke with the two women who later became my main collaborators and sponsors in the company, Alice and Kirsten (pseudonyms). They found it particularly appropriate to have me study GE work in the organisation at this time, as they were in the preliminary phase of developing and approving a new equality programme which I could follow: the 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Programme' (EDIP). They were keen on having me observing them in the work that they were going to do in relation to this new programme. They felt that this would allow them to see themselves through the eyes of an outsider, hopefully enabling them to 'catch' some of their blind spots (see Ybema & Kamsteeg, 2009: 102). In this way, they were very interested in my critical approach and hoped that I could constitute a 'productive disturbance'³⁹ through my questions about the organisation and its GE work. It was agreed that once the final executive approvals were ensured as planned in September 2017, the date of the launch of the new EDIP (sometime in late September–early October 2017) would also mark the start of my fieldwork in the organisation. After the meeting, however, I was left for a time without any clear answers as to when it would be possible to start. The process was delayed because the intended EDIP 'project lead', Sarah, went on indefinite sick leave. As I could not postpone significantly due to the time constraints of my PhD employment, I had to push a little to initiate the fieldwork, and my first day in the organisation was, in the end, planned for 1 November 2017.

Terms and conditions

Our collaboration was formalised through a legal contract, which was handled through Aarhus University's Technology Transfer Office. This way, the terms and conditions were clear to both parties from the outset. Most importantly, we agreed that I had no formal responsibilities to the company. Alice and Kirsten understood that my research questions were of a general nature, and I explained that my explorative approach made it very difficult for me to state in advance exactly what the output of my study would be (Beech et al., 2009). While I would be happy to contribute with my knowledge and input, which would hopefully stimulate general learning, I was not present in the company in the role of consultant. In other words, while my role would mainly be that of an observer, when relevant, I would participate to the extent and in the manner that my research participants wished and allowed (Kristiansen & Krogstrup, 2009; Waddington, 2004; Moeran, 2009). I was not required to

³⁹ This idea was used by one research participant. I believe the notion originates from the work of Maturana & Verela, e.g., 1991, and Maturana, Verela & Uribe, 1991.

deliver any specified reporting to the company in return for allowing me to use it as the case for my research. The contract stated plainly that the data that I gathered in the company would be used in scientific publications (i.e., published articles and this dissertation), and I had an informal agreement with Kirsten and Alice to share my research output with them, either in writing or some kind of presentation.

While the company had no preference with respect to anonymity, I myself decided to anonymise the company completely. I felt that this choice ensured me the latitude to also explore the more sensitive dimensions of the company, either disclosed to me by the research participants or that I experienced and observed myself in the field. I have anonymised all of the research participants and been cautious to protect them as much as possible while also providing a frank and critical account (Nycyk, 2018). In general, I have felt particularly lost and in the lack of guidance when it comes to anonymisation of my research participants. Following Pereira (2017): ‘Protecting anonymity is extremely important, but extraordinarily difficult, in a project focusing on relatively high-profile individuals within a small community, who can easily be identified’ (p. 13). This holds true of both my ethnographic work (chapters 5 and 6) and the interview study (chapter 4). To the communities that my research participants belong, they are easily identifiable. I have of course anonymised organisations and used pseudonyms and, for the ethnography, I have also used different pseudonyms for the same people across texts to limit the ability of the reader to track individual people. In chapter 5, I have not used any names at all but, frankly, I had neither the knowledge nor experience to assess the ‘pros and cons’ of either option. In addition, merely changing the names of people I know felt like a kind of violation, even though I was doing so to protect them. I have also engaged in minor fictionalisation (Humphreys & Watson, 2009) and omitted all non-crucial details about my research participants. Nevertheless, in the review process for chapter 4, I found that I was required to provide more information about interviewees, arguing that this was important contextual knowledge through which to understand their statements. In this way, more anonymity is not per definition better, and researchers may be faced with opposing expectations and demands that must be balanced.

2.2.2. Fieldwork in practice

Entering the field

Entering the field as a first-time ethnographer was, quite frankly, nerve-racking. I was excited and nervous. I was made to feel welcome from the very

first day, however, and was helped to settle in. Kirsten and Alice had both allocated time for me, which provided the opportunity for some preliminary talks, and Kirsten gave me a tour of the headquarters building. Just as I had been on the occasion of our initial meeting, I was very impressed. The HQ building is a modern architectural marvel of light and space, which contrasts sharply with the corridors and small, separated offices of the original 1920–30s buildings of Aarhus University. The tour was also a useful way to get a very tentative overview of the many different professional divisions and units within the company. Alice invited me to participate in a Skype call with some international colleagues in which she introduced them to the EDIP, which also served as a useful update for me. Alice and Kirsten also had several suggestions as to whom might be relevant for me to talk to. Therefore, after the first day, I had already ‘snowballed’ my first interviewees, in addition to those I knew in advance that I wanted to talk to.

I entered the field intending to explore ‘motivation’, understood as the pressures and incentives that may drive organisational GE work. As I explain in chapter 6, my hypothesis was that, for instance, legislation, the ‘business case’ for gender equality and corporate social responsibility (CSR) *might* play a role in driving organisational GE work. I assumed that to uncover why the case company was increasing its attention to gender inequality, by developing the new EDIP, I would have to get to know the people involved in this programme, and those who had been part of decision-making in this regard. I therefore emphasised to Alice and Kirsten that I would need to be seated where work on the EDIP generally took place, namely the HR and CSR departments. This means that only a few of my research participants were actually engineers. At this point, the engineering staff (which is the largest professional group in the company) were unaware of the new EDIP. No communication about it had been issued. The engineers would, in other words, be unable to provide me with the information I was seeking.

As such, most of my research participants were instead trained in fields such as business administration, communication and psychology, although some of the leaders I interviewed were indeed engineers who had risen through the ranks of the company over time. It was agreed that I would interchange between the HR and CSR departments, depending on where I might have scheduled interviews and meetings and where an unoccupied desk might be available. My presence and physical proximity to the people working with different aspect of gender issues in the company proved key to access. After having participated in a meeting, for instance, Alice and I would chat about what was discussed, which led her to remember documents and information that were relevant to me. She would then immediately forward the documents

in question. Access was also determined by the atmospheres and different cultures of the physical spaces between which I alternated. The CSR department consisted of four full-time employees and one part-time student assistant. CSR occupied a relatively small, separate office area on the top floor. Whereas the HR department, consisting of seven full-time consultants and two part-time student assistants, shared a large open office area on a lower floor, the CSR group and the small, enclosed ‘glass cage’ they shared was intimate; when anyone engaged in conversation, whether work-related or social, it usually gradually spread to include everyone present. While the CSR team were all pleasant and easy-going people, the atmosphere was slightly more subdued, which may be because the office was located amongst the executives and their assistants. In HR, on the other hand, the desks were spread more widely apart, and personnel were able to have more or less private conversations amongst themselves. I also had the feeling once or twice that my presence led people to deliberately lower their voices. Nevertheless, social banter across the room that included everyone was also common, as a few of the HR employees were very humorous and entertaining. For example, one consultant once loudly and jokingly declared to the room with a kindly wink in my direction ‘We have to be careful what we say – we have *the professor* visiting!’.

This quote speaks to the issue of distance and closeness to the field under study. I felt both ‘at home’ and as a stranger in my case company (Knoblauch, 2005; Ybema & Kamsteeg, 2009; Alvesson, 2009). For one, the engineering field was unfamiliar to me. I had much to learn about the markets in which the company operates, not to mention the functioning of large-scale, cross-field engineering projects. Secondly, the company felt very ‘corporate’ to me, and in this way unfamiliar vis-à-vis academia. As already mentioned, the CSR department was located on the top floor of the building, which also housed the corporate executives and their support staff. The dress code there was more formal than amongst most of the engineers. Most men wore a shirt, tie and blazer, and some women wore heels. I tried to assimilate to the dress code (e.g., by wearing heels, which I would not normally do at work). While I have not explicitly addressed my decision to change my footwear in my fieldwork journal, I recall joking with university colleagues that I had ‘gone corporate’ and that, at one point, I was complimented on my shoes by one of the executive’s personal assistants. Clearly, then, attire is one way through which one, as an ethnographer in the field, can assimilate ‘the locals’ in order to be perceived as a legitimate actor (Beech et al., 2009). My HR background⁴⁰ was also

⁴⁰ My master’s degree is in human resource management and, during my time as a university student, I completed two HR internships in Danish and German companies (amounting to 1 year in total).

important in this regard. My familiarity with HR lingo and practices enabled me to participate more quickly in discussions with my research participants and to better understand the interactions I was observing. However, it also caused me to forget to ask the kinds of probing and elaborating questions, which enrich empirical material by enabling research participants to articulate their understandings more fully (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

Participant observation

At its basic level, ethnographic fieldwork is about ‘participating, overtly and covertly, in people’s daily lives’ (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007: 3). This was what I did in the company. I focused my observations on the daily routines and work procedures of the HR and CSR departments, interpersonal dynamics, communication, structural and social relationships (Whyte, 1984). I was interested in understanding the role of HR and CSR in the company in general, my observations of which resembled ‘descriptive’ observations, in Spradley’s terminology (1980, cited by Kristiansen & Krogstrup, 2009: 143–144). Building on my descriptive understanding of HR and CSR processes and practices in the company, I was better equipped to ‘focus’ my observations (Ibid.) in order to understand how gender equality and the EDIP would be part of the company’s HR and CSR work. My observations of particular meetings, events, contexts and interactions which related specifically to the GE issue and the EDIP may be characterised as ‘selective’ (Ibid.). Through selective observations, I narrowed my focus even further to be able to answer my research question. Some selective observations were not about gender equality, such as a workshop about how engineering employees could become involved in voluntary work through the company as well as external organisations. Still, this specific event was enormously informative about the company culture and how the value of ‘contributing positively to society’ manifests itself in the organisation (see chapter 5).

I journaled my observations meticulously. Decisions about what to record in my research journal (and how) were made organically. Still, some journal entries may be characterised ‘substantive’ (Burgess, 1982a: 293–294) and focus on recording factual information, such as names, dates, places and sequences of events. Substantive field notes are more objective in style and help structure ethnographic observations. I often wrote substantive field notes in a concise, bullet-point format. Other entries in my fieldwork journal are ‘methodological’ (Ibid.: 297–295) in the sense that they convey my personal impressions of situations, my participation, field roles and relationships, but most importantly the emotions associated with these aspects. Emotions are valuable data in their own right, as they are conducive to the reflexive work, which

is required to ensure research quality (Kara, 2013; Vincett, 2018). I generally wrote methodological field notes as coherent text in narrative form, which also applies to ‘analytic’ field notes (Burgess, 1982a: 295–296). As data generation and data analysis occur simultaneously in ethnography, an absolute distinction between types of field notes is difficult. Analytic journal entries typically overlapped with methodological reflections, noticeable in observations that led to further questions and new empirical topics to explore. In addition hereto, I took photos of significant elements of the architecture of the office building, décor and artefacts (incl. the portraits of the company’s founders, see chapter 5), and video-recorded for instance an important cultural, communal singing event (also discussed in chapter 5).

Furthermore, in an attempt to blend in as an ordinary participant in the everyday life of the company as opposed to constantly drawing attention to myself as the visiting, ‘snooping’ researcher (Jarvie, 1982; Moeran, 2009), I spent many hours simply working at my desk. In my time at the company, I also had other work responsibilities not directly related to the fieldwork (in relation to other research projects, as part of my PhD obligations). Although always aware of what was going on around me, when not interviewing or invited to meetings etc. I would sit at my desk and work on my different tasks. In this way, my fieldwork journal is very much characterised by entries alternating between the very mundane and ordinary (Back, 2015), and specific, extraordinary events. Although the ‘[t]he very ‘ordinariness’ of normality’ often prevents us from seeing ‘the extraordinary-in-the-ordinary’ (Ybema et al., 2009: 2–3), I argue that it is the dialectic between the everyday and extraordinary events that enabled me to gradually ‘read the tacitly known scripts and schemas that organize ordinary activities’ in my case company (Perec, 1989, cited by Ybema et al., 2009: 2). In my attentiveness to this dialectic, I focused as much on patterns as on fragmentation in accounts and my observations (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011: 42). In my experience, ambiguity tells us just as much about ‘how dispositions, beliefs, order and culture are made and remade through [...] everyday face-to-face interaction’ as patterns do (Jerolmack & Kahn, 2014: 197). As Flyvbjerg (2010) argues, a neat, coherent story may be an indication that a case study has only scratched the surface. Conversely, a story which encompasses contradictions and fragmentations signals that the researcher may have succeeded in uncovering deep-rooted social issues that are always complex in nature. Still, it is ‘by accounting for variation through sampling across actors, times, and contexts, the ethnographer strengthens her explanations’ (Jerolmack & Kahn, 2014: 197). Before turning to formal and informal interviews, I will now focus on one recurrent, mundane but very important event, namely lunches, and one specific significant field event.

Lunches

Looking through my fieldwork journal, lunches stand out. My closest contacts within the company, the HR and CSR employees, were always very considerate to invite me along when they went to lunch. Lunch takes place in a large, bright, open area, where employees from all functions and departments would go around midday. At lunch, I was often introduced to new people – the friends and collaborators of my research participants from diverse areas and departments within the company. These introductions presented a challenge with respect to how I positioned myself towards these people, some of whom would later become interview participants. I found that they would never really allow me to be aloof or vague about myself or what I was doing in the company. I rarely experienced them as critical about my presence in the company (Moeran, 2009: 141); rather, when they knew of the focus of my study, new contacts generally expressed support for the relevance of this topic for the company. Their questions to elaborate when I was purposefully being vague seemed driven by a genuine interest; nevertheless, I was worried that I projected some kind of script onto my research participants, for example, by mentioning my interest in the idea of motivation. Meeting new people at lunches proved a great opportunity to network beyond the HR and CSR departments, and a source of valuable new perspective when these new contacts would give me their immediate input and reflections on gender and equality in the company off the top of their heads. My experience here appears to resonate with van der Waal (2009), who notes that much information will only be revealed when you interact informally with people and that striving to capture the cues in this information is ‘essential for developing an awareness of the complexity and multi-layered character of meanings and relationships’ (p. 35). After lunch, I would therefore often rush back to my desk to try to recapitulate the gist of such conversations in my fieldwork journal.

Lunches were also significant for my fieldwork in other ways. The lunch situation confronted me with particular social anxieties. For one, in the large lunch area, there were often several hundred employees gathered around the buffets and tables, chatting loudly and eating. It was therefore also quite overwhelming, as a newcomer, to be surrounded by this seemingly immense group of people whom I would never meet nor in any way relate to, and that I definitely did not feel part of. I was therefore happy to be included in the groups of the few people I did know when going to lunch, because the idea of going to lunch alone was honestly terrifying. Interestingly, by the end of the field work, I changed my behaviour noticeably. During the last few field visits, due to (what I think of as) ‘ethnographic fatigue’ (inspired by Vincett, 2018), I willingly went to lunch alone. Although lunches were key to building relationships and

often goldmines of information, they also required extensive emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983), compassion (Vincett, 2018) and a constant orientation towards others, demonstrating interest in them, their views and encouraging disclosure. But my ethnographic fatigue was not solely a consequence of emotional labour. The logistics of my fieldwork were such that I would usually spend three days per week in my case company and then return for the last two days of the work week to my home university. The company is located in Copenhagen (eastern Denmark), whereas my university is in Aarhus (western Denmark). As such, I would commute approximately 3–4 hours twice weekly, staying at low-standard hotels in the vicinity of the company building. For me personally, this meant that I would either work long hours in the company or make plans with friends in Copenhagen during the evenings to limit the time I would spend in my hotel room to literally only involve sleeping. In other words, I pushed myself to the limit during most of these days in the field. As such, by the end, going to lunch alone offered to me a needed moment in which I did not have to relate to anything or anyone, where I could instead take a pause and replenish my energy, for example before an interview or meeting. My change of behaviour had an impact on my data generation in that I may have missed out on valuable information by the social lunches I chose not to pursue. Nevertheless, awareness of self-care in fieldwork is crucial (Vincett, 2018) in order for the researcher to sustain herself while confronted with the peculiar social circumstance which ethnography is.

The Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Programme launch

As mentioned above, in our initial plans, the EDIP launch event was supposed to have marked my entry into the field. Sarah's sick leave postponed everything, however, and the launch thus took place approximately mid-way through the fieldwork. This possibly added to my anticipation of the launch event. It was to be a full day of workshops and discussions about actions, creating a time plan, deciding KPIs and more, ending with the EDI project group of five people, an external consultant, and myself going out for dinner at a high-end Copenhagen restaurant. I had thoroughly read all of the documents and slide decks that had been distributed via email beforehand. I had also prepared a brief presentation of my fieldwork so far, my impressions of the company and thoughts on the EDIP at this point. Nevertheless, I had decided in advance to not pitch in unless asked, to see if others would bring up my points themselves, which they generally did. I thus assumed the role of observer while focused on taking notes, with the intention of limiting the influence of my presence in that setting (Mikkelsen, 2013). On multiple occasions, however, the fact that my presence was very marked in the perception of the other

participants became evident. For example, at the launch, one participant mentioned how none of the authors of an internal investigation of gender equality in the company, conducted a few years earlier, no longer worked there (see chapter 5). I interjected that I had spoken with one of the authors just the week before, in the belief that I was simply conveying a neutral fact. However, my comment was received with a sharp glare, which I interpreted as an indication that, as an outsider, my correcting her knowledge of the company, as an insider, was a ‘face threat’ (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In a later discussion between several of the participants, which I was following with interest, my presence was made particularly salient when I was reprimanded ‘Don’t write this in your notes!’. These examples show how, during one event, the insider–outsider roles are constantly negotiated (Gosovic, 2018) and that, as a field researcher, your presence can never be neutral. In one instance, I am a warmly invited participant in social contexts revolving around the topic which I consider my academic ‘home turf’; in the next, I’m explicitly and abruptly marked as an intruder, presenting me to everyone in the room as someone who holds the power to potentially damage the company. While in that moment, I felt very uncomfortable and singled out, everything immediately went back to normal and the atmosphere again became pleasant. Such shifts of taking and ascribing insider–outsider positions also imply a shift in power. I never felt powerful in the field, which may likely be attributed to the insecurities that accompany being a novice field researcher. I felt that I was generally ‘studying up’, given that I was faced with the enormity of this corporation and its members, on whom I depended entirely for the success of my research (Moeran, 2009). Nevertheless, such instances made evident to me that behind the genuinely welcoming attitudes that generally made me feel very included in the company, an awareness of the power that my participants ascribed to me and my research appeared to lurk constantly.

2.2.3. Formal and informal interviewing

While I will go into more detail on my general approach to interviewing below (see 2.3.), I will explain in the following the specificities of the interviews carried out in relation to the ethnography in the company’s Danish headquarters. In total, I carried out 16 interviews⁴¹ of between roughly 30–75 minutes. The premise of my interview sampling was that to explore and understand organisational motivation to engage in GE work, I would have to talk with the people involved in this work. When I commenced the fieldwork, I therefore immedi-

⁴¹ I also carried out 10 interviews in the US; see 2.2.5. below.

ately set up initial interviews with the HR and CSR employees directly involved in the design and implementation of the EDIP. I also arranged interviews with the HR and CSR employees who would be more indirectly involved in the programme. These interviewees included the managers of international recruitment and the global 'staff development dialogue' framework, within which issues of gender and diversity are important aspects. I also knew that I would like to talk to the executives who had been involved in decision-making relating to the EDIP. My sponsors, Alice and Kirsten, served as gatekeepers to the executive interviews.

In addition hereto, my approach to interview sampling resembles the notion of 'theoretical sampling' known from Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006), through which I made strategic decisions about who (and what) might be able to provide me with the information I needed (see also Brinkmann, 2016). The output was very much a 'judgment' sample (Honnigmann, 1982), as I would assess potential interviewees based on the information I already had about them or on the advice of other research participants. Advice from research participants was also indispensable when new empirical topics emerged that I wanted to pursue. In such situations, I asked around about who might be able to tell me more about the topic in question. I further 'snowballed' interview participants who were involved in organisational GE work in the past or who were involved in feminist activism external to the company, which had spilled over into their role within the organisation. I also 'chunk sampled' (Ibid.) some of my international interviewees through my participation in Skype calls and emails with a network of female leaders from across the company's international branches. This network was involved in lobbying for women's issues and equality (see chapter 6). Access to these interviews was, in other words, opportunistic.

The physical settings in which the interviews took place varied, four of them being carried out virtually via Skype. Overall, there were two categories, formal and informal interviews. All were semi-structured although guided to different degrees, some closer to conversations than interviews. I begin by addressing this latter category.

Coffee chats

As mentioned previously, I entered the company with my overall research question and ideas for particular 'motivations' which I wanted to investigate. At the same time, however, I wanted to explore more openly how this company and its employees and leaders understood and approached gender (in)equality and GE work. I began interviewing with a particular focus on the explorative aspect in order to get to know people and, through them, the company.

These talks assumed the form of ‘coffee chats’, which were very loosely structured interviews. Some chats were guided based on a list of a few topics, whereas in others I had an interview guide which I drew on in a flexible manner. Appendix 2.6.1. contains the interview guide used in the coffee chats. In some cases, minor adaptations were made to the interviewee in question. I asked HR and CSR employees about their everyday tasks and responsibilities, and what role they expected to play in the EDIP. I encouraged their views on the status of gender issues in the company and on what they viewed as relevant steps to resolving these issues. Finally, in the coffee chats, I asked my interlocutors general questions about the company’s history, culture, vision and mission for the future. Several of the coffee chats proceeded as a more or less equal conversation, as some interviewees also asked about me and my research. In others, I would let the research participant do most of the talking and probe interesting, new information. The coffee chats therefore developed in very different directions and the topics discussed vary. These interviews took place either in so-called ‘flex rooms’ (i.e., meeting rooms arranged to facilitate dynamic, workshop-style meetings) or in the café – a particular part of the lunch area offering snacks and drinks outside of lunch hours, decorated with comfortable chairs inviting employees to lounge and talk. In this sense, the setting for these talks was very informal. Some were fully recorded, while others were only partly recorded.

The nine coffee talks offered several opportunities and advantages. Firstly, they enabled me to explore different topics, such as organisational culture, HR and CSR processes more generally, previous efforts to improve gender equality in the company, hopes for the future etc. Secondly, they allowed me to gradually get back into the craft of interviewing and to test different interview formats. Finally, the coffee talks enabled me to test and reflect on my own strengths and weaknesses as an interviewer. I noted these reflections in my fieldwork journal. I quickly found that I felt much more comfortable in talks with individuals who did not need much guidance, who would give rich, long answers to my questions and take the talk in unanticipated directions, as well as with research participants who were feminist in their orientations – although not all would label their views or self-identify as such. Keen to be understood, I would also tend to ask several questions at once and elaborate on my questions which obviously implies the risk of leading the answers of the interview participants. In other words, I was very aware of my challenges as an interviewer and, in my fieldwork journal, I wrote that ‘I would have to do better in the *actual* interviews’, referring to the interviews I would later have with the director of the board, the CEO and the like. This reflection seems to suggest that I found the coffee chats with the people I would be around on normal days in the field somehow less weighty, or that I was studying slightly

more ‘sideways’ than ‘up’ in these informal interviews (Nader, 1969; Hannerz, 2006). Or, due to the informal set-up, I may have felt that I did not have to perform the professional identity of the ‘researcher’ (Koning & Ooi, 2013; Gosovic, 2018) to the same extent in the coffee chats, which relieved me of some of the pressure of doing the interviews.

Formal interviews

Because the participants in the formal interviews were more diverse than the participants in the coffee chats in terms of their organisational positions, backgrounds, roles, responsibilities etc., the interview guide had to be individually adapted. Participants were Danish and international leadership, as well as central persons involved in designing and implementing the EDIP. The nine coffee chats and the knowledge base that they ensured enabled me to tailor the seven formal interviews much better to the individual interviewee, which resulted in seven slightly different interview guides for the formal interviews. Appendix 2.6.2. contains the basic version of the interview guide for the formal interviews. Adaptations were relatively minor and related principally to the role of the interviewee (decision-maker or practitioner), context (whether a given interviewee was located in Denmark or in the company’s international branches), or the interviewees’ seniority (i.e., the length of their employment, which related to their involvement in previous GE initiatives). The formal interviews were also semi-structured, but more so than the coffee chats. All of the formal interviews covered some of the same open questions as the coffee chats, including

1. What kinds of changes would you personally like to see as a result of the new ‘Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Programme’?
2. What do you see as the biggest impediments in the company to improve equality and diversity?
3. What do you think is needed in order for [Company X] to succeed in improving equality and diversity?

In contrast to the coffee chats, the formal interviews also encompassed more specific, closed questions in concerning issues such as legislation, civic engagement and feminist social movements. Still, I allowed the participants to take the interview in their desired directions, especially when these directions required me to reassess my own presuppositions and hypotheses (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015: 35).

The purpose of the formal interviews was partly to elicit interview participants’ views and opinions about gender equality in the company, but I was mostly interested in obtaining rich accounts of events related to GE work in

order to understand interconnections between different events and between events and contexts (Bryman & Bell, 2007: 542, building on Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). I therefore invited interviewees to revisit previous GE work and address the new EDIP, reflecting on the processes leading up to these initiatives, with a particular focus on what they perceived to be the most important incentives and drivers. In so doing, I was attentive to the limitations of this approach, namely that interview data is always *ex post* or *ex ante* explanations or justifications and that I cannot take the ‘actors’ sense making and self-reported behaviours’ in the interviews for granted as unequivocal proxies for social action (Jerolmack & Kahn, 2014: 192). Therefore, in order to capture those implicit cultural schemas and individual dispositions beyond the level of discursive consciousness that may motivate action, I contextualised the interviews through my observations, my ongoing informal, everyday conversations with research participants, and the wealth of organisational documents I collected. In particular, I paid attention to ‘management bias’ (Burgess, 1982c: 118) as managers are more likely to present a very positive view of the organisation. I am keenly aware that a relatively small sample of interviews together with a short-term, focused ethnography (Knoblauch, 2005; Pink and Morgan, 2013) limits my capacity to make generalisable claims. But external generalisation was never my aim. My objective was to ensure enough (and the right) information to answer my research question concerning motivation relating to GE work in this specific company. Generalisability is often presented as the epitome of scientific quality criteria (Flyvbjerg, 2010; see also Welch & Piekkari, 2017). Nonetheless, an in-depth study of motivation in one case is intrinsically valuable and plays an important role in the collective knowledge accumulation relating to a specific research field or more broadly in society; here, gender equality (Flyvbjerg, 2010).

In the formal interviews, I worked more consciously with interview techniques based on my experiences from the coffee chats. I quickly found the success of these techniques to depend entirely on the individual interview meeting. For example, I could ask open questions in the hope of long, full responses, but the interview participant might instead keep their answers short, concise and then await my next move. Consequently, following Brinkmann (2016), I built a ‘sensitivity to how the particulars of interview episodes code-terminate[d] what and how things [were] talked about’ (p. 531) and, on that basis, adjusted my approach on the go. Furthermore, as I undertook the formal interviews about half-way through the fieldwork, I had already gained glimpses into the ‘backstage’ of the organisation (Goffman, 1990) as concerned gender issues through informal conversations (incl. at lunches). My document analysis had also made me quite familiar with the company’s cor-

porate communication. In this way, I was able to register when interview participants drew on official and more polished narratives (van der Waal, 2009). While I believe that the relative truth of formal narratives may be less important, I certainly learned to be attentive to the dialectic between patterns and fragmentation in accounts (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011) as well as alignment and contradictions between the front- and backstage⁴² (Goffman, 1990). While such complexity enriched my empirical material, it requires much attention in analysis and writing (Flyvbjerg, 2010; Jerolmack & Kahn, 2014).

The ethics of interviewing

When an ethnographer enters a case organisation to do research, somebody, usually at the leadership level, extends the invitation on behalf of everyone within that company. My research participants showed much openness, interest and willingness to participate and contribute (the only two exceptions are described below). Still, they had no say in the decision to grant me access and inevitably had less knowledge of my research focus and the conditions of my access than did my two sponsors, with whom I negotiated the collaboration. This fact increases the necessity for the researcher to constantly ensure informed consent with research participants. In the formal interviews, ensuring informed consent is relatively straightforward, as I made sure to inform participants at the outset of the purpose of the research, the terms and conditions of participation, issues of anonymity and confidentiality etc. I also ended each interview with an open question such as ‘Do you have anything more to add? Anything that has come to mind? Any final thoughts?’ to enable the research participant to reflect and comment on the interview, issues beyond my questions or whatever else they might like to address. The informal interviews, on the other hand, are more ethically challenging. Coffee chats give the impression of informality and trust, but I, as researcher, still have an agenda. In compliance with recognised research integrity protocols and codes of conduct (Danish Ministry of Education and Science, 2014; All European Academies, 2017), I have never deliberately deceived anyone in an informal interview but, as Beech et al. (2009) posit, researchers occasionally engage in self-silencing, such as, shielding or glossing over certain aspects of their research. Decisions

⁴² ‘The metaphors of frontstage and backstage refer to how there may be discrepancies between official organizational discourses [frontstage] and gossip and rumours [backstage], formal organizational design and informal politics, or what people say they do and what they can be seen to be doing [...] Some studies describe, for instance, the marked contrast between amicability in public situations [frontstage] and animosities expressed in confidential conversations [backstage]’ (Ybema & Kamsteeg, 2009: 112).

to do so typically rest on concerns about potentially leading people's responses. For example, I was very cautious about using the word 'motivation' (it was a tentative concept that made sense to me in my explorative work). As mentioned above, however, my research participants would not really allow me to be aloof. My attempts at being vague inevitably triggered further questions. I therefore told them what they wanted to know, because I always felt that their questions were based on a positive interest. Gosovic (2018, citing Jenkins, 2008) further stresses that access to data is 'shaped by the dismissal or approval of the identities we are trying to claim' or that others ascribe to us within the given interaction (p. 193). While claiming identities is not necessarily deliberate nor strategic on the ethnographer's part, such as stepping out of the researcher role, this may be the effect of the context of the informal coffee chat as perceived by the participant. I made sure to signal that what was said in the coffee chats was 'on the record', as I asked permission to audio record and kept the recording device visible throughout the conversation. Nevertheless, I am forced to recognise how my choice to do coffee chats, through its creating a sense of informality, ease and perhaps closeness, may have led participants to share information that they might not have shared in a more formal, 'clinical' interview setting (Ibid.; see also Brinkmann, 2016: 529). Easterday et al. (1982) argue that gender and age play a role in relation to overrapport problems, because a young(er) woman may be perceived as less professional and, thus, less threatening (p. 102). Following Lund (2015), the overrapport issue forces me to consider what information and insights I can use without compromising the trust of my participants (p. 71).

'David'

The final aspect of the interviews that I wish to address is the interview that never happened. I had heard much about the CEO, David, before ever meeting him. While it was the intention, I never managed to meet him 'properly'. The first time I saw David was at a Friday breakfast gathering at which the top-floor employees celebrated that David had been awarded an industry prize. He stood up, gave a short speech, and thanked the group of people for their contribution to the work for which he had been recognised. He made a charming and powerful impression. David's appearance at the breakfast was brief, and Alice did not manage to introduce me to him before he left. Alice and Kirsten had, however, spoken with him and related to me that he would gladly participate in an interview. It was therefore agreed that I should coordinate with his personal assistant, Laura, on a day and time, which I did.

Many of my research participants, including Alice and Kirsten, described David as a true 'gender equality champion' and described how the topic was

very important to him personally. As such, I was genuinely excited to speak with him and hear his views and ambitions for the company in this respect. When the interview approached, however, Laura wrote to me that David had to reschedule. The same occurred with the second interview appointment. At this point, my fieldwork was coming to an end, and the interview with David was postponed right until the end, which only increased my anticipation further. In order to squeeze our interview into his busy schedule, during my very final days in the company, we reduced the interview from a full hour to 30 minutes. Regardless, this appointment was also cancelled, and my suggestion to set up a Skype interview after my stay ended regrettably also never amounted to anything. Because of his reputation as gender equality champion and due to his role as decision-maker in relation to not only the EDIP but also a previous GE initiative (see chapter 5), I had really hoped to get the interview with David. My last initiative to schedule the interview with David occurred when I planned a follow-up meeting with Alice and Kirsten about eight months after my fieldwork had ended. Although I met with Alice and Kirsten on that occasion, they never responded to the part of my query which concerned a new interview appointment with David.

2.2.4. Navigating field roles and relationships

In ethnography, data generation is dependent on and shaped by ‘the social bonds we create’ (Gosovic, 2018: 190) and is therefore imbued with emotion. When the researcher puts herself at work and at stake in the field, in collaboration with research participants, research will always be messy and characterised by ambiguity, emergence, contingencies, personal orientations, trial and error, hesitation, back and forth etc. (Lambotte et al., 2013: 87). In my fieldwork, I experienced how dependent I was on positive, mutual relationships with organisational members – and how frail such relationships are, which the following story from the field exemplifies. This frailty largely relates to the paradox of the role of participant observer. As Jarvie (1982) argues, in aiming for immersion while trying to avoid going native, the researcher must be as much friend as stranger – two mutually exclusive positions (p. 104).

Upon my arrival, I got along particularly well with one research participant. I admired her, and she clearly enjoyed the respect of her colleagues. In my second week in the company, we set up a ‘coffee chat’ so that I could introduce my research to her and we could have a talk about the company, its challenges and the upcoming EDIP. After the meeting, in my field notes, I wrote that the talk had been very insightful with respect to getting to know the company, but that ‘something happens to me’ when I talk with female peers, who I sense generally share my views on issues of gender and equality. I engage

more. It becomes a conversation, and I share thoughts and experiences as much as my interlocutor does. This experience resonates with Easterday et al. (1982), who found themselves getting better along with feminist research participants (male and female alike). After that initial conversation, I would find myself going to her as one of the first things upon returning to the company after periods away for updates on the status of the programme and to catch up on topics of shared interest. This relationship ended when I unintentionally crossed a boundary by voicing a critical question to her about the organisation, I believe.

In my interpretation, the transgression occurred, because I found it difficult to navigate different roles. Lund (2015) reminds us of how field relationships are ‘dynamic and continuously produced through struggle and negotiation. When negotiating multiple roles and relations in the field – simultaneously researcher–participant [...] and sometimes friends – tensions and dilemmas arise accordingly’ (p. 82). As a passionate and deeply, personally engaged feminist scholar and activist, in the field, I often found myself in the situation of not really being sure in what capacity I was speaking: Was I the researcher, talking to organisational members about the EDIP, or was I Ea, the feminist activist? Or had the boundaries between these two identities begun to blur (Mikkelsen, 2013)? At that moment, when I crossed the line, I spoke freely, informally, but critically, as the feminist to someone who I perceived to be like-minded. I believe that this was the discrepancy which caused the offence, assuming that she instead saw me as a researcher holding the power to, through my critical analysis, potentially damage the reputation of the organisation which she represents. In response, she defended the organisation. As also mentioned by Jarvie (1982), positive, mutual relationships may cause research participants to forget that they are being observed and it can be uncomfortable for them to realise that they are being analysed. In this way, her reaction may have been a response to feeling betrayed (p. 105). It was striking in this experience how this research participant switched from indicating intimacy and, to some extent, friendship between us the one moment (Beech et al., 2009) to reminding me that I was an outsider who clearly did not understand the company and had consequently reached drastic conclusions in the next. When I had voiced my critique to her, I instantly knew that it had not been well-received, and thus immediately backtracked and apologised. Nevertheless, this initially important research participant sadly showed little inclination to talk with me subsequently.

As Nycyk (2018) argues, one of the dilemmas facing field researchers is ‘the need to maintain co-operative relationships with informants because they are the organizational actors who hold the power to determine access to data and the time to obtain it’ (p. 320). When writing this story, I am attentive to

its ethical implications as ‘it has at its core the behaviour of others and my relationships with them’ (Lee, 2018: 303). To accommodate this concern, I have strengthened the anonymity of the research participant and deliberately told the story through my experience and feelings to not ascribe feelings and motives to my participant that I cannot know if she had. I have also emphasised that the transgression owed to my mistake. Still, I choose to include the story here because it had an impact on my research. The end of the relationship with this research participant not only influenced the data I produced but my fieldwork experience. The recurrent updating when I returned to company was both a source of valuable information but also served as a way of achieving a social place in the community of the organisation (Whyte, 2013: 114), which I lost. Her change of attitude and behaviour towards me further meant that I became less proactive in my observations and participation. I found myself holding back and feeling slightly anxious in her presence.

2.2.5. Short field study in the United States

As will be evident in chapter 6, the case company’s American branch came to stand out as important in the data. Pressures from leadership in the US appeared to have played a significant role in pushing for an increased focus on issues of equality and diversity in the company, which led to the initiation of the EDIP. Although research participants in the Danish HQ frequently mentioned pressures from the US branch, I found that the US research participants could not recognise this narrative. This contradiction intrigued me. When Alice and Kirsten (during the fieldwork in Denmark, autumn–winter 2017–2018) found out that I would be going for a five-month research exchange in the US in the spring of 2019 as part of my PhD, they suggested that I visit the North American office. This opportunity was too good to pass up, and I was connected with the American HR director, John, who was very interested in my work and would be happy to host me. My central interest was the relationship between the central organisation in Denmark and the American branch, which the Danish company had acquired some five years previously. I wanted to explore how understandings of equality and diversity differed depending on context, and how a global company balances the need for a common direction and strategy on diversity with local specificities and adaptations.

With John, I planned a week’s intensive field visit in May 2019, and his personal assistant, Lindsey, supported me to make the most of my very short stay. At the office, I was seated in a cubicle next to Lindsey. In contrast to my experience of how the open spaces, glass walls, flex rooms and lounge areas of the Danish HQ office actually facilitated my participation and observation in

the field, the US office almost worked against observation and participation. It was instead characterised by corridors with closed doors and cubicles that screened off the people sitting within them. The work culture between the two offices also appeared to differ greatly. The US office was very quiet. People generally seemed to stay in their offices, and there was little small talk in the hallways. This may of course be explained by the fact that the American branch had until relatively recently been an entirely different company with its own history, culture and identity. It may also be a consequence of dissimilarities in the national working culture, such as power distance and what constitutes an acceptable tone of communication and degree of informality (e.g., Hofstede, 1980, 2011).

Already before arriving on my first day, Lindsey had forwarded an agenda for the week to me, including several scheduled interviews (some via Skype, others face-to-face), with 45 minutes allocated to each. I was impressed and excited. However, I quickly found that Lindsey's support came at a cost. Firstly, she participated as observer in two of the first interviews, which came as a complete surprise to me. While I cannot say for sure if it affected how much or what the interview participants shared, I assume this to be the case. Secondly, as my stay was so brief, I depended entirely on Lindsey to connect me with interviewees, and who she chose in turn depended on her understanding of my research and, thus, who she thought might be relevant. Occasionally, this relevance was not only unclear to me but to the interviewee as well. This must have seemed very unprofessional to the people who kindly consented to the interview. Thirdly, her interpretation of what 'doing research' entails also became significant. After the interviews, she would ask 'Did you get what you needed?', which seemed to suggest that she believed that I was looking for something very specific, whereas my approach was much more explorative and open-ended. Seeing that the first interviews were shorter than the time slots she had booked with interviewees seemingly led her to conclude that I could 'get what I needed' in less time, because she reduced the allocated time of subsequent appointments.

I was obviously very grateful for all of Lindsey's help, and her role ensured that I finished the week with 10 interviews, although of highly varying quality (see appendix 2.6.3. for the interview guide). As a novice field researcher, the experience was also very instructive. I noted in my field notes that the lack of control I experienced felt like being 'along for the ride' and that I simply had to 'buckle up' and see where it took me. It also required me to voice my needs to Lindsey, when I felt that her participation affected the research process too much. Due to the brevity of the field stay, however, I decided that I would not risk the positive relationship by taking back control completely. Apart from

the interviews and my observations, the field study also facilitated my collecting a substantial compilation of documents, including the summary of a recent focus-group investigation across the North American offices about women's experiences in the company. This study had been conducted from the grass-root level by some personally invested women, two of whom I interviewed while in the US.

The data I produced in the US has ultimately come to play a minor role in the context of this PhD dissertation. I address the narrative of international leadership pressures to engage in GE work in chapter 6. However, I decided not to engage in a lengthy discussion about how the US research participants did not appear to recognise the story, because I am uncertain as to whether it is important if it is 'true' or not. My US contacts did not address it. Or maybe I was simply not talking to the people who were involved in voicing this push. Nevertheless, it was a prevalent story which was consistently emphasised in Copenhagen as an important driver for diversity efforts, and therefore it and its motivating effect is 'real' to them. While the data I gathered in the US cannot say whether the push is 'real', it certainly tells me many other interesting things and therefore serves as an important source of information to understand the dynamics of a global company and between its individual localities.

2.3. Interview study

Chapter 4 is based on qualitative interviews carried out in relation to two distinct research projects focusing on GE policymakers and practitioners in the context of Danish academia (please see 4.5. for information about the interview participants). In the following, I introduce these projects and their respective approaches to interviewing, beginning with my master's thesis, entitled 'Genuine intent or obligation: Understanding assumptions and outcomes of gender equality efforts within academia' (Utoft, 2015), followed by the project entitled 'EFFORTI – Evaluation framework for promoting gender equality in research and innovation' (e.g., Palmén et al., 2019; Striebing et al., 2019).

2.3.1. Genuine intent or obligation: Understanding assumptions and outcomes of gender equality efforts within academia

As I was a student of human resource management, the aim of my master's thesis was to examine how the GE issue was incorporated into HR management policies and practices in Danish academia. I used the Faculty of Science at the University of Southern Denmark (SDU) as my case, as it stood out as taking a progressive and comprehensive approach to organisational change

with respect to gender equality. Through four in-depth, qualitative interviews with a university HR manager, two HR consultants at the faculty level (interviewed together), and two department-level leaders,⁴³ I obtained an overview of past and present (2015) GE initiatives, which I analysed using the work of Benschop and Verloo (2012) and Benschop and van den Brink (2014). The goal was to understand the underlying assumptions and outcomes of these efforts. I aimed to ensure a diverse sample of interview participants, who could address GE work from multiple perspectives and organisational levels.

Following my realist ontology and constructivist epistemology, I understand interviews as ‘episodes of situated interaction and talk’, but at the same time as resources that can provide useful information about ‘processes and realities’ beyond the interview interaction (Henwood, 2007: 271–272, cited by Pereira, 2017: 12). My approach to the interviews is based on Brinkmann and Kvale’s (2015) metaphor of the ‘traveller’. Interviews founded on the traveller metaphor are exploratory, meaning that the interviewer consciously allows for meaning to be challenged and contradicted during the interview (p. 109). In exploratory interviews, scientific quality is ensured through nuanced accounts of phenomena and the richness of descriptions (p. 33). When I started my master’s thesis project, the literatures on gender equality in organisations and GE work in organisations was new to me. As such, I was very focused in the interviews on accumulating knowledge and understanding from the practitioners’ perspective, even though I was not entering the interviews as a blank slate completely. The interview guide (see appendix 2.6.4.) was developed on the basis of my readings of e.g. Bloch (1999), Henningsen (2002), Rosenbeck (2014), and the Danish Ministry of Education and Science (2015), together with my interest in understanding the assumptions underlying GE interventions and their implications. I aimed to vary the types of questions I included, using open as well as some closed questions, direct and indirect questions, and structuring as well as interpreting questions (Bryman & Bell, 2006: 486, citing Kvale, 1996).

When the opportunity to reuse these interviews for chapter 4 arose (early 2018), I reached out to my interview participants from 2015, some of whom I remain in occasional contact with through our participation in the same networks of researchers and practitioners focused on gender equality in academia. I asked for and obtained their permission to use the interviews in the context of a different research focus and explained my (at that point) tentative idea for the article. The fact that I consider some of the interview participants

⁴³ The thesis included two small, separate interview studies: a study focusing on GE practitioners and another focusing on the experiences of female researchers. As such, the thesis was based on 11 interviews in total.

good professional connections turned out to pose significant ethical dilemmas in the analysis and writing phase of the chapter. Moreover, they are co-experts who have worked in the field of gender equality in academia for years (Pereira, 2017: 14). I faced considerable scruples about how my interpretive framework shaped my representation of them (Haynes, 2011) and whether my critical analysis and use of their statements would embarrass or offend them (Donnelly et al., 2013). In this manner, my experience resonates strongly with Gosovic (2018), who states that ‘what we write and who we write about may be influenced by the attachments we feel to the field and the social bonds we create’ (p. 190). However, the review process in chapter 4 has enabled me to sharpen the framing of my analysis to stress that the purpose is not to expose any individual (Suchman, 2008), but rather to understand the contexts and meetings with other stakeholders that individuals navigate when doing organisational GE work.

2.3.2. Evaluation framework for promoting gender equality in research and innovation

As part of the requirements for my PhD programme, I participated in research relating to the so-called EFFORTI project (Evaluation framework for promoting gender equality in research and innovation). EFFORTI was financed by the European Commission through the specific Horizon 2020 programme ‘Science with and for Society (SWAFS)’.⁴⁴ It ran between 2016 and 2019 with partners in six European countries: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Hungary and Spain. The project was based on the premise that to achieve gender equality in (private and public) research and innovation organisations, equal opportunity officers, equality programme designers and evaluators must develop and implement effective interventions in a result-oriented and strategic manner. The role of evaluation is crucial to this end. The EFFORTI project therefore aimed to develop an innovative conceptual framework for the identification and study of the linkages between GE interventions and effects. Traditional, linear models and mono-dimensional approaches cannot adequately capture the complexity, the importance of context and the increased emphasis on impact over effects that research highlights as central in the design and evaluation of GE interventions (Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace, 2017; Vogel, 2012). EFFORTI thus proposes a conceptual framework and toolbox to study GE interventions at the team, organisation and system levels, adopting a dynamic, non-linear, holistic approach (Kalpazidou Schmidt et al., 2017b).

⁴⁴ Project no. 710470, see www.efforti.eu

In relation to the overall objective of the project, I was involved in in-depth case studies of specific gender-equality intervention types, including a mentoring programme, a leadership training programme for women, and an affirmative action funding scheme. We used documents, publications, and interviews with policymakers to build these case studies, and my role in this regard was the desk research (i.e., literature review and document analysis). My colleagues, Ebbe K. Graversen, Evanthia Kalpazidou Schmidt and Emal Sadeq Agazadeh, carried out the interviews, which were semi-structured but using a rather detailed interview guide (see appendix 2.6.5.). The objective of a somewhat more structured interview than my own approach, as well as the use of a standardised reporting framework, was to facilitate the comparative work between the international EFFORTI project partners and their local contexts. Nevertheless, the interview guide was adapted to the individual interview participant and the specific GE action in question. Through the practitioners' perspective, the interviews focused on understanding the implementation of the given intervention and to identify the main contextual factors influencing the intervention, its output and impact (Palmén et al., 2019).

For chapter 4, I was allowed access to the audio recordings and transcripts of seven interviews. Having neither been involved in the interviewing nor the transcribing of the interviews imposes significant limitations with respect to my use of the material. Listening to the recordings can provide a good sense of the interpersonal dynamics of the interaction through tone of voice, sequentiality,⁴⁵ pauses etc. However, given the logic of 'situated knowledges' (Hara-way, 1988) and the understanding of interviews as situated social action (Brinkmann, 2016: 525), how an interview pans out and what is said is entirely dependent on the specific partners present. For example, I would probably have asked different probing and elaborating questions than did my colleagues. Age and gender also affect the interview (Ibid.: 529). For instance, having my senior colleague, Ebbe, an experienced, male associate professor, interview the (senior, male) director of a national Danish funding agency inevitably creates more of a power balance than if I, a (relatively) young, female PhD student had been the interviewer. Moreover, the risk of interviewees orienting their answers in a presumably more feminist and socially acceptable direction (in the context of the specific topic at hand) may be greater if they had talked to me (as a woman) as opposed to Ebbe (Lueptow et al., 1990; Kane & Macaulay, 1993; Højgaard, 2010). In other words, irrespective of whether

⁴⁵ Following conversation analysis, 'sequentiality' refers to how participants orient their turns-at-talk to what has just been said and to what might be the next turn; in this sense, a turn is never independent (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2012: 13–14).

my colleagues carried out the interviews or if I had done them myself, the interview approach has limitations. Finally, in the end, most of the examples and quotes I analyse in the chapter 4 came from my master's thesis interviews, indicating that the EFFORTI interviews did not lend themselves as smoothly to a new context as did the master's thesis interviews.

2.3.3. An interview study in context

As I have strived to make evident throughout all of the above, my feminism has in various ways affected my PhD research. Nevertheless, I felt that I had less of a personal stake in the success of my case company's EDIP (chapters 5 and 6). The opposite may be said about the interview study (chapter 4). Here, the overlap of interests is much greater. The interview study should therefore be understood in the context of the fact that my feminist activism very much revolves around the issue of gender equality and diversity in academia. While the dual scholar–activist role implies various risks and difficulties in the research process (Pereira, 2016), it also encourages responsible research practices. I discuss both of these aspects in the following.

Traditionally, scholars' political participation has been viewed as 'an undesirable transgression of the supposed fundamental boundaries between science and politics, and between academics and the social world they study' (Pereira, 2016: 102). However, with the emergence of gender studies (and other fields, incl. critical race and queer studies) in response to the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s (Weber, 2006), many feminist scholars came to understand their work as knowledge production, but also as critical intervention in the academy itself (Pereira, 2012: 284). Intervention may be understood here as 'oppositional research' aimed at challenging dominant research paradigms (Hawkesworth, 2012), or it may concern participation in social change via involvement in communities, social movement organisations or advocacy groups inside and outside of the academy (Weber, 2006: 154). I practice activism through my involvement in grass-root gender-research organising at my university and by participating in practically all 'gender equality in academia' events I come across, occasionally invited as a speaker myself, or by giving statements in the media or writing a blog entry (Utoft, 2018). Engaging in these activities is a conscious choice, because my activist self feels a responsibility to engage in knowledge dissemination beyond the ivory tower. It is meaningful to me to engage in concrete ways with other actors who are concerned with the same 'real world' problem that I am. This means that the

interview participants⁴⁶ and I share a political goal (improving university gender equality), and that the challenges and obstacles they face in achieving this goal (which I explore in chapter 4) are the same as I often face in my scholarly work and activist activities.

We are feminist killjoys who disrupt and challenge the status quo of academia by calling out injustice (Ahmed, 2010). ‘Killing joy’ can lead to a sense of ‘moral satisfaction’ from not just going along with things to keep the peace (Murray, 2018). Ahmed (2012, 2017) has famously posited that we learn about worlds through the resistance we experience trying to change them, and I am in no way slighting the degree of resistance, opposition and occasionally personal attacks experienced by GE and diversity practitioners in academia. They occupy an extremely fraught position (Ahmed, 2012). However, the scholar–activist position may be even more complicated, as tellingly portrayed by Maria do mar Pereira (2016, 2017), Marieke van den Brink (2015) and the inspiring volume edited by Taylor and Lahad (2018). When simultaneously studying, often critiquing and sometimes exposing the institutions that also pay our salary, as feminist scholar–activists of and in universities, we put our jobs and careers on the line. Furthermore, while an endless workload seems to have become an ‘endemic feature of academic life’ (Gill, 2009: 231), following Burton (2018) this may be ‘even more so for women, and for women who attempt to live academia through feminist research methods, thought, and practice’ (p. 131). Feminist research is a risky option for scholars, because its epistemic status is not fully recognised as it has always been seen as less rigorous, too political and excessively ideological (Lund, 2015; Pereira 2016, 2017).

Van den Brink (2015) writes that, as feminists in academia (scholars and practitioners),

[w]e often find ourselves at the forefront of the struggle when we are engaging in gender equality initiatives. When we are attacked or discredited and our change efforts met with backlash and resistance, it is easy to become frustrated, discouraged and disempowered. (p. 484)

Therefore, there is comfort in the company and communities of others who experience the same backlash, which is why, I believe, strong bonds may arise – including between researchers and research participants; in my case, GE practitioners. Friese (2001) argues that researching peers entails ‘walking a

⁴⁶ Here, I refer principally to those research participants from my master’s thesis research with whom I have close relationships established over several years of acquaintance. Some of my research participants of the ethnography also claimed feminist identities, while others – also in the interview study – demonstrated very limited feminist inclination.

touchy tightrope between discretion, loyalty, and [critical] distance' (p. 307, cited by Pereira, 2017), which is exactly the struggle I faced, as described above. Nevertheless, this peer status, or belonging to the same community, may also potentially remedy a central limitation to my interview study; namely, the fact that, from interviews alone, 'we cannot know what actually happens in interaction, but only what people think about situations and how they feel about them' (Jerolmack & Kahn, 2014: 184). Being myself often in similar situations to those that my interviewees describe or having similar reflections on the nature of inequality and, thus, the most adequate solutions provides important contextual knowledge for my work; although I obviously cannot *a priori* assume that our experiences and reasonings are the same. Therefore, as I have also argued in my master's thesis (Utoft, 2015), I must stick to my data, strive to achieve an appropriate balance between (feminist) passion and explanation (Haynes, 2011), and leave it to readers to, on this basis, individually 'evaluate the credibility and strength of [my] arrived at theorisations and interpretations' (Utoft, 2015: 19). On that note, I will now turn to my analytical approach.

2.4. Approach to analysis

First, I want to address what Pereira (2017) refers to as the multiple processes of translation that much qualitative empirical material undergoes (p. 12) – from a chat over lunch to my field notes later, or from the interviews to transcriptions, and later all of this from Danish into English.

All of the interview material has been transcribed, partly by myself but mostly by the excellent student assistants at the Danish Centre for Studies in Research and Research Policy.⁴⁷ The student assistants received instructions on how to transcribe (incl. pauses, emphases, overlaps etc.), and all of the material was treated confidentially. While the transcription assistance was an indescribable help, I am very aware of the limitations and sacrifices this choice involves. Much analytical reflection occurs in the transcription process due to the slow tempo and scrutiny of the details in the conversation. When handing over transcription to others, this reflection may be lost. However, I have aimed to remedy this limitation by working with both audio recordings as well as the transcriptions in my analytical work. Many of the interviews that took place in my case company's Copenhagen headquarters were done in Danish, which implies that excerpts and quotes have been translated into English. The same applies to my Copenhagen fieldwork journal. It is important to be conscious

⁴⁷ Many thanks to Trine Byg, Signe Nygaard, Astrid-Marie Kierkgaard-Schmidt, Christinna Weiergang Ladegaard and Amalie Due Svendssen.

of how things are lost in translation and that the words on the final editing of the page are the results of the choices of the interviewee as much as the researcher (Pereira, 2017: 22). Despite all my best efforts to be true to the voices of my research participants, a translation – be that a field note or an interview quote – will inevitably be ‘distinct from the text it replaces’ (Venuti, 1998: 11–12; see also Temple, 2005).

When I started my PhD project, I had never previously worked with qualitative analysis software. But given the amount of data and types of different sources with which I would have to work, I ventured out into the world of NVivo. I did so mainly assisted by Saldaña (2016), and my sporadic auditing of a qualitative research methods course given at my department, and it did not come naturally to me. Choosing a coding strategy, such as line-by-line coding in a Grounded Theory-style (Charmaz, 2006), made little sense to me, and I felt that I lost my overview when slicing up my material into codes which I hardly knew how to name; or, if I employed a closed coding strategy with pre-determined codes, determining whether a particular quote or field note could legitimately be placed under a specific code became difficult. It either led to a garbage-can situation in which the code could capture too much or I felt that the quote would have to be very precisely ‘spot on’ in order for me to place it under a given code, indicating that it was probably too narrow. As such, with practice and my coming to terms with and fully embracing the ‘messiness’ of interpretivist research (Lambotte & Meunier, 2013; Donnelly et al., 2013), I found a – or my – way. This means that even though I have thoroughly coded my material multiple times to strengthen my interpretations, I have not strategised my way of doing so. Analysis occurs dynamically and recursively across multiple data sources. Interpretations therefore emerge in fleeting, elusive ways that are often difficult to pinpoint. If anything, this involves a combination of theory-informed codes as well as codes that emerge from the data. This is a creative, interpretive process which involves constantly moving between data and theory to emphasise their interdependence in a hermeneutic understanding. That is, theory (which is usually of a general nature) illuminates the micro-level (data), and the micro-level speaks back to the theory, expanding in turn our understanding of the macro-level.

In practice, when I analyse my data, I search for fragmentation, variation and contradiction as much as for patterns and recurrent themes (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011: 42). This search concerns what the data itself can tell me, but also what my use of theory can show me. My use of theory closely resembles Alvesson and Kärreman’s (2011) ambition that ‘[w]e want theories that make us able to “see” new issues and themes, ask new questions, challenge the established wisdom, open up alternative lines of thinking, inform careful and sometimes even bold interpretations, and so on’ (p. 25). However, to impose

theory upon data in a one-way fashion entails the risk of fixing subjects, relations and contexts in one specific kind of ‘meaningfulness’ (Esmark et al., 2005: 18, my translation). As a qualitative-interpretive researcher, it is important to constantly bear in mind that ‘the physical reality does not ask to be described in any certain way’ (Ibid.: 23). To accommodate this risk, again, I must constantly return to my data.

Through this approach, I navigate a contested space within which the quality of research is determined. On the one side, positivist quality criteria such as rigour, reliability, validity and truth reign. Pursuing such standards seems at odds with my having embraced the messiness of research. The other side, rooted in the postmodern, non-foundationalist tradition, aims to ‘find a way to claim legitimacy and trustworthiness without the necessity of laying claim to uncontested certainty’ (Angen, 2000: 379). While positivist quality criteria constitute those that usually ensure legitimacy in the academic world, they should be viewed ‘as “*particular* [italics added] ways of warranting validity claims” rather than continuing to be privileged “as universal, abstract guarantors of truth”’ (Moss, 1994: 10, cited by Angen, 2000: 386). This point leads to an important question: Truthful to whom? Positivism claims objective truth. Interpretive research in the phenomenological life-world tradition would, for example, stress truth and credibility to research participants; namely, how accurately the interpretations represent participants’ realities (Schwandt, 1997, cited by Creswell & Miller, 2000: 124–125). While I have not engaged consistently in ‘member checks’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), I discussed hunches with research participants while in the field, validated the chronology of events with them, and returned to the company to present tentative analyses after the fieldwork -to the extent that they were interested). Furthermore, as mentioned above, in one instance, I found member checks incapable of validating the truthfulness of one empirical narrative which emerged from the fieldwork. Nevertheless, while questions may be raised regarding the factual accuracy of the narrative, its existence to those people who engaged it cannot, nor can its very real consequences (see also 6.4.2.). Therefore, anchored in my feminist epistemology, I approach the analysis with humility and aim to balance my giving voice to the research participants’ sense-making and my own sense-giving. Nevertheless, interpretation must necessarily transcend participants’ first-order, life-world descriptions in order to construct new knowledge about the social phenomenon of interest (Giddens, 1993 cited by Ravn, 2017). I was also invited into the company as a critical outsider, who they hoped would enable them to see themselves through new eyes and ‘catch’ their own blind spots. As this was their explicit wish, I felt legitimised in pursuing interpretations that may not accurately reflect their reality but which would hopefully

offer convincing, critical insights evoking their ‘spontaneous validity’ (Nielsen, 1995); that is, a smile of recognition or an ‘Aha! moment’ (Angen, 2000: 391).

Other streams of interpretivist research emphasise validity, as assessed by the readership, typically the research community; that is, a process of validation ‘of what it means to have done something well, having made an effort that is worthy of trust and written up convincingly’ (Angen, 2000: 392). From this perspective, validity is not located in the end product (i.e., whether the output of research represents ‘the truth’); rather, it is inherent in the research process. Tracy (2010) argues that high-quality, qualitative-interpretivist research ‘is marked by (a) worthy topic, (b) rich rigor, (c) sincerity, (d) credibility, (e) resonance, (f) significant contribution, (g) ethics, and (h) meaningful coherence’ (p. 839). These criteria also imply a non-foundationalist view of validation over validity (as truth and finality); the responsibility for ensuring that they are met lies with the researcher throughout the research process. For a research project that aims to produce different kinds of knowledge about a hitherto uncharted phenomenon, perhaps a search for a valid, singular truth should not be the goal. Opening up ‘a more complex, in-depth, but still thoroughly partial, understanding of the issue’ in question may be more appropriate (Ellingson, 2008, cited by Tracy, 2010: 844).

Finally, I want to stress the importance of writing in the analysis process. Humphreys and Watson (2009) assert that ‘ethnography is not simply something one ‘does’ out in the field before returning to one’s study to ‘write it up’. To [them], ethnography *is* writing’ (p. 40, emphasis added). At the heart of this claim lies the fact that qualitative-interpretivist research is not about reporting data or findings, but rather that the research output emerges just as much while writing. This is what Gabriel (2000) calls ‘storywork’, which, to him, is poetic labour, and van Maanen (2011) calls ‘textwork’, which refers to ‘the intensive writing process in which the [researcher] makes choices about claims on reality and interpretation, on his/her own presence in the text and on scientific or imagery writing’ (cited by De Coster et al., 2017: 2). I would claim that this applies just as much to interview studies as ethnographies. Although I might have had an idea about the direction of my empirical articles when I started writing them, they very much developed through and took form during writing. NVivo is helpful in detecting links in empirical material, however, when I lifted my perspective from the microscopic level of a close-to-text analysis of, for example, the interview transcripts, field notes or documents, links with the research literatures and beyond (e.g., public and political debates) creatively emerged. These points bring me back to highlighting the inherently embodied nature of research (Haraway, 1988) and especially the messiness of the research process (Lambotte & Meunier, 2013; Donnelly et al., 2013).

2.5. Summary of chapter

This chapter paints a rather eclectic image of the methodology and methods employed in this dissertation. This image reflects the central premise of this chapter, namely that doing embodied, interpretivist research constitutes an inherently messy process. My decision to adopt embodied research methods, ethnography and interviews rests on my aim to explore motivation as organisational or societal, which requires a holistic, situated approach capable of capturing dimensions beyond individual accounts. To achieve this aim, I operationalised my overall research question into three sub-studies investigating motivation on multiple levels and from different methodological and theoretical perspectives.

Furthermore, my employing embodied research practices corresponds to the feminist epistemological foundation of this dissertation, which brings to the fore the role of the researcher in shaping the research process. The explicitly political nature of feminist research requires critical reflexivity on the researcher's part which, in turn, necessitates that the researcher writes herself into the text to some extent. I have done so above by relating the 'tales of the field' (van Maanen, 1988) from my ethnographic work and by stressing how my feminist activism constitutes an important contextual factor through which to understand the interview study. Using embodied empirical methods also implies a need to embrace the inherently relational, intersubjective ways through which qualitative-interpretivist research is produced, which further aligns with the feminist ethical principle that research should be oriented towards policy, practice and activism.

The messiness of research also pertains to analysis. Embodied research practices reject linear conceptions of social science. Within the individual empirical studies, data generation and analysis occur simultaneously and iteratively in dialogue with theory, as well as during writing in a creative process. The dynamic, iterative movement between the three empirical chapters and the different levels of analysis ultimately enables me to theorise about motivation at the aggregate level. Importantly, as argued by Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2013), an improved understanding of a phenomenon, here organisational motivation to engage in GE work, may tell us something about the world of which it is part. In this dissertation, I construe this world (i.e., Danish society) as a 'postfeminist gender regime'. Before contextualising postfeminism in the Danish setting, however, I provide a thorough review of the postfeminist literatures.

2.6. Appendix

2.6.1. Interview guide for informal interviews

- Opening: Introduce the purpose of the conversation, general conversation about HR/CSR and [Company X]
- Warm-up: Can you please start by telling me about your role in [Company X]?
Do you have any formal responsibilities concerning equality and diversity?
What kind of role do you expect to play in the new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Programme?
- General: What kinds of changes would you personally like to see as a result of the new 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Programme'?
What do you see as the biggest impediments in the company to improve equality and diversity?
What do you think is needed for [Company X] to succeed in improving equality and diversity?
- Round-off: Do you have any questions for me?
Thank you for your time and help.

2.6.2. Interview guide for formal interviews⁴⁸

Opening:

1. Clarify conditions of participation: Anonymity and brief introduction to my research
2. Icebreaker: If I say 'gender equality in [the company]' – what immediately comes to your mind?

GE work:

1. In your role as X in the past, was gender equality and women in leadership an issue on the agenda?
 - Why did you think it was important?
 - Which kinds of initiatives did you implement? Why?
2. Now, the topic of gender has seen a revival in the company. Where do you think this resurgence has come from?
 - Why now?
 - What do you think might have changed over time in this regard?
(compared to the past, when equality was addressed to a lesser extent)
3. In your current role as X, have you pushed the gender equality agenda in any way?
 - How?
 - Why?

General:

1. What kinds of changes would you personally like to see as a result of the new 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Programme'?
2. What do you see as the biggest impediments in the company to improving equality and diversity?
3. What do you think is needed for [Company X] to succeed in improving equality and diversity?

⁴⁸ Translated from Danish.

Motivations:

1. In your view, do you think that [Company X]’s approach to gender equality and women in leadership has changed since the ‘gender targets’ legislation was enacted in 2012?
 - If so, how?
2. Do you think other tendencies or movements, both within the company and in society in general, have affected when and how [Company X] has addressed and launched initiatives with respect to equality and diversity?
 - Which? (Probes: #MeToo, client demands, UN Global Compact)
 - How?

The extent of [Company X]’s responsibility with respect to EDI:

1. [Company X] champions civic engagement and the corporation’s social responsibility to contribute to the solution of grand challenges facing society. Does this also encompass gender equality?
 - How?
2. Other Danish companies [like Z and Y] have gone beyond Danish legislation, for example, by introducing improved paternity leave schemes and ‘daddy programmes’. Could you see [Company X] taking progressive steps like that? Beyond legislation?
 - Why (not)?

Round-off:

1. Before we wrap things up, now that we have covered many different topics and issues, do you have any final thoughts to add?
 - Anything that has popped up?
 - Any questions for me?
2. Thank you for your time and help.

2.6.3. Interview guide for US interviews

Opening: Clarify conditions of participation: Anonymity and brief introduction to my research

Warm-up: Can you maybe start by telling me who you are and what your role in [Company X] is?

How long have you been working in [Company X]?

Do you have any formal responsibilities concerning diversity issues?

What kinds of diversity initiatives have you been involved in?

Were they initiated by the company or bottom-up?

Why do you think such initiatives are important?

Denmark–US relationship:

Have you experienced any change in relation to gender/diversity efforts after [US company] became [Company X]?

In your impression, are diversity initiatives in the company generally decided US-locally or are they driven from Denmark?

Do you work together with any Danish employees on diversity efforts?

Problems/changes? What are the most pressing problems in the company, in your view?

What kinds of gender/diversity changes would you like to see?

Which initiatives do you think are needed to create those changes?

Denmark–US Differences:

What is more urgent (or on the agenda) here in [Company X] in the US, do you think: race or gender issues?

Has it always been like that?

Motivations:

In Copenhagen, I often heard that the US leadership had been pressing the corporate functions in Denmark to strengthen diversity efforts, because the US had already done so much and it was now up to Copenhagen to raise the bar and drive this agenda.

Is that something you recognise?

Yes: What might the motivation be? Probe: To encourage leadership and drive from Denmark, do you think?

((No: Could it be a way of pushing the responsibility onto someone else?))

Corporate culture:

So, in Denmark they talk a lot about the [Company X] heritage – the founders, the values of contributing positively to society, the Danish/Nordic roots of the company etc. Do you think these things have become part of the culture here too?

Closing: Before we end, now that we have covered many different topics and issues, do you have any final thoughts to add? Any questions for me?

Thank you for your time and help.

2.6.4. Interview guide for master thesis interviews⁴⁹

1. How is the gender equality perspective incorporated into management policies at the University of Southern Denmark and the Faculty of Science?
2. Which practical measures do SDU and the Faculty of Science take to solve problems of gender inequality?
3. How are gender equality efforts at the SDU, faculty and department levels connected?
4. In your experience, what are the most effective measures to counter issues of gender inequality within Academia?
5. In your experience, which measures to counter gender inequality have been less effective?
6. In your opinion, is gender equality an issue which should receive particular political and managerial attention?
7. How do you perceive the general opinion among management towards gender equality efforts?
8. How do you perceive the general opinion among staff towards gender equality efforts?
9. In which direction do you see future gender equality efforts heading?

⁴⁹ Translated from Danish.

2.6.5. Interview guide for EFFORTI interviews⁵⁰

Introductory Information: For all Interviewees
Please explain to the interviewee the purpose of the interview. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General objectives of EFFORTI • The role of the case study work
Please explain to the interviewee why and how they have been contacted.
Please explain the legal (country-specific) framework that regulates the storage and handling of the submitted information.
Please explain the procedures to follow in case of a request for the deletion of the personal data and recording.
Please inform the interviewee that they have the right to withdraw at any point
Check that the interviewee has received and signed the consent form
1: Role & Relationship to intervention: For all Interviewees
1.1: Could you please briefly describe the intervention?
1.2: Could you please describe your role regarding [name of intervention]?
1.3: How long have you been working with or involved with [name of intervention]?
2: Design/Concept Analysis: Particularly important for policymakers
2.1: What is the intervention trying to address? [problem/objectives]
2.2: How long has the intervention been in place? Planned until when?
2.3: Could you briefly explain how the intervention should work?
2.4: Could you please describe the history of the intervention? Do planned activities (of this specific intervention) represent continuity or a significant change of other interventions' activities implemented by the organisation?
2.5: What impacts of the intervention were initially foreseen?
2.6: In your opinion, given the available resources, is it possible to fulfil its main objectives?
2.7 Are the general conditions in place to ensure the effectiveness of the intervention? (comprehensive and tailored/inclusion of targets/special interventions for women/múltiple actors responsibility/sufficient resources/embedded in structures and procedures/accountable and transparent/flexible and resilient/publicised and promoted)
3: Implementation Analysis: Particularly important for practitioners, programme managers and beneficiaries
3.1: Can you briefly describe the implementation process?
3.2: How are the work and responsibilities for the implementation of the intervention distributed? (e.g., one organisation or collaboration between various organisations/units of the same organisation?)

⁵⁰ This interview guide is drawn from Palmén et al. (2019: 94–97).

3.3: Can you describe the ‘beneficiaries’ or ‘target audience’ of your intervention? How are they addressed and involved? If the intervention would stop overnight, who would notice first?
3.4: What are the main decision-making bodies involved in the implementation of this intervention? Are the top-level decision-making bodies committed?
3.5: Are there any (fixed) working procedures established for the implementation of this intervention, such as for example periodic meetings, reporting to management, fixed office space, online presence and distribution channels (visibility)?
3.6: What resources are available to implement this intervention? This includes human resources dedicated to the implementation but also financial resources or infrastructure, such as office space, online presence and financial resources for traveling.
3.7: In your opinion has the intervention been implemented correctly?
3.8: Has this changed over time?
3.9: What has facilitated the correct implementation of the intervention?
3.10: Can you describe the barriers and challenges during the implementation process of this intervention? How have these been addressed and possibly overcome?
4: Impact Assessment: Particularly important for practitioners, programme managers and beneficiaries
4.1: Can you briefly describe the main outcomes of the intervention? [we understand outcomes as...] Per target group/any in specific relation to RTDI? Are these the expected outcomes? How are they measured?
4.2: Can you briefly describe the main impacts [direct/indirect, foreseen/unforeseen] of the intervention? [we understand impacts as...] Per target group/any in specific relation to RTDI? Are these the expected impacts? How are they measured?
4.3: What are the main factors that have hindered/supported the impacts of the intervention?
5: Theory of Change Validation: Only with programme managers
5.1: Discuss your theory of change (taking the interview into consideration)
6: Please ask your interview for any material (e.g., monitoring data, evaluations) that have been conducted on the intervention.

3. Postfeminism

Every temporary stabilization, when the blurring pixels offer up a momentary glimpse of clarity, feels like a comforting illusion. But it is never long before the image is dancing again—and I (and I’m sure it is not just me) am screwing up my eyes, and squinting, trying to make sense of it all. (Gill, 2016: 614)

The postfeminist concept has spurred much definitional debate, generally owing to divergent understandings of the prefix (Coppock et al., 1995; Gamble, 2004; Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004; Genz & Brabon, 2009). I will return to that. The bottom line of this debate is that postfeminism is not one thing. It has been theorised in multiple scientific fields from countless perspectives, and definitions have changed and morphed over time (Gill, 2017). My aim in this chapter is not to resolve the definitional complexity and ongoing discussions in the fields and literatures into which the postfeminist concept has been adopted. Rather, building on the work of the scholars who came before me, in this chapter I aim to delineate a postfeminist framework that will contribute to my answering the overarching research questions of this dissertation.

Reading the literatures through my positionality as a white, heterosexual, middle-class, able-bodied, Scandinavian ciswoman, I will outline what I take postfeminism to mean and be in this moment of writing. In particular, my national-cultural positionality is significant, as I am inevitably biased towards those points in the literature which resonate particularly well with my scholarly and personal familiarity with the Danish context. In that sense, I make no claim that the present review is exhaustive. The sources used have been collected – often ‘snowballed’ – over the three years of writing this PhD dissertation. In other words, this is not a systematic review. Nevertheless, all sources have been carefully read and most (i.e., those available in electronic formats) have been thematically coded using NVivo. Based on this process and the codes developed, I have reflexively selected those aspects of the literatures on postfeminism which most insightfully contribute to developing as comprehensive a framework as possible. I have included some of the most prominent themes in the literature, such as how postfeminism tends to be connected with a sense of ‘gender blindness’ (Lewis, 2006b; 2014a), which generally renders inequalities unintelligible or ‘unspeakable’ (Kelan, 2007, 2009; Gill, 2014b). I have also paid particular attention to aspects relating to gender equality (GE) work in organisations; that is, the topic of this dissertation. I have further included the less-prominent topic of men and masculinities, as men are not immune to the influences of postfeminist discourses. Finally, I focus on the co-

existence of multiple feminisms in postfeminism, because it is central to understanding the complexity of contemporary gender relations.

The following is a brief introduction to different understandings of postfeminism in different fields together with a more comprehensive review of empirical research on postfeminism. I build on the latter to outline my reading of the notion of the ‘postfeminist gender regime’ (Acker, 2006; Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009; Dean, 2010a, 2010b; Lewis, 2014a). In short, I figuratively conceptualise postfeminism as a kind of backcloth upon which a set of recurrent complex and often contradictory discourses around gender can and do co-exist, as well as multiple and often incongruous forms of feminism. Postfeminism is at ease with ambiguity and contradiction. This contradiction is fundamentally anchored in the entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist ideas; or people’s simultaneous celebration of (the success of) feminism and their disavowal of it.

3.1. Understanding the ‘post’ in postfeminism

The definitional ambivalence associated with postfeminism is often linked to divergent understandings of the ‘post’. An immediate, intuitive interpretation often implies a temporal understanding; something which succeeds something else, as in ‘after-feminism’. For example, Dosekun (2015) has shown how much Western-centric scholarship on postfeminism assumes a historical linearity in which postfeminism must follow feminism in an invariant sequence (cited by Gill, 2017: 614). The forms that postfeminism take in this sequence vary. It has been equated with backlash dating all the way back to the early 20th century (Faludi, 1991; Holmlund, 2005). Understood as backlash, postfeminism constitutes an overtly hostile response to feminism not only by the male-dominated establishment towards the early suffragettes and women’s liberationists of the 1960s and 1970s, but also by women in the late 20th century (e.g., Wolf, 1993; Roiphe, 1994; Denfeld, 1995). From this perspective, postfeminism represents a devastating relapse in relation to the ground gained by feminist activism and politics (Gamble, 2004: 40). As different scholars have argued, however, while the concept of backlash has been crucial to the fields of feminist and gender studies, equating postfeminism with backlash paints a less-than-complete picture (Gill & Scharff, 2011). What seems to characterise the contemporary, postfeminist gender regime in particular (on which I elaborate more fully below) is the so-called ‘double entanglement’ of feminist and anti-feminist ideas (McRobbie, 2003; 2004; 2009).

In addition to the temporal understanding of postfeminism as ‘a time after feminism’, which is occasionally understood as backlash and setback, a differ-

ent interpretation of the 'post' in postfeminism also exists. Here, postfeminism implies moving on or beyond feminism. There are generally two narratives under the 'moving beyond feminism' umbrella. Gamble (2004), for one, contends that feminism has become unfashionable and passé, not because women have 'arrived at equal justice' with men, but because they are beyond 'even pretending to care' (p. 38). Other scholars argue that the moving beyond feminism is predicated upon the assumption that gender equality is already a reality (e.g., Hall & Rodriguez, 2003; Tasker & Negra, 2007; Ferguson, 2010; Ahmed, 2012). From this perspective, the 'post' in postfeminism does not necessarily mean a stalling or backwards movement, but in Gamble's words (2004) 'it can also be read as indicating the continuation of [feminism's] aims and ideologies, albeit on a different level' (p. 37). Understood in this sense, we get closer to the double entanglement at the heart of postfeminism. According to Siegel (1997), the view that gender equality is achieved seems to suggest that 'gains forged by previous generations of women have so completely pervaded all tiers of our social existence that those [individuals] still "harping" about women's victim status are embarrassingly out of touch' (p. 75). In other words, the double entanglement implies that feminism is simultaneously celebrated (often under the more palatable moniker 'gender equality') and disavowed. That is, as gender equality is viewed as achieved, there is no longer any need for feminism (McRobbie, 2004, 2009; Tasker & Negra, 2007; Gill, 2007). For quite some time, this disavowal of feminism was apparent in the explicit rejection of the 'F-word' amongst some girls and women (Siegel, 1997; Ferguson, 2010; Scharff, 2012). As I shall elaborate below, however, feminism has seen a recent resurgence (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Rottenberg, 2014; 2018b), albeit generally limited to particular versions of feminism which maintain an unmistakably postfeminist patina (Gill et al., 2017: 241).

Other scholars, including Brooks (1997), have placed postfeminism in the same camp as other 'posts', such as postmodernism, poststructuralism, queer theory and postcolonialism (Gill & Scharff, 2011; Rumens, 2017). Following this understanding, postfeminism comes to serve a similar function as the other concepts, namely the deconstruction of universalising categories and power hegemonies promulgated by white, Anglo-American feminist theories (Ibid.). Approaching postfeminism as an epistemology is not very widespread, and Lewis (2014a) argues that the propensity of some to associate postfeminism with other 'post' perspectives may be a result of the slippage between postfeminism and the notion of third-wave feminism. Lewis (2014a) describes third-wave feminism as a reaction to and unreserved critique of liberal feminisms of the 1960s and 1970s. Building on the seminal works of, among others, hooks (1981), Crenshaw (1989, 1991), Butler (1990, 1993) and Mohanty

(1988, 2003), the third wave challenges the grand narratives and universalising categories (incl. 'patriarchy' and 'women') linked with the second wave, allowing for plurality, fluidity, hybridism and even contradiction (Gamble, 2004; Lewis, 2014a; Rumens, 2017). From this perspective, third-wave feminism – *not* postfeminism – may be viewed as a poststructuralist version of feminism.

The slippage between postfeminism and the third wave, as well as the temporal underpinnings of the prefix 'post', also occasionally result in an understanding of postfeminism as an 'era' or 'moment' in time, which may or may not be over (Gill, 2016; Rottenberg, 2018b). This approach regards postfeminism as a period after (the height of) second-wave feminism, but Gill et al. (2017) question whether all of the features of the culture post-dating the second wave should then be treated as automatically and necessarily postfeminist – and the implications that would have for the usefulness of the concept (p. 229). Siegel (1997) argues that in the popular press, postfeminism has often come to represent 'a moment when women's movements are, for whatever reasons, no longer moving, no longer vital, no longer relevant' (p. 75). This speaks to the widespread 'successful but obsolete' narrative pertaining to feminism detailed above (Lewis & Simpson, 2017). Nevertheless, alongside this imagery of an *époque* of feminist dearth (manifest through individuals' disidentification with the feminist label) exists the narrative of the third wave succeeding the second wave, indicating that feminism is not dead at all, as has frequently been pondered (Stuart, 1990; Siegel, 1997; Thornham, 2001); rather, feminism is simply developing into a 'sexier', more inclusive brand (Lewis, 2014a: 1849).

Scholars have also problematised the notion of 'waves' for invoking the image that one wave must necessarily end in order for the next to take over (Rivers, 2017). Such representations of social justice movements do not adequately capture the complexity characterising any given moment, as a multiplicity of (new and old) feminisms can and do co-exist (Gamble, 2004). Indeed, liberal feminist assumptions and politics are alive and well today, operating in conjunction with those (often highly critiqued) forms of contemporary feminism associated with postfeminism, such as 'choice feminism' (Hirshman, 2006), although these feminisms do not sit well together. Nevertheless, due to its conceptual ambiguity and inherent contradictions, it appears as though the postfeminist gender regime is capable of 'containing' different (and at times opposing) feminist orientations. This leads me to another recurring issue in the literature: How should we understand – not the 'post' in postfeminism as above but – the 'feminism' in postfeminism?

3.2. Understanding the ‘feminism’ in postfeminism

Whelehan (2010) argues that postfeminist discourses build on ‘what might be regarded as broadly feminist sentiments in order to justify certain behaviours or choices, but [that] these sentiments have become severed from their political or philosophical origins’ (p. 156). She further posits that most people do not recognise the feminist rhetoric which postfeminist discourses ventriloquise (p. 159). Choice feminism (Hirshman, 2006) is an example hereof. From this perspective, feminism successfully secured women the freedom of choice (Projansky, 2001; Lewis et al., 2017). Choice feminism holds that all life choices that women make, whether pursuing a career, preferring to be a homemaker or combining the two (Hakim, 1998; 2000; 2006), are implicitly feminist, because (presumed) unencumbered, autonomous choice is considered indicative of women’s liberation (Ferguson, 2010; building on Baumgardner & Richards, 2000). Lewis and Simpson (2017) state that notions of choice, as championed by Catherine Hakim in particular, are not only symptomatic of postfeminist logics, but have contributed to the emergence of that which Gill, Kelan and Scharff (2017) now consider the hegemony of postfeminism.

The ‘anything goes’ model of choice feminism makes for an inclusive, albeit highly individualised, judgment-free and palatable feminism (Ferguson, 2010). With its focus on the individual, choice feminism is closely linked to neoliberalism, understood here as a form of governance that has been transferred from macro politics and economics (characterised by deregulation and privatisation) to a ‘central organizing ethic of society that shapes the way we live, think and feel about ourselves and each other’ (Gill, 2017: 608). Through neoliberalism, subjects are constituted as self-managing, autonomous and enterprising individuals whose lives are perceived as the outcome of unrestricted, agentic choices (Gill, 2008; Gill et al., 2017). The link with neoliberalism is also evident in other contemporary, mainstream feminisms, such as ‘popular feminism’ (Banet-Weiser, 2018) and ‘neoliberal feminism’ (Rottenberg, 2018b). Through their neoliberal propensity to rewrite all issues in individual terms, as well as through the tropes of make-over, self-surveillance and enhancement (see, e.g., Gill, 2007; 2017), these postfeminist feminisms ‘divorce’ individual lives from broader institutional, political, historical and social contexts (Ferguson 2010). Though the individual may recognise the existence of gender disparities in contemporary society, the solution is ‘to work on the self rather than to work with others for social and political transformation’ (Gill, 2016: 617).

Unsurprisingly, feminist scholarship has heavily critiqued postfeminist variations of feminism. Whereas research has previously paid substantial attention to the explicit disavowal of and disidentification with feminism (e.g., Scharff, 2012), Lewis et al. (2017) contend that ‘postfeminism cannot be associated with an absolute denunciation of feminist action’ (p. 217) owing to the liberal feminist underpinnings of the postfeminist gender regime. Rather, what is spurned is ‘excessive feminism’, as characterised by a critical orientation to gendered structures, cultures and power dynamics, and a collectivist spirit (Lewis & Simpson, 2017). As nobody likes the ‘feminist killjoy’ (Ahmed, 2010), excessively radical feminism has generally been replaced by moderate, and thus safe and unthreatening, variations.

While recognising that the emergence of politics-averse, moderate feminisms (Ferguson, 2010; Dean, 2010a) has contributed to the recent increased uptake of feminism (Gill, 2016; Lewis et al., 2017), postfeminist feminisms are widely considered ‘diluted’ permutations (Whelehan, 2010) that cater to the status quo of gendered power relations (Lewis et al., 2017; Gill et al., 2017; Adamson & Kelan, 2018). Gill (2016) tellingly writes that what she calls ‘style feminism’ ‘is not just feminism-lite but feminism-weightless’. Rottenberg (2018b) goes even further in her critique of neoliberal feminism: ‘Neoliberal feminism is an unabashedly exclusionary feminism’ (p. 20) in which certain (white, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied, cis-) women’s emancipation and self-realisation in public life is often predicated upon the oppression and confinement of ‘disposable women’ within the domestic sphere.

That which all of these varieties of feminism appear to have in common is a close entwinement with neoliberalism. Neoliberalism has been said to have ‘co-opted feminism’ (Eisenstein, 2009; Fraser, 2013), but Rottenberg (2018b) claims that neoliberalism needs feminism to resolve its internal inconsistencies. Irrespective of which position readers take, the consequence of the close link between postfeminism (and contemporary feminisms) and neoliberal capitalism is the extreme emphasis placed on the individual and the glossing over of the persistence of masculine hegemony and the male stronghold on power in society (Lewis et al., 2017).

In sum, postfeminism has emerged in the context of historical developments such as the transformation of women’s place in contemporary society and the gradual transferal of neoliberal principles from policy to individuals’ ‘interiority’ (Dejmanee, 2015; Gill & Kanai, 2018). Importantly, however, postfeminism is ‘not entirely linked to any particular historical moment’ (Projan-sky, 2001: 88). Furthermore, postfeminism has no political movement (Blue, 2013), although it overlaps with definitions of the third wave. This implies that postfeminism is not an identity (Gill, 2016). There are no self-proclaimed ‘postfeminists’. In the literature, if used about people, the term is generally

used analytically to designate how individuals may perform a postfeminist identity by virtue of discursive subjectivation processes (e.g., Dosekun, 2015; Adamson, 2017; Sørensen, 2017; Adamson & Kelan, 2018; see also chapter 4).

In this dissertation, I will not refer to any kind of ideological, political feminism as postfeminism. Postfeminism constitutes a gender regime (Acker, 2006; Dean, 2010a) that harbours a set of always available discourses around gender, feminism and femininity. These discourses are highly ambiguous, often contradictory, and closely entwined with neoliberal logics (Gill, 2007). When I mention any variety of feminism, I will use specific labels (e.g., liberal, third-wave, intersectional, popular or neoliberal feminism), to underscore how the co-existence of these multiple feminisms contributes to the complexity of the postfeminist context. In Kelan's (2018) words, 'using postfeminism as a lens does not attempt to map different forms of feminism. Instead postfeminism is an analytical tool to understand the contemporary common sense on gender' (p. 106).

To recapitulate: The literature generally identifies four understandings of postfeminism. Thus far, I have introduced three that respectively take postfeminism as: 1) an 'epistemological break' within feminism influenced by post-structuralism, postmodernism, queer and postcolonial thinking; 2) a historical shift and a generational 'moving on' within feminism – sometimes linked to the third wave; and 3) backlash against feminism (Gill et al., 2017: 228). In this dissertation, I align myself mostly with those scholars who employ postfeminism in the fourth understanding noticeable in the literature; namely the view that postfeminism constitutes an object of study (e.g., Gill, 2007; Lewis, 2014a; Lewis et al., 2017; Gill et al., 2017; Kelan, 2018).

In this stream of the literature, postfeminism is viewed as an empirical phenomenon which is at times labelled a 'sensibility' (Gill, 2007; 2017), a 'discursive formation' (Lewis et al., 2017; Lewis & Simpson, 2017) or a 'gender regime' (McRobbie, 2009; Dean, 2010a; 2010b). While these concepts are largely equivalent, I opt for the postfeminist gender regime, as it intuitively resonates with Acker's (2006) concept of 'inequality regimes'. Acker (Ibid.) defines these as 'loosely interrelated practices, processes, actions, and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities' (p. 443). More specifically, Acker deals with what occurs within organisations and identifies as salient, including the processes through which power elites reproduce themselves (i.e., hiring and recruitment) and sustain class distinctions by controlling the allocation of resources. Inequalities may be more or less visible and perceived as more or less legitimate (Acker, 2006). She further stresses that organisational inequality regimes are dynamic and 'linked to inequality in the surrounding society, its politics, history, and culture' (Ibid.: 443). The wider context of organisations must therefore be considered. Following Dean

(2010a), what characterises the postfeminist gender regime at large is that it rejects ‘any simple relation of externality between pro- and anti-feminist discourses’ (p. 392).

Across multiple research fields, studies of postfeminism as an empirical phenomenon have attempted to identify and map empirically observable regularities in ideas and beliefs about gender, femininities and feminism (for an overview, see Gill, 2017: 607). Central elements of the postfeminist gender regime include

a focus upon empowerment, choice and individualism; the repudiation of sexism and thus of the need for feminism alongside a sense of ‘fatigue’ about gender; notions of make-over and self-reinvention/transformation; an emphasis upon embodiment and femininity as a bodily property; an emphasis on surveillance and discipline; a resurgence of ideas of sexual difference. (Gill et al., 2017: 227)

Kelan (2018) stresses that these discourses are part of a ‘contemporary common sense’ and the always ‘winning arguments’ on gender. Although this list is not irrefutable, empirical research has consistently established these discourses as part of efforts to outline the contours of postfeminism ‘even while it keeps moving and changing’ (Gill et al., 2017: 230). This is what makes postfeminism, in Fuller and Driscoll’s (2015) words, a ‘productive irritation’.

Lastly, understanding postfeminism as a discursive regime that encompasses practices, processes, actions and meanings underscores how postfeminism is not simply something ‘out there’. Rather, it ‘moulds our thinking, attitudes and behaviour towards feminism and women’s changing position in contemporary society’ (Lewis & Simpson, 2017: 119). Gill (2008), for example, argues that postfeminist discourses must be understood as ‘technologies of the self’ (Foucault, 1991a; Lewis et al., 2017) that shape discursive processes of subjectivation (Butler, 1997); that is, how the self is formed, enabled and constrained by power (Rumens, 2017: 239). Scholarship points to the close links between postfeminism and neoliberalism as an explanation for the so-called ‘turn to interiority’ (Dejmanee, 2015). Like neoliberalism, postfeminism is understood as governmentality in the Foucauldian sense (Foucault, 1991a; Brown, 2005; Gill, 2017), which in particular ‘encourages people to see themselves as individualized and active subjects responsible for enhancing their own well-being’ (Larner, 2000: 13). This is especially expressed through self-monitoring and regulation, entrepreneurialism and consumerism (Dejmanee, 2015). So while the ‘postfeminism as an object of study’ approach is distinguishable from the streams of research that place postfeminism in the same camp as other ‘post’ perspectives, the former still rests on a poststructuralist backdrop.

Finally, although I classify this stream of the literature in terms of its view of postfeminism as an object of study, there seems to be some degree of internal inconsistency in this work. For example, Gill (2007; 2017) has repeatedly stressed how she considers herself ‘a feminist analyst of postfeminist culture, and not a postfeminist analyst or theorist’ (Banet-Weiser et al., 2019: 3), by which she seems to clarify that she views postfeminism as ontology and not epistemology. Elsewhere, however, she places postfeminism as one option among a ‘critical toolkit’ that enables scholars to capture and make sense of a specific patterning of social life (Gill, 2016), suggesting that postfeminism is epistemology after all. Likewise, Lewis and Simpson (2017) argue that postfeminism is used most insightfully when put to work to critically explore those complex, dominant practices, processes and meanings ‘that result in and maintain continuing gender inequalities’ (p. 120). These arguments and quotes seem to imply that postfeminism must be either ontology or epistemology; however, I do not agree that this distinction can be made quite so rigidly. I see this relationship between the two as mutually co-constitutive. In claiming so, I align myself with those philosophers of science who argue that while ontology and epistemology are not the same, they have intrinsic ties to one another (Gunnarsson, 2017). This is the ‘unity-in-difference paradox’, which implies that something can be both part of something else and separate from it (Bhaskar, 2008, cited by Gunnarsson, 2017). Knowledge (epistemology) is in this sense both part of and separate from reality (ontology). More specifically, ontology means ‘what is out there to know about’, and epistemology refers to ‘what and how can we know about it’ (Grix, 2002: 175, cited by Kant, 2014). In the present research, this translates to the ontological claim that the postfeminist gender regime exists ‘out there’ as something we can study, which logically precedes what and how I assume I can study it. But the relationship between ontology and epistemology does not merely imply one-way directionality from ontology to epistemology, because knowledge production (epistemology) involves a relationship between the world and human beings (Kant, 2014; Cunliffe, 2011). The relationship between ontology and epistemology is in this sense reciprocal, because interaction ‘takes place between the researcher and reality, as knowledge is neither acquired nor exists in a vacuum’ (Kant, 2014: 80). Consequently, ontological and epistemological assumptions then both influence the questions a researcher asks, how they are formulated and how they are answered (Grix 2002: 179, cited by Kant, 2014). In my case, I noticed the postfeminist concept and its literatures because it resonated particularly well with how I view my native context, Denmark, and enabled me to understand certain contradictory aspects of it. In this way, theorisations about postfeminism based on empirical work (as presented throughout this chapter)

shape the questions I ask in my research; how I interpret my empirical material; and my ‘findings’ speak back to (and enhance) our understanding of ‘the postfeminist gender regime’.

3.3. The postfeminist gender regime

In the first part of the chapter, I outlined how postfeminism has been theorised in different ways in the literature. I clarified how, in this dissertation, I engage postfeminism as both ontology and epistemology, which enables me to explore a gender regime characterised by patterned (albeit highly ambiguous and often contradictory) discourses on gender, femininity and feminism. I will now outline the postfeminist gender regime, building on empirical research primarily drawn from two fields: cultural and media studies (CMS) and organisation and management studies (OMS).

While OMS research is more closely related to the topic at hand, I will nevertheless include a brief, selective review of work from CMS. Understanding the central tenets of the cultural landscape of postfeminism as depicted in popular television, cinema and literature constitutes an important part of the postfeminist gender regime. Scholars have argued that the prominence of postfeminist narratives in culture and media have contributed to the diffusion of postfeminist logics into all aspects of contemporary societies with material effects in people’s lives (Gamble, 2004; Tasker & Negra, 2005; Gill, 2008). Although postfeminist representations in popular culture are slightly different from the shape postfeminism takes in workplaces (Ronen, 2018), CMS research on postfeminism laid the groundwork for subsequent OMS research. The CMS literature therefore constitutes an important frame of reference for the later work in OMS. Importantly, much of these literatures is anchored in the Anglo-American contexts, which poses limitations on my ambition to use postfeminism to illuminate the Danish context. Empirical research findings from one setting can never be transferred directly to another. However, in the introduction (see section 1.2 of the Introduction), I presented both quantitative and qualitative research empirically situated in Denmark which, without naming them as such, strongly indicates the prevalence of postfeminist tendencies, most clearly Dahlerup (2018). This is the inevitable implication of the fact that postfeminism has not been widely applied in empirical research about Denmark which, in turn, is why this dissertation potentially represents a valuable contribution.

I will again note that this review does not aim to be exhaustive. My objective is to delineate a postfeminist framework that will enable me to answer the research questions raised in this dissertation. While I acknowledge a substantial overlap in the topics covered below, I have structured the following part of

the chapter under three subheadings to ensure coherence and legibility, namely: postfeminism in culture and media, postfeminism and the workplace, and feminisms in the postfeminist gender regime.

3.3.1. Postfeminism in culture and media

In the CMS field, scholars often point to a postfeminist ‘canon’ (Gill, 2017) largely consisting of US-based and some UK-based ‘chick lit’ (Mazza & DeShell, 1995), cinema and television productions. This canon traces back to the early 1990s’ plethora of romantic comedies and dramas revolving around postfeminist themes and female postfeminist archetypes (Tasker & Negra, 2005), which I elaborate below. More concretely, the canon includes hits such as *Sex and the City* (Kim, 2001), *Ally McBeal* (Mosely & Read, 2002) and *Bridget Jones’ Diary* (McRobbie, 2004), which have been discussed extensively in the literature, and all of which have been broadcast in Denmark. Other work focuses on the notion of ‘girl power’, as mainstreamed by the 1990s British pop group Spice Girls (Ashby, 2004), and so-called ‘girlie’ femininity (Munford, 2004; Dejmanee, 2015). Quintessential postfeminist themes from early research on postfeminism in the media are contradictions between personal and private life, often in the shape of the career-success/love-failure dichotomy (Dejmanee, 2015), the shift from sexual objectification to self-subjectification (Gill, 2003a), ‘downsizing’ career ambitions and retreat to home (Tasker & Negra, 2005; Negra, 2009), strong female friendships (Adriaens & van Bauwel, 2014) and inter-generational misunderstandings between mothers and daughters (Ashby, 2004). A later emergent theme is the turn to ‘interiority’, as exemplified in, for instance, the television show *Girls* and *The Mindy Project* (Dejmanee, 2015). Below, I briefly recapitulate four CMS analyses of postfeminism.

Sex and the City aired between 1998 and 2004, succeeded by two feature films in 2008 and 2010. The show rests on a feminist backdrop which is rarely addressed. The lives led by the show’s main characters (Carrie, Samantha, Charlotte and Miranda) are enabled by the transformations regarding women’s place in society achieved by feminism (Arthurs, 2003; Dejmanee, 2015). Their successful careers ensure the financial independence required to indulge in public life set in New York City. In the show, freedom is equated with extensive luxury consumption, dating, romances and casual sexual relationships, and female friendships. Through their professional ambition, sexual liberation and an explicit distancing of themselves from domesticity, the main characters embrace masculine values, which come to represent their (feminist) emancipation. In sharp contrast to these liberal feminist values (which are never labelled as such), we find traditionalism in the form of, for

example, Carrie's hyper femininity, expressed through her love of fashion and constant pursuit of male approval and romantic love, and Charlotte's desperate longing for heterosexual marital bliss and children (Dejmanee, 2015). Upon finally marrying, Charlotte quits her job as a successful art curator to become a homemaker (Kim, 2001). Alongside such narratives, we find Samantha's sexual adventures, which are simultaneously glorified as freedom and occasionally condemned as hollow – not by the set-up of the show, but by other characters (Adriaens & van Bauwel, 2014) – and Miranda's struggle to get ahead in the law firm where she works while trying to manage as a single mother. However, neither the pressures resulting from social expectations around familialism and traditional gender stereotypes, sexual double standards nor structural, cultural barriers in the workplace are discussed at much length as persistent gender injustice. Therefore, the show constructs a context in which gender equality and feminist values are presumed incorporated into everyday social life, which makes them unremarkable and thus taken for granted. The postfeminist discourses in *Sex and the City* suggest that as long as the women who choose to can succeed in typically male arenas, feminism has worked and it is therefore no longer relevant (Projansky, 2001: 75). This leaves outcries of gender injustice not only unfounded but implausible (Pomerantz et al., 2013: 186).

Another cinematic blockbuster in the postfeminist canon is the *Bridget Jones' Diary* series, which had its origins in a weekly column in a UK newspaper, *The Independent*, in 1996. Author Helen Fielding subsequently published the diaries as books, and the first *Bridget Jones' Diary* movie came out in 2001. The set-up of the movie is similar to *Sex and the City*: The protagonist, Bridget Jones, is a 'free agent'. At age 30, she lives and works in London, single without children. She goes out with her friends to pubs and restaurants and engages in an affair with her boss. But Bridget's freedom is accompanied by new anxieties, not least loneliness and the stigma of remaining single while her 'biological clock' is running out. During the aforementioned affair, she fantasises about wedding her boss. While radical feminism would likely disprove of such conventional desires, the postfeminist setting offers relief from such censorious politics. Through narratives of liberal equality and endless choice, any life path that a woman pursues may be regarded as feminist in the sense that she is exercising the agency won for her by feminism (Ferguson, 2010; Snyder-Hall, 2010). In this manner, feminism is invoked only to be relegated to the past (McRobbie, 2004: 262). McRobbie (2004) further argues that the Bridget Jones character perfectly exemplifies the self-monitoring and -regulating postfeminist subject, as she keeps a diary, consistently confides in her friends, strictly monitors her weight and food intake, and 'plans, plots, and has

projects' (p. 261). Through these mechanisms, Bridget only has herself to blame if she fails to find the right partner in time.

The Spice Girls released their debut album in 1996, immediately becoming a global success. The group became a cultural phenomenon beyond their music by championing the 'girl power' slogan. According to Ashby (2004), this slogan covers a 'boisterous, even aggressive, attitude toward gender politics' (p. 127) and a paradigm that rejects the supposedly anti-sex attitudes⁵¹ of previous generations of women (in particular, radical feminists) (Negra, 2009; Ferguson, 2010) in favour of an unmarked feminism that simultaneously celebrates female camaraderie and champions individuality and independence. At the height of the Spice Girls' popularity, vehement disavowal of feminism was widespread among young US and UK women (Williams & Wittig, 1007; Budgeon, 2001; Houvouras & Carter, 2008; Scharff, 2012). Budgeon (2001) and McRobbie (2004) contend that, around the millennium, girls and young women were indeed gender aware. But as gender was no longer viewed as a liability for women (Pomerantz et al., 2013), in McRobbie's (2003) words, young women were called upon to almost ritualistically denounce feminism in order to constitute themselves as modern, sophisticated girls. The girl subject constituted through 'girl power' discourses actively invoked hostility towards assumed feminist positions from the past due to a fear of 'the radical-lesbian-manhating-militant stigma' (Siegel, 1997), but particularly in opposition to the presumed 'victim paradigm' of liberal feminism (Gamble, 2004; Baker, 2010; Pomerantz et al., 2013). In keeping with postfeminist discourses and neoliberalism, 'girl power' girls are 'can-do girls' (Harris, 2003; 2004) who endorse a new, politics-free regime of equality, participation and pleasure (McRobbie, 2004; Ferguson, 2010). Nevertheless, the Spice Girls (somewhat controversially) repeatedly claimed that the Conservative ex-UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher – unsurprisingly a highly problematic figure for many feminists of that time – was an inspirational icon and 'the first Spice Girl' (Ashby, 2004: 127).

On the backdrop of the 'double entanglement' – that is, the simultaneous celebration of the success of feminism and the repudiation of it (McRobbie,

⁵¹ The notion of 'anti-sex' attitudes originates in the divisive so-called 'sex wars' of second-wave feminism. The feminists criticised as being anti-sex understood viewed pornography and prostitution as expressions of the oppression of women, whereas 'pro-sex' or 'sex-positive' feminists (and many third-wave feminists) see a potential for sexual emancipation herein. In other words, the latter group (re)claims sexual pleasure, as they desire it (heterosexual or otherwise) and engage in self-subjectification (in contrast to male, sexual objectification), often by playing with femininity (Snyder-Hall, 2008).

2003; 2004; 2009) – CMS has allocated considerable attention to analyses of representations of femininity, including those introduced above, such as empowered girls and women, and successful career women with or without a desire for heterosexual romantic monogamy. In cases where successful career women in popular culture are depicted as uninterested in romance and children, they often come across as what Mizejewski (2004, 2005) refers to as ‘the female dick’, defined by their isolation and exceptional status. In contrast hereto, we find a different but widespread representation of femininity, namely that which has been dubbed in the literature, ‘girlie femininity’ (Munford, 2004; Baumgardner & Richards, 2010). Baumgardner and Richards (2010) explain: ‘Girlies are girls in their twenties or thirties who [...] have reclaimed girl culture, which is made up of such formerly disparaged things as knitting, the color pink, nail polish, and fun’ (p. 80). McRobbie (2007b) forcefully declared that ‘girls and young women now understand power as the “spectacle of excessive femininity”’ (p. 725). Historically, feminists would resist social pressures to behave and dress in socially acceptable feminine ways as part of their struggle for liberation. But since gender equality is presumed achieved, postfeminist subjects are granted permission to indulge in and enjoy femininity (Marso, 2006; Snyder-Hall, 2010). Dejmanee (2015) explores the television shows *Girls* and *The Mindy Project* as examples hereof. The protagonist of *The Mindy Project* (2012–17), Mindy Lahiri, is a successful gynaecologist who wears polka dots and ruffles, and the décor of her New York apartment comes across as a girlie haven, featuring bright colours and plush cushions and armchairs. However, the character is not empowered by her femininity in the same manner as e.g. Carrie in *Sex and the City*. Dejmanee (2015) argues that Mindy is instead consistently mocked for her hyperbolic femininity (p. 130). It would therefore appear as though aspirations of male approval through spectacularly feminine displays are replaced with self-imposed feminine cultural norms (McRobbie, 2009: 63, cited by Lewis et al., 2017). In this narrative, we again encounter the double entanglement of postfeminism. Tasker and Negra (2005) argue that, more generally, through the ‘girlying’ of femininity in media narratives, competent professional adult women are rendered safe by being represented as fundamentally still being girls. In sum, feminism is taken for granted as that which enables Mindy to live her life and diluted through the fusion of traditionally masculine values (agency, choices, ambition) with femininity (beauty, likeability and often motherhood – although not in this specific show). Thus, postfeminist gender performances require careful calibration (Carlson, 2011; Cairns & Johnston, 2015 cited by Lewis et al., 2017), since configurations of femininity at either extreme, such as the female dick or the girlie girl, are scorned as not properly postfeminist and risk hampering the protagonists in their careers as well as their love lives.

In conclusion, the purpose of this part of the chapter was to provide a few examples of analyses of postfeminism as first done in CMS prior to the concept being adopted by OMS. Across these examples, feminism serves as the implicit premise that enables the plot to unfold, whether characters in a fictional television show or the success of real-life popstars. Nevertheless, this premise is either explicitly challenged, as in the case of the Spice Girls or *Sex and the City*-Charlotte's decision to become a homemaker, or implicitly through performances of femininity, of which *Sex and the City*'s Carrie and Mindy of *The Mindy Project* are examples. As feminism is understood as 'having passed away' (McRobbie, 2009), it is hardly surprising that the 'continuing contradiction between women's personal and professional lives is more likely to be foregrounded in postfeminist [media and culture] than the failure to eliminate either the pay gap or the burden of care between men and women' (Tasker & Negra, 2005: 108). However, it may also be this contradiction (i.e., the coexistence of neo-conservative values in relation to gender, sexuality and family life with the increasing liberalisation of domestic, sexual and kinship relations) that allows for more diverse representations of women in culture and media (McRobbie, 2007a).

On a final note, it is too easy by half to simply compare contemporary popular cultural texts with a '1970s version' of feminism – only to find them wanting. Hollows (2000) argues that the feminism in such texts (if any) may simply have changed for a new moment, whereby she stresses her view that feminism is a dynamic, negotiated process of ongoing transformation (cited by Gill et al., 2017). Following this point, I should disclaim that the historical context of, in particular, the Spice Girls, *Sex and the City* and *Bridget Jones's Diary* may be considered different from the context of *Girls* and *The Mindy Project* (which postdate, for example, 9/11 and the 2007–08 Financial Crisis; Dejmanee, 2015), as well as from the historical context of today. Analyses of more recent cultural productions may find other themes or representations of femininities, although these may still be explored and understood through the postfeminist lens. While this has been a point of contention (Whelehan, 2010; Keller & Ryan, 2014 cited by Gill, 2017), I agree with scholars who assert that the postfeminism concept remains valuable to understand qualitative shifts in gender relations in social life which often maintain a distinctively postfeminist tenor (Gill, 2017). Through its ever-closer relationship with neoliberalism, postfeminism shows its malleability and longevity (Dejmanee, 2015) which, according to Gill (2017), has led to it becoming 'the new normal' throughout contemporary life (p. 609).

Lastly, the importance of context also pertains to location. As a theoretical concept, postfeminism has gained little traction in Danish CMS scholarship. One noticeable exception is Pedersen's (2010) discussion of *Nynne's Dagbog*

(Nynne's Diary) which is basically a Danish version of *Bridget Jones' Diary*. Scholars such as Ashby (2005) and Dosekun (2015) contend that despite its strong anchoring in North American culture, the postfeminist cultural phenomenon travels, adapts to and morphs into cultures elsewhere and shapes local gender politics and media (Ashby, 2005: 126). This may be a call for Danish CMS scholars to explore how, during the past three decades, Danish iterations of postfeminist narratives and archetypes have formed and to what effects vis-à-vis the Danish political, social and media contexts, and how they compare with the postfeminist CMS canon.

3.3.2. Postfeminism and the workplace

The above is a very brief presentation of the existing CMS research on postfeminism, intended to introduce some of the contradictory narratives and female archetypes that have consistently reappeared in culture and media in recent decades. While they may assume different forms, they all build on the double entanglement premise (McRobbie, 2003; 2004; 2009). While fictional cultural texts, such as film and television shows, may seem more detached from the 'actual' lives of their spectators than, by comparison, the influence that an idolised girls' pop group may have on their young fans, a generation has now grown up under constant exposure to postfeminist logics and reasoning. In this manner, postfeminism now permeates all spheres of life (Gamble, 2004; Tasker & Negra, 2005; Gill, 2008), including the workplace, which is what OMS research on postfeminism explores. Like CMS, the OMS literature assumes that the postfeminist gender regime comprises a set of recurrent discourses around gender, feminism and femininity. I group these discourses into four subtopics and add a topic that is not as widely included in the literature, namely men, masculinities and postfeminism.

Gender unspeakable

Gender equality is institutionalised legally in many developed countries, and, in principle, women face no obstacles in the labour market. Gender-based discrimination has been criminalised, and 'the battle for women's rights' is widely presumed won (McRobbie, 2004; 2009; Negra, 2009; Gill, 2014b). Still, organisations and professions are often constructed as gender-egalitarian and neutral (Eisenhart & Finkel, 1998; Lewis, 2006b; Bailyn, 2003) despite ample evidence to the contrary (Kanter, 1977; Acker, 1990, 2006; Lorber, 1994) as well as persistent vertical and horizontal gender divisions at work and the gender pay gap (Schwab et al., 2018; Equal Measures, 2019c). These postfeminist contradictions pose ideological dilemmas for workers, and Kelan (2009) asks 'how can they make sense of gender discrimination at work while presenting

their workplace as gender neutral?’ (p. 197). In the following, I review some discursive strategies uncovered in the literature.

One of the ways workers manoeuvre the dilemma of understanding gender inequality in the context of presumed gender-equal and neutral organisations and professions is by denying the existence of structural and cultural sexism (Gill et al., 2017; Lewis & Simpson, 2017; Ronen, 2018). In Kelan’s (2007) study of two information, communication and technology (ICT) companies, workers frequently employed the disclaimer ‘I don’t know’ in response to queries concerning the low share of women employees, arguing that the organisation was certainly not to blame. ‘We treat men and women exactly the same here’ is a common trope through which the gender neutrality of organisations is constructed (Eisenhart & Finkel, 1998). When the existence of structural, cultural gender discrimination is denied and women and men are believed treated equally at work, gender discrimination is perceived as impossible (Ibid.: 197 cited by Kelan, 2009). From a postfeminist perspective, the progressiveness of gender equality has come to be equated with ‘gender blindness’ (Lewis, 2006b; 2014a); that is, individuals no longer recognise themselves as gendered actors and gender is, thus, presumed not to play a role in a liberal democracy (Gamble, 2004; Ferguson, 2010; Rottenberg, 2014). Some scholars have argued that ‘gender blindness’ (in combination with the pervasive disavowal of feminism) has resulted in an inability to articulate discrimination (Wetterer, 2003; 2004 cited by Kelan, 2007; Gill et al., 2017). Here, ‘I don’t know’ reflects a rhetorical problem (Wetterer, 2003) and, more specifically, a lack of (feminist) vocabulary. Others claim that because gender discrimination has been criminalised, problematic gender dynamics are increasingly becoming more subtle and complex – and that it is this complexity and uncertainty that make persistent inequality ‘unspeakable’ and mysterious (Kelan, 2007, 2009; Gill, 2014b).

Interestingly, the ‘I don’t know’ response in Kelan’s (2007) research was often followed by a variety of explanations for the lack of female ICT workers, including gender differences in educational and professional interests owing to either biology or socialisation. In these instances, the ‘I don’t know’ serves as a disclaimer through which the interviewees cover themselves against being read as sexist by instead self-presenting as incompetent to talk about gender issues (p. 508). Such discursive moves are part of identity work that reflects how, today, being neither perpetrator nor victim of sexism is viewed as a desirable subject position (Kelan, 2007: 500). As gender discrimination is criminalised and gender inequality is frequently displaced as a problem of the past (Tasker & Negra, 2007; Ahmed, 2012; Gill et al., 2017), explicitly sexist views are rarely perceived as socially acceptable (Billig et al., 1988; Blau, Brinton & Grusky, 2006 cited by Kelan, 2009), unless served with adequate humorous

disclaimers. Men and women alike therefore avoid accusatory language about, for instance, men's sexism towards women, and men carefully avoid notions of women's intellectual shortcomings or lack of rights to pursue careers, as in relation to ICT in Kelan's work (2004, 2009).

As mentioned above, the 'victim' subject position is equally fraught, which may be explained by the opposition in third-wave feminism to the 'victim paradigm' of second-wave feminism (Gamble, 2004; Baker, 2010; Ferguson, 2010). In other words, we here encounter the slippage between third-wave feminism and postfeminism. Central third-wave voices, including Wolf (1993), Roiphe (1994) and Denfeld (1995), opposed totalising – and patronising, they argue – ideas of inescapable female oppression by an all-powerful patriarchy (Gamble, 2004). Victimhood seems to have become associated with 'self-pity, insufficient personal drive and a lack of personal responsibility for one's own life' (Baker, 2010: 190), which oppose everything which neoliberalism champions. In this way, contemporary workers generally prefer a narrative which abstains from broader critiques of gender inequalities and stresses women's individual agency and empowerment to overcome obstacles, which may or may not be recognised as gendered (Lewis, 2006b; Kelan, 2007; 2009). Consequently, when women fail to overcome barriers, explanations often pertain to their shortcomings; but often more in terms of their lack of confidence and ambition than with respect to any intellectual or professional inadequacies (Lewis, 2006b; Sandberg, 2013; Gill & Orgad, 2015; Banet-Weiser, 2018). Furthermore, denying the structural-cultural nature of gender inequalities implies that when discrimination occurs and cannot be denied, it is constructed as very rare (Kelan, 2009) and as one-off occurrences that are easily handled by the individual women (Gill et al., 2017). Through the individualisation (and trivialisation) of sexism and discrimination, the status quo of gendered power relations remains unquestioned, and 'fix the women' logics (see Introduction, 1.3.3.) are reinforced (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000; Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Zanoni et al., 2010). In sum, acknowledging cultural influence is seen as somehow disrespectful and being influenced is regarded as shameful, while autonomous choices are fetishised (Gill, 2016: 436).

A final way through which gender is rendered unspeakable in work organisations is what the literature has labelled 'gender fatigue'. In her original definition, Kelan (2009) conceived of gender fatigue as a sort of cognitive strain resulting from the dilemma of reconciling the existence of inequality with presumed gender-equal and neutral organisations and professions. This strain leads to discomfort, aversion or even on occasion outright animosity when gender is discussed, because if gender equality is already the reality, gender should supposedly not be an issue. On this background, Gill et al. (2017) appear to present gender fatigue as a sort of discursive derailing technique which

assumes different forms, including the temporal or spatial relocation of gender inequality to the past or to other countries or contexts (see also Ahmed, 2012; Pomerantz et al., 2013). Along similar lines, Ronen (2018) identifies ‘the Novocain effect’, which she conceptualises as a ‘selective gag order’ preventing discussions about gender. Novocain numbs the pain of gender inequality, she writes, even despite inequality being acknowledge and addressed elsewhere in the same organisation (p. 13).

Gender essentialism

The literature has consistently identified a resurgence of gender-essentialist assumptions as part of central postfeminist discourses (Gill, 2007; 2017; Lewis & Simpson, 2017; Gill et al., 2017). Whereas the second-wave feminist movement of the 1960s–70s emphasised the social construction of gender (see, e.g., Thornham, 2001), issues such as the underrepresentation of women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), in leadership and in top research positions in academia are increasingly attributed to gendered essences – either biological or socialised (McRobbie, 2004; Gill, 2007). After decades of liberal feminists policing such reasoning, gender-essentialist arguments have been re-legitimised in public discourse (Rennison, 2014). In Kelan’s work (2007), research participants more frequently explained stable gender differences with reference to socialisation than biology, thereby introducing a kind of cultural essentialisation (cf. Franklin, Lury & Stacey 2000). By engaging socialisation and culture rather than biology, individuals attempt to construct themselves as legitimate postfeminist subjects in a presumed gender-equal context in which sexism is unacceptable, as was also discussed above. However, Kelan (2007) concludes that socialisation arguments are used largely interchangeably with biological essence arguments, and the implications are the same; that is, men and women are understood as fundamentally predisposed to pursue different life paths, including different educations, professional fields, types of jobs, and priorities in life (Hakim, 1998; 2000; 2006). In this way, ‘gender essentialism serves to justify existing social inequalities rather than describing them neutrally’ (Skewes et al., 2018: 17).

Gender essentialism discourages interventions to raise the share of women in areas where they make up the minority (Ibid.). Importantly, women are not unwelcome (Rennison, 2014). However, when women’s choices to pursue other jobs are viewed as anchored in their essential preferences (Hakim, 1998; 2006), GE interventions aimed at raising the share of women are superfluous (Gill et al., 2017). In fact, such interventions are viewed as patronising, because women are presumed more than capable of deciding for themselves (Rennison, 2014) and because the ability of women to choose is equated with

the progressiveness of their liberation (Lewis, 2006b; Gill et al., 2017). Nevertheless, if gender is addressed in male-dominated fields, it typically involves discussing ‘women as other’ and how women should adapt to and adopt the masculine norm which widely characterises work organisations (Kanter, 1977; Acker, 1990, 2006; Lorber, 1994). Paradoxically, gender-essentialist arguments are also employed to encourage organisations to improve gender equality, such as by increasing the number of women in management. Arguments for gender-balanced leadership often emphasise women’s so-called ‘uniquely feminine viewpoint’ (Lewis, 2014a). In other words, women are presumed to add specific perspectives and skills that men do not possess (Ronen, 2018). In Rennison’s words (2014): ‘the sexes are complementary, not competing; equal in dignity, different in function’ (p. 44). As Ronen (2018) has demonstrated, however, although the inclusion of women is championed based on the essentialisation of femininity, the devaluation of feminine-typed work goes unrecognised.

Thus, the topic of femininity has also been explored in the literature on postfeminism. A focus on femininities, and in other words a performative understanding of gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Martin, 2001, 2006), may seem contradictory to the claim that the postfeminist gender regime has seen a resurgence of gender essentialism. However, another central tenet of postfeminism that goes hand in hand with gender essentialism is the tendency to understand femininity as a bodily property (Gill, 2007; 2017). Still, scholars may employ a performative lens in their research on postfeminist femininities. For example, Lewis (2014a) explores the premise of the increased inclusion of women at work through the lens of postfeminist femininities. Echoing Billing (2011), Lewis states that it is important to not exclusively study the dynamics pertaining to the exclusion of women from male-dominated fields based on the ‘male norm’ argument, as introduced above; rather, as femininity is now increasingly engaged as an advantage that encourages organisations to improve the inclusion of women, we must understand the nature of that inclusion. Lewis and her colleagues (Lewis, 2014a; Lewis & Simpson, 2017; Lewis et al., 2017) argue that postfeminism has enabled a rapprochement of feminism and femininity, which has led to greater levels of variability and fluidity in representations and enactments of femininity (McRobbie, 1993). Here, feminism means ‘individualism and choice conventionally perceived as masculine behaviours’ (Lewis & Simpson, 2017: 217) often associated with the world of work and femininity refers to care, communality and beauty. Following Brunsdon (1997), femininity constitutes ‘a difficult and contradictory psychic, historical and cultural formation, to which feminists have been historically ambivalent’ (p. 1851, cited by Lewis, 2014a). However, since gender equality is presumed achieved in the postfeminist gender regime, women are

granted permission to indulge in and enjoy femininity (Marso, 2006; Snyder-Hall, 2008; 2010). In other words, femininity and feminism can co-exist (Hinds & Stacey, 2001; Baumgardner & Richards, 2004 cited by Lewis, 2014a).

In traditionally masculine fields, the successful ‘doing’ of contemporary femininity is necessarily marked by masculinity (Ibid.). However, retaining femininity is perceived as paramount to success (Adamson & Kelan, 2018). At the same time, enactments of femininity in the corporate world must be ‘measured’ (Lewis, 2014a). Displays of femininity must be just feminine enough to benefit business while not being perceived as disruptive (Lewis, 2012). This means, among other things, that women should exert self-control over their (presumed essential) emotionality. That is, women must avoid being perceived as either ‘overly emotional’ or ‘cold’ (Adamson & Kelan, 2018). This is a difficult balancing act for working women (Carlson, 2011; Lewis et al., 2017), which, importantly, does not mean taking on an androgynous persona. Rather, in their enactments of individualism, agency, and choice versus care, communality and motherhood, women must carefully calibrate the balance between masculinity and femininity (Cairns & Johnston, 2015 cited by Lewis et al., 2017). There is no single ‘correct’ form which this balancing act may take; rather, multiple available feminine subject positions exist in different work situations (Genz, 2009; Gill & Scharff, 2011; Lewis, 2014a). In sum, while women’s labour market participation enables them to enjoy the freedom achieved by feminism, cultural requirements to enact feminine practices, such as motherhood and beauty, restrict that freedom. Moreover, although arguments of the perceived benefits of feminine approaches are engaged to encourage a strengthened inclusion of women in organisations, the emphasis of post-feminism on femininity and the demands it poses on women ‘tilt’ the balance of power in favour of men and masculinity (Lewis et al., 2017). Femininity works as a technology of the self (Foucault, 1991a), which consistently holds women back (Marso, 2006) while being constructed as freely chosen by women themselves (McRobbie, 2009).

Work–family balance

Closely related to the discussion above pertaining to how the postfeminist gender regime enables a rapprochement between feminism (agency, individualism, work) and femininity (care, communality) is the topic of work–family balance. This topic has received particular attention through the lens of ‘choice’ discourses. Following the double entanglement logic, the success of feminism is celebrated as having secured women the freedom of choice (Hirshman, 2006), from which follows that all of contemporary women’s life choices may

be viewed as implicitly feminist (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000 cited by Ferguson, 2010). These life choices often pertain to career and family.

Postfeminist discourses of ‘choice’ mark a noticeable break with the liberal feminism of the 1960s–70s, since the Red Stockings movement aimed to free women from the duty of toilsome, monotonous housework and care responsibilities (Thornham, 2001; Lewis, 2014b). Through the double entanglement which consistently brings women back to femininity, the postfeminist gender regime requires women to ‘create their own life in similar ways to their male colleagues while still maintaining a foothold in the domestic realm’ (Lewis, 2014b: 113). Mainstream postfeminist feminisms (see 3.3.3. below) expect women to pursue work, ‘lean in’ (Sandberg, 2013) and ‘let go’ of their incessant grip at home in order to flourish in the workplace (Slaughter, 2015). However, postfeminist femininity almost always translates into motherhood, making work–family balance a central concept to understanding women’s life experiences today (Rottenberg, 2018b). Lewis and Simpson (2017) note that ‘this blending of care work and labour-market work does not simply mean being a “working mother” who tries to “balance” home and work but rather requires that contemporary women are “good” employees and “good” mothers’ (p. 124). Nevertheless, good mothering usually takes precedence (Sørensen, 2017).

The postfeminist gender regime has therefore seen an increasing tendency for women to retreat to the domestic sphere (Negra, 2009; Orgad, 2017; 2018); a retreat which may take different forms. Some women choose to reduce their career ambitions while prioritising family life for a period of time, go part-time (Sørensen, 2017; Armstrong, 2017), or opt out of their careers entirely to dedicate themselves wholeheartedly to child-rearing and ‘home-making’ (Hakim, 1998; 2000; 2006; Stone, 2007). Retreating to the home is, however, understood as a voluntary choice as opposed to an obligation (Negra, 2009; Lewis & Simpson, 2017). Through the resurgence of gender essentialism in postfeminism, motherhood is perceived as natural. Consequently, there is essentially no choice but to return to the home (in whichever form), but emphasis is still placed on having made the right choice as much as on having *made* the choice (Sørensen, 2017). As such, when women of the postfeminist gender regime choose part-time working arrangements while their children are young, they do so not with reference to the labour market structures and gendered parenting expectations which may require doing so; rather, shaped by neoliberalism, women who go part-time typically stress their individual agency and personal responsibility to make that choice (Larner, 2000). The complete or partial retreat to the home may be rationalised as a return to ‘truer’ or ‘purer’ feminine values, such as family and motherhood (Stone, 2007; see also Douglas & Michaels 2004; Crompton & Lyonette, 2005).

On the other hand, the woman who manages to succeed in both arenas is perceived as exceptional. She is both admired and condemned, because women who refuse to embrace the naturalness of a return to the home fail to accommodate the ideal of good mothering by insisting on prioritising their career ambitions (Sørensen, 2017: 138). They further fail to accommodate the imperative of the work–family balance. In other words, the social pressure is strong. Rottenberg (2018b) argues that work–family balance discourses constitute an ambiguous aspirational goal and ideal that works through notions of time and affect (see also Armstrong, 2017). For instance, contemporary women are encouraged to make careers and postpone motherhood in order to achieve the promise of happiness (Ahmed, 2010), in the form of work–family balance, later in life. At the same time, working women with children should strive to live in the present and prioritise happiness (i.e., balance) now, which means reducing career ambitions. This seems to resonate with Lewis' (2014a) point that postfeminism does not discourage women from working; it is more a question of what work they can do while caring for children (p. 1856).

It is hardly surprising that choice discourses linked to work–family balance have received significant criticism. Historically, feminists fought to make having children a woman's choice. However, the consequence of the imperative to strive for work–family or work–life balance is that having children has widely been re-inscribed as a mandated part of women's lives (Rottenberg, 2018b). While flexible working arrangements to facilitate work–family balance may be viewed as organisational attempts to change the conditions of work, such efforts fail to take the structural–cultural constraints facing women sufficiently into account (Lewis et al., 2017). For example, contemporary catch phrases such as Sandberg's (2013) 'lean in' appear to contradictorily presuppose that, by pursuing careers, women will somehow be better poised to establish a felicitous work–family balance (Rottenberg, 2014). And Slaughter's (2015) 'let go [of the home]' mantra seems to imply that heterosexual men are desperate to take on 'more domestic and caring responsibilities but are being prevented from doing so by recalcitrant women who cannot bear to secede responsibility' (Gill et al., 2017: 241). If either of these assumptions were representative of reality, there would presumably be no work–family dilemma for women. Thus, by downplaying the structural–cultural factors shaping women's life choices, work–family balance produces a subject who is fully responsible for her own happiness while being expected to desire both professional and familial fulfilment – the two factors that create the work–family tension and strain which require women to choose (Rottenberg, 2014; Lewis & Simpson, 2017). Finally, women's choices to leave their careers, the freedom of which may be questioned, also feed into the narrative that inequalities in

the workplace may be explained by maternity. The implication is that the masculine norm of the world of work is disguised, and it is women who are made 'other' and blamed for opting out (Gill et al., 2017).

Changing the status quo of organisations

OMS research has explored how postfeminist discourses serve to obfuscate gender inequalities in the work context in different ways (Ronen, 2018). For example, women's presumed liberated and equal position in contemporary society is generally understood as a relatively new situation, and change takes time (Gill et al., 2017). Society is, in other words, facing a time lag. Still, gender change is certain to happen, which 'means that more proactive approaches to tackling inequalities [at work] tend to be considered unnecessary' (Ibid.: 237). While some people recognise the existence of gender inequalities in the present, they are often spatially displaced to contexts outside of the workplace, as happening in society in general, because organisations are constructed as gender-equal and neutral (Ibid.; Kelan, 2007). Furthermore, gendered barriers for women may also be constructed as 'simply the way things are', which Gill et al. (2017) label '*c'est la vie* accounting'. Lastly, when organisations are presumed gender-egalitarian, as indicative of the success of liberal feminism, it seems intuitive that opposition to women-targeted GE initiatives is bound to occur. That is, such initiatives are presumed to give women an unfair advantage over men (Ibid.; Rumens, 2017).

Women themselves also occasionally resist being the target of GE programmes (Lewis et al., 2017), which may be explained by the postfeminist (or rather, third-wave feminist) tendency to reject the notion of women as victims (Baker, 2010). Initiatives for women also seem to be associated with helping women who would not otherwise be able to succeed in their careers (van den Brink & Benschop, 2013). The implications are that women's participation in GE programmes subtracts from their perceived professional skills and personal stamina, which strengthens the widespread narrative that improving gender equality in the workplace comes at the expense of quality (Ibid.). In sum, by blurring gender dynamics in organisations in these ways, postfeminist logics discourage organisational initiatives to increasingly attract, retain and advance women in organisations and fields, in which they are underrepresented. Focus is placed on individuals rather than questioning how and why barriers arise, and how they may be dismantled (Adamson & Kelan, 2018). Lewis et al. (2017) posit that it is very likely that postfeminism in organisations plays a key role in the 'blinding lack of progress' (Ainsworth et al., 2010) with respect to gender change in the workplace.

By blurring the systemic nature of gender inequalities, the consequence of these discourses is the preservation of the status quo and the reinforcement of the individualisation which postfeminism promotes (Gill, 2007; 2017; Kelan, 2009; Rottenberg, 2014). In other words, the responsibility for overcoming gendered organisational barriers is placed squarely on the shoulders of individual women who are encouraged to work on themselves in order to make it (Gill, 2016; Rottenberg, 2018a; 2018b), which mirrors several central post-feminist principles. Transforming the self reflects the so-called postfeminist 'make-over paradigm' (Gill, 2016; 2017) and involves constant emotional and behavioural self-monitoring and regulation (Gill, 2017). This speaks to the turn to interiority (Dejmanee, 2015) as well as the notion of 'moderate feminism' (Dean, 2010a; Lewis, 2014a). Therefore, if organisations implement GE initiatives, they typically target women for networks, trainings and mentoring programmes (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000; Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Zanon et al., 2010), which Lewis et al. (2017) contend represent an organisational extension of women's magazines and self-help books for women in business (Kauppinen, 2013; see Adamson & Kelan, 2018). Research has shown how GE initiatives that do not teach participants to recognise and challenge gender barriers are less likely to lead to sustainable change (De Vries, Webb & Eveline, 2006). Nonetheless, teaching women career skills, confidence and resilience remains prevalent (Kalev, Dobbin & Kelly, 2006; Timmers et al., 2010; Gill, 2017; Gill & Kanai, 2018; Wynn, 2019). Such approaches are considered appropriately 'moderately feminist', or, in Gill's (2017) words, 'neoliberalism and patriarchy friendly' (p. 618), in contrast to initiatives aimed at intentionally disrupting gendered hierarchies, such as preferential selection or quotas (Tienari et al., 2009; Lewis et al., 2017). Due to the high likelihood of opposition to disruptive intervention types, such steps are rarely taken (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Benschop & Verloo, 2012; Benschop & van den Brink, 2014). Instead, organisations aim for the 'small, manageable, psychological tweaks' (Gill, 2017) enabled by supposedly benign interventions that will not stir the waters too much. While more disruptive and radical GE actions (and occasionally the presumably benign ones as well) are prone to opposition, organisations face increasing pressures to develop GE policies and implement GE initiatives (Ahmed, 2012). As a result, responsibility for GE work in organisations means occupying a highly ambivalent and challenging position (Meyerson & Scully, 1995; Nentwich, 2006; Keisu & Carbin, 2014; Kelan, 2018).

Men, masculinities and postfeminism

Like research centring on women and postfeminism, research about men explores the often-complex discourses around gender, feminism and gender performances – in this case masculinities – characteristic of the postfeminist gender regime (Rumens, 2017). Circumstances for men and masculinities within the postfeminist context are just as ambivalent and contradictory as those described in the above review pertaining to women's lives, feminism and femininities. In the following, I briefly explore co-existing narratives of 'men and masculinity in crisis' (Dow, 2006; Roberts, 2014 cited by Rumens, 2017), the emergence of the 'new, modern man' and 'new laddism' (Gill, 2003b, 2014a; Rumens, 2017), and finally the presumed need for male 'gender equality champions' in organisations (Gill et al., 2017; Kelan, 2018) vis-à-vis the continued prevalence of popular misogyny (Anderson, 2014; Gill, 2017; Banet-Weiser, 2018).

Following Rumens (2017), discursive constructions of postfeminist masculinities appear to have taken feminism into account in different ways; that is, men must negotiate the demands made on them by feminism (Nettleton, 2016). As such, the construction of postfeminist masculinities is not independent of the construction of postfeminist femininities (Kolehmainen, 2012). For example, the success of empowered postfeminist women in the workplace is perceived as dependent on caring and supportive husbands (Dow, 2006), which is why modern, heterosexual women are encouraged to find the 'right' man (Sørensen, 2017). This supportive 'new modern man' is understood to treat women as equals; share childrearing and domestic responsibilities; while their female partners may be more empowered, autonomous and successful in and outside work than them (Rumens, 2017: 245). The new modern man does not feel threatened by the 'new' and transformed gender order of the postfeminist gender regime, and has therefore entered traditionally feminine occupations and sectors, he is scornful of sexist attitudes towards women (Roberts, 2013) and generally supportive of the feminist project (Dow, 2006).

Conversely, in the case of the 'men and masculinity in crisis' narrative, feminism and the changes it has created for women seems to constitute the culprit responsible for 'feminising' society and, this way, disabling men (Ashcraft & Flores, 2003 cited by Rumens, 2017). Men no longer know how to be men, as they can no longer obtain ontological security by relying on 'traditional values associated with an idealized type of heterosexual hegemonic masculinity' (Rumens, 2017: 250; Faludi, 1999). For example, in popular fiction, male characters may be portrayed 'as troubled and bumbling losers who are looking for love, in counterpoint to women's (apparently effortless) success and accomplishments' (Rumens, 2017: 249; Gill, 2014a) at work as well

as at home. In her work, Kelan (2018) also identifies a prevalent discourse which presents women as an advantaged group because ‘the labour market is [now] stacked in their favour; their skills are in high demand and they have the right type of education to succeed’ (p. 2). The implication is that men are represented as inept, falling behind women, and unable to adapt (Negra, 2009), which means that men are perceived as outpaced by women at work in the new postfeminist gender order (Ibid.; Rumens, 2017). In other words, the crisis narrative disseminates the tropes of men’s loss, underachievement and injury, such as emasculation and sexual rejection (Hearn, 2015; Banet-Weiser, 2018).

In response hereto, a ‘new lad’ masculinity has emerged across different cultural sites (Gill, 2003b; 2014a). New lads perceive the new modern man as inauthentic. By being unapologetically hedonistic and predatory towards women, the new lad seeks to expose the ‘myth’ of the sensitive, caring and non-sexist new man (Gill, 2014a). The new lad may be understood as a direct response and challenge to feminism and the societal changes it has created (Whelehan, 2000). As an example of lad culture, Banet-Weiser (2018) describes geek-tech communities characterised by a normative misogyny which is operationalised against women (feminists in particular) through tactics such as online trolling, revenge porn, the publication of personal information or even rape and death threats. The networked nature of popular misogyny, particularly online, has facilitated the global dispersion of language characteristic of ‘men’s rights activists’ and ‘incels’ (involuntary celibates) from the Anglo-American contexts (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Banet-Weiser (2018) posits that the fact that misogyny is mainstream, in contrast to feminism despite its current revival (see more below), and that it allows for the reframing of misogynist terrorism (e.g., Elliot Rodger in 2014 and Alek Minassian in 2018) as exceptional occurrences, while in fact these occurrences are symptomatic of widespread, taken-for-granted misogynist views and assumptions. Kuhar and Paternotte (2017) have shown how so-called ‘anti-gender’ movements in Europe have mobilised alongside right-wing populism and religious actors (often Catholic) in efforts to oppose the rights of women and LGBTQ+ people. The prevalence of misogyny in contemporary society is probably most visible in the election of Donald Trump in 2016, whose blatant sexism seems to ‘give carte blanche to an insurgent patriarchy which can now reassert itself with confidence’ (McRobbie, 2016: online, no page number).

Regardless, legitimacy pressures increasingly require workplaces and organisations to address gender and other inequalities, and many agree that women and men must work together to create organisational change (Connell, 2003; Kelan, 2018). Men are therefore encouraged to become champions of gender equality change efforts, as seen in the UN #HeforShe campaign (Kelan,

2018) and when male politicians and celebrities sport t-shirts emblazoned, ‘This is what a feminist looks like’ (Rivers, 2017). However, donning a t-shirt requires little critical reflection about how the hegemony of male practice contributes to the reproduction of inequalities in organisational settings (Hearn, 2015) or questioning of men’s apparent continued entitlement to hold particular organisational roles (Kerfoot & Knights, 1996; Puwar, 2004; Gill et al., 2017; Rumens, 2017). The OMS literature stresses the importance of leadership to the success of GE change initiatives (Lyness, 2002; Dobbin & Kalev, 2007; cited by Kelan & Wratil, 2018). Leaders are supposed to champion gender change by demonstrating accountability, building ownership, communicating, leading by example, initiating and driving cultural change (Kelan & Wratil, 2018: 6); that is, through practices that resonate with traditional masculine leadership values of control and assertiveness. The personal stake of women in the issue can serve to undermine GE initiatives (De Vries, 2015: 31), among other things because women supporting other women is often considered a suspicious, ‘marked practice’ (van den Brink & Benschop, 2013). Following De Vries (2015), men are better positioned to champion gender equality by influencing other men due to ‘their membership of, and acceptance within, the male establishment’ (p. 30). Senior women in organisations are often expected to champion gender equality simply by virtue of being women, whereas men may be perceived as ‘heroic’ and celebrated for engaging in ‘women’s issues’ (Ibid.; Kelan & Wratil, 2018).

In sum, the topic of men and masculinities is replete with contradiction anchored in the double entanglement of postfeminism. This simultaneous acknowledgment of, on the one hand, the success of feminism and the changes it has created, and, on the other, the disavowal of any further need for (critical and thus excessive) feminism, shapes gender performances through which ‘men’s power is simultaneously being dislodged, reconfigured and fortified’ (Rumens, 2017: 250). In this way, the performance of postfeminist masculinities may just as much signal (and ideally contribute to) progress as the reinforcement of traditional, patriarchal discourses of masculinity (Clark, 2014 cited by Rumens, 2017).

3.3.3. Feminisms in the postfeminist gender regime

I initiate this part of the chapter by reiterating a point made in the introduction: In my reading, postfeminism neither refers to any form of ideological or political feminism nor is it a tool to map out different kinds of feminism (Kelan, 2018). Rather, I figuratively conceptualise postfeminism as the backcloth upon which complex and often contradictory discourses around gender, as

well as multiple and incongruous forms of feminism, co-exist. Indeed, I believe that the co-existence of these multiple feminisms contributes to the complexity of the postfeminist gender regime. In this part of the chapter, I will introduce some of those feminisms which may be considered most ‘popular’ or mainstream at the time of writing.

By conceptualising postfeminism as a backcloth or gender regime capable of containing a variety of feminisms, I subscribe to a more fluent, cyclical understanding of feminist movements. For example, Rivers (2017) cautions using the ‘wave’ analogy, claiming that it fosters an unhelpful linear understanding of progress from one feminist wave to another. Such a view gives the impression of unity within waves and stresses the differences and tensions between them while downplaying the similarities and overlaps. It may be helpful to clearly outline different feminisms as waves or as different schools of feminist thinking, as well as to compare them in order to understand them individually. Importantly, every wave or era is necessarily characterised by fragmentation and disagreement within and among feminisms, which is also linked to geography and contexts (Thornham, 2001). However, fragmentation and disagreement should not unequivocally be written off as weakness. Disagreements between different positions are frequently emphasised by the media and anti-feminists with a certain amount of ‘glee’ in the attempts to undermine the legitimacy of feminism – ‘the feminists are at each other again – hurray!’ (Winch et al., 2016: 559 cited by Rivers, 2017: 50). Still, debate and exchange between different positions may serve to ensure that the feminist movement remains dynamic and responsive (Rivers, 2017: 3). Therefore, conscious of the issues which a narrow and potentially reductive depiction of different feminisms entails, I will now summarise key elements of second-wave feminism, third-wave feminism and ‘popular feminism’ as an umbrella term which encompasses, for example, neoliberal feminism and – perhaps – the fourth wave of feminism.

Second-wave feminism

The second wave of feminism can roughly be attributed to the decades between 1960 and 1990 (Rivers, 2017). Building on key second-wave writings, incl. Betty Friedan (1963), Germaine Greer (1970), Kate Millett (1970) and Shulamith Firestone (1970), feminists emphasised the social and cultural nature of inequality. In this way, Simone de Beauvoir’s seminal book, *The Second Sex* (1949), laid the foundation for much of the theoretical work of the second wave. Her landmark claim that ‘One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman’ played a central role in disseminating the view that ‘the feminine’ has no basis in biology or physiology; instead, it is socially produced. ‘[S]ince all cultural

representations of the world presently available to us – whether in myth, religion, literature or popular culture – are the work of men, women too have internalised these definitions [of femininity] and learned to “dream through the dreams of men” (Thornham, 2001: 29). In other words, culture is understood as political with ‘its images, meanings, representations working to define and control women’ (Ibid.: 32).

Second-wave feminism is usually equated with liberal feminism and radical feminism, while also including socialist feminism, black feminism and other variations. Liberal feminism critiques the gendered exclusion of liberal democracy’s proclaimed universal equality, stating that women should have equal opportunities in life to men (Rottenberg, 2014). Radical feminists, on the other hand, ‘aimed not simply to provide women with equal opportunities within existing society but to transform the entire multifaceted sex/gender system that advantages men at the expense of women’ (Snyder-Hall, 2010: 257). Nevertheless, the two perspectives align in their emphasis on the traditional, gendered division of labour which, through reproductive labour, generally placed women in the private sphere while placing men, as breadwinners, in the public sphere. Their struggle for emancipation thus implied a fight for the right of the (middle-class) woman to leave the home and the role of the housewife in favour of work (Lewis, 2014b). Individualised autonomy and economic independence were to be ensured through labour-market activity and public participation (Johnson & Lloyd, 2004). Ferguson (2010) contends that feminists in this tradition attributed the historical absence of women in positions of power to systematic exclusion of women hindering their involvement in shaping the world in which they live (p. 251).

Under the well-known refrain of ‘the private is political’, second-wavers and radical feminists in particular critiqued the perceived ‘lynchpins’ of male dominance – family, marriage, love, normative heterosexuality and rape (Echols, 1989: 3–4 cited by Snyder-Hall, 2010). Through ‘The Dialectic of Sex’, Millett (1970) popularised the notion of the ‘patriarchy’ beyond kinship structures to comprise ‘a system of institutionalised oppression maintained by ideological means’ (Thornham, 2001: 32). Millett argued that because women have internalised the patriarchy with its devaluation of femininity, emancipation is unrealistic until consciousness is raised about overt and subtle means of oppression. Therefore, in the context of consciousness-raising groups, (primarily white, middle-class) women shared stories and found common ground and solidarity in what they found to be their shared struggles (Siegel, 1997) inspiring protests, activism and political lobbying (Thornham, 2001). Their demands were twofold, namely, social with respect to equal access, influence and pay, and relating to the body in terms of sexual freedom, access to contraception and abortion (Ibid.). It was believed that when women could claim control

over their bodies and reproduction, those social and cultural structures (incl. family, marriage, romance and motherhood), which provided ideological support for the sexual division of labour, would collapse (Firestone, 1970).

While second-wave feminism championed sisterhood and solidarity, large parts of the movement were white, middle-class women. Critics noted that emancipation from traditionalist family structures, with women confined to the home, did not reflect the reality of working-class women and middle-class single mothers, as they had long been part of the labour market – more due to financial necessity than any desire for self-realisation (Rowbotham, 1974; Sanders, 2004). Also, women of colour, such as Angela Davis, bell hooks and Audre Lorde felt little connection to the feminist movement of the 1970s, as it often failed to encompass the ‘double jeopardy’ (Beale, 1970) of racism and sexism confronting black women. Furthermore, sexuality-related issues – which have been labelled the ‘sex wars’ of the second wave (see Duggan & Hunter, 1995; Snyder-Hall, 2008) – became divisive for the movement, hurting its cohesion. To some feminists, pornography and sex work were evidence of oppression and, by others, they were viewed as offering opportunities for sexual pleasure and empowerment (Snyder-Hall, 2010). Moreover, lesbian women’s concerns were not represented in the movement’s fight for emancipation from and within patriarchal, heterosexual family structures (Thornham, 2001).

Third-wave feminism

The third wave is said to be characterised by what it is not (Shugart et al., 2001); or rather, early third-wave writers presented their positions in opposition to the second wave (e.g., Wolf 1993; Roiphe 1994; Denfeld 1995) – often conflated with and reduced to only liberal feminism (Lewis, 2014a; Dejmanee, 2015). The opposition generally concerns three aspects.

First, in response to the critiques raised above, ‘third-wavers’ rejected the category of ‘women’ as a signifier of women’s shared experiences and oppression (Brooks, 1997; Gillis & Munford, 2004). In this way, the third wave is anchored in, among other things, poststructural theory and queer feminism (Butler, 1990, 1993), postcolonial feminism (Mohanty, 1988; 2003) and black feminist theory (hooks, 1981; Lorde, 1984). Focus was placed on subverting ‘stable meanings of gender as well as disrupting and deconstructing authoritative models and practices’ (Lewis, 2014a: 1849). Snyder-Hall (2008) argues that ‘[t]he collapse of the category of women [...] corresponded to a larger trend in intellectual life away from the grand narratives of modernity and into the foundationless world of postmodernity’ (p. 186). The third wave therefore foregrounds personal narratives that illustrate an intersectional (Crenshaw,

1898; 1991) and multi-perspectival version of feminism encompassing gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, (dis)ability and economic standing, but which also makes allowances for different identities within a single person (Heywood, 2006; cited by Snyder-Hall, 2008). For Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake, editors of *The Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism* (1997), the defining characteristic of third-wavers is that they feel comfortable with fragmentation, hybridity and contradiction (Gamble, 2004). By embracing multiple identities and different perspectives, the third wave aims to accommodate ‘the problems of essentialism and exclusion that plagued the second wave’ (Ferguson, 2010: 248). While embracing multiplicity makes for an inclusive feminist movement, it simultaneously means that feminists can merely be understood as ‘a loose collection of individuals’ (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000: 54 cited by Ferguson, 2010), and feminist politics as coalitional rather than unified (Snyder-Hall, 2008).

Secondly, third-wavers such as Denfeld (1995) denounced notions of inevitable female victimisation at the hands of ‘the patriarchy’ (Gamble, 2004). They regarded feminism as overly totalising in its ‘accounts of social relations, and as producing a patronising and politically offensive model of the subject as (variously) victim of ‘false consciousness’, [as a] governed ‘docile subject’ or ‘cultural dope’” (Gill, 2008: 435). Instead, emphasis was placed on empowerment, agency and individual choice. For example, Roiphe (1993) argued that by promoting an image of women as passive, wide-eyed, innocent victims of sexual harassment and rape, feminists were bringing back a ‘1950s ideal’ which women of that generation had fought hard to make irrelevant (Gamble, 2004). In sum, third-wave writers present feminism as out of touch and alienating to a new generation of women (Ibid.: 39) which leads me to the third point.

In efforts to reclaim femininity and sexuality, third-wavers distanced themselves from feminism as a ‘nagging conscience’ lurking in the background of women’s lives (Whelehan, 2010: 161), dictating ‘appropriate’ feminist actions (Munford, 2009: 191). In Henry’s (2003) analysis of Roiphe (1993), it seems as though ‘it is no longer misogynist men, patriarchal attitudes, or sexist cultures that “regulate” women’s behavior. The task of regulating women’s behaviour has been taken over by feminists’ (p. 210) (cited by Rivers, 2017: 19). In this manner, the third wave’s rejection of the second wave’s ‘victim paradigm’ (Siegel, 1997; Baker, 2010), together with its acceptance of multiplicity and contradiction, has further led to the dispersion of notions of ‘choice’ (see above). As Snyder-Hall (2010) writes, however: ‘Lacking a common definition of feminism makes it difficult to judge another woman’s claim to be a feminist because a wide variety of choices [...] could be justified as feminist’ (p. 259),

even when such choices could be deemed conformist, submissive, or humiliating (Whelehan, 2010; Snyder-Hall, 2008). By repudiating second-wave feminism as both 'irrelevant and undesirably 'rigid, serious, anti-sex and romance, difficult and extremist' (Negra, 2009: 2), populist third-wavers offer a sexier 'brand' of feminism (Lewis, 2014a: 1849; see also Snyder-Hall, 2008). That is, the third wave 'respects the right of women to decide for themselves how to negotiate the often-contradictory desires for both gender equality [hetero-marital bliss] and sexual pleasure' (Snyder-Hall, 2010: 255).

Moreover, by explicitly locating the third wave outside and in opposition to scholarly feminism (Gillis & Munford, 2004; Kelly, 2005; Snyder-Hall, 2008), writers such as Wolf (1993), Walker (1995) and Baumgardner & Richards (2000) claimed that this 'new, power feminism' more adequately than inaccessible theoretical feminism(s) represented the actual struggles of 'real life women' (Whelehan, 2010). Paradoxically, these writers show little acknowledgement of the third wave's history and, in particular, its academic-theoretical foundations. Third-wave feminism remains heavily influenced by especially Judith Butler's theorisations on gender performativity and processes of subjectivation (e.g., 1990, 1993), as well as Kimberlé Crenshaw's 'intersectionality' (1989; 1991).

Third-wave positions and arguments have frequently been written off by second-wavers as a backlash (Siegel, 1997). Nevertheless, most third-wave writers were 'motivated by a desire to reinvent a feminism of their own' (Ibid.: 59) by liberating themselves from their figurative (and occasionally literal) feminist mothers (e.g., Roiphe, 1993; Walker, 1995). They wanted to ensure the viability of feminism in the wake of 'postfeminism' – here, signifying the stalling of the movement – and increasing disidentification with the feminist label (Rivers, 2017).

Importantly, the above introduction of third-wave feminism through how it explicitly distinguished itself from its predecessor(s) is problematic in several ways. Writers such as Roiphe (1994) and Denfeld (1995) 'gained prominence by creating caricatures of second-wave feminism and then lambasting them' (Snyder-Hall, 2008: 176). Their strategies contributed to the tenacious entrenchment of stereotypes of feminists as bra-burning 'man-haters' (Siegel, 1997), as well as the narrative of inter-generational feminist conflict (Rivers, 2017). It also contributes to the understanding that moving from one wave to the next is a marker of progress, rendering the old 'bad' and the new 'good' feminism (Siegel, 1997; Snyder-Hall, 2008). However, as many of the issues addressed in earlier feminism(s) 'return to haunt the present' (Barret & Phillips, 1992), the third wave may more adequately be understood as having developed from within the second-wave feminist movement in relation to a

changing context which may, in different ways, be viewed as increasingly ‘postfeminist’ and neoliberal (Rivers, 2017).

*Popular feminism*⁵²

Feminism has experienced an undeniable resurgence in recent years. It has become ‘cool’ (Valenti, 2014) and achieved increased visibility (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Irrespective of the optimism pertaining to an assumed ‘feminist zeitgeist’, the attention and visibility given to different kinds of feminism is highly uneven (Gill, 2016). As I unfold below, it is generally the safe and unthreatening forms of feminism (Dean, 2010a; 2010b) linked to neoliberal-capitalist individualism which are granted attention at the expense of presumed ‘excessive’ feminisms characterised by a critical orientation to systemic inequalities and male dominance (Lewis et al., 2017). It is therefore worth exploring how different feminisms ‘materialise’ in media culture (Gill, 2016) in order to understand their implications for feminist social movements and politics.

I take popular feminism as an umbrella term encompassing a range of contemporary feminisms. They may also be referred to as mainstream feminisms. I build the following review of popular feminism on Banet-Weiser’s framework (2018). In her book, ‘popular’ means both widespread in the media, widely ‘liked’ (i.e., *popularity*) and a terrain of struggle for power (Hall, 1998). The author conceptualises this terrain as the ‘economy of visibility’ in which the struggle for visibility (among feminisms, and between feminism and misogyny) plays out through discursive repertoires building on the tropes of injury and capacity. Injury refers to the sexism and discrimination suffered by women at the hands of misogyny/ists, and capacity is their ability to stand up against it and overcome that injury.

This capacity is often expressed through notions of female confidence and empowerment. This line of thought usually takes a supposed, innate lack of ‘confidence’ in girls and women as its central explanation for inequalities as well as a solution to rectifying issues such as the underrepresentation of women in STEM fields and positions of power in society (Gill & Orgad, 2015; Banet-Weiser, 2018). As such, this form of popular feminism recognises the existence of inequalities, which turns raising the confidence of girls and women into a feminist issue (Ibid.: 128). Women are encouraged to find this confidence within themselves and just ‘be’ more confident; or to work to become ‘their best selves’. Female confidence has been commercialised through

⁵² This part of the chapter is partly based on my book review of Banet-Weiser (2018) and Rottenberg (2018b), which has been accepted for publication by *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* (Utoft, forthcoming 2020b).

the availability of merchandise such as clothing, tote bags and stickers speaking to female empowerment, which Zeisler has dubbed ‘empowertising’ (2016). Confidence and empowerment has been taken up in marketing strategies by brands such as Always and Dove (Banet-Weiser, 2018: 43, 76) and has sparked the emergence of countless non-profit and political initiatives aimed at, in particular, girls and young women (incl. SPARK and ‘Girl Effect’⁵³). However, it is hardly surprising that the decisions as to which girls as recipients of empowerment intervention will garner a ‘return on investment’ (and who will not) are made along classed and racialised lines (Banet-Weiser, 2018: 105–108). Such initiatives may also carry ‘white saviour’ and imperialist connotations when directed towards girls in developing countries (Ibid.).

For adult women, a plethora of self-help books exist. These books aim to aid women in their endeavours to become (more) confident and empowered in order to realise their full potential, both professionally and personally (Rottenberg, 2018b). Such books are often authored by celebrity businesswomen building on their own experiences of navigating careers, family and achieving success. Titles such as *On Becoming Fearless ... In Love, Work, and Life* (Huffington, 2006), *Strong Woman: Ambition, Grit and a Great Pair of Heels* (Brady, 2012), and perhaps most famously *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* (Sandberg, 2013), all emphasise extensive self-work and self-regulation (Adamson, 2017; Adamson & Kelan, 2018; Rottenberg 2018b). According to these books, the key to success in neoliberal societies is the ‘right kind’ of disposition: confidence, resilience and a positive mental attitude (Gill, 2017). Effectively, the majority of working women, perhaps managing multiple jobs to make ends meet, will not recognise their concerns in these books (Rottenberg, 2014, 2018b).

Interestingly, these works are heralded as ‘feminist manifestos’. Rottenberg (Ibid.) conceptualises the form of feminism which these books promote as ‘neoliberal feminism’, and while this feminism generally does recognise the existence of systemic gender disparities, these are paid minimal attention. The focus is immediately redirected to individual women who are encouraged to ‘internalise the revolution’ (Sandberg, 2013: 11). This explicit focus on the individual reinforces the hegemony of neoliberalism⁵⁴ and helps us to understand why this feminism can so easily be ‘popularized and capitalized upon in

⁵³ <http://www.sparkmovement.org/>
<https://www.girleffect.org/>

⁵⁴ Here, ‘hegemony’ refers to dominant and taken-for-granted norms, discourses and structures, which control actors by shaping common-sense understandings, identity regulation and behaviours (Gramsci, 1978; Agustín & Jørgensen, 2016; cited by Keskinen, 2018).

the marketplace' (Rottenberg, 2018a: 8). It may seem paradoxical how, in neoliberal times, interest in feminism has seen such an upsurge, when trust in liberal equality and meritocracy widely prevails. However, Rottenberg (2018b) argues that neoliberalism *needs* feminism to resolve its internal inconsistencies. As an economic order, neoliberalism relies on reproduction and care work in order to reproduce and maintain human capital. And yet as a political rationality, neoliberalism has no vocabulary that can recognise let alone value reproduction and care work. To resolve this tension, a 'work-family balance' discourse has emerged as an aspirational ideal and goal of this new variety of feminism (see, e.g., Sandberg, 2013; Slaughter, 2014; Trump, 2017), which implies that reproduction remains a mandated aspect of women's life trajectory (Rottenberg, 2014; 2018b).

Alongside celebrity businesswomen, a long list of music and movie stars, politicians and public figures have professed themselves to be feminists, including Beyoncé, Emma Watson and Barack Obama (Rivers, 2017), serving as a source of pride and positive branding (see Banet-Weiser, 2018; Gill & Orgad, 2015; Rottenberg, 2014, 2018b). Stepping out as spokesperson for the UN #HeForShe campaign in 2014, Watson appealed to boys and men to become advocates for gender equality. Many will doubtlessly applaud this opinion and initiative (Connell, 2003). Nonetheless, in doing so, Watson promotes a supposedly 'new' feminism which is welcoming to men with no consideration for why men may previously have been excluded, suggesting that feminism itself may have been the problem (Rivers, 2017: 67–68). At the 2014 MTV awards, Beyoncé's stage visuals sported the word FEMINIST in huge neon letters, while the voice of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, author of *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014), literally spelled out what feminism means to more than eight million viewers (Zeisler, 2016). This iconic moment was certainly part of strategic branding and image-building, and some might question the depth of Beyoncé's feminism. However, her subsequent performance at the 2016 Super Bowl halftime show demonstrated her 'commitment to increasing her political engagement beyond perhaps the more palatable presentation of empowerment associated with celebrity feminism' (Rivers, 2017: 40). Therefore, irrespective of the different criticisms which may justifiably be levelled at celebrity feminists, the tendency for public figures to present an openly pro-feminist identity and the increasing public attention to feminist issues should not be unequivocally written off as problematic. Scholars cautiously celebrate celebrity feminism, as it may constitute a gateway for fans to critically engage with feminism (Keller & Ringrose, 2015) and might encourage activism and more 'real' feminist politics (Hobson, 2016); that is, beyond merely sporting t-shirts

or badges with feminist slogans. In so doing, celebrity feminism may have contributed to the 'swell of [feminist] activity that could be conceptualized as the arrival of the fourth wave' (Rivers, 2017: 25).

Fourth-wave feminism was first declared by British journalist and novelist Kira Cochrane in 2013. She emphasised the internet and technology as the distinguishing feature of this wave, providing a platform to disseminate ideas and views and to build strong online communities (Rivers, 2017). Social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, have led to the emergence of so-called 'hashtag feminism' (Dixon, 2014), the most famous example probably being #MeToo. But there has also been an upsurge of offline activism in recent years. As such, the distinction between online activism and feminism 'operating in the real world' is blurred, with online campaigns frequently influencing offline activity and events (and vice-versa) (Rivers, 2017: 109), but this relationship is not straightforward (Ibid.: 113). For example, the Everyday Sexism Project created by Laura Bates in the UK encourages women to share their experiences of sexism and discrimination to the project's Twitter and Facebook accounts to create visibility around the normalcy of such experiences. However, the extent to which the practice of sharing is able to contribute to the elimination of sexism is unclear. Instead, the outcome seems to be visibility as an end unto itself – as opposed to a route to change (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Conversely, in the wake of the presidential election of Donald Trump, the first Women's March in 2017 mobilised between an estimated 3.3 and 4.6 million protesters in the US alone (Broomfield, 2017) together with hundreds of solidarity marches across the globe (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Undoubtedly, the March would not have accomplished this unprecedented feat without online campaigns. However, can it be considered a 'success' if there are no implications beyond visibility to gender issues? With decreasing participation in the two subsequent Women's Marches in 2018 and 2019, it may be too early to assess its (lasting) impact (Ibid.).

The implications of popular feminism(s) cannot be understood in isolation. Banet-Weiser (2018) contends that we must understand popular feminism through its relationship with popular misogyny, which seems to present its most virulent and unabashed 'face' online (Ibid.). Here, she echoes Ahmed (2017), who argues that we learn about the feminist cause by the bother it causes (p. 21). Precisely because it caters to postfeminist principles and neoliberalism, most versions of popular feminism cause little bother, such as celebrity feminism, which champions empowerment or constructs feminism as 'a youthful, stylish (celebrity) identity' (Gill, 2016). Considering the mainstreaming of these forms of feminism, we must ask what their extensive visibility hides. While the concept of 'intersectionality' (Crenshaw, 1991) has

gained prominence in online feminist communities with the promise of allowing marginalised voices increasingly to be heard (Martin & Valenti, 2013), mainstream feminisms continue to promote a narrow, predominantly white, middle-class focus. Regardless of it being ‘claimed to signal everything that is apparently good about contemporary’ feminism (Rivers, 2017: 122), intersectional feminism widely constitutes an aspirational ‘brand’, especially when claimed as identity marker by white women (but not exclusively), ‘rather than a theoretical tool or mode of activist practice’ (Ibid.: 123). In Danish feminist milieus, intersectionality may be considered a contemporary feminist ‘buzzword’ (Davis, 2008). However, it is still not mainstream in the Danish context (Borchorst et al., 2012).

3.4. Critiquing postfeminism

Postfeminism has received considerable criticism, both as theoretical perspective and empirical phenomenon. First, although scholars such as Tasker and Negra (2007) have attempted to think postfeminism intersectionally, they conclude that the female subject constituted by postfeminism is ‘white and middle class by default’ (p. 3). Butler (2013) disagrees, contending that the tendency ‘to argue that postfeminist culture excludes women of colour constitutively and/or representationally’ (Gill, 2017: 613) is unfounded. Agreeing that a postfeminist sensibility may be shaped by racialised contours, Butler argues that women of colour are not (necessarily) ‘positioned outside of its interpellations and invitations’ (Ibid.), of which celebrities such as Beyoncé, Nicky Minaj and Jennifer Lopez are examples (Butler, 2013). While these stars may be women of colour, they are still representative of Western contexts and culture. Dosekun (2015) points out that much research not only focuses empirically on the West, it assumes that ‘postfeminism is *itself* Western – as if the sensibility were distinctively and authentically European or North American’ (Gill, 2017: 613). Showing how her interviewees in Lagos and Nigeria engage recognisably postfeminist ideas and self-descriptions, Dosekun (2015) argues that postfeminism travels transnationally through mediated consumer culture.

Nevertheless, one of the central ways in which the postfeminist gender regime is constituted by racialisation is through the postfeminist cliché stressing the progressiveness of equality in Western contexts by pointing to the extent of misogyny and discrimination in other, often predominantly Muslim, countries (Pomerantz et al., 2013; Ahmed, 2012). In Gill et al.’s work (2017), actors use comparisons with ‘other’ presumably backwards societies (see Scharff, 2012) as a way of denying ‘that different forms of sexism may persist’ (p. 236) in their local, Western contexts. In the extreme, this cliché has been mobilised

with dire consequences as ‘femonationalism’ (Farris, 2012) to emphasise the assumed ‘profound danger that Muslim males constitute for western European societies, due [...] to their oppressive treatment of women’ (p. 2). Through the ‘well-worn binary that positions the liberated West in opposition to the subjugated rest’ (Rottenberg, 2014: 422), gender equality is presented as the benchmark for civilisation, with liberal principles established as unsailable standards of good (Ibid.; Farris, 2012). The various bans on veiling in different European countries demonstrate the very real politics of femonationism (see, e.g., Rosenberger & Sauer, 2012).

A second point of critique concerns heteronormativity (Flood & Gill, forthcoming; cited by Gill, 2017). Whelehan (2010) has stated that male/female relationships are ‘at the heart of’ postfeminist discourses (see also Projansky 2001), which becomes empirically manifest in different ways. Topics such as gender essentialism and work–family balance, occasionally leading to neo-conservatism (Banet-Weiser, Gill & Rottenberg, 2019) in the sense of a return to traditional gender relations within family life, are some of the most obvious examples. Furthermore, in social media, subjects engage in ‘heterosexy’ beauty and self-representation practices (Dobson, 2016). Nevertheless, through the postfeminist portrayals of women as independent and agentic, achieving heterosexual desirability is re-framed as women pleasing themselves, not men (Gill, 2008; Rumens, 2017), speaking to the postfeminist shift from sexual objectivation to self-subjectivation. This is exemplified in both *Sex and the City* and *Bridget Jones’ Diary* (Gill, 2008). Gamble (2004) argues that postfeminism tends to be ‘implicitly heterosexist in orientation [as it] seeks to develop an agenda which can find a place for men, as lovers, husbands and fathers as well as friends’ (p. 36). In its efforts to include men, we encounter the overlap between postfeminism and third-wave feminism, which aims to distance itself from the stereotype of the anti-sex, man-hating feminist (Siegel, 1997; Snyder-Hall, 2008). In response to critiques of heteronormativity, queer studies have adopted postfeminism into studies of the increased visibility of, for example, lesbianism on television, including *The L Word* and *Orange is the New Black*. McNicholas Smith and Tyler (2017) develop a ‘post-queerness’ perspective, which serves to wrongly suggest that homophobia has been eliminated similar to postfeminist and post-race arguments (Gill, 2017: 615). In this way, postfeminism can be both ontology and epistemology in queer studies, as is also the case in CMS and OMS.

Thirdly, issues of classism become particularly evident with respect to two recurrent postfeminist topics: women in leadership and work–family balance discourses. For instance, when organisations attempt to ‘improve gender equality’ by raising the share of women in leadership, they per definition target already-privileged women – educated and generally white (Acker, 2006;

Kalev et al., 2006; Dobbin & Kalev, 2007). Moreover, as understood in the texts (Sandberg, 2013; Slaughter, 2015; Trump, 2017) analysed by Rottenberg (2014, 2018a, 2018b), work–family balance is only available to privileged women. At least in the US context, its attainment is often predicated (in true neoliberal spirit) upon the market-based outsourcing of domestic labour, which entrenches the oppression of less privileged women, enabling privileged women to pursue self-fulfilment in all spheres of their lives.⁵⁵ In this manner, critiques of classism cannot be addressed without attention to capitalism. Clearly, not all working women are financially able to hire someone to help with their cleaning, for example, and doing so hardly ensures work–family balance for those working multiple jobs. Furthermore, in the postfeminist media studies canon, representations of ‘the success of feminism’ and, thus, characters’ freedom is often equated with their capacity to consume (Whelehan, 2010). In particular, the consumption of fashion is presented as recreation and leisure; as much a means of self-expression and identity creation (Kim, 2001; Adriaens & van Bauwel, 2014), Sex and the City’s Carrie and her love of Jimmy Choo shoes being the most obvious example.

3.5. Summary and framework

This chapter has provided a selective review of research on postfeminism from different scholarly fields. In this section, I will now outline my reading of the postfeminist gender regime. I opt for the concept ‘gender regime’ as, to me, it brings the governance dimensions (Lewis et al., 2017) of postfeminist discourses more to the fore than, for instance, Gill’s notions of a ‘sensibility’.

While postfeminism does not refer to a period or moment in time, it has emerged as a consequence of historical developments, including a) second-wave feminism and the (partial) transformations of women’s place in society, which the second wave has created; b) the rebellion of early third-wave feminists against certain second-wave politics, and; c) the gradual transfer of neoliberal principles from policy to individuals’ ‘interiority’. From this follows that we find the notion of the ‘double entanglement’ at the very foundation of postfeminism (McRobbie, 2009); that is, the entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist ideas, or people’s simultaneous celebration of (the success of) feminism and their disavowal of (radical versions of it) it.

This double entanglement leads to a highly ambiguous and complex context harbouring a set of always available discourses, which (despite their internal contradictions) constitute the contemporary ‘common sense’ or always ‘winning arguments’ around gender, feminism and femininity. In the section

⁵⁵ Excerpt from Utoft (forthcoming, 2020b).

on postfeminism in culture and media studies (CMS), I outlined certain recurrent postfeminist themes and archetypes, including the career-success/love-failure dichotomy, girl power and girlie femininity, as well as women as empowered consumers and as self-monitoring and regulating neoliberal subjects alongside values of traditional gender roles and familialism. The prominence of postfeminist narratives and female archetypes in culture and media has contributed to the diffusion of postfeminist logics into all spheres of life, with material effects for people's experiences. In the field of organisation and management studies (OMS), research has thus explored how, through different discursive mechanisms, gender and inequality at work become mysterious and unspeakable. Gender blindness and meritocracy turn structural-cultural sexism into an individual problem. Transforming organisations thus becomes a matter of changing the affective and psychological state of women. To overcome gender barriers, women must become more confident and resilient. Women are welcome at work, especially if they demonstrate and use their 'unique' feminine perspectives and skills. However, assumed 'essential femininity' is also engaged to argue that women freely choose their marginalised position at work, because they 'inherently' prefer family life and motherhood. Closely entwined with neoliberal principles, notions of agency and choice are especially prevalent in work-family balance discourses and in arguments against organisational intervention to improve circumstances for women. Finally, men also feel the contradictory demands of postfeminism, which has led to 'new men' becoming champions of equality – but also to a surge of popular misogyny due to the presumed 'feminisation' of society and, thus, the emasculation of men.

More recently, scholars have argued that postfeminism cannot be equated with an absolute disavowal of feminism (Lewis et al., 2017), because feminist movements have been on the rise in recent years. What is spurned are excessive feminisms (Ibid.); that is, generally, only moderate, and presumably benign, versions of feminism achieve mainstream visibility and popularity. I have already discussed the versions that champion female confidence and empowerment and work-family balance. While these feminisms generally urge women to internalise the revolution (Sandberg, 2013: 11), they occasionally also draw on liberal feminism's critique of gendered exclusions in the public and corporate spheres (Banet-Weiser et al., 2019: 8). In addition, elements of postfeminism (individualism, entrepreneurial subjectivity and the emphasis on personal transformation) seem to be present in most versions of mainstream feminism (Ibid.: 11). I therefore argued that in the postfeminist gender regime, multiple feminisms co-exist and operate alongside each other – even while not always sitting well together. The second-wave feminist tendency to

resist feminine beauty standards and practices associated with capitalist heteropatriarchy against the third wave's reclaiming of femininity is an example hereof. Therefore, they engage in cultural conversations and exchanges while also pushing back against one another in their efforts to achieve visibility and buy-in (Banet-Weiser et al., 2019). The fact that newer ideas rarely displace older ones and their mutual inconsistencies and struggles contributes to the complexity of the postfeminist context. Finally, we must remain attentive to the feminisms, such as black and intersectional feminism, which are overshadowed and marginalised through and by the struggles for visibility between palatable mainstream feminisms.

The recent strengthened uptake of feminism has been argued to signal a move towards 'post-postfeminism', which has spurred questioning around the continued scholarly value of the concept; as if to signal that anything explicitly marked 'feminist' cannot be considered *postfeminist*. However, 'declaring a theoretical fatigue with postfeminism does not erase its dominant presence' in all social life (Dejmanee, 2015: 131), including in contemporary feminisms. Indeed, regardless of qualitative shifts over time, gender relations and social life maintain a distinctively postfeminist tenor, which suggests the 'longevity and evolutionary potential of postfeminism', even within constant cultural flux (Ibid.). Therefore, I believe that the concept remains productive in efforts to understand contemporary gender relations, especially since the disavowal of feminism appears particularly tenacious in the Danish context (Dahlerup, 2018; Orange & Duncan, 2019).

In sum, postfeminism is fundamentally at ease with ambiguity contradiction. As a context, the postfeminist gender regime is 'marked by struggles for equality, yet [the] feminist "revolution" remains unfinished and progress is at best uneven, at worst characterized by myriad processes of backlash, "recuperation" and commodification' (Gill et al., 2017: 226). Therefore, I figuratively conceptualise postfeminism as a backcloth against which complex and often contradictory discourses can and do co-exist, as well as multiple and incongruous forms of feminism. This is not to say that postfeminism is some sort of catch-all 'garbage can model'. Rather, the postfeminist gender regime comprises a set of recurrent discourses around gender, feminism and femininity marked by contradiction, and they may be considered postfeminist exactly because this contradiction can be fundamentally attributed to the double entanglement at the heart of postfeminism.

4. Manoeuvring within postfeminism (article 1)

Manoeuvring within postfeminism: A study of gender equality practitioners in Danish academia

Citation:

Utoft, E. H. (forthcoming). Manoeuvring within postfeminism: A study of gender equality practitioners in Danish academia (under review, April 2020)

Abstract:

In Denmark, gender equality in academia has progressed little in the past 30 years. To improve our understanding of this persistent problem, this article examines gender equality practitioners in relation to the broader discursive context of Danish society. Building on the theoretical perspective ‘postfeminism’, I analyse how gender equality practitioners shift dynamically between contextually available discourses which, in different ways, provide opportunities and pose restrictions on their work. I introduce the notion of ‘manoeuvring’ as a way of understanding this dynamic shifting between hegemonic and marginal – and potentially subversive – discourses. The ability of practitioners to manoeuvre rests on their critical reflexivity, which in turn is conditioned by their knowledge of gender and power dynamics. The analysis indicates that it is not practitioners’ reproduction of postfeminist discourses which hampers progress towards gender equality at Danish universities; rather, progress is often limited in the meetings between practitioners, their work and other stakeholders who are unreflexively absorbed in the postfeminist gender regime.

Keywords: Academia – Gender equality work – Postfeminism – Manoeuvring – Gender essentialism

4.1. Introduction

For around 30 years, policymakers, universities and the media have debated gender inequality in academia in Denmark, and many dimensions of the exclusion of women in the Danish academy have been thoroughly mapped (e.g., Bloch & Dalsgaard, 2002; Egeland, 2001; Nielsen, 2014a). The political attention and priority granted to the issue have oscillated, and progress in the representation of women has proven glacial, with significant variation across academic fields (Danish Ministry of Education and Science (DMES), 1998, 2005, 2015, 2019a). Over the past 10 years, the share of female assistant and associate professors has stabilised at around 40 and 30 per cent, respectively, while female full professors have increased from 13 per cent in 2007 to 22 per cent in 2017, which is below both European and Nordic averages (DMES, 2019a).

Increasing legitimacy pressures (DMES, 1997; 2009; 2015; Mohr, de Coninck-Smith & Krabbe, 2019) have meant that universities are now expected to undertake initiatives and interventions aimed at improving parity among researchers and university leadership (henceforth, gender equality work). Still, Danish universities appear to be remarkably resistant to change (Cecchini et al., 2019; Mohr et al., 2019). Research has generally focused on assessing the efficacy of individual types of interventions (Benschop & Verloo, 2012; Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Kalev, Kelly & Dobbin, 2006; Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace, 2019), but the people involved in gender equality work, practitioners, are also important to consider. While international scholarship has paid some attention to the practitioner perspective (Ahmed, 2012; Keisu & Carbin, 2014; Meyerson & Scully, 1995; Nentwich, 2006), it has largely been overlooked in research empirically situated in Denmark. To shed new light on the persistent gender inequality in Danish universities, I therefore explore gender equality practitioners and their work in relation to the wider Danish context. I posit that the discursive practices of gender equality practitioners are central to understanding when, why and how gender equality programmes and actions are implemented in universities. Following Foucault (1991b), ‘practices’ may be understood as ‘places where what is said and what is done, rules imposed and reasons given, the planned and the taken for granted meet and interconnect’ (p. 75). Individuals’ discursive practices are products of the discourses available in the given institutional context, which, in turn, is shaped by the wider societal context. In this article, I argue that Danish society may be understood as a ‘postfeminist gender regime’ (Acker, 2006; Dean, 2010a; 2010b; Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009), which constitutes a context characterised by a recurrent set of complex and ambiguous discourses around gender, femininity and feminism (Lewis, Benschop & Simpson, 2017). I focus on

three central aspects of postfeminism: a) the idea that gender equality has already been achieved; b) assumptions of essential gender differences; and c) discourses of individual choice, which together generally render gender equality work superfluous. This means that gender equality practitioners must manoeuvre a minefield of contradictory assumptions and positions on top of widespread opposition to their work.

Because postfeminism is such a complex discursive regime, gender equality practitioners must be 'lingual' in many different discursive frames. I introduce the notion of 'manoeuvring' to designate how gender equality practitioners constantly shift between the available discursive repertoires (Wetherell & Potter, 1988). Practitioners must simultaneously try to derive meaning from the structures and cultures that they navigate and aim to change, as well as speak to their institutions through the limited discursive positions that those very structures and cultures offer, which are rarely conducive to creating the desired changes. Based on eleven interviews with gender equality policymakers and practitioners from three Danish universities and a Danish research-funding agency, this study finds that for practitioners to successfully manoeuvre within postfeminism, they must maintain high levels of critical reflexivity with respect to gender issues and power dynamics (Brody et al., 2001⁵⁶). Due to the 'hegemony of postfeminism' (Gill, Kelan & Scharff, 2017), practitioners themselves occasionally fall into the traps and contradictions of postfeminist assumptions. However, this does not appear to reduce their personal motivation and commitment to contribute to improving gender equality. This way, it is not the individual practitioners' reproduction of postfeminist discourses which hampers progress towards gender equality in Danish universities. Instead, this study indicates that progress is limited by the responses and resistance to gender equality work among stakeholders who are unreflexively absorbed in the postfeminist gender regime.

In sum, this article contributes to the literatures on gender equality work in organisations and gender equality in academia by studying the practitioners in this context through the postfeminist lens. The notion of 'manoeuvring' highlights how practitioners dynamically shift between the hegemonic postfeminist 'common sense' on gender and equality (Kelan, 2018) and more marginalised, potentially subversive discursive repertoires. This manoeuvring happens smoothly even when repertoires do not align. Postfeminism offers a

⁵⁶ I understand critical reflexivity as Brody et al. (2015) define 'gender awareness', which refers to 'a person's readiness to recognize how gender differences and privilege are deeply embedded in the assumptions, expectations, practices and manifestations of organizations and society' (cited by van den Brink, 2015: 485).

rich lens through which to explore the complexity and opposition which gender equality practitioners manoeuvre within in their efforts to create institutional change. This manoeuvring unfolds on two levels in the analysis: 1) How practitioners make sense of, e.g., the causes of inequality and potential solutions, as well as 2) How practitioners make sense of and accommodate other people's responses and opposition to their work.

4.2. Gender equality work and practitioners

In this article, gender equality work refers to the formulation of gender equality policies that state priorities and goals, strategies and plans specifying concrete actions, as well as the implementation, ongoing management, monitoring and evaluation of actions. Extant research has typologised gender equality work in different ways. Ely and Meyerson (2000) developed a four-category framework of gender equality actions based on different conceptions of gender and (in)equality. For example, 'fix the women' actions intend to change women to meet a masculine norm, thereby ensuring equal labour market participation, whereas 'value the feminine' actions celebrate differences and argue that organisations will benefit from engaging women's presumed unique contributions. Other actions aim to change organisational structures, such as by eliminating gender bias, as is the case in 'create equal opportunity' actions.

To understand the existence of this variety in gender equality actions, Benschop and Verloo (2012) stress that we must consider the divergent diagnoses of the core problems (e.g., unequal treatment, lack of access to resources or gendered organising processes) and the different conceptualisations of the goals (e.g., equal opportunity, gender neutrality or equality) underpinning them. The problem and goal definitions (i.e., which dimensions are included or omitted) have profound implications for the design of interventions and who or what they target (Lombardo, Meier & Verloo, 2009). Nentwich (2006) therefore emphasises the importance of studying 'equal opportunities' work as a discursive practice.

Ahmed (2012) insightfully describes the politics of engaging in equality work in British and Australian academia with a focus on racial diversity. If the value of diversity is not institutionally recognised, then to become responsible for that work entails inhabiting an organisational space which is not valued (p. 4). Despite diversity workers being appointed to do this work, they often face great resistance (p. 30). For one, this is because diversity work implies naming racial discrimination, which organisations are not legally permitted to allow (p. 49). Secondly, following Benschop and van den Brink (2014), the redistribution of power in organisations requires 'at least the consent and preferably the engagement of those currently in power' (p. 340). It is therefore hardly

surprising that gender equality practitioners often face opposition from leaders as well as researchers in top positions.

Nentwich (2006) further posits that ‘change agents are thought to be free to choose a perspective for a certain problem in a specific situation’ (p. 504) but highlights the importance of context for sense making. Gender equality practitioners must ensure that opposition does not prevent action. Consequently, they must be ‘tempered radicals’ (Meyerson & Scully, 1995), who find themselves in a constant state of ambivalence as invested proponents of organisational change who simultaneously need to cool-headedly ‘temper’ (i.e., tone down) their radicalism to ‘get ahead in the game’ (p. 587). This often leads practitioners to adopt equality actions which they do not believe will create the changes that they themselves desire (Keisu & Carbin, 2014), such as ‘fix the women’ rather than ‘fix the organisation’ initiatives (Wynn, 2019).

To summarise, improving gender equality in organisations such as universities via actions and interventions is extremely complex. Following Ahmed (2012), we therefore need research ‘describing the complicated and messy situations in which [equality] workers often find themselves’ (p. 10). In response hereto, this article illuminates how gender equality practitioners in Danish academia manoeuvre within the ambiguity and contradictions created by the postfeminist ‘common sense’ (Kelan, 2018: 106), especially in the meetings between practitioners, their work and other stakeholders.

4.3. Postfeminism

As a critical theoretical concept, postfeminism facilitates the exploration of a ‘gender regime’ (Dean, 2010a; 2010b) characterised by a set of complex and ambivalent discourses around gender, feminism and femininity. I follow Lewis et al.’s suggestion (2017) that postfeminism, ‘as a critical concept in organization studies, should be underpinned by poststructuralist theoretical principles whereby this cultural phenomenon is understood as having a governance dimension’ (p. 215). Approaching postfeminism as governmentality enables the identification of discursive cultural regularities ‘which impact on organisations, gendering them in very particular ways and constituting the subjectivities of those who work within them’ (p. 214).

Most noticeably, the postfeminist gender regime simultaneously champions and disavows feminism: Ideologically, everyone supports gender equality, which is generally believed to have been achieved, but this means that there is no longer any need for feminism (Gill, 2014b; Scharff, 2009). Gender equality then becomes a ‘cheer word, a positive value’ empty of any reference to what it might mean in terms of politics (Gill, 2016: 619). Postfeminism may thus be

understood as a variety of discursive scripts that people employ to justify certain behaviours or positions rooted in ‘broadly “feminist” sentiments [but which] have become severed from their political or philosophical origins’ (Whelehan, 2010: 156). Lewis et al. (2017) therefore argue that ‘it may well be that the influence of postfeminism in organisations plays a role in the “blinding lack of progress”’ (Ainsworth, Knox & O’Flynn, 2010) in creating systemic gender change (p. 216). To understand why that is, in the following, I unfold the three widespread postfeminist discourses with which I engage in this article.

4.3.1. Gender equality has been achieved

In the postfeminist gender regime, it is generally assumed that gender equality is achieved (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009). The consequence of this discourse is that people are largely ‘gender blind’, meaning that they do not recognise themselves as gendered actors (Lewis, 2006b). While people are able to identify gender disparity, such as a lack of women in top positions, disparity is not equated with injustice (Kelan, 2007).

Furthermore, strong trust in the gender neutrality of organisations (Acker, 1990; Kelan, 2009) and individual self-determination (Ronen, 2018) discourages organisations from intervening to improve the circumstances for women. Affirmative interventions especially stir controversy, as they are seen as violations of equal opportunity and meritocratic principles (Rumens, 2017). Some argue that affirmative initiatives give women an unfair advantage and that gender equality has almost ‘gone too far’ (Gill et al., 2017). Men are not alone in holding this view, as women’s alleged advantage jeopardises their professional reputation and credibility, and they *must* therefore oppose positive action.

Finally, there is an aversion to discussing gender issues because the topic often leads to heated and emotional debates (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Kelan (2009) labels this aversion ‘gender fatigue’. She argues that this tiredness is the result of constantly having to reconstruct organisations as gender-neutral and equal while recognising that discrimination could happen (p. 206). The ‘simultaneous recognition that gender might play a role combined with the insistence that it does not’ (Gill et al., 2017: 227) causes significant cognitive strain, which makes people uncomfortable (p. 206). Consequently, the topic of gender is preferably avoided (Gill, 2014b).

4.3.2. Essential gender differences

While the 1960s and 1970s were influenced by the emphasis of second-wave feminism on the social construction of gender (see e.g., Thornham, 2001),

gender essentialist views are resurging in the postfeminist era (McRobbie, 2004; Gill, 2007). The different life paths of women and men are increasingly ascribed to essential predispositions, re-legitimising ‘natural’ differences in equality discussions (Rennison, 2014: 43). From a gender essentialist perspective, the underrepresentation of women in top organisational positions may, for example, be attributed to women’s ‘feminine sensibilities’, including their supposed preference for a ‘home-oriented’ life (Hakim, 1998; 2000) or presumed lack of confidence, competitiveness and assertiveness (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Nielsen, 2017).

Understood in these terms, gender essentialism predictably discourages organisational intervention to raise the share of women in organisational positions of power (Skewes, Fine & Haslam, 2018), as it implies that women are viewed as being unsuited for particular posts, such as masculine-typed leadership roles (Alvesson & Billing, 2009). Nevertheless, when gender is discussed, it typically involves discussing ‘women as other’ and how they should behave to ‘fit’ such positions (Nielsen, 2017). Women must therefore learn to ‘play the game’ (Singh, Kumra & Vinnicombe, 2002) on masculine terms and to adopt masculine behaviours (Alvesson & Billing, 2009). Gender equality initiatives such as mentoring schemes and career training for women are introduced to teach ‘career skills’ and empowerment (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Following neoliberal imperatives, women are expected to incessantly ‘invest’ in and work on themselves (Rottenberg, 2018b), thus turning gender equality work into a change project of individual women through their individual self-realisation endeavours (Gill et al., 2017).

Gender essentialist discourses may also be engaged to argue that organisations should do more to retain women (Lewis, 2014a; Ronen, 2018). The existence of a ‘business case’ for gender parity is widely accepted, that is, the assumption that leveraging the diverse skills and perspectives – be they socialised or ‘natural’ – of women and men will enhance organisational performance (Baumann, 2017; Rennison, 2014). Organisations therefore need women’s presumed ‘uniquely feminine’ contributions, such as multitasking and connectivity (Kelan, 2009), empathy (Ronen, 2018) or ‘transformational leadership style’ (Simpson, Ross-Smith & Lewis, 2010) to ensure a competitive edge (Lewis, 2014a).

4.3.3. Individual choice

In the postfeminist gender regime, feminism is in particular celebrated for having ensured women the freedom of choice (Ferguson, 2010; Gamble, 2004). Nevertheless, choice discourses mark a clear break with second-wave feminism. Lewis and Simpson (2017) argue that Catherine Hakim’s work on

‘preference’ is not only representative of postfeminist logics but that it has actually been constitutive of them. Building on liberal feminist politics emphasising the public–private divide (signifying the traditional gendered division of labour), Hakim (1998; 2000) argues that the most important life choices women can make relate to work and home. She posits that ‘home-centred’ and ‘work-centred’ lives are choices of equal value. Nevertheless, in many Western contexts, most women combine work and family because the two appear to have a ‘symbiotic interdependence’ (Lewis & Simpson, 2017: 119) anchored in postfeminism’s simultaneous championing and disavowal of feminism (McRobbie, 2009). By working, women enact feminism (agency, individualism). By having a family as well, they enact also more traditional forms of femininity (care, communality) (Lewis & Simpson, 2017). In sum, by combining work and family, women ensure that they are not perceived as ‘excessively feminist’ (Lewis et al., 2017; Lewis & Simpson, 2017) and retain the femininity that remains culturally required and is perceived as paramount to female success (Adamson & Kelan, 2018). Whereas the Red Stocking movement aimed to free women from the confinement of the home, the implication of postfeminist forms of femininity is that motherhood is inscribed as a mandated part of women’s lives (Rottenberg, 2018b). This becomes evident in the increasing tendency for women to retreat to the domestic sphere (Stone, 2007). However, ‘retreat to home’ is understood as a voluntary choice and not an obligation (Lewis & Simpson, 2017). Judging the content of women’s choices is therefore perceived as wrong, since their ability to make those choices is indicative of the progress made in terms of their equality and liberation (Ferguson, 2010). In Scandinavia, ‘retreat to home’ mostly refers to women working part-time or remaining in full-time employment but pursuing less demanding jobs to balance work and family responsibilities (Sørensen, 2017).

Choice discourses thus imply that organisations should avoid paternalistic intervention to retain women at all costs (Rennison, 2014), since they oppose what appears to be a woman’s ‘innate’ preference for a – if not ‘home-centred’ then at least ‘home-oriented’ – life (Hakim, 1998; 2000). Interventions are further viewed as condescending to women, as they are presumed more than capable of taking responsibility for their own lives (Rennison, 2014). Here, choice discourses emphasise female empowerment and agency while rejecting what some contemporary women consider the ‘unswerving belief in female victimization at the hands of an all-powerful patriarchal system’ of second-wave feminism (Gamble, 2004: 39; see also Ferguson, 2010).

4.4. The Danish context as a postfeminist gender regime

Borchorst and Siim (2008) argue that while the Danish feminist movement was very strong in the 1970s and 1980s, feminist issues gained little ground within Danish political parties (p. 136). Consequently, gender issues gradually disappeared from public concern, exacerbated by the demobilisation of the Danish women's movement in the 1990s and high levels of female labour market participation. These factors have resulted in the widespread belief that gender equality has been achieved in Denmark (Dahlerup, 2008; 2018). According to a survey conducted by the European Commission (EC) (2012b: 34) in 2012, Denmark had the highest score of 'perceived gender equality' in the European Union, 81 per cent of respondents indicating that gender discrimination was rare or non-existent. Consequently, Danish politicians are reluctant to legislate about gender (Dahlerup, 2018). Denmark's former Social Democratic government had to shelve earmarked paternity leave, presumably due to popular opposition, while the right-of-centre parties promote the repeal of existing gender equality legislation (Danish Parliament, 2015a; 2015b).

Even the 'soft Danish quota system'⁵⁷ is controversial. In another 2012 survey, only 10 per cent of Danes opted for binding legal measures to ensure gender-balanced corporate boards, the lowest share of all surveyed European countries (EC, 2012a: 43). In 2017, 61 per cent were against legal measures to ensure gender parity in politics, making Denmark the 'high scorer' of Europe in this regard (EC, 2017: 53). In sum, Danish corporations and state institutions find themselves in an ambivalent position as they are compelled by law to take action on gender issues but face high levels of opposition from stakeholders.

Gender essentialist explanations are often engaged when arguing against gender equality interventions (Skewes et al., 2018). For instance, the EC (2012a: 12) found in 2012 that a staggering 49 per cent of Danes believed that women are less interested than men in holding positions of responsibility, compared to only 16 per cent of Swedes.⁵⁸ Sixty-four per cent of Danes agree

⁵⁷ In 2012, the Danish parliament passed a so-called 'comply or explain' quota system. This legal initiative requires the largest public and private Danish companies, incl. universities, to set targets for the underrepresented sex in the highest executive levels and to develop a policy for raising the share of the underrepresented sex in all leadership levels (Danish Business Authorities, 2018).

⁵⁸ It should be noted that, in 2017, 29 per cent of Danish respondents agreed with the statement 'Women are less interested than men in holding positions of responsibility' within the area of politics specifically (European Commission, 2017: 40).

further that women are more likely to make decisions based on their emotions (EC, 2017: 15), and as emotions are often dissociated from the work sphere, such assumptions discourage gender equality actions. However, gender essentialist reasoning may also encourage action. For instance, in 2012, 55 per cent of Danes believed that gender-balanced leadership makes a difference ‘in the way companies are run’ (EC, 2012a: 37).

Despite the prevalence of gender essentialist views, only 14 per cent of Danes agree that women’s most important responsibility lies in the home (EC, 2017: 16), and 95 per cent approve of a man doing his equal share of household work (p. 21). Ambiguity is nevertheless evident, as 55 per cent believe that women spend more time than men doing household work (Ibid.) and 49 per cent agree that women have less freedom due to their family responsibilities (p. 39). Danes thus identify gendered discrepancies but, interestingly, such discrepancies do not reduce their convictions that gender equality has been achieved.

Moreover, Borchorst, Christensen and Siim (2002) argue that the above-mentioned demobilisation of the women’s movement and high levels of female labour market participation contributed to the weakening of structural explanations for gender inequality and the dispersion of narratives about women’s agency and empowerment. Due to these discursive changes, most women will dismiss and trivialise experiences of sexism and discrimination, even though research shows that they occur (Borchorst & Agustín, 2017). The trivialisation of discrimination may further be aggravated by the Danish championing of the values of ‘mutual trust’ and ‘liberalism’, i.e., a laid-back broad-mindedness ‘in particular in relation to the body and sexuality’ (Danish Ministry of Culture, 2016). Such values are used to disarm women who raise their voices about sexism and harassment (Askanius & Hartley, 2019; Reestorff, 2019).

In sum, the predominance of ambiguous and contradictory views, assumptions and action patterns concerning gender and equality make Denmark an ideal case to study how gender equality practitioners manoeuvre within and draw on postfeminist discourses in their efforts to create gender change in academia.

4.5. Method

Empirically, the article builds on eleven interviews⁵⁹ with gender equality policymakers and practitioners from three Danish universities and a research-

⁵⁹ The interviews were conducted in two different research projects: my master’s thesis (Utoft, 2015), and EFFORTI – Evaluation Framework for Promoting Gender Equality in R&I (Kalpazidou Schmidt et al., 2017b).

funding agency. Each of the institutions has been involved in concrete gender equality-related actions and programmes, which were the topics of the interviews. It is a purposive sample which includes three policymakers from the funding agency, three university department heads, and six university gender equality practitioners in administrative and human resources (HR) positions (three men and nine women, two of whom were interviewed together). The roles of these interview participants clearly differ, as do their positions and motivations towards gender equality work. Some of the interviewees are administrative workers with limited to no knowledge about gender and power dynamics who were assigned the task of implementing or managing a certain gender equality action. Other gender equality practitioners have extensive knowledge about gender and feminism together with significant personal motivation and commitment to their work. The aim of this particular sample was to ensure diversity reflecting the different positions that gender equality policymakers and practitioners may occupy in the field in order to capture a wide variety of understandings of and approaches to gender equality work. The interviews were all semi-structured (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). They were transcribed and coded in NVivo. Coding occurred in a focused manner using a combination of theory-informed codes building on postfeminism and ‘in vivo’ codes (Saldaña, 2016).

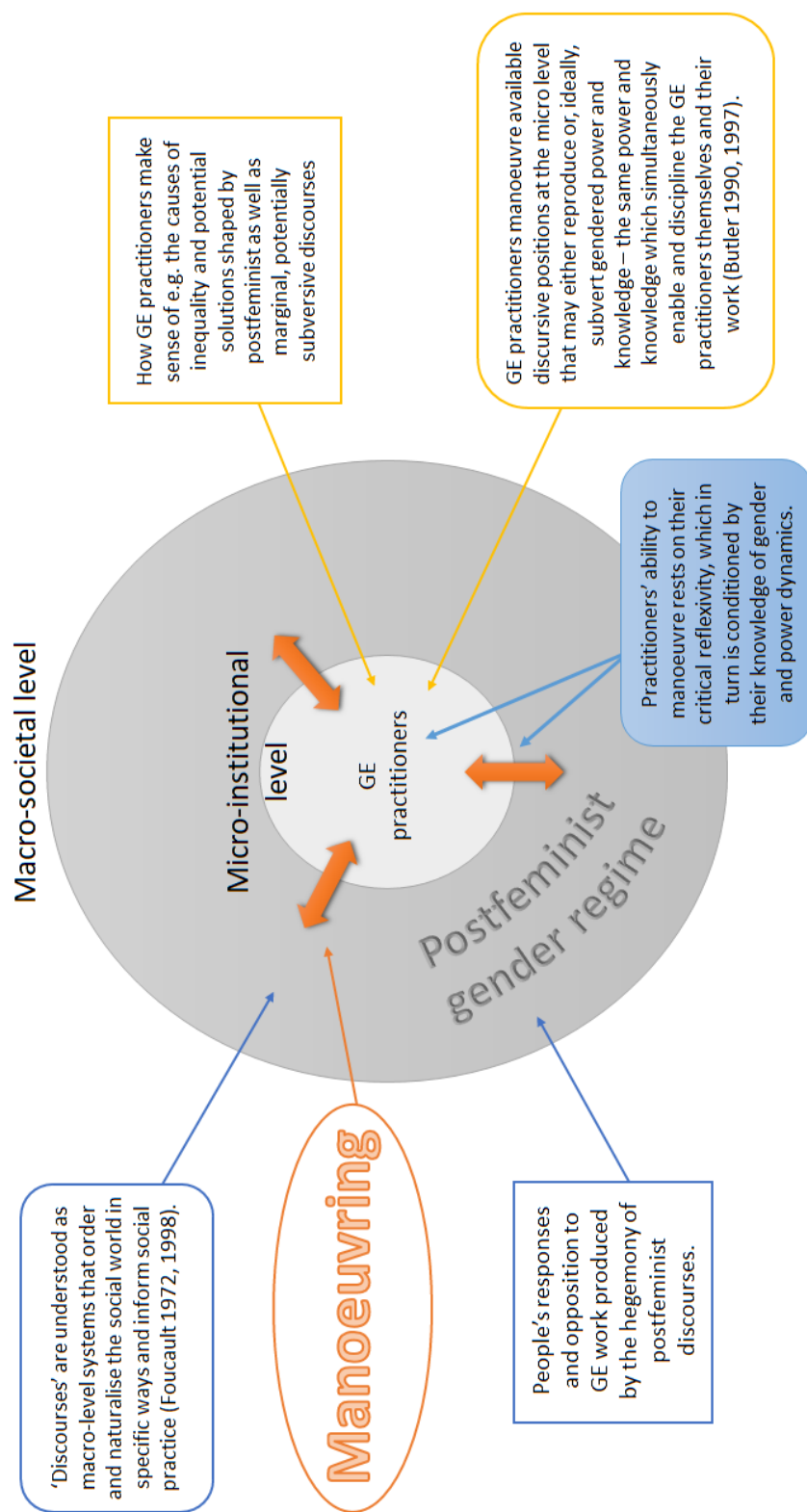
I have strived to produce an analysis grounded in feminist ethics and empathy. Based on the interview material, I provide an honest but critical account recognising the work of (most of) my research participants as an important feminist project (Davis, 2010: 148). Developing a critical account does not imply judging the research participants. The theoretical analysis is intended to expand our understanding of gender equality work and the persistent inequality in Danish academia. Following Lee (2018), I fully recognise my responsibility to the people in my work (p. 312), which is why I have anonymised them (using pseudonyms) and the organisations they represent. I have granted careful consideration to the selection and translation of quotes and to issues of representation, especially in relation to how my interpretive framework shapes the representation of the interview participants (Haynes, 2011). Quotes were selected as illuminating examples out of a full data set which points to the prevalence of postfeminist discourses in the material. Taking a feminist stance in this study further implies that research is never disinterested and external. When the research participants’ wishes (e.g., to improve gender equality in academia) and problems (the challenges they face trying to do so) are shared by the researcher (Pereira, 2017: 15), research will always be ‘deeply implicated’ (Suchman, 2007: 152).

In the analysis, I explore ‘manoeuvring’ on two levels: 1) How postfeminist and marginal discourses shape how gender equality practitioners make sense

of, e.g., the causes of inequality and potential solutions, and 2) how practitioners make sense of and accommodate other people's responses and opposition to their work generally produced by the predominance of postfeminist discourses. In the latter case, 'discourses' are understood as macro-level systems that order and naturalise the social world in specific ways and inform social practice (Foucault, 1972, 1998). In practice, I analyse how gender equality practitioners manoeuvre between available discursive positions and repertoires at the micro level that may either reproduce or, ideally, subvert gendered power and knowledge – the same power and knowledge which simultaneously enable and discipline the gender equality practitioners themselves and their work (Butler, 1990, 1997). I have illustrated my approach in figure 4.1.

I proceed in an interpretive manner and move dynamically between empirical accounts and theory (i.e., the three postfeminist discourses) to emphasise the co-constitutive relationship between macro-level societal discourses on the one hand and interactional, micro-level discourses on the other. Interpreting individual discursive practices through the lens of macro-level, postfeminist discourses facilitates an improved understanding of how certain activities become desirable or undesirable, possible and impossible. The empirical analysis at the micro level also speaks back to the theory and expands our understanding of the postfeminist gender regime and its implications for gender equality work.

Fig. 4.1. Manoeuvring with postfeminism



In Fig. 4.1, the solid (orange) arrows illustrate how gender equality practitioners manoeuvre between macro-level, postfeminist discourses (especially in the meetings with people's responses and opposition to gender equality work) and micro-level, marginal discursive positions (in their making sense of inequality and solutions), which may potentially subvert gendered power relations. As gender equality practitioners are also shaped by the 'postfeminist gender regime', manoeuvring requires knowledge and critical reflexivity. Manoeuvring happens smoothly even when macro and micro-level discourses do not align, which may help us understand how and why postfeminist reasoning does not necessarily lead to the obvious postfeminist conclusions for the gender equality practitioners of this study.

4.6. Analysis

4.6.1. Gender equality has been achieved

Gender fatigue and animosity

The strong postfeminist conviction that 'gender equality has been achieved' expresses itself in different ways in the interviews. At University 1, for instance, one action of a gender equality project intended to 'normalise' gender discussions. As gender equality tends to be a contentious topic among academics, the aim of this initiative was to reduce tension by addressing the issue regularly and in a manner believed to be benign. In practice, this involved e.g., presenting gender statistics at staff meetings. The responsibility for carrying out this action thus fell on department heads, such as Søren. When asked about how employees respond to having gender on the agenda at staff meetings, Søren commented:

if there are 70 employees present and five are women and the rest are men, and you have me talking about how few women are hired, well I think the reaction from the women is 'This is nonsense! We don't need to talk about this'. And this is a perfectly natural reaction. They obviously feel I'm talking about them. They feel singled out – that they're made different from the men.

This situation offers a rich example of how this practitioner makes sense of and accommodates his staff's response and opposition in the meeting between him, them and this gender equality intervention. I interpret the evasiveness with respect to discussing gender issues demonstrated by the female employees as expressions of 'gender fatigue' (Kelan, 2009). Gender fatigue implies that individuals deny the idea that gender imbalance equals injustice. Denial is a convenient evasive tactic, because people cannot reconcile the existence of

injustice with their trust in the gender neutrality and equality of the academic institution.

In the situation Søren describes, he stands before his staff and addresses the underrepresentation of women among researchers as a problem. As academia is believed to be gender-neutral, however, inequality becomes a ‘void, illegitimate problem’ (Egeland, 2001) – or, as in the quote, a ‘nonsensical’ problem. Søren finds this response ‘perfectly natural’, possibly because he is aware that women tend to deny gender inequalities to constitute themselves as professionals according to cultural norms and occupational expectations (Rhoton, 2011). Legitimate professionalism in academia generally revolves around the closely interlinked ideals of meritocracy and scientific objectivity (Egeland, 2001). ‘Excellent’ researchers are believed hired and promoted based on objective assessments of their individual merits (Bagilhole & Goode, 2001; Lund, 2015). Insinuating that they are in fact not and that women are discriminated against therefore challenges some employees’ professional identities and certitude in their own excellence. This way, gender fatigue may not only lead to evasiveness, but also to animosity. Søren describes how his presentations occasionally result in emotional outbursts from men:

[The women] also know that this is a very emotional topic for some of their male colleagues. And they don’t want to risk becoming the object of the men’s anger.

In the postfeminist context, being neither victim nor perpetrator of sexism is viewed as a desirable subject position (Kelan, 2007). Being a victim seems to be associated with ‘self-pity, insufficient personal drive, and a lack of taking responsibility for one’s own life’ (Baker, 2010: 190). The female employees might have seen their superior’s account of inequality as a problem as legitimisation to raise their voices about the discomforts of being ‘tokens’, but they do not. As such, the women’s denunciation may be a way of rejecting victimhood in order to constitute themselves as legitimate postfeminist subjects; or perhaps there is simply no room for dissent in this context. As a minority, it would appear as though the female staff cannot risk further marginalisation by acknowledging injustice. In other words, they are silenced and forced to adhere to hegemonic views. Conversely, discussing gender issues in academia as injustice not only challenges men’s professional identities, as I suggested above, it also challenges their personal values and morals. That is, the men may feel personally accused when inequality is discussed. Consequently, in defence, they launch an attack, and the women risk being in the line of fire.

Evidently, this practitioner manoeuvres within a tricky situation. The atmosphere of the meetings sounds quite charged, and the easiest way to avoid conflict would be for him to avoid the topic of gender. In the interview, Søren makes evident that he is genuinely concerned with inequality and wishes to

contribute to change by carrying out the actions believed necessary. Indeed, Søren may see the evasive and resentful responses of his staff as confirmation that efforts to ‘normalise gender discussions’ are much needed. Therefore, the department head is compelled to discuss gender issues with his staff, even though he knows that he might agitate some of the men and expose the women. In the quotes, Søren does not reproduce hegemonic postfeminist assumptions, but he appears aware of what they are. This awareness facilitates his manoeuvring between marginal (his own) and postfeminist positions (those of his employees). That is, he appears aware of how, due to assumptions of gender-neutrality and meritocracy, the women are likely subscribing to a ‘sameness feminism’ perspective (Nentwich, 2006). In other words, manoeuvring enables him to reflect on and understand why his female employees deny inequality despite being outnumbered 65 to 5 in this department.

Equality initiatives become gender-integrated

At two universities, I found examples of gender equality initiatives for women that over time also opened up to men: a career development course at University 1 and a mentoring scheme at University 3. Lars from University 1 explained:

We’re very concerned with competence development [...] such as career development for young researchers, which started as a gender equality initiative for young women, female researchers, and ran a few times. But after the first cycles, we agreed, or rather it became open to both men and women, because the women who participated also found it problematic that it was for women, and also because there were quite a few men who wanted to join.

It is striking in this quote how the interviewee shifts from active to passive voice. This shift from ‘we agreed’ to ‘it became open to both men and women’ gives the impression that he was not included in or did not fully support the decision to change the scope of the course. Indeed, Lars repeatedly emphasised how career efforts should principally support women since barriers to progression affect them disproportionately. In so doing, he subscribes to the understanding of academia as a ‘tilted playing field’, which gender equality actions aim to ‘level out’ for women (Kanter, 1977). Strategies for supporting women are often scrutinised, however, and many women resent being targeted for such activities (Lewis et al., 2017). This is because raising the share of women in research through such means is believed to occur at the expense of better-qualified men (van den Brink & Benschop, 2013), which is seen as unfairly disadvantaging men (Rumens, 2017). Consequently, some people feel that gender equality has almost ‘gone too far’ (Gill et al., 2017). If Lars wants

female participants for the course, men must be included and he has to accept the fact that the course will not give women the support he believes they need to compete on equal footing with men.

Another practitioner, Lise-Lotte from University 3, reasoned the gender integration of a mentoring scheme as follows:

[...] since 2013 there's been a desire to talk about diversity more broadly, which is obviously also about gender, and some departments actually want more male researchers. So it's not clear-cut that it's the women we try to support with [our mentoring programme]. And there's also something about cultural background, ethnicity for instance. So we attempt to make [the mentoring programme] as diverse as possible on all possible parameters.

This practitioner stresses how she and her colleagues are merely following the strategic priorities from management when emphasising diversity over gender. Lise-Lotte does not outright deny the existence of disparity, but she downplays the need to talk about women by underscoring that men are the minority in some research fields. This way, she insinuates that it may be more pressing to discuss the lack of men and ethnic minorities in research. Management's choice to prioritise diversity over gender may reflect the view that equality work has 'matured' into diversity management (Longman & De Graeve, 2014). 'Diversity' is now widely perceived to be the appropriate label for HR activities revolving around non-discrimination and equal opportunities. However, Ahmed (2012) stresses that diversity is a power-evasive concept originating in the realm of management, and as such the term is detached from histories of struggle over inequality. While Lise-Lotte's claim that it is necessary to address ethnic and racial inequality in academia is indisputably justified (Ibid.), the interview in its entirety does not indicate much preoccupation with this issue. Instead, by insinuating that it may be time to shift focus to other social categories than women, Lise-Lotte seemingly reproduces postfeminist assumptions, including its displacement of sexism to a bygone era (Tasker & Negra, 2007) and the idea that gender equality has almost 'gone too far'. She appears either unfamiliar with or in denial of the evidence of the fundamentally gendered nature of academia (e.g., Bagilhole & Goode, 2001; Belle et al., 2014; Nielsen, 2014a; Lund, 2015) and does not equate the continued underrepresentation of women in most scientific fields with injustice. This way, engaging 'diversity' in relation to the mentoring scheme, with its implied general lack of consideration for structural and cultural discrimination (Ahmed, 2012), neatly corresponds to core postfeminist beliefs.

The practitioner in the first example, Lars, still thought of the career course as a gender equality initiative despite it having been gender-integrated, because departments with limited resources were encouraged to prioritise

women's participation. Interestingly, in the second example, Lise-Lotte denied that the mentoring scheme had ever been a gender equality initiative.⁶⁰ Evidently, we find two very different positions. It is obviously possible for gender equality practitioners to reproduce postfeminist discourses unreflexively, even though they may likely be counterproductive to creating organisational gender change. This seems to be the case with Lise-Lotte. Lars, on the other hand, manoeuvres between marginal and hegemonic discourses. He has clearly reflected on the causes of inequality and believes that actions supporting women are appropriate. However, in the meeting between him, the career course, potential participants and management, he too cannot escape the omnipresence of postfeminist discourses. In this instance, they are employed by individuals with the authority to overrule him. Consequently, the career course for women is gender-integrated so as also to include men, which undermines the intended purpose of this gender equality action.

4.6.2. Gender essentialism

At University 1, two adjacent (but not necessarily contradictory) assumptions relating to women and the working environment seem to co-exist. Improving the working environment (i.e., creating cultural change and making the workplace more inclusive to women) was part of the gender equality project of which University 1 was a part. One department head, Jonna, describes how an employee in her department fell ill with a severe case of stress, which she chose to speak publicly about afterwards. In Jonna's account, this employee helped address a common but sensitive problem, thereby contributing to improving the working environment. She states: '[the male employees] would never dare to do that.' This interviewee ascribes a lack of courage to her male employees with respect to talking about personal issues that risk making them appear vulnerable. While the female employee's willingness to talk about her stress is not explicitly described as courageous, Jonna imbues it with an inherent legitimacy which men's talking about their feelings does not have. She explains:

And you can then argue that if you have a diverse environment, well [...] then [the men] can see prospectively that 'Oh, the women can actually make a difference, so that we will have a better working climate.'

Jonna hopes that by setting an example, her female employees will open the eyes of her male employees to the benefits of gender balance. As it is generally more socially acceptable for women to talk about the personal costs of a career

⁶⁰ The mentoring scheme was piloted and monitored as part of two international cross-European gender equality projects.

characterised by high degrees of competition and performance pressure, they may encourage men to do the same. For this department head, I therefore argue that the benefit of raising the share of women resides in an opening up for more diverse performances of gender, including masculinities which embrace vulnerability and sensitivity. In her article, Nentwich (2006) labels this discourse concerning a broadening of the gender spectrum the 'bandwidth repertoire' (p. 513). Moreover, Jonna hopes that her male employees will recognise this benefit of gender balance so that they will be more supportive of efforts to increase the number of women in the department in the future.

At the same university, the practitioner, Lars, argues that universities must improve the working environment to retain more women in research careers:

Personally, I was really inspired by a presentation I heard by [a prominent Danish economist]. [...] she said something along the lines of 'If women don't stay at the university, it's because it's not a very pleasant place to be. Women pose higher demands with respect to their work lives than men. So, if you want to be better at retaining the women, you have to make the university a nice place to be'. This basically implies good HR work. And I really believe this is true.

This interviewee employs that which Belle, Smith-Doerr and O'Brien (2014) label the 'high expectations explanation', which implies that men are presumed satisfied with working environments in terms of matters such as atmosphere, social integration, collaboration and recognition that women find inadequate. This may reflect an awareness on Lars' part that different people experience working conditions differently. Conversely, it possibly also reflects a postfeminist tendency to essentialise gender characteristics, such as needs and expectations regarding working conditions. Nevertheless, by arguing that women pose higher demands to their working environment than do men, Lars does not take a typical postfeminist stance. The typical postfeminist stance assumes that the 'inherent' inclination of women to pose high demands leads them to be deterred by the competitive, academic work culture. Universities should therefore not attempt to retain women who wish to leave because they are merely making the choice towards which they are predisposed. Or, if universities should, it would often imply 'fixing the women' (Ely & Meyerson, 2000), enabling them to 'play the game' of academia on masculine terms (Singh et al., 2002). Instead, for Lars, the need to 'make the university a nice place to be' apparently motivates him to work harder to retain women. He believes that if we understand the particular needs and preferences of women, we can create a working climate to match them.

Along similar lines, the department head, Jonna, is not saying that since more women than men talk openly about work-related stress, this is a

women's issue. Nor is she arguing for training or coaching women to be more resilient and empowered so that they are better 'equipped' to make it in academia, a conclusion which resonates very well with postfeminist values (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Rottenberg, 2018b). Rather, she believes that men are equally prone to stress and should be allowed to talk about it. She therefore hopes that having more women in her department will positively affect the social and psychological working environment for everyone. Consequently, in both examples, the interviewees ascribe women features and preferences that may be considered stereotypically feminine and which are coupled in different ways with an ambition to improve gender equality. In one case, the presence of women will positively affect the work climate; in the other, a better work climate will attract and retain more women. Finally, although building their arguments on a postfeminist tendency to essentialise gender characteristics, these interview participants do not reach the obvious postfeminist conclusions. Indeed, Jonna seemingly 'gets away with' combining essentialism with a more performative understanding of gender and, interestingly, such complexity does not have to be resolved (Nentwich, 2006: 504). In other words, they manoeuvre between prevalent macro-level discourses, but their reflexivity on gender issues apparently enables them to not only withstand postfeminist imperatives but also to find strengthened motivation to persevere in their efforts to create gender change.

4.6.3. Choice

Discourses of choice were also identified in the interviews. For instance, in comments about the strong focus in gender equality work on the lack of women among full professors, a practitioner at University 1, Erna, argued that:

We also have to look at PhDs and postdocs, because that's where the pipeline begins. And I feel like there are some narratives that propagate the idea that 'Well, I have to choose between family and career, but I don't really understand why that is'.

Underneath these narratives runs an assumption that combining family and a research career is unfeasible. Erna stresses how she experiences female early-career researchers as uncomprehending of this assumption, implying that it should be possible to combine family and career in a modern, gender-equal society. When they do, however, women are still judged on their orientation to either work or parenting (Lewis & Simpson, 2017), which Nina, a department head at University 2, also recognises:

I mean, there are still prejudices about what women want and can do, how engaged they are in their work, or whatever. But if you look at our female professors and leaders, they're extremely committed and work *a lot*.

Implicit in this quote is that these female professors and leaders work a lot despite having children. Never-ending workdays are considered a reasonable sacrifice for becoming an excellent researcher (Nielsen, 2017), while cultural perceptions of 'good mothering' also presuppose constant presence (Rottenberg, 2018b; Sørensen, 2017). Commitment to both work and children thus equals time. Choice this way becomes inevitable, and the chooser is caught in a double bind.

At University 1, the two colleagues, Erna and Meriam, address the work–family balance issue differently. Meriam argues for strategies targeting leadership:

[W]e're considering making courses for those leaders responsible for recruitment and career counselling, such as department heads, so that they will focus more on the fact that there are actual differences, also in people's needs. And it's not about teaching them 'women are this way, men are that way', but much more nuanced in relation to what is going on and [the researchers'] individual points of departure.

This interviewee stresses attention to the needs of the individual, encouraging managers and supervisors to consider the possibility that work–family balance might not be a challenge to all women (some women do not have children); and conversely, that some men might actually also find it challenging. That is, Meriam wishes to teach leadership a more norm-critical approach, which does not equate 'women' with parenting and care. Nina, the department head mentioned above, also appears to perceive a need to create such leadership awareness:

And if you look at the young researchers, there's no difference between men and women. I mean, everyone struggles to manage their families within the available time. But maybe the male leaders just don't see that.

The fact that Meriam argues that courses for leaders are not about teaching that 'women are this way, men are that way' reflects how she is aware of the danger of reproducing problematic gender essentialist assumptions, through which she takes a marginal discursive position critical of postfeminist inclinations. At the same time, her colleague, Erna, suggests that the way forward lies in promoting role models who exemplify that it is possible to combine a research career and having a family. In continuation of her initial quote above, Erna says:

I feel like there are some narratives that propagate the idea that ‘Well, I have to choose between family and career, but I don’t really understand why that is’. However, if we also have different stories and role models, [the young women] may recognise themselves in them. So we also address such matters. I really think that’s important.

As in Meriam’s quote, Erna’s emphasis on the promotion of ‘different stories’ may signal a recognition of the dissimilar points of departure and needs. Different people organise their careers and families differently. Scholarship also underlines the importance of role models (e.g., Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace, 2019; Sealy & Singh, 2010). Nonetheless, the idea of using role models as a gender equality strategy resonates very strongly with the trust in liberal equality and individual self-determination of postfeminism (Adamson & Kelan, 2018). The idea is that, inspired by women who have made careers despite barriers and the ‘second shift’ (Hochschild, 1990), female early-career researchers are supposed to find ‘empowerment’ and resilience within themselves to break through the glass ceiling of academia individually (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Rottenberg, 2018b).

In sum, even when working together closely, gender equality practitioners may reason things differently and manoeuvre between incongruous discourses, which can coexist in the pursuit of the same goals. While these practitioners demonstrate reflexivity with respect to how they understand gender dynamics and the causes of inequality, in some instances, postfeminist logics become entwined with how they intend to ensure parity at their universities. We see this in how Erna understands the worries of female early-career researchers concerning work–family balance. By placing the responsibility for change on women, promoting role models is a less subversive gender equality initiative than teaching the university leadership about gender awareness. Nevertheless, these actions can be employed simultaneously, as they address stakeholders at different levels of the organisation (Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace, 2019).

4.7. Gender equality work, postfeminism and motivation

As I touched upon in the first part of the analysis, Søren and Lars both acknowledge the existence of structural inequalities and, thus, the need for active intervention to create change; in Søren’s case, this is reflected in efforts to ‘normalise’ GE discussions; in Lars’ case, it is reflected in the launching of a career-development course for women. However, since the intended recipients of these interventions question their relevance and fairness, Søren and

Lars come to occupy marginal positions in the postfeminist gender regime. Lars' case represents an illustrative example of how GE practitioners must 'temper' their radicalism (Meyerson & Scully, 1995). The organisational resistance leads him to broaden the career-development programme to also include men, although this undermines its initial purpose. In Søren's case, he knows that the GE initiative will agitate the men and expose the women, which is clearly an unfortunate side effect, but this fact also confirms for him the existence of a problem and the need for change. In neither of these examples do we see the research participants reproducing postfeminist discourses. While both Søren and Lars are motivated to create change, organisational resistance ends up narrowing their scope of action.

In the second part of the analysis, Lars and Jonna express gender-essentialist views. Interestingly, in the postfeminist gender regime, essentialism may both encourage and discourage GE actions. For Jonna, women positively affect the working environment by talking about emotions and vulnerability in relation to the demands of pursuing a research career. Jonna, in other words, engages essentialist views to argue *for* actions to improve gender equality which, in turn, will encourage men to show similar openness and vulnerability; that is, to embrace diverse performances of masculinity. For Lars, understanding the needs and preferences of women researchers will enable universities to better attract and retain female talent by changing working environments accordingly. If women's innate needs and preferences lead them to be discouraged by the academic working environment, postfeminism would have us abstaining from intervening, because doing so would go against nature. However, Lars' motivation to act seems only strengthened. These examples demonstrate an interesting paradox: while practitioners cannot altogether escape the hegemony of postfeminism, for them, postfeminist reasoning does not necessarily lead to postfeminist conclusions. On the contrary, the practitioners' motivations to create change tend to partially build on postfeminist ideas. Surprisingly, Jonna's gender-essentialist reasoning leads to a gender-performative conclusion, whereas Lars' ideas about the specific needs and preferences of women are mobilised to evade the postfeminist imperatives of 'fixing the women' or simply accepting the attrition of women from academic research as 'natural'.

Finally, in the third part of the analysis, two practitioner colleagues propose different actions in response to the widespread conception that, for women, having a family is incompatible with pursuing a research career. One interviewee, Erna, suggests that the promotion of role models is an appropriate remedy, which is in line with postfeminist tendencies towards self-improvement and trust in liberal equality and individual, unencumbered agency.

Erna's colleague, Nina, suggests educating university leadership in norm-critical approaches through which the assumption that work–family balance is by definition a female issue is deconstructed. While one aligns herself with the postfeminist commonsense and the other in opposition to it, these interventions may be employed simultaneously as a way of practicing tempered radicalism; while the norm-critical approach will undoubtedly seem 'excessively feminist' to some (i.e., too radical and too critical) (Lewis et al., 2017; Lewis & Simpson, 2017), the other is sufficiently 'moderately feminist' (Ferguson, 2010; Dean, 2010a) to be palatable to the postfeminist order.

As reflected in these examples, academic GE practitioners are not immune to the hegemony of postfeminism, as they are inevitably part of the postfeminist gender regime. However, it seems as though they have their eyes so much 'on the prize' that irrespective of which logics or arguments they engage, they remain oriented towards the goal of improving equality at universities; even when those logics or arguments should in principle discourage action or only encourage action in ways that are compatible with postfeminism. Secondly, as I stressed in the Method section (4.5), the different institutional roles of the interview participants affect their positions and motivations towards GE work. As Ahmed (2012) points out, for example, the motivation of university policymakers may pertain to the *implementation* of gender-equality initiatives rather than actually improving gender equality as a way of ensuring institutional legitimacy. Despite this, in this study, the motivation of the practitioners (with one exception) to create 'gender change' generally seems both high and genuine. Even while their discursive practices may not always fully align with that goal, and even when confronted with opposition anchored in the postfeminist gender regime, they persist in their efforts because they are oriented towards improving gender equality as *the* goal in and of itself. Unfortunately, organisational resistance and the hegemony of postfeminism often imply that gender-equality interventions constitute middle-of-the-road compromises between the divergent interests of different actors (Benschop & Verloo, 2012). This way, practitioners may feel that moderate, palatable GE initiatives are better than no initiatives at all, which indicates that tempered radicalism may be closely linked with postfeminism.

4.8. Conclusion: Manoeuvring within postfeminism

In this article, I explored gender equality practitioners through the lens of postfeminism. This approach has enabled me to study their discursive practices and to paint a holistic picture of the multifaceted discursive context within which gender equality work takes place in Danish universities. This

context, I have substantiated, may be construed as a 'postfeminist gender regime'. I have shown that gender equality practitioners navigate a minefield of contradictory assumptions and positions on top of widespread opposition to their work. Because postfeminism is such a complex discursive regime, gender equality practitioners must be 'lingual' in many different discursive frames, for example, defining the problem and goals (Benschop & Verloo, 2012; Lombardo et al., 2009), sameness versus difference feminism arguments (Simpson et al., 2010; Nentwich, 2006), and 'fix the women' vis-à-vis 'fix the organisation' reasoning (Wynn, 2019).

I introduced the notion of 'manoeuvring' to denote how practitioners dynamically shift between hegemonic, postfeminist discourses around gender and equality and more marginalised and potentially subversive repertoires. The access of practitioners to these marginal positions depends on their critical reflexivity which, in turn, requires knowledge of gender relations and power dynamics. Occasionally, practitioners fall into the traps and contradictions of postfeminism when trying to make sense of inequality and adequate solutions. However, I have shown that it is not unequivocally practitioners' reproduction of postfeminist discourses that hampers progress towards gender equality at Danish universities. Instead, I suggest that the critical reflexivity and commitment to gender equality demonstrated by practitioners may help us understand how and why postfeminist reasoning does not necessarily lead to the obvious postfeminist conclusions for them. Indeed, by manoeuvring between different discursive positions, practitioners appear able to not only withstand postfeminist imperatives, but to find strengthened motivation to persevere in their efforts to create gender change. This way, this study indicates that limits to gender equality progress at Danish universities often occur in the meetings between practitioners, their work and other stakeholders who are unreflexively absorbed in the postfeminist gender regime.

5. Exploring linkages (article 2)

Exploring linkages between organisational culture and gender equality work - An ethnography of a multinational engineering company

Citation:

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Abstract:

This article explores the linkages between organisation-specific cultural narratives and gender-equality programme planning through the lens of the ‘historicity’ concept. It argues that to fully understand the problem definitions, programme design and organisational change processes related to gender equality (GE), scholars and practitioners cannot focus one-sidedly on expected outcomes and effects; we must also factor in organisational narratives, because GE actors never arrive at their work as *tabulae rasae*. A community of actors always draws on shared dispositions that give sense, direction and shape to their anticipations of the future, hereby guiding their actions in the present. Based on an ethnography of a multi-national engineering company, the article shows how cultural narratives may serve in different ways as support factors for GE programme planning and implementation if they are actively but mindfully engaged. This mindfulness is important, as positive cultural narratives may entail problematic gender dimensions. On the other hand, negative cultural narratives may entail important learning outcomes that may benefit future GE initiatives. The analysis further points to the centrality of strategic communication, leadership commitment and comprehensive evaluation in order to mobilise the potential of cultural narratives as support factors to GE work. Finally, this article offers a rich example to scholars and practitioners of how to employ cultural analysis in relation to GE activities and demonstrates the value of the insights produced by this analysis for the case company and its GE programme.

Keywords: Ethnography – Gender equality – Historicity – Engineering – Organisational change

5.1. Introduction

In this article, I explore linkages between organisational culture and the gender equality (GE) work carried out in a multinational engineering company headquartered in Denmark. Based on the premise that GE programme planning and evaluation must take context into consideration (Reidl et al., 2017; Kalpazidou Schmidt et al., 2017b), I here focus on organisational culture. Organisational culture is widely recognised as the cause of inequalities (Acker, 1990; Lorber, 1994) and is often the target in GE change projects (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Benschop & Verloo, 2012). In this article, however, I investigate whether and how organisational culture may serve as a ‘support factor’ for GE work (Cartwright & Hardie, 2012).

Women remain a minority at top levels of Danish businesses. A mere 15 per cent of the board members of the largest companies are women (Danish Business Authorities, 2018)⁶¹ and, in 2015, at the senior and executive levels, women made up just 17 and 7 per cent, respectively (Poulsen et al., 2016). While a ‘soft quota solution’ was legally introduced in Denmark in 2013, the share of women leaders increases only marginally each year (DIHR, 2015). Besides this legal requirement to address gender issues, contemporary corporations also face strong legitimacy pressures, as with respect to ethical business conduct and corporate social responsibility (CSR), of which gender equality is a part (Grosser & Moon, 2008; Cacace et al., 2015). As stated by Benschop and Verloo (2012), there is a strong belief in the necessity of planned change to produce organisational transformations toward gender equality (p. 285). Many companies therefore implement change programmes to move in desired directions.

Organisational change is complex and unforeseen consequences are inevitable, which is also true for GE change (Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace, 2017; 2019). Consequently, streams of research have focused on pointing to potential obstacles and resistance to GE change (Ibid.; Benschop & Verloo, 2012; Benschop & van den Brink, 2014) and on establishing the necessary conditions for change (e.g., Armenakis et al., 1993; Cartwright & Hardie, 2012). Much scholarly effort has further been invested in identifying the ideal content and form of GE change strategies (e.g., Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Cacace, 2009; Timmers et al., 2010), as well as the most adequate ways of institutionalising

⁶¹ Following the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), Denmark performs just slightly above the EU average with respect to gender distribution among presidents, board members and employee representatives in the largest listed companies: 27.8% women (EU) vs. 30% women (Denmark). URL: https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/indicator/wmidm_bus_bus_wmid_comp_compbm (accessed: 17 January 2020)

change (see review by Buchanan et al., 2005). Scholarship further emphasises the need to consider context in organisational change projects (e.g., Kanter, 1977; Bleijenbergh et al., 2008; Timmers et al., 2010). Contextual factors which should be addressed include social and political conditions, the current state of the problem in question, and not least organisational cultural dimensions (Vogel, 2012: 3). This article is particularly interested in the latter.

This study is based on a four-month ethnography carried out in a multinational engineering company headquartered in Denmark. It is a qualitative-interpretivist study (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2013). As such, it is based on the premise that any object of study has no essential, universal or timeless meaning. Instead, interpretive researchers aim to understand the meaning of a phenomenon of interest in context and its implications for those to whom it relates (Ibid.: 23). This article investigates two organisational narratives that were particularly salient in the generated data. Narratives are culturally important, as they offer interpretations of an organisation's history and convey ideas and beliefs (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008: 38). The specific narratives of this article concern the organisation's 'heritage' – the story of the humanism and philanthropy of the company's founders – as well as the narrative of a rather recent (but generally forgotten) GE initiative. I explore whether and how these cultural narratives may serve as 'support factors' for the company's GE work; that is, the events and conditions needed to bring about a contribution to effecting desired organisational changes (Cartwright & Hardie, 2012).

My research questions are:

- How do participants engage cultural narratives in relation to GE work?
- What are the implications of engaging cultural narratives for GE work?
- How may the potential of cultural narratives as support factors for GE work be mobilised?

Furthermore, in organisational life, time is not merely a background against which things occur (Staudenmayer et al., 2002). Time is part and parcel of organisational activities, including GE work. Through its emphasis on milestones, targets, key performance indicators etc., change project planning and management essentially involves speculating about the future and is thus often limited to mainly taking a forward-looking approach (Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace, 2017). I argue that the actors working with the design, planning and implementation of GE change projects cannot focus one-sidedly on the future. The past is always present in the present and shapes actors' actions and conceptions of possible futures (Otto, 2013). The concept of 'historicity' (e.g., Dalsgaard & Nielsen, 2013; Maclean et al., 2016; Hirsch & Steward, 2005) therefore serves as the theoretical backdrop for this article. By aiming to blur linear conceptions of time, 'historicity' demands a more complex and context-

dependent view of GE change projects and allows for a focus on organisation-specific cultural narratives. Based on this conceptual framework, the article explores the linkages between organisational, cultural narratives pertaining to the past in order to understand GE work in the present and articulations of the expected, future outcomes of such GE work.

I will now elaborate my conceptual framework and the method of the study, after which I describe the two empirical narratives and discuss their implications for GE work. The article concludes with the lessons learnt for scholarship and practice.

5.2. Conceptual framework

This article builds on the EFFORTI project – ‘Evaluation Framework for Promoting Gender Equality in Research and Innovation’ (e.g., Reidl et al., 2017; Kalpazidou Schmidt et al., 2017b). EFFORTI takes a ‘theory of change’ approach which requires applying ‘critical thinking to the design, implementation and evaluation of initiatives and programmes intended to support change in their contexts’ (Vogel, 2012: 3). The ‘theory of change’ approach places emphasis on outcomes and thus requires making explicit assumptions about how organisational changes might happen (Kalpazidou Schmidt et al., 2017b: 28). Doing so, the ‘theory of change’ approach enables and indeed requires researchers and practitioners to factor context into any explanation of change – inevitably increasing levels of complexity (p. 27). As social spaces are ‘noisy’ and there are many intervening factors, it is almost impossible to attribute observed changes to a specific policy intervention, perhaps in particular with respect to interventions targeting a deep and extensive social phenomenon like gender inequality (e.g., Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Benschop & Verloo, 2012). In recognition of the complex and non-linear relationship between inputs, outputs, outcomes and impacts in GE intervention design, implementation and evaluation, the EFFORTI conceptual evaluation framework promotes analyses of intervention contributions – not attribution – to effected change (Kalpazidou Schmidt & Graversen, 2020). Consequently, the EFFORTI framework emphasises that GE programmes should strive to foster the right *conditions* to increase the probability that desired gender changes may occur in a given context (Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace, 2019: 7). The organisational, cultural dimensions that are the focus of this article are an important aspect of such change-facilitating conditions.

The article contributes to the literature on GE work in knowledge-intensive organisations. In the literature, organisational culture is widely recognised as the cause of gender inequality (Acker, 1990; Lorber, 1994) and is of-

ten targeted in change programmes in order to improve equality (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Benschop & Verloo, 2012). However, research on links between organisational culture, as a moderator, and GE work is scarce (e.g., Lipinsky & Schäfer, 2015; Cacace, 2009). The literature has studied other aspects of contextual conditions as moderators and their significance for GE actions. Stepan-Norris and Kerrissey (2016) found organisational growth to affect the gender ratio at two North American universities, particularly when coupled with effective GE interventions. Timmers et al. (2010) found organisational structures characterised by high degrees of centralisation versus decentralisation to be conducive to the implementation of GE actions. Organisational size is also assumed to influence the degree of action aimed at inequality (Cacace et al., 2015). Finally, GE programme design, planning and implementation imply extensive negotiations between stakeholders. Following Kalpazidou Schmidt and Cacace (2019), I therefore argue that such negotiations constitute a suitable entry point for this study as they shed light on actors' underlying 'negotiation basis' (p. 14). In this article, I explore actors' cultural negotiation basis, specifically, through the lens of two salient organisational narratives.

Czarniawska (1998) notes that narratives may enter the study of organisations in different ways. For example, researchers may collect stories in the field (van Maanen, 1988), or research may be written in a 'storylike' fashion. Through his notion of 'storywork', Gabriel (2000) argues that much poetic labour goes into weaving stories, observations, thoughts and emotions into new narratives. I undertake such storywork in the following when I empirically develop the two narratives (collected in the field) in the first part of the analysis together with my discussion of the meanings and implications of those narratives for the company's GE work in the second part. Organisational members use narratives to help make sense of their experiences, which are communicated with a richness and directness that mere information lacks (Gabriel & Connell, 2010: 508). In sum, narratives may be regarded as symptomatic of important mental and organisational processes and they represent symbolic reconstructions of the organisation's history. Whether cultural narratives accurately represent certain aspects of an organisation or events that have taken place may be less important. What is important is that cultural narratives exist, and organisational scholars are therefore tasked with investigating their implications. As such, the 'truth' and value of cultural narratives lie in their meaning (Gabriel, 1991).

To unfold the symbolic value and meanings of the case company's history in the present, I engage the 'historicity' concept (e.g., Dalsgaard & Nielsen, 2013; Maclean et al., 2016; Hirsch & Steward, 2005). Historicity brings to the fore that the objects of organisational-ethnographic observations (i.e., the

work activities carried out in organisations) are closely linked with time (Otto, 2013). Following Bourdieu (e.g., 1977, 1990), people's previous participation in certain activities (e.g., human resource management (HRM), CSR or GE work) provides a shared set of dispositions that give sense, direction and shape, both consciously and unconsciously, to their anticipations of the near future, thereby guiding their actions in the present (Otto, 2013: 67). When ethnographers enter an organisational field, they therefore go in a sense to a different time – despite existing in the same present – because they interact with people with whom they do not share a culturally common past (Ibid.). As such, this article explores the linkages between cultural narratives pertaining to the past in order to understand GE work in the present and articulations of expected, future outcomes of such GE work.

5.3. Method

Empirically, this article is based on an ethnography of a Danish multi-service engineering company branched out across the globe (please see appendix 5.6. for more information about the case company). Within this company, I followed the design, planning, early implementation and evaluation process of a new 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Programme' (EDIP). The fieldwork was carried out over four months (late 2017 to early 2018) in the company's headquarters in Denmark, but also included a later field visit to the company's North American office to ensure a well-rounded representation of the case company. The US field visit also facilitated a better understanding of the relationship and dynamic between the Danish, global head office and an international branch. During the fieldwork, I participated in the daily work activities of the company's CSR and HR departments, which were responsible for the concrete EDIP-related tasks. Consequently, few of my research participants were engineers, most of them instead had business, economics or psychology backgrounds. I maintained contact with the company and returned twice for follow-up meetings during which I had the opportunity to ask clarifying follow-up questions, validate information and discuss preliminary analyses.

The fact that I majored in business communication and HRM proved an invaluable key to access. My understanding of HR and CSR enabled me to blend in quite quickly. My embeddedness (i.e., my cognitive and emotional involvement within the research site) enabled me to create positive relationships with research participants. In so doing, my research became a two-way process through which I involved myself in the participants' worlds, and participants were active in the generation of research output. I selected interview participants based on the principle of 'theoretical sampling' known from Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006). Theoretical sampling means that I made

strategic decisions as to what or who would provide the most insightful data when a need for information became apparent (Birks & Mills, 2015). I also ‘snowballed’ participants based on the suggestions of others. This approach required openness to partial and sometimes conflicting truths (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011).

The ethnographic method positions situated meaning front and centre; that is, the sense-making of situated actors together with that of the researcher (Weick, 1995; Yanow, 2012). I thus entered the field with an interest in uncovering the situated meanings relating to gender equality in general and with respect to the company’s GE programme specifically, as perceived by the participants. Importantly, situated meaning is conditioned by a company’s ‘historicity’ (Hirsch & Steward, 2005). As historicity draws attention to ‘the complex temporal nexus of past-present-future [... and] concerns the ongoing social production of accounts of pasts and futures’ (p. 262), the concept is particularly useful when analysing how cultural narratives may affect GE programme planning in the present and expectations of their impacts in the future. This way, the historicity concept also fits particularly well with how the EFFORTI framework embraces the non-linearity of change interventions and promotes notions of contribution rather than attribution, as well as the probability to achieve change (Kalpazidou Schmidt & Graversen, 2020).

The data set upon which I base this article includes recordings and transcripts from 16 interviews,⁶² field notes and an extensive research journal from my four months in the field. The data also includes a comprehensive collection of organisational documents, such as HR and CSR strategies and policies, GE reports and action plans. This article represents an in-depth single-case study, which limits my capacity to make externally generalisable claims. However, an in-depth study of whether and how organisational, cultural dimensions may serve as support factors for GE work in one organisation is intrinsically valuable and may play an important role in the collective knowledge accumulation relating to a specific research field and topic (Flyvbjerg, 2010). An improved understanding of a phenomenon – here, the linkages between organisational culture and GE work – may further provide new and interesting perspectives on the world of which the phenomenon is part (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2013; see also Welch & Piekkari, 2017).

In practice, data analysis constitutes a creative and iterative process across the many different materials of the comprehensive data set. This process was assisted by the qualitative analysis software, NVivo. First, I carried out an open coding of the empirical material (Saldaña, 2016). Once the outlines of

⁶² Four of which were done via Skype with employees in the company’s UK and US offices.

the two narratives explored in this article began to emerge, I thoroughly re-coded the material in a closed manner to ensure a strong empirical foundation for the analysis. On this basis, I engaged in the ‘storywork’ Gabriel (2000) of developing the narratives, the result of which I will present below.

5.4. Analysis

5.4.1. Unfolding the narratives

The company ‘heritage’

The company was founded after World War II. At this time, two men wished to contribute to the rebuilding of society using their professional engineering skills (embodied in particular by one of the founders) and a humanistic, philanthropic vision (embodied in particular by the other founder). The engineering profession and its many subfields of expertise directly affect people’s lives, and to this day the company explicitly aims to create societies in which people and nature thrive. For the company, however, the focus on human wellbeing begins among those most closely within its reach: its employees. From the outset, the founders viewed the company as the ‘extended family of its people’ and believed that work should be a source of joy and satisfaction which, subsequently, would lead to ‘good business’ and happy customers. Therefore, the founders championed financial restraint to ensure job security for the staff, structuring the company so that profits are invested back into it to the benefit of the employees.

To this day, the company bears the footprint of the founders and the values that they instilled in the organisation. The company website proclaims these values and the story of the founders is immediately visible. In other words, the company’s ‘heritage’ is consistently used for marketing and employer-branding purposes. For example, one engineering employee told of how she, as a student, became interested in the company as a future employer because she believed that working there would allow her to ‘do something good for society’. In the field, I also observed a company-organised workshop, which provided information about how employees could become involved in charitable work through different initiatives, and the presenters explicitly emphasised how such involvement mirrors the founders’ values. This narrative constitutes a source of pride for the members of the organisation, towards which they orient their professional identities. Today, the company employs more than 15,000 people worldwide. In a global organisation comprising extensive cultural diversity, the company strategically engages its founding values and heritage to guide and unite employees worldwide. For example, one interview participant explained how one international branch had ‘sort of lost it a little bit’ so, in

order to re-install the heritage in the minds of those employees, the company ran a local campaign entitled ‘Make John Proud’;⁶³ John being the philosopher and humanitarian of the two founders.

Furthermore, despite its global presence, the company still explicitly emphasises its ‘Nordic roots’, and (Danish) employees characterise it as ‘particularly Danish’. The company understands this Nordic affiliation to imply values of social cohesion, egalitarianism, community spirit, as well as a direct, no non-sense approach to work and people (Simonyi & Cagan, 2016). The company’s Danish cultural heritage is also practiced, for instance, when organisational members meet to sing together in the large open space of the corporate headquarters in Copenhagen. Community singing in Denmark dates back to the beginning of the 1800s. When contemporary corporate employees gather to sing, it thus connects them to Danish history and culture while also positively affecting the general atmosphere and mood (Isaksen, 2018), which I experienced while participating in such a musical gathering during my field-work.

In sum, through the heritage narrative, the work carried out in the company comes to symbolise much more than the construction of buildings and infrastructure. As one employee put it, the company has a social impact through its engineering projects and that motivates him to go the extra mile. Moreover, the implication of the company’s championing of the family metaphor and values of egalitarianism and social cohesion is that the organisation commits itself to very high moral standards towards its stakeholders. One executive told of how:

Companies have to do their best with respect to helping to create a holistic existence for people, which is balanced and bearable in some way. We have to do so by working with those levers available to us around the actual work situation. We also have to do so by having opinions on our society and saying ‘You have to do something about these problems or those problems’. And in a sense, our company is in a unique position. It was always our point of departure to contribute, to centre on human beings. A humanistic approach.

He connects this point to GE work, stating that ‘a better world was always the ambition of this company. So that’s why we push this issue.’

⁶³ A branding and culture management initiative about the company’s history, the values of the founders, in particular ‘John’, and the close connection between the engineering profession and people’s lives. The campaign was aimed at reinvigorating a sense of pride in the company ‘heritage’ and ideals of contributing to society, epitomised in the slogan ‘Make John Proud’, which the company hoped would serve as a compass for the employees in their work.

The ‘forgotten’ gender equality initiative

Although the company’s attention to gender issues may be traced back to around the millennium, the implementation of the Danish ‘soft quota’ legislation in 2012–13 was seen a ‘welcome push’ for concrete action in this area. Around the same time, a group of female leaders from the company’s international branches raised concerns about, in particular, the existence of a gender pay gap and a problematic masculine leadership culture in the company. Following these events, the company launched what was labelled its ‘Gender Diversity Initiative’ (henceforth, GDI) in 2014 comprising four elements:

1. A thorough internal investigation of the current state of the problem, perceptions, views and wishes of employees with respect to equality, together with recommendations for actions
2. A gender pay gap analysis
3. Efforts to ensure gender-neutral corporate communications
4. Gender targets for leadership and gender-aware succession planning

Organisational members indicate that the GDI was implemented in a rather rushed manner. Both the motivation and pressures to set things in motion were high. Legal compliance had to be ensured, and the worried female leaders ‘had to be appeased’. The first steps were the internal investigation and the pay gap analysis. These actions were intended to determine whether inequality existed in the company based on which further actions would be decided.

The initiative would appear to have lost its initial momentum for several reasons. The internal investigation took approximately a year to complete, and complications related to the extraction of adequate data for the pay gap analysis delayed the process significantly. The first pay analysis was completed in the spring of 2017. Knowledge of the initiative was kept quite strictly among the involved employees and top managers, meaning that the engineers ‘on the floor’ were generally unaware of the attention being paid to inequality. In this way, the internal accountability to keep the project in motion remained among a limited number of people. Over the years, some of these people left the organisation with little or no transfer of assignments to new people. Finally, members of the organisation described the inertia that followed the original drive as ‘typical of the company’, which in their view can be overly cautious, rigid and therefore reluctant to act.

I came to think of the GDI as ‘forgotten’ when I started following the development of the new EDIP. I was struck by how one aspect of this new programme would be to more or less re-investigate the state of the problem, perceptions, views and wishes of employees with respect to equality and actions – only two years after the original investigation and report. Someone eventually recalled the existence of the old report, which was then ‘dug up’ from a

drawer somewhere. Interestingly, at a meeting, one participant pointed out how none of the authors of the report were in the company any longer. I mentioned that I had spoken with one of them the week before. Also, in a more recent follow-up meeting with two of the research participants that took place more than six months after the fieldwork ended, I asked specifically about the old GDI to obtain more information about it. It seemed as though it was simply not present in the minds of my contacts, as they consistently addressed the new EDIP instead. Finally, in my analysis of my field notes, interview transcripts and countless organisational documents, it was extremely difficult to determine which particular actions constituted the four elements of the GDI and the chronology of the different actions, since different sources indicated different things.

Taken together, the evidence above indicates how members view their organisation. The GDI was implemented because there was no longer any way around it, and employees tend to agree that the steps taken were rather reactive (intending to establish whether a gender problem existed at all) and not very ambitious (ensuring legal compliance⁶⁴). While the motivation and good intentions of management may have been genuine at the time, research participants, knowing of the inaction that followed, now see the initiative (and the somewhat feverish manner in which it was launched) as a way to signal legitimacy in the short term but without much consideration for the future.

Organisational members express frustration with how equality and diversity are addressed in the company. One employee stated rather bluntly:

Personally, I think we're acting too slowly. I think we're being too cautious. I think that some of the things we are starting now – well we're 10 years behind everyone else, sorry to say, and that's probably very characteristic of many of the things we do in general.

This quote indicates a sense of disillusionment with the company and a perceived discrepancy between the company's values and its passivity with respect to gender issues; that is, the company is failing to live up to its own high moral standards towards its employees and society. At the same time, research participants express a desire for the company to engage in gender issues in a

⁶⁴ Compliance in the case of the Danish gender targets legislation (see Danish Business Authorities, 2018; Kalpazidou Schmidt, 2019) implies developing a GE policy, setting industry-adapted gender targets, while emphasis is mainly placed on reporting practices. This is legislation is an accounting-type requirement, which means that companies are obliged to publish information about their performance on gender indicators, such as women in leadership (see also Grosser & Moon, 2008).

thorough and consistent manner, and for the company to see the future EDIP through.

5.4.2. Exploring linkages to gender equality work

The company 'heritage'

Two competing arguments for why the organisation should engage in GE actions co-exist. While organisational members generally opt for business arguments relating to performance benefits, competitors moving ahead or client demands, some draw on the heritage narrative to argue for GE actions. In other words, utility arguments compete with social justice arguments (Nielson, 2014b). Utility arguments, or 'the business case' for more women in top leadership positions, are widely accepted (Rennison, 2014; Baumann, 2016). Nevertheless, there is also research suggesting that the entry of women in executive leadership and boards makes little or no difference to firm performance (Francoeur et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2006) – or that gender equality may have a negative effect on firm performance (Adams & Ferreira, 2009). Considering that the gender equality–performance link is unclear (see also Dickens, 1994, 1999), opting for justice arguments instead may be the better choice. In particular in this specific company, where values play such a pronounced role, justice arguments for gender equality presumably align well with the company heritage. Only in a few internal documents, the company heritage is explicitly engaged as 'sufficient reason for why diversity is important' to the company.

Furthermore, in its global branches, some employees expected the company's Nordic roots to also reflect the Nordics' spearhead status with respect to gender equality in general. However, they were disappointed to find that gender disparity in leadership positions was no better in this company than in their average local corporations. International employees, this way, equate Denmark with other Nordic countries with respect to gender equality (Nielson, 2017). However, Denmark lags behind its neighbours. While Norway and Sweden rank second and third, respectively, on the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index, Denmark currently ranks thirteenth (Schwab et al., 2018).

In contrast to Denmark, Sweden and Norway saw a strong anchoring of feminist issues in politics during the women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Borchorst & Siim, 2008). Consequently, Swedish and Norwegian politicians implemented more progressive equality legislation and kept gender on the agenda in recent decades (Kalpazidou Schmidt, 2019). In Denmark, due to the gradual demobilisation of the Danish women's movement in the 1990s and the already high levels of labour market participation

among women, gender issues gradually waned as a topic of public concern (Nielsen, 2014a). These factors resulted in the belief that gender equality has already been achieved in Denmark (European Commission (EC) 2012a; Dahlerup, 2018), which precludes the need for politicians to legislate and for businesses to implement initiatives to drive gender change.

Similarly, Danish HR and CSR employees agree that the local branches in Norway and Sweden are far ahead with respect to how they view and approach gender and diversity. Therefore, the company might have much to gain from actively utilising its Nordic affiliation. Attentive to contextual differences, looking north for inspiration on how to go beyond the compliance minimum in Denmark may hold a leveraging potential for the company. However, as the support for feminist thinking and interventions is greater in Norway and Sweden than in Denmark (Borchorst & Siim, 2008; EC, 2012a, 2017⁶⁵), opposition to what may in the Danish context be viewed as progressive steps is also more likely. A widespread argument of this opposition is that hiring women through GE interventions will occur at the expense of better-qualified men (van den Brink & Benschop, 2013). Therefore, taking this approach necessitates that the company addresses two important challenges.

First, while the heritage narrative entails aspects, which align well with GE actions, the ‘family’ metaphor is less straightforward. For the company, ‘taking care of family’ involves avoiding unnecessary risks. As change processes entail uncertainty, they unavoidably imply risk. Whether addressing gender equality by means of interventions is perceived as risky due to the company’s less successful previous experience with the ‘forgotten’ GDI or because of the widespread Danish scepticism to feminist views and hesitation towards feminist interventions is unclear. However, one may challenge the view that engaging in GE actions per definition implies risk and reframe the argument. That is, as HR and CSR employees already think that the company is ‘10 years behind everyone else’ (quote above), not stepping up GE and diversity efforts might be construed as the risky move from the business perspective; that is, in order for the company to realise its mission of contributing positively to society and the environment, successfully mobilising all available human resources, including all genders, is essential.

Furthermore, the risk-averse, cautious cultural trait of the company seemingly affects GE work by making employees adjust their expectations in various ways. Some organisational members hope for improvements to the representation of women among leadership, while others see cultural change as pressing. Nevertheless, moderation consistently characterise their expectations and is incorporated as a moderator in their ‘theories of change’ (i.e., their

⁶⁵ Denmark compared to Sweden, Norway not included.

assumptions about how change may occur in the specific context). For example:

I think we'll move on this in phases, because we, as a company, don't move very quickly on things. We prefer chewing everything thoroughly, and [discussing] from all different viewpoints. We need to understand everything before we can actually execute stuff, right? [...] But I hope that this, like so many other things here, is a journey, and that we can slowly get somewhere.

Secondly, the family metaphor may further imply connotations of patriarchal family structures underscored by the idea of the founders of the company. Besides the 'Make John Proud' campaign, the patriarchal symbolism of the founders is maintained through their 'physical' presence in the form of two highly idealised portraits in the large entrance of the corporate headquarters. 'The father' represents an archetypical leadership figure which is both benefactor and centralised authority (Steyrer, 1998). Patriarchal families have a clear division of labour, and the female role is usually that of 'helper' (Acker, 1990), which does not align well with an ambition to empower women in the company. Further, when the founders are maintained as the original and ideal leader of the company today, the heritage narrative risks contributing to the reproduction of masculine leadership norms which may affect whether women are attracted to leadership roles as well how their performance as leaders is judged (e.g., Kanter, 1977; Broadbridge & Hearn, 2008; Timmers et al., 2010).

In sum, some aspects of the heritage narrative may likely serve as a support factor for the new EDIP. However, the idea that change towards gender equality is necessarily 'risky' and the family metaphor require significant re-framing, as patriarchal family structures have historically been detrimental to women's economic and political empowerment (Millett, 1970; Echols, 1989; Thornham, 2001).

The 'forgotten' gender diversity initiative

While the narrative of the former, forgotten GDI describes an initiative viewed by organisational members as a disappointment, this narrative may also serve as a support factor for the new EDIP. There are important lessons to learn from the previous initiative, however, only few incorporate them actively in the planning of the EDIP. One HR practitioner explicitly distances the new EDIP from the old GDI by saying that they are doing their research and preparations much more thoroughly this time around. When the internal investigation and the gender pay gap analysis were commissioned, the people charged with the tasks were informed that these analyses would form the basis

of further actions, although nothing was written on paper as to what or when these next actions would be. Now, one employee involved in the planning of the EDIP states that the team would rather postpone implementation until the timing is ‘absolutely right’. Absolutely right here connotes a long-term orientation which ensures the presence of designated individuals to execute initial as well as subsequent steps. Comprehensive planning also includes realistic expectation-setting with respect to how long concrete actions will take in order to accommodate potential bottlenecks and accompanying frustration if delays occur. Another research participant commented on the ‘dosage’ of actions, saying that the organisation knows from experience that if they ‘sail off full steam ahead, they will run out of gas too quickly’. This seems to suggest that, for the company, launching actions in subsequent steps or phases as opposed to everything at once may be the sensible strategy, which holds the potential to contribute positively to the programme’s long-term sustainability. These are examples of how learning outcomes from previous experiences positively feed into people’s ‘theories of change’ relating to the planning of the EDIP.

Furthermore, in the company’s work on the EDIP, a central point of contention revolves around the degree of communication. One HR leader draws on the work of famous consultancy companies such as the Boston Consulting Group and McKinsey, when she argues that ‘those companies that do best with respect to gender and diversity communicate everything’ (e.g., Cuellar et al., 2017). Whereas others argue that the company is still in a ‘learning process with respect to gender’, finding out what it is capable of, and that communication should therefore be limited. Presumably, caution led management to keep communication about the GDI at a minimum, fearing bad publicity if the report and the pay gap analysis turned out to demonstrate discrimination.

Keeping information about the existence of the initiative among management and the few employees involved in concrete tasks risks hampering impact. Ensuring transparency, on the other hand, by communicating about the initiative increases accountability and therefore holds a ‘performative potential’. Christensen and his colleagues (2013) argue that intention statements, strategy documents etc. constitute descriptions of a desired future state towards which the organisation is currently working to progress. Consequently, discrepancies between what the organisation says it does and what it actually does are inevitable – even desirable. Such discrepancies are indeed necessary, as their elimination constitutes a source of motivation and they ensure organisations some degree of latitude to explore and create new practices (p. 378). Consequently, when the case company reduces communication by restricting information about GE actions to leadership levels, this ‘performative potential’ may be lost at the cost of impact.

Nevertheless, if the company decides to strengthen accountability towards stakeholders by increasing communication, two things seem pertinent. First, integrating extensive, ongoing and holistic evaluation into short and long-term GE programme planning and implementation is crucial in order to activate high levels of continuous learning (Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace, 2017; 2019). And secondly, to ensure trustworthiness, a willingness to communicate not only about successful interventions is important. Sharing evaluations which indicate the inadequacy of steps taken demonstrates how explorations towards the most effective actions occur (Ibid.; see also Benschop & Verloo, 2012). Here, executive leadership plays a central role. The literature stresses that leaders must demonstrate and communicate sustained, long-term motivation and commitment to the gender agenda (Pitts, 2007; De Vries, 2015; Nielsen, 2017). In the case company, sustained and explicit leadership commitment may contribute to preventing inertia from reoccurring. Reframing GE actions from being ‘risky’ to being prerequisite in order for the company to live up to its values and CSR represents one communicative strategy through which leaders may justify commitment. This may be done by anchoring the EDIP solidly and unwaveringly in the heritage narrative. Finally, the problem areas identified by the previous GDI report and gender pay gap analysis may serve as a starting point on which to build the EDIP. This way, the company may also attempt to change the narrative of the GDI as a disappointment and the output produced will turn from ‘forgotten’ to applied.

5.5. Lessons learnt

Based on the analysis, three important ‘takeaways’ stand out: communication, leadership commitment, and comprehensive evaluation. The goal of improving gender equality (equity in leadership, cultural change or otherwise) presumably aligns well with the corporate values of the company. Explicitly and consistently anchoring GE programme design, planning, implementation and evaluation in the company’s heritage may prove valuable in legitimising GE efforts. However, an extensive and diversified communication strategy is needed to avoid the pitfalls associated with engaging the heritage narrative described above, including the potentially problematic aspects of the family metaphor vis-à-vis fostering women in leadership. Effective communication activities require considerations about the content of messages, language, communication channels and target audiences. Communications to employees and external stakeholders increase accountability, which may facilitate internal support and contribute to a smoother implementation of the company’s new EDIP (Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace, 2019).

Open communication about GE activities and results further signal organisational transparency and commitment. Closely related hereto is the issue of leadership commitment. Pitts (2007) states that ‘diversity initiatives should come from the top of the organisation in order to be perceived as credible and worthwhile’ (p. 1583). Therefore, GE programmes depend on the explicit support and commitment from executives (Nielsen, 2017). To say something would (in most cases) imply that one believes it and is, thus, accompanied by a social contract that the speaker will live up to that espoused belief. This way, statements have performative qualities which commit the organisation to act in a certain manner (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; Christensen et al., 2013). Given its founding values, one might argue that the case company has already made that commitment long ago. Now, it is taking steps to live up to the high moral standards installed in it by its founders by addressing gender inequality.

The literature, including this special issue (Marra, 2020; Kalpazidou Schmidt & Graversen, 2020), stresses the importance of defining clear milestones, goals and targets, and of conducting ongoing, multi-level, qualitative and quantitative evaluations of GE change programmes. Such evaluations will enable the company to assess whether it is in fact living up to its own high moral standards and to identify potential adverse areas. Moreover, having a system in place to monitor and analyse ‘change-as-it-happens’ (Dawson, 2011) allows for reflexive and continuous learning about the activated change processes (Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace, 2019). For example, when and how the risk-averse, cautious cultural trait of the company affects GE work by making employees moderate their expectations with respect to what can be achieved through GE initiatives; or if and how (limited) levels of communication may potentially be undermining well-intentioned GE efforts. As emphasised throughout this article, however, the company cannot one-sidedly focus on the present and future; it must also engage with its ‘historicity’. GE programme planning and evaluation are temporal activities. While change planning and evaluation may be considered the – if not conscious, then at least liminal – ways in which considerations of time are entwined with organisational activities, it may also be so in more subtle ways. What having the historicity concept as the theoretical backdrop of this article has made evident is the complex ways in which the past is present in the present as well as in articulations of the future; namely, research participants’ ‘theories of change’.

In sum, the article contributes to the literature on GE work in knowledge-intensive organisations by exploring whether and how organisational, cultural narratives may serve as support factors for GE programme planning, implementation and evaluation. The combination of the narrative analysis with my use of the historicity concept alongside the ‘theory of change’ approach has proven particularly insightful to this end. In this study, the company’s origins

have been mythologised into the heritage narrative, and the multiple events and experiences of past GE actions have been condensed into (what I have constructed as) the narrative of the ‘forgotten’ GDI. These narratives were empirically substantiated through a creative and iterative process across multiple data sources. Interpretations therefore emerge in fleeting, elusive ways that are often difficult to pinpoint exactly, which may be considered a limitation to the undertaken approach. The analysis should therefore most accurately be understood as ‘a particular construction of reality as seen through the lens of a set of interpretation-guiding concepts’ (Esmark, Laustsen & Andersen, 2005: 11, translated from Danish). As I have stressed, the relative ‘truth’ of cultural narratives may be less important. Their value lies in their meaning and what they can tell us about the empirical phenomenon of interest in a specific setting. Still, in order for qualitative-interpretivist research to be persuasive, choices concerning method must align with the methodology⁶⁶ (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2013: 19), and conclusions drawn from the empirical material must be logically consistent and theoretically-anchored to be credible (Welch & Piekkari, 2017). While generalisations based on a single case study may be problematic, in-depth insights into the role of organisational culture in GE work is intrinsically valuable and contributes to the collective knowledge accumulation relating to the specific research field and topic (Flyvbjerg, 2010).

Through the two narratives, this article has illustrated how culture gives sense and direction to GE programme planning and that organisational narratives may in different – and not always straightforward – ways serve as support factors for GE programme planning and implementation, if they are actively but mindfully engaged. Based on the discussion of linkages, the article offers some tentative suggestions as to how the potential of cultural narratives as support factors for GE work may be mobilised. While positive cultural narratives may entail problematic gender dimensions, which require attention, negative cultural narratives may entail important learning outcomes for future GE actions which evaluation can help make explicit. Finally, the article offers a rich example to organisational GE policymakers and practitioners of how to engage in cultural analysis and of how improved knowledge about the organisational culture may contribute to creating those conditions that can facilitate change towards gender equality.

⁶⁶ In other words, the ‘presuppositions about the “reality status” (ontology) of what is being studied and its “know-ability” (epistemology)’ (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2013: 19) must correspond.

5.6. Appendix

About the case company

The case company employs more than 15,000 people working in 300 offices in 35 countries around the world. Its regions include the Nordics, the United Kingdom and Continental Europe, North America, the Middle East and Asia-Pacific. Its biggest markets are buildings, transport, urban planning and design, water, energy and environment, as well as management consulting. As such, the employees come from diverse educational and professional backgrounds.

Since its inception, the company has been carried by a set of strong values championed by the founders. They practiced these values, for instance, by securing the company's long-term survival through a governance structure that places the vast majority ownership⁶⁷ in a corporate foundation. The central task of the foundation, and the delegates who manage it, is to ensure the company's continued compliance with the founders' values, including employee wellbeing. Firstly, the founders wished that profits were to be dedicated to philanthropic causes, but mostly reinvested in the company for the benefit of the employees. Secondly, contributing positively to society, civic engagement and concern for the environment were always part of the founders' vision for the company. Today, the company is, among other things, held accountable for its commitment to sustainability through its status as a signatory to the United Nations' Global Compact.⁶⁸ Diversity and gender equality are also focus areas within the Global Compact framework, meaning that the company has integrated discrimination into its annual CSR reporting since 2011. In 2017, the overall gender distribution within the company was 66–34 per cent male–female. The share of women at D level leadership was 25 per cent, at C level 21 per cent, and at B level 10 per cent. Successor pools of women at these levels fluctuate at around 25 per cent.

In 2013, following the implementation of the Danish 'soft quota' legislation, the company developed policies for non-discrimination and equal treatment together with gender targets for leadership. The company's so-called 'Gender Diversity Initiative' (GDI) was also launched at around this time. It included four main areas: 1) A thorough internal investigation of the current state of the problem, perceptions, views and wishes of employees with respect

⁶⁷ 95.5%; the remainder is owned by employees.

⁶⁸ A voluntary initiative based on leadership commitment to implement universal sustainability principles, incl. the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals. Participation requires sustainability reporting on a diverse range of areas, including human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption. (www.unglobalcompact.com)

to equality, together with recommendations for actions; 2) a pay gap analysis; 3) efforts to ensure gender-neutral corporate communications and 4) gender targets for leadership and gender-aware succession planning.

Following the GDI, the company started to experience increasing client demands with respect to diversity and equality. In 2017, the company therefore began developing its 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Programme' (EDIP), which aims to: 1) raise awareness about unconscious bias and implement strategies to mitigate cultural and structural biases; 2) map regional barriers to EDI across its international branches; 3) develop top female leadership talent; and 4) increase and diversify communication efforts to internal and external stakeholders.

Due to its lengthy history and perhaps especially its brand as civically engaged, the company holds a particular position in Denmark. It is often invited by state agencies and public servants to participate in events, conferences, etc. as representative of 'the Nordic way' of living and working, often in relation to topics such as the environment, sustainability and world-famous Danish design and architecture.

6. Motivations (article 3)

Motivations to engage in organisational gender equality work

Citation:

Utoft, E. H. (forthcoming) Motivations to engage in organisational gender equality work.

Abstract:

Progress towards gender parity in corporate leadership occurs at a glacial pace. Assuming that an increased uptake of gender equality work is necessary to improve equality in organisations, this paper explores how an organisation may be motivated to do such work. It is based on the ethnography of Danish multi-national engineering company. The paper translates the influential Ryan and Deci (1985, 2000) typology of motivations from psychology into the field of organisation and management studies. This typology highlights the degree to which actions are perceived by people as autonomous and volitional. The more internalised and integrated motivation is, the positive extreme being *intrinsic motivation*, the greater the commitment and quality of engagement. Employing Ryan and Deci's work as an analytical lens enables me to unfold the underlying attitudes and goals of the motivations identified in the study. It further facilitates a discussion of how and to what extent individual motivations were capable driving equality initiatives in the case company. The categories of motivation identified are: Legislation, market logics, feminist movements and corporate social responsibility. This study suggests that it may be the existence of these multiple motivations influencing the company over time and in different ways that has created the necessary foundation and a gradual preparedness for gender equality work. Nevertheless, market logics originating from the company's North American and British branches and markets appear particularly important for a recent increasing, strategic focus on gender equality. The Danish context, on the other hand, seemingly harbours little motivation for the company to go beyond the legally required minimum, which may seem surprising given that Denmark is widely perceived a global gender-equality spearhead nation.

Keywords: Ethnography – Gender equality – Equality, Diversity & Inclusion – Motivation – Corporate social responsibility – Engineering

6.1. Introduction

Change is a precondition for contemporary businesses (Thomas & Hardy, 2011). The literatures on organisational change and change management emphasise the importance of the ability of organisations to identify future needs in order to instigate the changes required to meet those needs (Burnes, 2004; Todnem By, 2005). Change efforts are generally framed as originating from a desire to move towards something attractive, for example a reward, or to move away from something unattractive, like a sanction or even a state of crisis (Conner, 1993). The change literature relating specifically to improving gender equality (GE) in organisations has paid some attention to uncovering what may lead organisations to act. Labelle et al. (2015) ask ‘to regulate or not to regulate?’ with respect to corporations’ efforts to raise the share of women on boards. Dickens (1994) asks ‘is the carrot better than the stick?’ in her discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of legal compliance versus the ‘business case’ for gender equality. Georgeac et al. (2018) discuss the ‘business case’ vis-à-vis a ‘fairness case’ for equality. Grosser and Moon (2008) study the *drivers* for company-reporting of GE performance information. De Vries (2015) stresses the importance of leadership *commitment* for driving GE change efforts. An interest in understanding what *motivates* organisations to address gender inequalities seems to underpin this work (although the word ‘motivation’ is rarely used), assuming that this knowledge may enable advocates, policymakers and leaders to encourage more organisations to work to improve equality for women. This wish that more organisations would engage in GE work seems justified, considering women’s continued underrepresentation in positions of corporate and political power across the globe (Schwab et al., 2018). Furthermore, most of the above-cited references look at individual, delimited aspects of motivation, such as legislation compared with assumptions that gender equality leads to business benefits, or women on boards or company gender reporting practices respectively. The fact that all of these aspects co-exist and operate and affect organisations simultaneously warrants research which explores them together.

In this paper, I therefore explore the question of how organisations are motivated to engage in GE work, assuming that an increased uptake of GE activities is desirable and a necessary step towards the goal of improving gender equality in organisations. Empirically, the paper is based on the ethnography of a multi-national engineering company headquartered in Denmark. I chose this specific company for the study as it was, at the time I reached out (summer of 2017), in the early stages of developing a new GE programme giving the impression that motivation was high. This way, the company offered an opportunity to investigate what was at work, driving the initiative at that

particular moment. Findings of this study point to how movements in the case company's North American and British branches and markets are especially important in driving recent GE actions. Given that the company is historically Danish and considers itself strongly anchored in the Nordic tradition and culture (see chapter 5) – which resonates strongly with values of social inclusion and gender equality (Borchorst, 2009; Lister, 2009) – it may seem surprising that central motivations to engage in GE work appear to come from outside of this context.

My objective with this paper is to contribute to the literatures on GE work in organisations by exploring motivations that drive this work. Gender equality work refers to the initiatives that organisations implement in efforts to create gender change, such as improving the gender balance in leadership or creating an inclusive culture. I premise this study on the assumption that some form of motivation has to be present in order for actions to occur. To be motivated means *to be moved* to do something (Ryan & Deci, 2000: 54). I am not interested in the *amount* of motivation per se, since the amount may be the same irrespective of whether a company is pressured to do GE work by legal requirements or whether it does so based on values of social justice, or the belief that it will lead to business benefits. However, the nature and focus of motivation in these three instances certainly differ. As such, I am exploring the *orientation* of motivation which pertains to the underlying attitudes and goals that gave rise to action (Ibid.).

The distinction between *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* motivation may likely be considered the most basic and most widely applied categorisation of motivation. In psychology, intrinsic motivation implies a sense of willingness on the actor's part because of the satisfaction inherent in specific tasks 'rather than external prods, pressures, or rewards' (Ryan & Deci, 2000: 57) (i.e., extrinsic motivation). Extrinsic motivation is often presented as an impoverished form of motivation potentially leading to lack of commitment or resentment. Nevertheless, forms of extrinsic motivation vary in the degree to which they are internalised, the most internal of which come to resemble intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 1985) and thus hold a greater promise of driving action. In this paper, I translate Ryan and Deci's (1985) taxonomy of motivations into my analysis of organisational motivations to engage in GE work. This approach facilitates an improved understanding of 1) the potential of individual motivations to spark action, and of 2) why some motivations are presented as more important or powerful than others in the accounts of my research participants (RPs). My analysis indicates that the existence of these multiple motivations influencing the company over time, and in different ways, may be crucial. The identified motivations include legislation, leadership pressures from international markets and feminist movements, a link to values and branding, and

finally the monitoring and reporting practices associated with CSR. These motivations may have created the necessary foundation and a gradual preparedness for GE work which, with increasing client demands, finally sparked the initiation of the company's new comprehensive Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Programme.

The article proceeds by outlining the ethnographic and analytic method employed, followed by an elaboration of Ryan and Deci's (henceforth R&D, 1985, 2000) typology. I structure the analysis to include four overall categories; legislation, market logics, feminist movements and CSR, which represent a combination of theory-informed and emergent topics from the field. I conclude the article by summarising the analysis and briefly discussing the findings and its implications.

6.2. Method and case

This paper is based on a four-month ethnography of a Danish multi-national engineering company. The company has approximately 15,000 employees globally, and it operates across multiple engineering and consulting areas. I approached the company because it appeared engaged in the GE agenda in the media, and communicated about the topic via their annual reporting and web page. I was invited to follow the development and initial implementation of the company's new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Programme (EDIP). While intended as a 'diversity management' programme (Janssens & Zanon, 2014; Kalev et al., 2006) encompassing multiple socio-cultural categories of differentiation, such as race, ethnicity, age, sexuality, (dis)ability etc., in practice, gender was the 'privileged category' (Staunæs & Søndergaard, 2008). That is, when RPs discussed target groups or desired outcomes of the EDIP, these mainly concerned improving the gender balance of leadership and changing leadership cultures to be more inclusive of women. The relatively short duration of the fieldwork required me to sharpen the focus of my inquiry from the outset (Knoblauch, 2005), e.g. by making my expectations and hypotheses explicit. However, as ethnography is fundamentally 'messy' (Lambotte & Meunier, 2013), relational (Beech et al., 2009; Nycyk, 2018) and thus co-constructed in the meeting between researcher, field and RPs (Pink & Morgan, 2013), surprises are (luckily) inevitable. This way, short and focused ethnographies, such as the present study, may be considered not only theory-informed, but rather a process of embodied exploration (Koning & Ooi, 2013; Mikkelsen, 2013) in which empirical work and theory engage in constant dialogue while the research is ongoing (Pink & Morgan, 2013).

During the four months, I was in and out of the field many times (Whyte, 2013; Wulff, 2002). The company headquarters are located in Eastern

Denmark, whereas my university is located in the West. As such, I would spend three days per week in the field, while staying at hotels close the headquarter building. In practice, my fieldwork involved a lot of ‘participating, overtly and covertly, in people’s daily lives’ by ‘watching what happens, listening to what is said and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews’ (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007: 3). All of this, I documented through extensive journaling, inclusive of the breakthroughs and obstacles which I experienced and how they made me feel. While at my university, I would stay in contact with my RPs via emails and Skype calls. As such, although physically not present in the field, the field was constantly present in my mind and work (Pink & Morgan, 2013; Wulff, 2002). Taking time out-of-field enabled me to process the data that I had produced and prepare for upcoming field visits.

In the field, I focused my attention on those people in the company who were involved in the EDIP based on the assumption that they would be able to relate to me why the company was addressing gender equality. This way, although the company is a multi-service engineering company, my RPs were mostly human resources (HR) and CSR people, some executives in Denmark as well as a few abroad, and a few engineers with a personal interest in the topic – around 20 people in total. I interchanged between desks in the HR and CSR departments, which enabled me to create a bigger network, and to explore drivers for the EDIP from the perspectives of several professional areas in the hope that this would ensure a holistic picture.

In collaboration with my RPs (who are all referred to by pseudonyms), I produced a data set which consists of semi-structured interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), field notes, and a compilation of organisational documents incl. gender-related analyses, HR policies, CSR reports and preliminary plans for the EDIP. In my field notes, I described encounters, episodes and conversations which I had participated in or overheard. I also wrote about my own critical self-reflexivity on the demands of the research experience and methodological challenges (Kara, 2013; Mikkelsen, 2013; Vincett, 2018). While all this data has been thoroughly thematically coded using NVivo (Saldaña, 2016), and disregarding that below I present the findings of my study in a very delimited and linear manner, analysis occurs dynamically and recursively across data sources while in the field and after. Therefore, the motivations that I uncovered often emerged in fleeting, elusive ways which are difficult to exactly pinpoint. Also, my subsequent explorations of them, in the field, were characterised by back and forth, trials and error, as well as personal orientations (Lambotte & Meunier, 2013) because I discussed tentative ideas with my participants. The strength of my approach, and my use of multiple data sources, lies in its ability to construct a ‘context-driven’ rather than

merely a ‘quote-driven’ ethnography (Duneier, 2007), as well as its ethical stance on doing collaborative research, i.e. research *with* rather than *about* participants (Pink & Morgan, 2013).

As mentioned above, in order to focus my ethnography (Knoblauch, 2005), I was conscious and explicit about my expectations and hypotheses concerning potential motivations at work. These included legislation, the so-called ‘business case’ for gender equality, and CSR which I explore below. I also wanted to explore whether feminist currents existed in the organisation as well as whether external, societal feminist movements, such as the #MeToo movement which was taking off around the time of my entry into the field (November 2017), might affect GE activities within the organisation. Because of spatial limits to this paper, I have not included in the analysis those motivations that did not appear important to the company’s GE work, such as it turned out to be the case with the #MeToo movement. I have also excluded industry and competitor pressures because the way this motivation works in driving GE work overlaps with my discussions of the business case for gender equality and CSR. Finally, I have excluded the topic of how the company’s history, values and culture might serve as a motivator for GE work. Since the company’s GE work is generally legitimised through business arguments, it appears that the motivational potential of the company’s history, values and culture remains untapped, which I have discussed in depth elsewhere (see chapter 5).

6.3. Theoretical framework

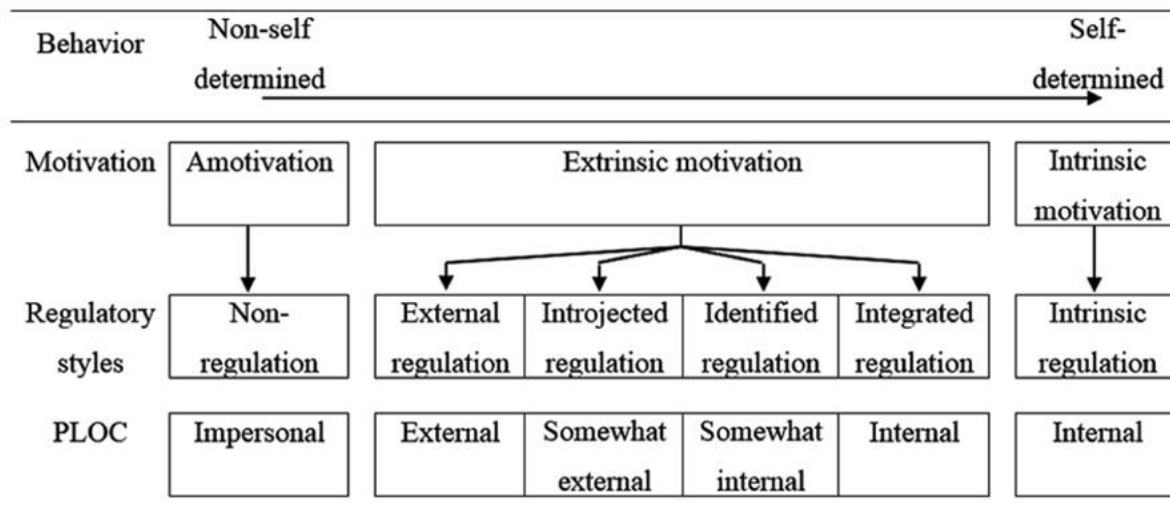
How to change gender inequality is a topic that has occupied feminist organisation scholars for many years (Benschop & Veloo, 2012; Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Hearn, 2000). Generally, change strategies either target people or organisations. Strategies that target individuals are often aimed at the underrepresented group, typically women, ethnic or racial minorities. Mentoring schemes or radical inclusion initiatives, such as quotas or preferential recruitment, are examples hereof (Benschop & van den Brink, 2014). In other instances, strategies targeting individuals are directed at the wider organisational population, or more frequently leadership. Here, interventions may take the form of trainings that are expected to limit the exclusionary effects of unconscious bias in e.g. staff development dialogues or recruitment processes (Williamson & Foley, 2018). Strategies that instead address organisations may aim to change structures, such as parental leave or flexible working arrangements, in order to accommodate diverging needs of different groups of people (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace, 2019). Or, they may

aim to change organisational culture, which is generally presumed a communicative task by e.g. distributing messages of inclusion or images of diversity within the organisation (Ahmed, 2012). Communication may also concern external reporting on GE indicators to increase accountability to stakeholders (Grosser & Moon, 2008). Scholarship and practice widely agree that as gender inequality is a highly complex issue, organisations should pursue top-down, bottom-up as well as cross-cutting GE activities (Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace 2017, 2019). This is why GE work is often organised in comprehensive programmes. Top-down efforts involve ensuring programme infrastructure, such as setting up a governing body, as well as communicating explicit leadership commitment (De Vries, 2015). Mentoring schemes are considered bottom-up, as is organisational support to grass-root initiatives such as informal women's networks, while cross-cutting activities typically cover corporate communication (Kalpazidou Schmidt & Cacace, 2019).

However, before any of the above GE activities occur, I assume that some form of motivation has to be present. In the classical distinction, intrinsic motivation exists in the relationship between individuals and tasks. For example, pupils or employees may be motivated to carry out a task because it is interesting and doing it brings satisfaction (R&D, 2000). Translated into the area of GE work in organisations, the moral, social justice argument for improving gender equality may be interpreted as intrinsic motivation. The social justice argument implies that organisations should improve gender equality simply because it is the right thing to do (e.g., Bleijenbergh et al., 2010; Georgeac et al., 2018). In this understanding, there is no other reward associated with doing GE work than the satisfaction of contributing to creating social change.

In contrast hereto, extrinsic motivation implies doing a task for its instrumental value. This may mean engaging in certain tasks in order to avoid sanctions, in which case people do so based on compliance and external control. Tasks may also be undertaken to achieve a desired reward, in which case the value of the task may be internalised and endorsed by people, and engaging in the task is associated with a sense of choice and willingness (R&D, 2000). Both cases are examples of extrinsic motivation. Therefore, in order to analyse different forms of extrinsic motivation, I employ the R&D (1985) typology of motivations (see Fig. 6.1 below) in which they distinguish different types of extrinsic motivation based on internalisation and integration of values and behavioural regulation. 'Internalization is the process of taking in a value or regulation, and integration is the process by which individuals more fully transform the regulation into their own so that it will emanate from their sense of self' (R&D, 2000: 60).

Fig. 6.1. Typology of human behaviour



Source: Ryan & Deci (1985).

In *external regulation*, action is experienced as completely controlled and often alienated because it has an external *perceived locus of causality* (PLOC in the model) (R&D, 2000: 62), which refers to the degree to which individuals perceive their actions as caused by internal or external reasons. *Introjected regulation* describes an internal type of regulation that is still quite controlling, because actions are often undertaken to ‘avoid guilt or anxiety or attain ego-enhancements or pride’ (Ibid.) *Identification*, in contrast, occurs when the actor recognises the importance of a task and accepts its regulation as their own. Finally, the most autonomous form of extrinsic motivation is *integrated regulation* (Ibid.). Here, external regulations are aligned with and assimilated into existing values and needs. The more internalised extrinsic motivation is, the more self-determined actions become. While *integrated regulation* shares many qualities with intrinsic motivation, the implied motivation is still extrinsic because actions are done for their assumed instrumental value even though they are volitional and valued by actors.

Of course, it must be noted that this typology was developed to understand human behaviour, which clearly implies limitations to my approach since, in this paper, I am trying to understand when and why the organisation, as a whole, moves. While organisations are made of and by humans, individual people may be motivated in different ways, which potentially curtails my capacity to talk about organisational motivation as one thing. Nevertheless, applying R&D’s framework as an analytical lens enables me to unfold those empirically identified themes that RPs draw on as reasons for *why* the organisation is engaging in GE work. My analysis should therefore be understood as ‘a

particular construction of reality as seen through the lens of a set of interpretation-guiding concepts' (Esmark et al., 2005: 11, author's translation). Employing a static, analytical framework in which the boundaries between categories are sharply marked, should always be done warily. I have been cautious to not enforce my use of R&D's typology in order not to risk harming the richness and nuances of my ethnographic, empirical material. In sum, used flexibly and with awareness, R&D's typology aids me in structuring my data and facilitates my exploring the potential of each of these themes – or motivations – for driving action, which I now turn to below.

6.4. Analysis of motivations

6.4.1. Legislation

In 2013, a so-called 'flexible alternative' to a gender quota was enacted into Danish legislation (DBA, 2015). This legislation concerns the largest Danish public and private businesses. It may be considered a 'comply or explain' model which leaves companies 'free to adopt their own pledges or targets that are not legally binding with regard to female representation[, ...] but with mandatory disclosure of compliance or non-compliance (Labelle et al., 2015: 341). In the case company, Danish legislation generally appeared to constitute an implicit minimum for action, which was rarely addressed on RPs' own initiative. For example, Ole responded in the following way when I asked if the gender targets legislation was discussed in the company, when it was introduced:

Yes, we immediately made up our minds about that, when that was implemented. And decided on those targets. And they were based on the one-third or two-thirds that is our benchmark. Anything other than that would create some kind of unnatural, let's say, preference. So based on that, we said: 'Well that's what we need to reflect'. [...]

So when they said 'set these targets' – lovely, right? That's what we were trying to do all along. We didn't do it, but that's what we were thinking. And it's sensible. So let's decide on these targets based on the reality that we live in. So no-one came and created this artificial reality, that we had to adapt to. But a reality that we recognised. So yes, I am a big supporter of that.

Ole's response reflects a positive view on increased political pressure to work to improve GE. At the same time, he clearly distances himself from ideas of a binding gender quota which he assumes would require the company to hire more women into leadership positions than the overall gender distribution in the engineering industry (approx. 30% women). He labels this situation an

‘artificial reality’. In Ole’s perspective, an actual quota may be understood as the most controlling form of extrinsic motivation, namely *external regulation* (R&D, 1985, 2000). A ‘soft quota’ system is, in contrast, understood as less controlling and viewed more positively by this RP, because it forces the organisation to do what they ‘already wanted to do’. This way, the soft quota is viewed as ‘enabling’ and not coercive (Labelle et al., 2015), in the sense that the company largely maintains its autonomy while doing what it must, which is aligned with already existing wishes. When regulation is aligned with existing values and goals, it may instead be understood as *identification*. The binding quota is thus associated with the ‘down-sides’ of extrinsic motivation, namely lack of commitment and resentment, whereas the soft quota led to action straight away, according to this RP. However, setting targets is not the same as creating change in the gender composition among leadership, which is reflected in another interpretation of the impact of this legislation:

According to Pia, the impact of the gender targets legislation wasn’t more than the gender equality policy, which both Pia and Lone almost scoff at. The owner of that policy was (and is) HR, but when it was written it didn’t lead to any action. (Fieldwork journal entry, 1 February 2018)

In Pia’s and Lone’s version of events, the Danish soft quota system may be understood as *external regulation*, which merely generated passive compliance in the sense that a policy was created – which these RPs call ‘a bit weird’ and ‘reactive’. Interpreting the gender targets legislation as *external regulation* in the context of this company resonates with evaluations of the general impact of this legislation. After five years, the Danish Business Authority (DBA) concluded that the effects of the legislation with respect to increasing women’s in leadership had been limited (DBA, 2018: 5). One central explanation for this relates to how, for the first several years, lack of compliance essentially had no consequences (Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2015). Denmark of course also has anti-discrimination and equal-pay legislation, however, as argued by Dickens (1994), such legislation concerns equality of opportunity emphasising formal, procedural equality rather than equality of outcomes. ‘The liberal, procedural approach leads to an essentially negative conception of objectives to be gained – a removal of current discrimination. The legislation does not really call on employers to do anything to promote equality (as distinct from ending present discrimination)’ (Dickens, 1994: 7), whereas the gender targets legislation does, although with little consequence in the case of non-compliance.

Furthermore, European legislation was mentioned by an external interviewee and in organisational documents, but was never addressed by organisational members. In sum, in this study, legislation does not seem to play a

significant role in driving GE action. Through the reporting requirement, it does however imply that gender remains on the organisations 'consciousness' to some extent. As such, I argue that legal compliance serves as an implicit minimum which is important to the case company because it stresses ethical business practices and brands itself as a CSR leader in its industry. With its new EDIP, the company aims to go beyond the legal minimum. Central pressures to do so may be categorised as market logics which I explore below.

6.4.2. Market logics

The business case for gender equality

In my study, I expected to come across the notion of the business case (BC) for gender equality and was curious to see to what degree it might be understood as motivation. The premise of the BC is that failing to improve the gender balance in organisations, often in leadership, is 'tantamount to a devastating loss of social, innovative and economic gains' (Rennison, 2014: 46). The gender equality/diversity → bottom line-link assumes that people of different personal characteristics, incl. gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, age, education, (dis)abilities, etc., bring different understandings and views to the table, which are presumed to improve decision-making and innovation processes (Dickens, 1994, 1999). This line of thought conflicts most noticeably with social justice arguments for gender equality, which suggest that doing GE work and contributing to creating social change is a moral imperative. BC reasoning is explicitly instrumental, making gender equality a means to improving business performance. The BC was engaged by RPs, for instance, in the following ways:

And then you've got to have leadership support which we have now and then you have the client influence, but also there is an economic case for it which is... Quite frankly nobody is going to spend their money on this unless they can see the economic benefit. And that's the one. I have been to lots and lots of seminars and talks and read research on this and it may be the moral thing to do, you know, the correct thing to do but unless there is an economic benefit, that may be long term, I don't think companies will spend money on it. That's a fact really. (Sharon, UK)

... and you can further say that there is also a long-term strategic gain in this, I mean, I think that it is important to take all emotions out of this, and that we look at it and say 'well, this is business strategy besides being corporate citizenship, which of course is important for a company like us [...]'. (Inge)

This is about making the most of the staff that we have. We're not running some charity case here, right? The point is that by ensuring diversity among leaders

but also in the general employee population, well, then we get better, broader perspectives, and then we get the most out of the talent that we have. (Christina)

These quotes seem to imply that while the company is very concerned with ethical business conduct and CSR, it is first and foremost a business. Therefore, what should be most important is ensuring its financial survival making emotions and moral considerations irrelevant. This way, these RPs have *identified* with this extrinsic motivation and have accepted the organisational importance of GE work and its regulation (R&D, 2000: 62).

By now, the notion of the BC for gender equality has existed for several decades (Dickens, 1994, 1999) and Danes generally buy into the idea that women's presence in leadership makes a difference in how companies are run (EC, 2012a). Nevertheless, it appears that the BC for gender equality has not been successful in driving much action in Denmark. Denmark ranks comparatively low (no. 38, having dropped from no. 28 in 2008) in terms of women's 'economic participation and opportunity' in the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index, whereas Sweden, Norway, Iceland and Finland rank 9, 11, 16 and 17, respectively (Hausmann et al., 2008; Schwab et al., 2018). Therefore, the BC may perhaps more adequately be understood as *external regulation*, with its unabashed emphasis on extrinsic rewards, rather than *identification* through which activities are consciously valued and goals are endorsed (R&D, 2000).

The literature offers various explanations for why the BC may not suffice in driving action. Dickens (1999) argues that how gender equality is believed to lead to performance benefits is rarely clear. Sometimes women's supposed 'feminine leadership styles' are viewed as needed to improve business performance, and other times women's presumed ability to empathise with female customers are expected to generate increased sales and profit. Dickens further stresses that even in organisations which accept BC rationales, action will always be selective and partial. By definition, the BC only encourages action in areas where equality and business needs coincide, while at times they may be in direct conflict (Ibid.). As such, understanding the BC as *external regulation* resonates with R&D's point that extrinsic, instrumental motivation is often presented as an impoverished form of motivation potentially leading to a lack of commitment or resentment (R&D, 2000: 55). This may help us to understand why, despite its relative longevity and widespread uptake, the BC apparently has not been able to drive much action to improve gender equality in Denmark.

Client demands

While I expected market logics to be important in driving GE work in the company, one motivation emerged that I had not anticipated. It became apparent that UK clients increasingly require the company to demonstrate their commitment to the gender equality/diversity agenda which is described by RPs, for example, in the following way:

Yes, we've definitely seen a shift. And that's due to many different things. But among other things it's to do with, I guess probably two years ago, we really started hearing from our clients: 'So, what are you *actually* doing?' And it changed from concerning how many men/women do we have, to our policy, our programmes, our data, our all kinds of things. A completely different scope than what we've seen before. (Hanne)

Hanne describes that, now, declaring values of equality and inclusion, or showing gender statistics, no longer suffice. The company has to be able to demonstrate more than words, i.e. policies, concrete actions and, ideally, that it has *already* improved on diverse representation. Several RPs note that the days of showing up to client meetings with teams of 'old men in suits' are over, and that this is a good thing:

So, if we turn up with five men aged 40 to 50–55 in suits and ties, and you can't tell them apart. That's not okay. And it gets more and more attention. When we form a team, we will say: 'Well, this isn't going to work.' So, regardless of whether these are the five most important people, they won't be the ones going. And this of course ensures that, well, now *these* are the ones going, then the new talents will get this opportunity. (Niels)

The literature ostensibly offers little guidance to understand this motivation, but we can draw on Grosser and Moon's (2008) study of CSR reporting on GE. These authors find that clients/customers increasingly engage in responsible procurement and supply-chain management, and that this necessitates other organisations' CSR disclosure on gender equality. However, one thing is disclosure and reporting. What appears to be particularly important and a new tendency is the requirement to change behaviours. Client demands to actively diversify teams and to engage in GE work are changing behaviours in the case company. In my fieldwork journal, I noted that now 'They cannot NOT improve' and labelled this motivation a 'burning platform' (1 February 2018).

The metaphor of the burning platform belongs to the change management literature, and it applies to situations in which staying the same is not an option. Not changing is to risk probable failure, but the required – sometimes

radical – change also implies uncertainty and risk. Ross and Segal (2015) emphasise that ‘in order for people to adopt a radical change strategy, they need to feel it’s important and necessary’. To convey this importance and necessity often ‘involves creating a pain message’ (retrived online, no page number). The pain message relating to the client demands of this study concerns challenging ingrained notions of liberal equality and meritocracy. Appointing people based on diversity markers violates many people’s trust in liberal equality and meritocracy, so to them, changing may be understood as moving towards a worse situation. Furthermore, designing, implementing and monitoring GE work is a new focus in the company. Feelings of competence as well as clearly defined goals positively influence motivation (R&D, 2000). Venturing into the largely unfamiliar territory of **GE** work presumably does not facilitate such feelings. Nevertheless, the company must do it, and I sensed a kind of resignation or acceptance of this fact.

International leadership pressures

In the field, I noticed a narrative which concerned how leadership in the company’s US branch has expressed its frustration that the Danish mother company was not doing enough on the diversity agenda. In my fieldwork journal, I wrote:

The way I’ve heard it from Hanne, Lone and more people, it seemed that a lot of things were going on in the US concerning diversity, and that [US leaders] had then pushed to get [Copenhagen’s] support, indicating that ‘we cannot do this on our own’. (27 February 2018)

Interestingly, in my data set, I only have information about this narrative based on instances in which I asked RPs about it. For example:

Ea: So, in relation to the international and what’s going on internationally in the company, in your branches in the US and the UK. As far as I’ve understood, they’ve also had an impact in terms of driving so that now, you’ve started developing the global [EDI] programme.

Hanne: 100%. Yes definitely. I mean, they are pushing and we’re talking large scale. In the US, it’s to do with the fact that they have so much legislation on what companies have to do. What they have to document. And they have some initiatives that we would never even think about. They have something like Veterans Day cooperation, where they help veterans from the army. We’d never think about something like that in Denmark as an engineering company.

The above field note and quote signal that actors in Copenhagen have experienced leadership pressure from the US as powerful. This leadership pressure

may stem from legal requirements in the US, as Hanne proposes. However, from something I said myself in an interview with a US female leader, it seems that this is not how I understood the narrative:

Ehm so, in Copenhagen, they seem to have this impression that, that one of the significant pressures has come from the US, so that there's already been a lot going on with respect to diversity and gender issues in the US, initiatives of different kinds that I don't know of, but that they, that management from the US has sort of been pushing management at the global level saying, you know 'we need your backing, we cannot drive this on our own, we need direction from you guys, we need resources and so on'. (Ea, interview with Barbara).

The Danish company purchased the American company in 2014. The integration of the two companies occurred gradually, but with the American branch finally taking the Danish company's name and its attached values, heritage and brand (see chapter 5). The American branch constitutes a separate business unit, but the company's global HR and CSR (located in Copenhagen) cover all units. This way, what the American leaders appear to stress is a displacement of responsibility. The Danish central branch has to accept this responsibility and take the lead on the equality and diversity agenda, because the company aims to build its corporate identity as a global enterprise. I interpret the leadership pressures stemming from the US as *introjected regulation* (R&D, 2000), because introjection drives actions in attempts to 'avoid guilt or anxiety or to attain ego-enhancements or pride' (R&D, 2000: 62). The scholarly and practical importance attributed to topics of diversity in organisations is ever-increasing (Longman & De Graeve, 2014). Therefore, to *not* engage in GE and diversity work risks making the US branch seem slow and out-of-touch to stakeholders and competition in its local context. Inadequate GE and diversity work, instigated from the mother company in Denmark, further constitutes a threat to internal legitimacy between the branches, making the Danish global headquarters seem slow and out-of-touch compared with the US. Consequently, international leadership pressures appear to have been an important motivation for GE action in the company, as have feminist leadership pressures which I now turn to.

6.4.3. Organisational feminist movements

Some years before my fieldwork, a group of female leaders in the company's international branches had raised concerns about things not being 'as beautiful as the company was claiming', as one RP described it. Another RP said:

Actually, I am thinking about, it wasn't legislation that pushed [our CEO]. I think it was because he was approached internally by some women. I know he was. (Pia)

In a field note, I wrote:

It seems that gender has been on/off the agenda for some years, but that the company didn't really put words into action before [a female UK leader] brought to their attention a macho culture, sexism and concrete discrimination in the UK branch. (1 February 2018)

The existence of the serious problems that the international female leaders brought to Danish leadership's attention speaks to issues of legal compliance, CSR and conflicts with the company brand. This way, the female leaders who spoke up proved a powerful motivator, which sparked the launch of specific GE actions in 2014 (the so-called Gender Diversity Initiative, see chapter 5), incl. a comprehensive mapping of the state of inequality in the company. Given that this motivation appears to have produced concrete action, it may be interpreted as *integrated regulation* (R&D, 2000). Integration 'occurs through self-examination and bringing new regulations into congruence with one's other values and needs' (R&D, 2000: 62). In this understanding, solving problems of macho culture, sexism and discrimination becomes an urgent moral matter, because these problems conflict with the company's self-perception as an ethical company that aims to treat its employees like 'family'. Still, integrated regulation is extrinsic motivation because actions are undertaken for their 'presumed instrumental value with respect to some outcome that is separate from the behaviour' (R&D, 2000: 62). From this view, integrated regulation drives GE work as reactive, remedial work. That is, the company *needs* to ensure that it is complying with the law and that a potential public-relations scandal does not tarnish its well-established brand and reputation as a responsible actor. Such outcomes pose a great risk to future business performance and, ultimately, to the survival of the company.

The women who pointed out the problems were also involved in the creation of a women's network which, I approached as part of the company's bottom-up GE work. The women's network constitutes an important feminist resource in the organisation since its members were all highly *intrinsically* motivated to address inequality. Presumably, it was the intention to mobilise the women's network in activities relating to the EDIP (Fieldwork journal, 2 November 2017). However, later, it seemed that this would only happen in a way and to an extent determined top-down (1 February 2018). In sum, it appears that the relationship between the women's network and the officially appointed EDIP team is complex, which resonates with Kelan's (2018) work. In

her research, defining gender equality and appropriate steps to improve it constitutes a 'contested terrain' between a women's lobby and the official equal opportunities officer. She argues that the women's lobby 'wants more radical change whereas the equal opportunities officer [has to work] in and through an existing structure' (Kelan, 2018: 110) which poses significant limitations the kinds of changes possible. In the case company of this study, involvement in the network happens on a voluntary basis on top of the members' official work duties. Such factors speak to Ahmed's claim (2012) that to do equality work is to inhabit an organisational space that is not valued. Therefore, despite high levels of individual intrinsic motivation, organisational structures and dynamics appear to hamper the ability of the women's network to contribute to GE work in the company. Seemingly, it is only in the company's interest to leverage that valuable motivation and commitment to eradicate inequality which exists in the network.

6.4.4. Corporate social responsibility

I wanted to explore whether and how CSR played a role in driving GE work in the case company, because gender equality is increasingly recognised as a sustainability and CSR issue (Grosser & Moon, 2008; Henningsen & Søndergaard, 2016; Kilgour, 2007). Right from the case company's inception, the founders championed values of CSR with respect to the environment, society and its employees. Since the 1990s, CSR in the company has been operationalised, in particular, through corporate social disclosure (CSD), which refers to public reporting of performance data on a broad spectre of economic, environmental and social dimensions (Grosser & Moon, 2008). In 2007, the company became a signatory to the United Nation's voluntary corporate governance and citizenship initiative, the so-called Global Compact (UNGC). Since 2009, CSD is also mandated through Danish legislation the requirements for which have been gradually expanded to include information on policies, implementation, and results relating to environmental impact, human rights and anti-corruption (DBA, 2019). Consequently, the company has significant experience with CSD as also expressed by this RP:

This is just to once again stress the importance of measuring. Because I mean, throughout the years, we have said: 'You get what you measure'. People know that when you measure, it is important. Because if you don't measure it, you can talk about it. But that makes it only talk. If you measure it, it becomes concrete. So measuring is crucial. (Ole)

The ‘you get what you measure’ truism turned out also to apply to GE. Through its involvement in the UNGC, human rights became an aspect of the company’s reporting practices. Following a mandatory human rights due diligence, gender equality and diversity were raised as problem areas which could potentially negatively affect the company (Fieldwork journal, 8 November 2017). Disparity in selection, hiring and promotions for women was identified as an urgent category requiring attention. The company’s response was the initiation of the EDIP which also stresses reporting:

And now, [the UNGC has] launched these different platforms. And there’s also one on gender, so we’ve been looking into whether we should be part of that, where they discuss different things. But I guess the most important thing is, as we’ve done, that companies embed [GE work] in order to take it seriously, but also that they report. And one thing that we’ve said in our new [EDI] strategy is: ‘We want to be “best in class” on reporting’. And to be that, there are many different things that have to be disclosed, which are beyond just being legally compliant. So obviously, that is also a driver. So that’s why we have these gender statistics and things like that in our CSR report. (Lone)

Reporting and increased corporate transparency is presumed to strengthen accountability (Grosser & Moon, 2008; Owen, 2003). It seems implicit in the quote that strengthened corporate accountability on gender dimensions will positively affect gender equality. The assumption is that by voluntarily expanding the indicators upon which stakeholders can assess its performance, the company enables stakeholders to also pose demands about increasing efforts in order to reach targets. As such, Lone’s conclusion might as well have been: ‘So obviously, that is also a driver [for more GE work].’

Above, I interpreted international leadership pressures as a threat to the legitimacy of the company and as *introjection*. Introjection motivates by a desire to obtain approval from others (R&D, 2000). The same mechanisms appears to be at work in relation to CSD. If stakeholders judge the company’s performance on gender or levels of GE work indicators as unsatisfactory, this will negatively affect the company’s reputation. In this understanding, the goal of action is simply to meet stakeholders’ expectations. In the slightly more positive interpretation, the company has *identified* with the regulation, which implies that activities and goals are endorsed leading to relatively autonomous and volitional action (R&D, 2000). Considering how Lone aims to go beyond legal compliance moving forward, I tend to opt for the latter interpretation. Nonetheless, it should be noted that Lone’s focus here is on reporting practices (i.e, evaluation of initiatives), rather than GE initiatives and interventions themselves.

Another RP, Hanne, shares Lone's hope that the company will expand its reporting efforts but appears more sceptical:

Actually, I think it's really interesting that in all of this, there's also communication, and in this respect we also soon have to have a discussion with management about openness. I mean, how much are they prepared to go out and communicate about these initiatives? Those companies that do best with respect to gender and diversity, they communicate everything. And for example, we did this pay analysis. If we were really progressive, we'd just put it all out there and say: 'This is what high-level looks like. Yes, we have a problem in some areas, but we're working to correct that.' But I don't think that [our company] is there at all. We're still really cautious. Very soon we have to decide about what should be in [our intranet] pages about EDI. What are we able to disclose? What do we want to report on? Apart from what we already report on. And how open do we want to be about the different initiatives? (Hanne)

In arguing that best practice equals full disclosure, this RP draws on famous consultancies, such as the Boston Consulting Group (e.g., Cuellar et al., 2017). However, scholarship indicates that reporting practices of even those companies that profess best practice are inconsistent at best. Grosser and Moon (2008) found that most companies in their sample claimed to collect a broad variety of gender-segregated data, but chose not to publically report it in fear of negative reactions. This may also be why the case company is, in Hanne's words, 'still really cautious'. Christensen et al. (2013) argue that corporate communications about CSR hold a 'performative potential'. This means that reporting potentially damning information, such as Hanne suggests ('Yes, we have a problem in some areas...'), and the elimination of the problems disclosed (...but we're working to correct that'), constitutes a source of motivation (Christensen et al., 2013: 378). However, if the case company decides to restrict disclosure, this performative potential of CSD may be lost which risks hampering impact of GE work.

6.5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have explored organisational motivations to engage in GE work. Building on R&D (1985, 2000), I analysed four categories of motivation identified in the study; Legislation, market logics, feminist movements and CSR. I argue that it may be the existence of these multiple motivations influencing the company over time, and in different ways, that is crucial. Some of these motivations led to particular small and some larger GE steps being taken by the organisation. These steps may have created a gradual preparedness for GE work which, with increasing client demands, finally sparked a significant leap. In other words, individual motivations emerging at different times and

leading to certain actions may have built the necessary foundation upon which the company has now initiated its comprehensive EDIP. This foundation may work as follows: Legislation is crucial in defining the minimum, and the overlap between CSR legislation with GE legislation is helpful by underlining gender from multiple angles. Legal reporting further appears to retain gender on the organisation's 'consciousness' culminating with the publication of annual reports which, in turn, strengthen accountability. While business case logics appear too abstract to generate concrete action, they can be useful in ensuring support for and commitment to GE work. Leadership pressures also heighten the urgency of GE actions in the company, be they driven by a business orientation to ensure legitimacy or a feminist orientation to end injustice. Most recently, client demands have sparked increasing strategic GE work, because business survival is at stake. It thus appears that imposing responsible supply chain management and procurement, for instance in the public sector in the UK, may constitute a lever to drive GE work that creates ripples across sectors, companies and borders.

7. Discussion

In chapter 6, I mapped out and discussed the four categories of motivation that appear most important in having driven gender equality (GE) work in the case company: legislation, market logics, feminist movements and CSR. My analysis suggested that powerful motivations appear to emanate from the case company's US and UK branches and markets. This finding sparks two questions:

1. Why the US and UK specifically? and
2. Why does the Danish context apparently hold little motivation that drives organisational gender equality work?

To unfold these questions, this chapter discusses the characteristics of the North American and British contexts and Denmark using Esping-Andersen's (1990, 1999) 'three worlds' of welfare regimes and the so-called Scandinavian 'gender equality model' (Lister, 2009; Borchorst, 2009; Teigen & Skjeie, 2017).

In his original work, Esping-Andersen (1990) identified three types of welfare regimes – the social-democratic, liberal and conservative regimes – which emphasise differences along the private–public axis, degree of de commodification⁶⁹ and social stratification vis-à-vis solidarities (Esping-Andersen, 1999). I limit this brief introduction to cover the two relevant ones, namely, the social-democratic, which applies to Denmark, and the liberal welfare regime of which the US and UK are representative. Beginning with the former, the the social-democratic, universalist welfare regime is strongly anchored in Northern Europe. This regime is meant to cultivate cross-class solidarity, which requires widespread acceptance of the taxation necessary to ensure equality (Lister, 2009). In this region, values pertaining to social equality and the increased redistribution of wealth were pushed by peasant and labour movements in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which is believed to have created the basis for the relative (and gradual) responsiveness of Scandinavian societies to women's claims in the 20th century (Borchorst, 2009). In this sense, the creation of the Nordic welfare regime, as we know it today, is closely linked to the emergence of the Nordic GE model (Huber & Stephens, 2000; Melby et al., 2008; Borchorst, 2009).

⁶⁹ Referring to the 'degree to which individuals, or families, can uphold a socially acceptable standard of living independently of market participation' (Esping-Andersen, 1990: 37).

The liberal-residual⁷⁰ welfare regime is typified by ‘a political commitment to minimise the state, to individualise risks, and to promote market solutions’ (Esping-Andersen, 1999: 75–76). Following traditional liberal thinking, ‘the rule of law provides a framework for the pursuit of private ends’, and ‘individuals should be left to pursue their own goals and purposes’ (Deeming, 2016: 406). Such liberal roots are noticeable in the US and the UK. The US is considered extremely residual due to its lack of health care, sickness and maternity benefits, family allowances and parental leave provisions (Esping-Andersen, 1999: 75). The UK has historically been characterised by a reluctance to intervene in the market (e.g., to regulate working hours) and in the domestic sphere (e.g., promoting a more equal gendered division of care labour) (Lister, 2009). From this liberal premise, we might expect these contexts to be inclined towards a *laissez-faire* approach to gender and diversity in organisations, ‘leaving it to market forces and corporations to determine the appropriate level of representation on a voluntary basis’ (Labelle et al., 2015: 340). Nevertheless, both the US and UK have ‘enabling, soft law’ accountancy-type legal schemes to encourage firms to promote diversity (Ibid.: 341). In this manner, gender equality and diversity activities in the case company’s US and UK branches are not left completely to market forces but are encouraged by soft law similar to that which exists in Denmark.

As Deeming (2016) argues, however, ‘[r]eality rarely conforms to the idealised pattern of the liberal model, and liberal principles rarely apply across all social programmes in market liberal societies’ (p. 409). For example, the UK has introduced significant initiatives to improve childcare services aimed at increasing women’s labour-market participation (Lewis, 2006a). More recently, it has also required private and voluntary-sector organisations with 250 or more employees to publish data on their gender pay gaps, with the first reports due in April 2018 (cf. equalpayportal.co.uk, 2020). This initiative also included the case company’s British branch. Tatli (2011) argues that the European Union has played an important role as a driver for equality legislation in the UK despite the political agenda of deregulation, voluntarism and individualism propounded by consecutive Conservative and New Labour governments. In the US, companies are required to disclose staff and leadership data segregated on gender as well as race and ethnic minority groups via mandatory annual reporting to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (Grosser & Moon, 2008). This emphasis on diversity beyond gender is noticeable in the narrative existing in the case company’s Danish headquarters that, in the US, they have a lengthy tradition of addressing diversity (see chapter 6).

⁷⁰ A residual regime ‘adheres to a narrow conception of what risks should be considered “social”’ (Esping-Andersen, 1999: 75).

We can understand the focus on diversity in North American companies as part of the ongoing ‘fight against racism and discrimination’ (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000: 24). The concept of ‘diversity management’ emerged in response to years of contentious affirmative action legislation in the US, offering companies a way to regain control over anti-discrimination and equal-opportunity issues instead of being reactive, forced by law (Risberg & Sørderberg, 2008). In the late 1980s, North American companies became increasingly aware of how, by ‘the year 2000 the majority of its workers would be African-Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, women and other “minority groups”’ (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000: 20). This compelled companies to re-evaluate their future managers, and they began considering those segments of the population that were already targets of affirmative action (Ibid.). Due to its power-evasive, supposedly ‘inclusive’ underpinnings (Ahmed, 2012), diversity management was perceived a palatable alternative to affirmative action, and the concept and its implied practices were institutionalised, supported by public opinion and the law (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000). Subsequently, ‘political interest in diversity management turned economic’ with the advent of business case reasoning (Ibid.: 20), which likely reinforced the understanding that diversity is a business (not a state) matter. This may be why the case company’s American branch is facing strong legitimacy pressures in its local market and must project responsibility for driving diversity activities onto the still relatively new mother company. The Danish company has not historically been faced with similar pressures given how Danish society is comparatively homogenous and because the diversity concept has only more recently been taken up in the Danish vocabulary (Risberg & Sørderberg, 2008). The UK generally also focuses more broadly on diversity (rather than specifically on gender equality), which may be attributed to strong dependence within the UK on lessons learnt from the US with respect to diversity management (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000: 20). Compliance with British diversity legislation therefore also involves implementing equality initiatives for age, sexual orientation and religion (Tatli, 2011). Lessons learnt from the US also imply that the ‘business case’ as well as depoliticised and ahistorical conceptions of the benefits of personal-demographic differences (gender, age, race, sexuality, (dis)abilities etc.), are replacing equal opportunity discourses in the UK (Ibid.: 247).

Although Denmark is generally considered a gender equality spearhead nation, the US and UK outperform Denmark in various respects. In the World Economic Forum’s Gender Gap Index, the UK ranks slightly higher than Denmark on ‘political empowerment’ (no. 15 vs. no. 11) and the US significantly outscores Denmark with respect to ‘economic participation and opportunity’

(no. 38 vs. no. 19) (Schwab et al., 2018). Also, while the Nordics (except Denmark) have generally stood out in their treatment of the domestic division of labour as a structural problem, they have been less willing than, for example, the UK to acknowledge issues of bodily integrity, including gender-based violence, as a matter of public citizenship requiring rights of protection (Lister, 2009: 262). Even more strikingly, the Nordic countries have some of the world's most gender-segregated labour markets, a fact that continues to puzzle scholars across the globe (Estévez-Abe, 2006; Teigen & Skjeie, 2017). I now turn to these and other paradoxes by exploring the social-democratic welfare regime and the 'Nordic gender equality model' in my attempt to unfold the question of why the Danish context apparently harbours little motivation for organisations to engage in GE work.

Following Stier et al. (2001), '[i]n a social-democratic welfare regime, the "social regulation" overrides market principles, and the state is committed to increasing equality among all citizens' (p. 1735). In this manner, it intuitively makes sense that the Scandinavian countries have been comparatively more responsive to women's claims during various 'waves' of women's movements, and that the creation of the Nordic welfare regime is closely linked to the emergence of the Nordic GE model (Borchorst, 2009). Under this regime, there are basically two ways for women to gain equality with men, the most common of which is to facilitate women's opportunities at work by offering state-subsidised childcare; another is by securing women's economic independence by remunerating childcare and housework through maternity and paternity leave, child allowances and similar stipends (Stier et al., 2001). Pushed by feminists, such provisions were implemented in Denmark in the 1970s and 1980s and institutionalised through the creation of permanent GE and anti-discrimination bodies (Borchorst, 2004). These steps meant that Denmark was already among world leaders with respect to women's labour-market participation in the 1980s, particularly the mothers of young children and access to public child-care services. Denmark was also among the spearhead nations at this time in terms of the participation of women in politics, although it has consistently ranked below Norway, Sweden and Finland (Ibid.). It would therefore appear as though the motivation to actively work to progress gender equality was once high in Denmark, which begs the question of how and why this has changed.

Borchorst (2009) argues that Denmark has the most bottom-up oriented GE system among the Nordic countries, with input and pressure from feminist movements 'from below' weakening over the course of the 1990s. The Danish feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s was never embedded in political parties, meaning that gender issues became increasingly overlooked in Danish

politics over time (Borchorst, 2004, 2009). Presumably due to previous successes, Danes now generally agree to the postfeminist myth that gender equality has already been achieved (EC, 2012a, 2017; Dahlerup, 2018), and Danish politicians are generally reluctant to legislate about gender (Ibid.) due, among other things, to strong popular opposition to legal intervention (EC, 2012a; 2017). Moreover, Lister (2009) argues that this ‘taken-for-granted’ status of gender equality as already the reality has changed the focus of the discussions of gender issues; that is, in a presumed progressively equal context, political discourses are generally gender-neutral because gender is no longer recognised as an obstacle to women’s opportunities. Swim et al. (2004) label this gender-blindness ‘modern sexism’. Skewes et al. (2019) explain that ‘[p]eople who subscribe to modern sexism underestimates the degree to which gender leads to discrimination, and often fail to recognize gender discrimination when it takes place’ (p. 73). Studies have shown that the prevalence of modern sexism correlates to a tendency to oppose the policies and changes designed to increase gender equality (Swim et al., 2004; Skewes, et al., 2019), which we also see in Denmark (see Introduction; EC, 2012a, 2017; Dahlerup, 2018). Unfortunately, gender-neutral policies ‘seem to have more of an impact in inadvertently reinforcing the gender division of labor than do the gender-explicit policies in shifting it’ (Lister, 2009: 260). In sum, postfeminism, modern sexism and the championing of gender-neutrality may be central in understanding why Denmark presumably provides little motivation for organisations to engage in GE work.

Nevertheless, the particularities of the Danish legislative and labour-market systems should also be mentioned. In chapter 6, I argued that legislation constituted an implicit foundation for my research participants, which only drives GE work to the extent of the required minimum. Denmark may be characterised as a ‘civil law regime’; that is, a top-down system in which legislation is the primary source of law (Labelle et al., 2015). This seems to imply a belief that once something is made illegal, that something is de facto eliminated. For example, 33 per cent of Danes believe that equal pay is ensured by law (EC, 2017: 64) despite evidence to the contrary (Phil & Jensen, 2018; Statistics Denmark, 2019b). This means that as long as companies comply with legislation, supposedly they are doing enough. While anti-discrimination is oriented towards removing current discrimination, the Danish gender-targets legislation is intended to further the participation of women in leadership positions. Labelle et al. (2015) argue that, due to their top-down approach, civil law regimes are more inclined towards ‘hard solutions’, such as enforced gender quotas. Interestingly, Denmark has opted for the soft, enabling version of a non-binding ‘comply or explain model’ (like the liberal US and UK contexts),

which may likely be explained with reference to the cultural traits (incl. post-feminism and modern sexism) discussed above.

Finally, it is also important to consider the so-called ‘Danish model’ of industrial relations, ‘whose core is a bipartite and relatively centralised system of collective bargaining between strong social partners’ (Mailand, 2006: 375). In Denmark, core industrial relation issues, such as regulating working and employment conditions and pay, are negotiated between labour unions and employer associations. Access to flexible and part-time working arrangements are presumed important for women’s labour-market participation (Stier et al., 2001). With the exception of parental leave,⁷¹ such provisions are determined by the social partners through collective agreements (Mailand, 2006: 382). Like legislation, this fact may also serve as an implicit foundation that speaks to the assumption that, by complying with collective agreements, gender equality is somehow ‘taken care of’. When gender equality is understood to be taken care of through legislation and collective agreements, GE work to create further gender change may seem superfluous. In sum, these structural characteristics of the Danish setting may be part of the explanation for why this context apparently holds little motivation for organisations to engage in GE work.

⁷¹ In 2003, the Danish government decided to extend the maximum leave period for parental leave from six months to one year and to make it more flexible for parents to share leave days between them (Mailand, 2006: 382). This decision was made without consulting the social partners.

8. Conclusion

I begin this chapter by taking readers back to the beginning and the background for this dissertation. Next, I revisit the methods employed and discuss the limitations before recapitulating the findings of the individual empirical chapters and the discussion in chapter 7. Under ‘Contributions and implications’, I aim to tie all the strings together with a particular focus on outlining how, based on this dissertation, we may understand organisational motivation to engage in gender equality (GE) work; how it may be high or low, momentary or sustained, and extrinsic or intrinsic, all of which has consequences for GE work. I end by outlining the possible directions for future research.

8.1. Motivation to study motivation

I opened this dissertation by unfolding the puzzle that sparked the overall research question addressed in this PhD research project; namely, that although both legal pressures and incentives of assumed performance benefits exist, knowledge-intensive organisations in Denmark have generally been reluctant to intervene to improve organisational gender equality. As I detailed in the Introduction, this is e.g. noticeable in the continued underrepresentation of women in corporate and academic leadership, as well as among top researchers in academia. In an intuitive understanding, motivation is just that – pressures or incentives that drive action. This puzzle therefore led me to wonder if there might be something about motivation, with respect to GE work specifically, that a traditional, intuitive conception is not capable of capturing. Or, when those pressures and incentives which we might expect to be able to drive organisational GE work, such as legislation or the assumptions of benefits, are seemingly not working, what then can? As such, this dissertation has explored the very broad question:

How are organisations motivated to engage in gender equality work?

For generally uncharted phenomena, a multi-level, multi-perspectival research design is appropriate to obtain comprehensive insights into the topic of interest. My objective was to investigate whether the motivation to undertake GE work may be understood as something other or more than simply individual (i.e., organisational and/or societal). I therefore operationalised my study of motivation into three sub-studies employing different theoretical and

methodological approaches aimed at generating different kinds of knowledge about the phenomenon. Each study contributes with a unique perspective on motivation to engage in GE work, which enables me to home in on how we may best understand it. Ethnography constitutes the main research method of this dissertation, but interviews were also employed. Due to my aim to explore motivation as potentially organisational or societal, which requires a holistic, situated approach, I opted for embodied research methods. My methodological approach is further anchored in feminist epistemology, which stresses the role of the researcher in the research process and, thus, is explicitly political. By stressing the role of the researcher in the research process, feminist epistemology further embraces the inherently relational, intersubjective ways through which scientific knowledge is produced. Embodied research approaches – with their implied interpersonal, relational foundation – bring the topic of research ethics to the fore. I have unfolded how dependent on positive, mutual relations I was in the field, and how fragile such relationships can be. I have also stressed my concerns about how theory shapes the representation of people I consider good professional connections and personal acquaintances.

Traditional perceptions of research design imply that research unfolds in a linear manner: Pose a research question, select a case, conduct research, analyse data and report findings. But this idealised process rarely reflects reality. When the researcher puts herself at work and at stake in the field, research will always be ‘messy’ (Lambotte & Meunier, 2013; Donnelly et al., 2013). In this PhD project, I have embraced the messiness of ‘embodied’ research, which has been key to my achieving rich empirical material and interesting analyses. Still, messiness and its implied complexity poses high critical reflexivity demands on the researcher which, in turn, necessitated that I wrote myself into the text. Based on my feminist ethics and politics, I have done so to strengthen accountability and with an objective of ‘writing differently’ to challenge ideas of what counts as legitimate academic writing (Pereira, 2012; Pullen, 2018; Weatherall, 2019). Doing ‘oppositional research’ (Hawkesworth, 2012) requires that feminist scholars be well versed in the quality criteria that generally apply to mainstream research within a field, such as the assumption that only high quantities of data can justify truth claims and conclusions of a general nature (Welch & Piekkari, 2017). As a qualitative-interpretivist study, this dissertation aims to understand the meanings of the phenomenon in question (motivation to engage in GE work) in context and its implications for those to whom it relates (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2013: 23). In other words, it does not purport to posit positivist notions of validity as truth, neither mine nor that of my research participants. I have, however, always strived for humility and respectfulness towards their voices and realities in my interpretations. As

a central quality criteria, I pursue ‘spontaneous validity’ (Nielsen, 1995) by aiming to deliver ‘compelling, powerful, and convincing research’ (Angen, 2000: 391), which opens ‘up a more complex, in-depth, but still thoroughly partial, understanding of the issue’ of interest (Ellingson, 2008, cited by Tracy, 2010: 844). In-depth qualitative studies are intrinsically valuable by contributing to the collective knowledge accumulation relating to the research field in question (Flyvbjerg, 2010). Furthermore, an in-depth understanding of people’s everyday sense- and meaning-making processes enables the interpretation of their actions and social worlds (Bryman & Bell, 2007). This way, based on qualitative-interpretivist research, it is possible to draw out a general picture. Rather than ‘generalisability’, the goal is therefore ‘transferability’, which refers to the ability of my research to resonate with readers intuitively and meaningfully (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tracy, 2010) by hopefully stimulating new dialogues, raising new questions, and revealing greater horizons of meaning (Madison, 1988; Gadamer, 1994, cited by Angen, 2000: 389). In the present research, the general picture pertains to my theorising motivation and my construction of Danish society as a ‘postfeminist gender regime’. I outline this picture below (8.2) after recapitulating the findings of the individual empirical chapters.

Chapter 4 links the individual and societal levels by studying GE practitioners in academia and their work in relation to the wider, Danish context, which is construed as a ‘postfeminist gender regime’. The chapter shows how practitioners navigate a minefield of contradictory assumptions and positions when trying to make sense of inequality and adequate solutions on top of widespread opposition to their work. The chapter focuses on three central tenets of postfeminism: a) the idea that gender equality is already achieved; b) assumptions of essential gender differences; and c) choice discourses, which together generally render organisational, GE work superfluous. I introduce the notion of ‘manoeuvring’ to designate how GE practitioners shift between contextually available discursive repertoires; that is, prevalent macro-level, postfeminist discourses and micro-level, marginal discursive positions, which may potentially subvert gendered power relations. Practitioners must try to derive meaning from the structures and cultures that they aim to change while speaking to their institutions through the limited discursive positions that those structures and cultures offer, which are rarely conducive to creating the desired changes. Practitioners must therefore be ‘lingual’ in many different discursive frames, such as defining the problem and goals (Benschop & Verloo, 2012; Lombardo et al., 2009), sameness versus difference feminism arguments (Lewis et al., 2017; Nentwich, 2006), and ‘fix the women’ vis-à-vis ‘fix the organisation’ reasoning (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Wynn, 2019). As practi-

tioners are themselves shaped by the common sense of the 'postfeminist gender regime', they occasionally fall into the traps and contradictions of postfeminist assumptions. However, the analysis finds that even when practitioners draw on postfeminist assumptions and logics, they do not always reach the obvious postfeminist conclusions. I posit that practitioners' critical reflexivity and commitment to gender equality may help us understand why that is. The chapter therefore argues that it is not unequivocally the practitioners' reproduction of postfeminist discourses that hampers progress towards gender equality at Danish universities. In fact, by manoeuvring between different discursive positions, practitioners appear able to not only withstand postfeminist imperatives but to find strengthened motivation to persevere in their efforts to create gender change. In this sense, the study suggests that limits to GE progress in the Danish academy often occur in the meetings between practitioners, their work and stakeholders who are unreflexively absorbed in the postfeminist gender regime.

Chapter 5 explores motivation at the organisational level, based on the premise that GE programme planning and evaluation must take context into consideration (Kalpazidou Schmidt et al., 2017b). This chapter focuses on culture as a contextual factor for GE work by unfolding two prevalent organisational narratives emerging from the ethnographic fieldwork of a Danish, multinational engineering company. Organisational narratives are culturally important, as they are symptomatic of mental and organisational processes, ideas and beliefs, and as they offer rich interpretations of an organisation's history (Gabriel, 1991; Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008). The 'historicity' concept therefore serves as the theoretical backdrop for this chapter (e.g., Dalsgaard & Nielsen, 2013; Hirsch & Steward, 2005), because it blurs linear conceptions of time. History is central to organisational change projects, because the past is always present in the present and shapes actors' actions and conceptions of possible futures (Otto, 2013). In other words, the chapter explores the linkages between two organisational, cultural narratives pertaining to the past in order to understand GE work in the present and articulations of expected, future outcomes. The first narrative concerns the organisation's 'heritage', which covers the story of the philanthropic vision that its founders had for the company with respect to how it should treat its employees and their ambition to contribute to society. The second narrative pertains to a previous but recent GE initiative that seems to have become largely forgotten over time. The analysis finds that both narratives harbour factors that may be supportive as well as unhelpful to creating gender change in the company. To mobilise the supportive potential of these narratives, the chapter stresses the importance of communication, leadership commitment and comprehensive evaluation. Comprehensive evaluation reveals important learning outcomes

from previous GE initiatives, which may benefit the design and implementation of GE work in the present. Some cultural narratives may require reframing to serve as support factors, which is a communicative task. Open communication about GE activities and results further signal organisational transparency and commitment. In sum, chapter 5 illustrates how organisational culture – in not always straightforward ways – gives sense and direction to GE work and that cultural narratives may serve as support factors for this work in different ways if they are actively but mindfully engaged.

The literature seems to be characterised by an interest in the question of how organisations are motivated to undertake GE work, assuming that an increased uptake of GE activities is desirable and a necessary step towards the goal of improving gender equality in organisations. For example, a stream of research aims to empirically substantiate the claim that gender equality and diversity are linked to positive performance benefits (e.g., improved teamwork, decision-making, etc.). This research appears to assume that an awareness of convincing evidence pertaining to this link will in and of itself lead to organisational GE actions. Scholars have also studied the ‘commitment’ to (De Vries, 2015) or ‘drivers’ of (Grosser & Moon, 2008) different kinds of GE actions, but the word motivation is rarely used. To turn motivation from an implicit to an explicit idea, chapter 6 therefore aims to identify motivations to engage in GE work at the organisational and societal levels. Based on the same ethnography as the previous chapter, chapter 6 identifies four categories of motivation: legislation, market logics, feminist movements, and corporate social responsibility. I employ Ryan and Deci’s (1985; 2000) typology of extrinsic motivations, which facilitates my exploration of the potential of identified motivations for driving action by highlighting the degree to which actors perceive actions as autonomous and volitional. The analysis suggests that legislation, in particular concerning requirements to report gender information, seems to ensure that gender issues are retained in the organisation’s ‘consciousness’. However, legislation does not appear able to drive action beyond the legally defined minimum. International leadership pressures in the company would appear to have heightened the urgency of action by stressing the importance of gender equality and diversity for business legitimacy in the United States, as well as by demanding an end to sexism and gender discrimination in the United Kingdom. Most recently, clients (also in the UK) have started requiring the company to increase its attention to issues of gender equality and diversity, expecting action and concrete, demonstrable change. In chapter 6, I argue that it may be the existence of these multiple motivations influencing the company over time, and in different ways, that is crucial. Some of these motivations led to some small and some larger GE steps being taken by the organisation. These steps may have created a gradual ‘preparedness’ for

GE work which, with increasing client demands, finally led to the company initiating its comprehensive Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Programme (EDIP). Aimed at investigating the motivational potential of pressures and incentives, the chapter indicates that some motivations have not had significant impact in driving organisational GE work, whereas others have. Pressures originating from the case company's North American and British branches and markets appear to be particularly important drivers of GE work, whereas the Danish context seemingly holds little motivation to engage in this work.

This finding constitutes the starting point for chapter 7. Because of Denmark's reputation as a world leader in gender equality, it may seem surprising that the US and UK outperform Denmark on some GE indicators and that the motivations from these contexts seemingly influence the decision to engage in GE work in a Danish company. In chapter 7, I discussed the specificities of the US and UK contexts vis-à-vis the Danish context in terms of welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1990; 1999) and 'GE models' (Borchorst, 2009; Teigen & Skjeie, 2017). I argued that the push for GE action emanating from the US and UK branches and their markets may be linked to the tradition in the liberal welfare regime to promote market solutions and limit the role of the state. However, whereas one might expect a liberal state to be more inclined towards a laissez-faire approach to gender and diversity in organisations, the US and UK have 'enabling, soft law' legal schemes to encourage firms to promote diversity (Labelle et al., 2015). The UK has also taken noticeable steps to improve childcare services and recently required companies to publish data on their gender pay gaps. In the US, we may understand the pressure on companies to address diversity as part of the ongoing 'fight against racism and discrimination' (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000: 24). While Denmark also has an enabling, soft-law scheme to promote women in leadership, the Danish context is characterised by high levels of opposition to feminist politics and intervention, as gender equality appears taken for granted and as 'taken care of' through compliance with legislation and collective agreements. Alongside welfare and labour market structures, considering Danish cultural traits, such as 'modern sexism' (Swim et al., 2004) and the distinctive free-spirited liberality (known as *frisind*, discussed in the Introduction), may add to our understanding of why the Danish context seems to harbour little motivation for organisations to engage in GE work.

8.2. Contributions and implications

8.2.1. Theorising motivation

This dissertation contributes to scholarship on gender equality and GE work in organisations. Much of these literatures seem to be implicitly interested in uncovering what may lead organisations to undertake GE work. The contribution made by this dissertation thus lies in it explicitly investigating and theorising motivation. Scholars have studied e.g. policy justifications or organisational actors' reasons for undertaking GE work (e.g., Lombardo et al., 2009; Grosser & Moon, 2008; Nielsen, 2014b; Kalpazidou Schmidt, 2019). As Jerolmack and Kahn (2014) emphasise, however, uncritically inferring behaviours from texts and verbal accounts alone may be problematic, since, for human beings, the relationship between sentiments and acts is complex (see also, e.g., Meyer & Rowan, 1977). In other words, justifications and reasons remain at the level of discourse. Motivation, on the other hand, presumes action (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which adds a different, deeper layer. Employing the motivation concept enables analyses of how a pressure, incentive or contextual, cultural factor drives GE work (or not). It is this capacity to unfold "*the how*" of motivation which is novel and makes a valuable contribution to the literature. Moreover, since the Danish context has long been characterised by a political reluctance (or a lack of motivation) to address persistent inequalities affecting women, organisations have an important role to play in bringing about change. An improved understanding of organisational motivation to engage in GE work based on multi-level, multi-perspectival knowledge may prove valuable by enabling advocates, policymakers and leaders to engage those motivations that hold the greatest potential to drive organisational GE efforts.

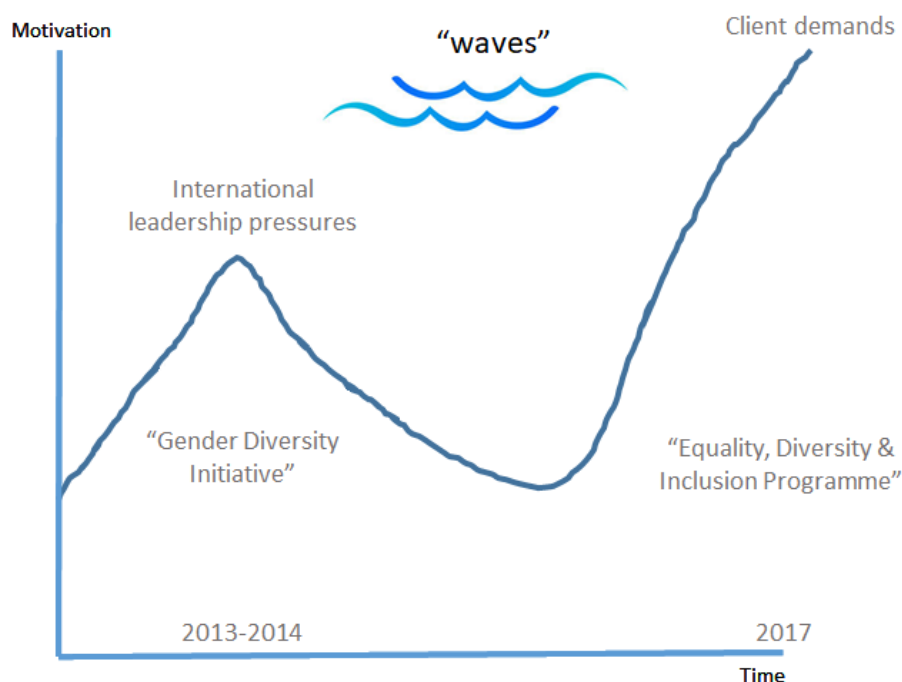
To summarise: motivations exist at all levels of analysis (individual, organisational and societal). We may think of motivation in terms of whether it is high or low or whether there is a lot or a little of it. One might expect the more pressure or incentive, the higher the motivation. However, motivation in the case of GE work is hardly so simple. Based on this dissertation, it seems as though some identified motivations are more likely to drive action than others or that motivations are able to drive action to varying degrees, which in turn implies varying quality of engagement. It may therefore be the co-existence of multiple motivations that affect knowledge-intensive organisations over time and in different ways that creates increasingly more motivation which, with a gradually strengthened 'preparedness' for GE work, leads to minor steps along the way. With 'preparedness' I mean both a general acceptance among decision-makers of the necessity to implement GE initiatives, but also the organisational learning and experience which the implementation

of individual, small initiatives ensure. With more knowledge and experience with doing GE work, organisations are better positioned to also implement comprehensive change projects and programmes. Nevertheless, a single pressure with high urgency – the burning platform – may in and of itself create high motivation, which sparks significant action, like the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Programme (EDIP) in the case company of this research.

With respect to individual, personal motivation, this dissertation suggests that most GE practitioners maintain relatively constant, high levels of motivation to do GE work. However, it would seem as though the practitioners who are invested in GE work for moral or political reasons (i.e., intrinsic motivation), rather than to fulfil other objectives, such as to optimise business performance (i.e., extrinsic motivation), are more adamant in their efforts, because equality is the goal. When the goal is performance benefits, there may be other means of achieving this goal than by undertaking GE work. While the motivation of most practitioners is generally high, it may shift at different moments, such as when they are faced with opposition to GE interventions from stakeholders. At such moments, motivation is likely lower. Conversely, opposition may also be perceived by actors as confirmation of the existence of a gender problem and thus strengthen motivation.

We may further think of motivation in terms of time; that is, whether it is something fleeting and momentary or if it can be sustained in the short or long term. I have argued that legal reporting requirements seem to retain GE efforts on the organisation's 'consciousness', because, in order to ensure legal compliance, the company must continuously produce and store the necessary data for when annual reports are due. In this way, legislation can be understood as a sustained motivation, although leading only to action at the compliance-minimum level. In the company, the 'forgotten' Gender Diversity Initiative was associated with high initial motivation and momentum presumably linked with the urgency created by concerns of sexism and discrimination. Momentum later faded and inertia followed, however, which I have discussed based on aspects of the organisational culture. This suggests that motivation may be difficult to sustain and that it tends to surface in 'waves' over time (see Fig. 8.1). That is, 2013–14 saw a peak in motivation, while the inertia that followed was a low. When my collaboration with the company commenced (2017), motivation was again high in conjunction with the beginning of the design and implementation of the EDIP.

Fig. 8.1. Motivation as ‘waves’



These points beg the question of how, in addition to legislation, organisations can prevent motivation from fading. The literature suggests that explicit leadership commitment (Pitts, 2007; Nielsen, 2017), especially by ‘male champions’ (Connell, 2003; De Vries, 2015), is crucial. This dissertation also points to the presence of intrinsically motivated individuals. The motivation of GE practitioners is central due to their direct role in GE work, although they cannot drive this work without addressing cultural obstacles (see chapters 4 and 5) and leveraging organisational support factors (see chapter 5). Other intrinsically motivated individuals who stood out in this research were the international, senior women who brought issues of sexism and discrimination to the attention of the Danish leadership. While it may seem counterintuitive and contradictory to the truism that ‘there is strength in numbers’, these female leaders appear to have had more success in driving GE actions individually than collectively through the women’s network. Still, as the women’s network exists outside of the established organisational processes and structures, it may serve as a constant ‘nagging’ presence which holds the company to account on its promises and professed intentions – by focusing on outcomes. Official organisational GE practitioners, on the other hand, are forced to be process-focused; that is, to do what they can within the limits of the current system (see also Kelan, 2018). As I argued in chapter 6, however, the motivational potential of the women’s network does not appear to have been mobilised to any great extent.

In the Introduction to this dissertation, I unfolded how, from the outset, I took the idea of motivation merely as a point of entry to my study. I conceptualised ‘motivation’ as any kind of pressure or incentive that appeared to drive organisational action with respect to equality and diversity. The purpose of doing so was partly that the knowledge of which kinds of motivations are more likely to drive GE work may prove valuable, assuming that GE work is necessary for improving gender equality – and assuming that knowledge-intensive organisations, and Denmark more broadly, have an interest in improving gender equality. Secondly, I aimed to investigate whether motivation might be thought of as something other or more than merely individual and personal. This was also why I was cautious about mentioning the word ‘motivation’ to my research participants. The preliminary definition therefore had to be open and my approach had to be exploratory, and I was prepared to discard the motivation concept if it turned out not to be constructive in data generation or helpful in empirical analysis. The methodology literature also warns qualitative-interpretivist researchers against fixing concepts from the outset instead of allowing concepts to emerge from empirical material (Charmaz, 2006; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2013). In my case, this would be like aiming to find motivation and then (surprise!) finding it; or like drawing the bullseye around the spot where the arrow landed. I have strived to avoid this limitation by instead aiming to identify not ‘motivation’ (as one thing), but types of motivation (or motivations) and by exploring how (or not) they work in driving action; and on this basis, to discuss how we may best understand the motivation specifically in relation to GE work.

The question then becomes: Does it still make sense to talk about motivation? Yes. Scholarship has critiqued whether other concepts originally pertaining to individuals, such as ‘learning’, may meaningfully be translated to research on and practice in organisations (Prelipcean & Bejinaru, 2016). Over time, the ‘organisational learning’ metaphor has become taken for granted to the point where its usefulness in understanding organisational behaviour is no longer questioned (Ibid.).⁷² Although the same objections may be raised to my introduction of the construct ‘organisational motivation’, the present research has shown that motivation may indeed be understood as something else (or more) than simply individual and personal – namely collective, organisational and/or societal. Therefore, I maintain the relevance of this idea and conceptualise such motivations as pressures, incentives or contextual and cultural factors that have the capacity to generate or support organisational GE

⁷² This analogy is based on the idea that a ‘goal-oriented social structure, such as an organization, is able to learn like an organism’ (Maier, Prange & von Rosenstiel, 2003: 14, cited by Prelipcean & Bejinaru, 2016).

action independently of any one, particular individual.⁷³ How this capacity may be mobilised to drive action is an empirical matter relating to each motivation identified as unfolded in chapters 5 and 6. Importantly, individual actors and their motivation cannot and should not be bracketed in understanding organisational and societal motivations, just as the organisational and societal context cannot and should not be bracketed in understanding individual motivation. The individual, organisational and societal levels are inextricably linked, and it is the dynamic, analytic movement – in a hermeneutical part-whole understanding – between levels (and the two empirical contexts) that enabled aggregate theorisations about motivation.

Lastly, through this research, I have found that thinking the issue of GE (in)action in terms of motivation enables two readings: one negative and one positive. The negative reading makes actors' statements seem slightly ingenuine and the GE efforts undertaken in organisations half-hearted, making them look like 'window dressing'. In chapter 5, for example, we saw how the previous Gender Diversity Initiative went from high momentum and action to inertia and, over time, to becoming largely 'forgotten', which makes the sincerity and priority of that initiative appear doubtful.⁷⁴ In chapter 6, my use of Ryan and Deci's (1985, 2000) typology of motivations made evident that different types of motivation create different levels and quality of engagement. I deliberately included both the positive and slightly more negative interpretations to underscore that reality does not ask to be described in any certain way (Esmark et al., 2005: 23). Nevertheless, I usually had a leaning towards one or

⁷³ An example hereof is the legitimacy pressures existing among competitors in the US market in terms of expectations pertaining to diversity performance (i.e., representation of racial and ethnic minorities and women) and the implementation of diversity management programmes. Irrespective of the role of people, here, *organisations* are considered actors and markets are considered contexts, at the super-organisational level (above or beyond the organisation), of which the organisation is part. The same logic applies to client demands for diversity-focused procurement and supply-chain management. The women's network, on the other hand, may be slightly more ambiguous. The motivation implied in a feminist movement is by definition collective, although levels of motivation may vary between individuals in such movements, and the motivation of particular individuals (sometimes just one) can be decisive for a whole group.

⁷⁴ Another example is how, in chapter 4, we saw one practitioner arguing that gender-integrating (what was previously) a GE initiative for women was argued as progressive and in keeping with the reality of inequality ('there are more important groups to focus on than women') and the managerial lingo of the day ('GE work has matured into diversity work'), while in fact it undermined the purpose of that specific initiative.

the other interpretation as more plausible considering the extent and scope of the action undertaken. Although it is easy to default to critique and claims of hypocrisy, this makes us no wiser about why organisations abstain from undertaking GE work, whereas discussions about *how* motivations drive action do.

Finally, some of the identified pressures or incentives that might have been expected to drive GE work seemingly did not manage to do so. For example, it is striking that knowledge does not seem to play a role as motivation for GE work in a study like the present, focusing on knowledge-intensive organisations. As I thoroughly detailed in the introduction to the dissertation (1.1. and 1.2.), gender inequalities in Denmark are hardly secret or a new discovery. Besides often being immediately visible, research, reports and personal disclosure document inequalities. This knowledge seemingly plays little role as the driver for GE work, even to the extent that the report developed locally within the case company became ‘forgotten’ (chapter 5). Feminist scholarship on organisations and change also indicates which types of interventions hold the greatest promise of change (e.g., Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Hearn, 2000; Benschop & Veloo, 2012). However, this knowledge is rarely translated into practice. The interventions that are most widely implemented in organisations are those that are most palatable to the majority but that will not lead to systemic change; namely, ‘fix the women’ over ‘fix the organisation’ (Kalev et al., 2006; Wynn, 2019). Such observations presumably challenge the view that the rational application of knowledge to the solution of complex issues is central to the functioning of knowledge-intensive organisations (Alvesson, 2001) or, at least, that gender inequality may be the exception. There may be several reasons for this. For instance, confirmation bias leads individuals to disregard information that is counter to their worldview (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012). When people generally adhere to the dominant view that gender inequality is a problem of the past, information about existing inequalities will be rejected in different ways (e.g. Kelan, 2007; Gill et al., 2017). Alternatively, when knowledge undermining the possibility of meritocracy threatens the legitimacy of one’s professional accomplishments and, thus, identity, attacking the value and truth of that knowledge is not uncommon (Pereira, 2012; Lund, 2015; van den Brink, 2015). Moreover, accepting gender as a fundamental organising principle (Acker, 1990) presumably implies that comprehensive re-organising is needed. Therefore, abstaining from accepting and applying such knowledge functions to maintain and strengthen organisational order (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012). Consequently, this would all seem to suggest that also knowledge-intensive organisations are unable to escape the genderedness of organisations (Greco, 2005; Truss et al., 2012).

8.2.2. Motivation in context: The postfeminist gender regime

Based on an extensive literature review, I contribute to the academic, postfeminist literature by outlining my reading of the postfeminist gender regime. My aim in doing so was to develop a dynamic framework that would facilitate the answering of my research questions. Postfeminism constitutes the theoretical backdrop of this dissertation, and I have emphasised that postfeminism is as much ontology as epistemology (see 3.2.). This means that we may understand it as an empirical, cultural-discursive phenomenon that scholars can study in different ways (ontology). It may also be understood as a theoretical lever among a 'critical toolkit' through which scholars can interpret social life (epistemology). In this way, I adhere to the view that the relationship between ontology and epistemology is reciprocal, because interaction 'takes place between the researcher and reality [ontology], as knowledge [epistemology] is neither acquired nor exists in a vacuum' (Kant, 2014: 80). In this dissertation, the distinction between ontology and epistemology is blurred because postfeminism has shaped the questions I have asked, how I interpreted my empirical material, and I have argued that postfeminism is also 'out there'; namely, that Denmark may be understood as a 'postfeminist gender regime'.

Importantly, my aim to investigate motivation as potentially something more than individual and personal essentially means exploring it in context. I have unfolded this context, Danish society, as characterised by prevalent, even hegemonic, postfeminist discourses around gender and feminism, which have material consequences for people's lives. These include prevalent narratives in culture and media, such as the career–success/love–failure dichotomy (Dejmanee, 2015), consumption and casual sexual relationships as emancipation, alongside traditionalist narratives of achieving felicitous marriage and the neo-conservative 'retreat to the home' as voluntary choice (Tasker & Negra, 2005; Negra, 2009). In organisations, postfeminist discourses render inequalities 'unspeakable' (Kelan, 2007; Gill, 2014b), which refers both to a kind of 'blindness' to the existence of inequality as well as a lack of feminist vocabulary. Discussions around gender are further characterised by a sense of 'fatigue' (Kelan, 2009). Postfeminism has also implied a resurgence of gender-essentialist views (Ronen, 2018) relating to, for example, how 'work–family balance' has become central to understanding women's work life experience (Sørensen, 2017; Rottenberg, 2018). Organisations generally strive to improve gender equality by trying to change women (Wynn, 2019), and men are encouraged to become champions of gender equality (De Vries, 2015). The latter relates to how postfeminist discourses have given rise to new masculine subjectivities, such as the 'new modern man' who is supportive of women and non-sexist (Gill, 2003; Rumens, 2017), as well as 'men's rights activists' and

so-called ‘incels’ (Banet-Weiser, 2018), who vehemently combat the emasculation of men by the hands of feminists.

In chapter 7, the Discussion, I offered some tentative suggestions for the question of why Denmark presumably holds little motivation for organisations to engage in GE work. In addition to context-specific welfare regime and labour market structures, I am convinced that postfeminism plays an important role in relation hereto. I would even go as far as to claim that postfeminism may be part of the answer to the reverse question, namely: How organisations may be motivated to *not* undertake GE work? Which renders postfeminism a factor that directly discourages action. In particular, postfeminism is manifest in the unwavering belief that gender equality has been achieved in Denmark, which Danes widely hold (dear) despite evidence to the contrary (EC, 2012a, 2017). As the literature also stresses, this means that Danes generally champion the success feminism in the past by declaring that gender equality constitutes a defining Danish, cultural value (Danish Ministry of Culture, 2016; Dahlerup, 2018), which precludes the need for further feminist activism, politics or intervention in the present. We see this tendency in the comparatively high levels of opposition to legal initiatives to support the economic and political empowerment of women, which Danes demonstrate (EC, 2012a, 2017), as well as in the endorsement of notions of choice (e.g., with respect to parental leave), and whether and how work organisations should address gender (in)equality (Skewes et al., 2018; 2019). Traits relating to Danish culture and national identity, such as informality, directness and broadmindedness (Danish Ministry of Culture, 2016), may further have exacerbated the postfeminist tendency to trivialise and individualise sexism and sexual harassment, which could be part of the explanation for why, for instance, the #MeToo movement has had less impact in Denmark than elsewhere (Askanius & Hartley, 2019; Reestorff, 2019).

In the Introduction, I unfolded how Denmark is simultaneously falling behind in international comparisons and topping gender equality charts. Denmark, in other words, presents a highly complex picture of progressiveness alongside stagnation, reluctance and opposition. This complexity is exactly what the ‘double entanglement’ (McRobbie, 2009) of postfeminism covers, namely the entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist ideas. Undoubtedly, Denmark has much progress to celebrate when it comes to gender equality. Still, there seem to be aspects, generally pertaining to women’s lives, which continue to be a thorn in the side of Danish society (Schwab et al., 2018; Equal Measures, 2019c). Denmark cannot rest on its laurels. While it may be a convenient conviction, it is simply untrue that gender equality has been achieved in Denmark. However, in order to address persistent as well as new, emergent

inequalities, we must understand them in light of and through their relationship to the changes to gender relations which have already occurred. In other words, as contexts change, so too do the roots and manifestations of inequality. That is, what constitutes '(in)equality' is constantly negotiated and contested through history, politics and culture. It is therefore equally unproductive to barricade ourselves in the feminist trenches of the Second Wave. Gender equality remains an unfinished project, and the Danish context stands out as immensely complex in this regard. That which will take us on from here may well be an improved understanding of this complexity and the nuances between the 'gender equality has been achieved' and 'has anything really changed?' positions. Through its capacity to bring complexity and contradiction to the fore, the postfeminist concept may prove key in this respect. In this dissertation, I have challenged the Danish reputation as being among the global GE leaders. Action is therefore required if Denmark is to live up to its reputation as a global spearhead nation in the future. As long as politicians remain reluctant to push the gender agenda, it will fall on individual organisations to lead the way. But as this dissertation also vividly illustrates, doing organisational GE work is hardly straightforward owing to the many opposing tendencies which may be linked to, and certainly unfolded through, postfeminism.

8.3. Limitations

'So, then, dear, what is your thesis, as a whole?'

'It's a story. The story of my PhD.'

(Kara, 2013: 78)

I opened the dissertation with this quote, which to me epitomises what the mess of embodied research means; namely, that the research process and output cannot be understood in isolation from my life in general. So much more than rational, scientific considerations entered into the decisions I have made and, ultimately, how this research panned out, which is evident in the end product in several ways. For example, the three empirical chapters may seem somewhat disconnected. The explanation is that these chapters had to work as stand-alone, publishable papers while simultaneously contributing to answering the research question of the dissertation. Chapter 4 was opportunistic in the sense that the chance to use the interview material analysed seemed too good to pass up on, and postfeminism had recently caught my attention. Looking back, I would have instead used the interview material from the ethnography (or produced new material specifically) for this paper to improve the

coherence between the empirical chapters. Furthermore, chapter 5 had to fit both into the context of a special issue about the EFFORTI project (see 2.3.2.) as well as this dissertation. These texts subsequently assumed ‘a life of their own’ in the review process for publication, where the appeasement of reviewers and editors often comes at the expense of satisfying personal interests. Indeed, only chapter 6 explicitly investigates motivation, whereas the links between the approaches undertaken in chapters 4 and 5 with motivation may be less clear. Motivation is implicit in these chapters, and readers are required to think beyond how we usefully perceive it; namely, as something that may be located in the organisational culture or how widespread postfeminist discourses (which generally inhibit GE action) do not seem to lessen individual GE practitioners’ motivation in their work. I have stressed that I aimed to study motivation by producing different kinds of knowledge about it. As such, it was never the intention that the theoretical concepts employed (postfeminism in chapter 4, historicity in chapter 5 and motivation in chapter 6) *should* necessarily link. Nevertheless, signposting the motivation in chapters 4 and 5 (and signposting postfeminism in chapters 5 and 6) would doubtlessly have improved the clarity and consistency of the overall argument of the dissertation.

A second factor that may add to the confusion about how the empirical studies relate to each other is the issue of context. Two of the chapters are based on empirical material from the private engineering company, while the other addresses academia more broadly. In the introduction (1.3.4.), I argued that conceptualising my cases as ‘knowledge-intensive organisations’ (Alvesson, 2004; Makani & Marche, 2009) would emphasise the similarities of these contexts and would enable studying them together. Such similarities include how knowledge-intensive organisations employ substantial numbers of highly skilled and educated employees and produce and offer ‘sophisticated knowledge or knowledge-based products’ or services (Greenwood, 2009). While knowledge-intensive companies may be strongly anchored in one profession, such as lawyers or accountants, they may also encompass multiple professional identities, such as the case company of this research (which employs many different engineering specialisations, as well as management consultants) as well as universities. In addition, the advent of ‘academic capitalism’ (Slaughter & Leslie, 1999), increasing ‘corporatisation’ (Tuchman, 2009) and the ‘neoliberalisation’ of universities (Gill, 2009; Lund, 2015; Taylor & Lahad, 2018) have diminished the differences in governance mechanisms. I further argued that gender dynamics in businesses and universities are similar, including, the phenomenon of the ‘leaky pipeline’ or vertical gender segregation (Henningsen & Højgaard, 2006; Poulsen et al., 2016), ‘gender

typing' of work tasks (Alvesson & Billing, 2009) and horizontal gender segregation across professional or academic fields (Teigen & Skjeie, 2017; Larsen et al., 2016). Nevertheless, the manifestation of these dynamics may differ slightly.

Labelling universities knowledge-intensive organisations makes intuitive sense, as Bratianu (2011) argues, given that the mission of universities is to 'create, preserve and transfer knowledge to students and society' (p. 1). To other scholars, such as Greenwood (2009), universities are not by definition knowledge-intensive as a result of the 'quanta of knowledge they contain, the level of education of their personnel, or their sectoral location' (p. 2). Rather, he argues that universities may perhaps be considered 'knowledge rich', but that they do not embody central defining characteristics of knowledge-intensive organisations, including a flat organisational structure and reduced hierarchy. Moreover, in academia, the type of knowledge which is idealised is abstract (at least in some disciplines) and generally far removed from practice, often only validated internally within disciplinary spaces (Greenwood, 2009). Furthermore, as 'loosely coupled organisations' (Weick, 1976), universities are characterised by disciplinary silos and networks of scholars between which coordination and knowledge exchange are limited at best (Greenwood, 2009). The case company of this dissertation, on the other hand, is structured as a matrix through which geography-based units and specialised markets intersect to ensure flexibility and expertise when mobilising large-scale projects. Such organising, in turn, is intended to foster organisational knowledge exchange and learning (Ibid.). Finally, although universities are increasingly required to be responsive to external legitimacy pressures, for instance, to address societal 'grand challenges' as advocated by the European Union (e.g., Kallerud et al., 2013), their reliance on 'a heavily hierarchical system of control' limits their capacity to adjust 'their structures, behavior, and alignment with the environment' (Greenwood, 2009: 10, 2).⁷⁵ For companies, on the other hand, constant change and external adaptation are considered inevitable and as prerequisites for business survival (Burnes, 2004; Todnem By, 2005; Thomas & Hardy, 2011). Such differences are significant, as we have seen in chapter 4, where widespread opposition to GE work seemingly outweighs legitimacy pressures in academia, whereas legitimacy pressures in the case company's international markets create a 'burning platform' for change (chapter 6). From these factors follows an impression that academia may be comparatively reluctant to undertake GE work (Egeland, 2001; Benschop &

⁷⁵ For an alternative perspective on this conclusion reached by Greenwood (2009), see Sørensen, Geschwind, Kekäle and Pinheiro (2019).

van den Brink, 2014; Rosenbeck, 2014; Nielsen, 2016; Palmén & Kalpazidou Schmidt, 2019).

Above, I have discussed several limitations of this dissertation, including a lack of coherence between the empirical chapters and the issue of studying public and private contexts together. In the aggregate theorisation of motivation (8.2.1.), these limitations may cause confusion about from where exactly the conclusions come; that is, which level of analysis (individual, organisational or societal), which empirical setting (academia or the private company) and whether they transfer (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tracy, 2010; see also 8.1. above). Furthermore, critics may hereto add the question: How did I access the organisational and societal motivations identified, if not through the individual research participants?

Firstly, I feel relatively confident in discussing individual motivation across the two empirical contexts. While, in the ethnography, I was mainly interested in organisational and societal motivations, through my daily interactions with practitioners, I gained rich insights into their personal motivations as well. There are undeniable similarities between practitioners in the corporate and academic spheres which, I would argue, are strongly linked to their navigating the postfeminist gender regime as a shared societal, cultural context. However, the organisational contextual differences (discussed in this part of the chapter as well as in chapters 4 and 5) may imply more limitations to the possible scope of action and stronger opposition to GE work in academia than in the engineering company.

Secondly, in response to the latter question: Embodied research practices presuppose the co-presence of people. Inevitably, the research participants play a key role in accessing organisational and societal motivations. That is, through their information and my observations, I aimed to establish a chronology of events and a deep understanding of the company, its processes and culture. This chronology involved determining when different GE initiatives were decided on and implemented, in response to which drivers, and facilitated and inhibited by which factors. I developed a timeline and validated it with my research participants in the company. Therefore, while individuals cannot be bracketed in the study of organisational motivations, motivations can be organisational (or societal) when driving or supporting GE work independently of any one, specific individual (see 8.2.1. above).

Thirdly, the conclusions about the organisational culture (as unfolded in chapter 5) concern only the case company, but they resonate with academic culture, including how the company's leadership ideals or the 'ideal academic' are constituted in masculine terms. Although the chapter about academia (4) studies the links between individual GE practitioners and widespread socie-

tal-cultural discourses, it also adds new postfeminist insights to our cumulative knowledge of university contexts in which GE work takes place. Finally, the conclusions about societal motivations, such as international leadership pressures and market dynamics (chapter 6), are based only on the case company. Still, the knowledge produced (i.e., how central drivers of GE work in the company emerges internationally) provides a new perspective for understanding the general inaction of universities whose central stakeholders (perhaps except international funders, such as the European Commission) are Danish and, thus, subject to the postfeminist hegemony, which generally prevents action.

In conclusion, I must return to the premise of my approach, namely that I have embraced the ‘messiness’ of research. This may seem like a convenient pretext for not thoroughly and critically engaging with the limitations pertaining to local, contextual particularities. However, accepting interpretive research as fundamentally messy and as a creative process implies that rational, conscious linking between different analytical levels and empirical settings may be difficult to pinpoint. The individual, organisational (and thus the corporate and academic setting) and societal levels are inextricably linked, and an improved understanding of each develops hermeneutically through better understandings of the others.

8.4. Recommendations for future research

In chapter 6, client demands for diversity action stood out as particularly important in having contributed to the case company initiating its EDIP. One of the significant developments was how British clients were increasingly posing demands on the company to actively diversify project teams when soliciting engineering projects. As indicated to me during the fieldwork, similar procurement and responsible supply-chain management requirements may also be emerging in Denmark, although this does not yet appear to be very widespread. Assuming client demands hold significant motivational potential to drive GE actions, as indicated by this dissertation, future research may investigate the prevalence of this phenomenon internationally as well in Denmark. Knowledge of the motivation for posing responsible procurement requirements pertaining to diversity and equality, as well as how these requirements work and are generally received, may prove valuable in promoting this practice more broadly. The European Commission offers an alternative case in this regard. The Commission’s research-funding programmes, the so-called Framework Programmes (e.g., Horizon 2020), have explicitly posed requirements for applicants to specify how sex and/or gender analysis is taken into account in the content of proposed research projects. They also require that

applicants grant consideration to the gender balance among research consortium members and advisory boards (see, e.g., EC, 2016). Future research might investigate the impact of such requirements, including whether considering gender aspects in the application also leads to changes in practice while research projects are ongoing; or whether such requirements merely remain a ‘tick the box’ exercise in the application phase with little or no effect subsequent to the awarding of funding.

As I have indicated multiple times in this dissertation, postfeminism has not widely been employed in research empirically situated in Denmark. Future research might therefore investigate how the Danish context specifically shapes postfeminism in culture and media as well as in the workplace (i.e., the forms postfeminism take in Denmark) and, vice versa, how postfeminist discourses affect Danish politics and the lives of Danes. Early international research (McRobbie, 2004, 2009; Tasker & Negra, 2007) equated postfeminism with the disavowal of feminism, as expressed in women’s explicit dis-identification with the ‘feminist’ label (Siegel, 1997; Ferguson, 2010; Scharff, 2012). Later scholarship, including Lewis et al. (2017) and Dean (2010b), has argued that postfeminism does not unequivocally correspond with a disavowal of feminism, as feminism – in moderate forms, palatable to the mainstream (incl. popular feminism and neoliberal feminism) – has seen a resurgence. That which postfeminisms spurns is therefore an excessive feminism characterised by a radical and critical orientation to cultures, structures and change (Lewis & Simpson, 2017). However, as trust that gender equality is achieved alongside dis-identification with the feminist label would appear to be comparatively high in Denmark (EC, 2012a; 2017; Orange & Duncan, 2019), postfeminism in its initial definition may be particularly tenacious here. Future research may further explore why this seems to be the case, and if or how Denmark is a peculiar case with respect to gender relations and equality. Finally, in this dissertation, I have aimed to translate the concept of postfeminism from the micro-level (e.g., of how postfeminist discourses are manifest in culture and media representations and how postfeminist subjectivities are constituted, especially in relation to work) into broader, sociological studies of postfeminism at the macro-societal level. That is, I have argued that we may understand a society as postfeminist. Therefore, future research may seek to empirically substantiate the ‘postfeminist gender regime’ in Denmark or using other contexts as cases. This approach would also potentially contribute to existing discussions in the literature concerning whether postfeminism is (not) a uniquely Western cultural phenomenon (Ashby, 2005; Dosekun, 2015; Gill, 2017).

Finally, developments associated with globalisation increasingly appear to be threatening gender equality. In light of changing times, contexts and political climates, it seems pertinent for scholarship to explore whether the entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist ideas associated with postfeminism is currently being trampled by global movements against the rights of women and LGBTQ+ people. In this dissertation, I have highlighted how the networked nature of popular misogyny online has facilitated the global dispersion of the belief associated with the political projects of ‘men’s rights activists’ and ‘incels’ (involuntary celibates) from the Anglo-American contexts (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Moreover, Kuhar and Paternotte (2017) argue that so-called ‘anti-gender’ movements in Europe have mobilised alongside right-wing populism and religious actors with neo-conservative, traditionalist agendas. Such tendencies are also noticeable in recent political attacks on women’s reproductive health and freedom, as seen in Poland (see, e.g., Grabowska, 2014; Verloo & Paternotte, 2018) and the United States (Banet-Weiser, 2018; see also www.stopthebans.org). Furthermore, to signal progressiveness and legitimacy, certain right-wing politicians and parties, also in Denmark, promote values of ‘gender equality’ as part of their anti-immigration politics (especially with respect to Muslim immigrants); that which Farris (2012) has dubbed ‘femonationalism’. While the incel project is unabashedly misogynist and the femonationalist agenda is undeniably racist, future research may explore whether the uneasy alignment between right-wing, neoconservatism and GE values may be a worrying expression of the ‘double entanglement’ rearticulated for a new era and context. Given the simultaneous resurgence of feminist movements across the globe,⁷⁶ which Banet-Weiser (2018) also attributes to online networks, it is also possible that positions have become more polarised and that the battle lines between feminist and anti-feminist fronts have been drawn ever-more sharply. Since its initial use in culture and media studies, postfeminism has remained in a constant state of definitional flux, which has been part of its generative, analytical strength (Fuller & Driscoll, 2015; Gill, 2016). Future research may therefore continue to explore the ‘constantly moving and changing contours’ of postfeminism (Gill et al., 2017: 230) as long as postfeminism remains valuable to understanding qualitative shifts in gender relations in contemporary social life (Gill, 2017).

⁷⁶ E.g., the Women’s March originating in the US (see: womensmarch.com/) and, most recently, the Las Tesis protests and anthem created by a Chilean feminist collective (see: twitter.com/lastesisoficial).

9. English summary

When it comes to gender relations and issues pertaining to gender equality (GE), Denmark constitutes a highly ambiguous context. Legal requirements exist which oblige the largest public and private companies to address the gender balance at top leadership levels. Alongside this legal pressure, Danes widely buy into the assumption that diversity in organisations is ‘good for business’. In international comparisons, however, Danes simultaneously demonstrate strikingly high levels of opposition to interventions to foster e.g., women’s participation in positions of power, while instead supporting the freedom of individual organisations to decide whether and how they wish to engage with gender issues. Denmark is generally considered part of the progressively gender-equal Nordic countries and, in Denmark, GE is widely perceived as already the reality – a belief that appears to be a source of pride leading to gender equality being named a defining, Danish cultural value. Still, opposition to feminism and feminist intervention appears particularly strong in Denmark. In international surveys, Danes further demonstrate comparatively regressive, traditionalist views on gender, such as essentialist assumptions about the skills, ambitions and wishes of women and men with respect to career and family. In sum, many ambiguous and contradictory views and assumptions about gender and equality seem to co-exist in the Danish context, rendering it an interesting case in which to explore the topic of gender equality in organisations and how organisations work with change programmes and interventions in their attempts to improve gender equality.

This dissertation explores the question of how knowledge-intensive organisations may be motivated to undertake GE work (i.e., initiatives and interventions aimed at, e.g., increasing the number of women in leadership or among academic professors, creating a more inclusive culture for women). The ‘knowledge-intensive organisations’ concept emphasises what an engineering company, offering knowledge-based products and consultancy, shares in common with universities. In this dissertation, these organisations are studied – not comparatively – but together. In an intuitive understanding, motivation refers to pressures and/or incentives that drive action. Such pressures and incentives exist in Denmark, which we might have expected to be able to drive organisational GE actions. For decades, however, Danish public and private companies have remained reluctant to actively intervene to improve the circumstances for women. One may therefore wonder whether there is something about motivation in the case of GE work in organisations that we simply

do not comprehend or if there might be something about motivation, with respect to GE work specifically, that a traditional, intuitive conception is incapable of capturing.

Scholarship in the field of gender, work and organisation seems to be characterised by an interest in the question of what may drive organisational GE action, although the word ‘motivation’ is rarely used. As the idea of motivation to engage in GE work remains a generally uncharted phenomenon, this dissertation takes an explorative approach. Using multiple theoretical and methodological perspectives, it aims to generate different kinds of knowledge about motivation in an attempt to tentatively home in on how we may best understand it. With this approach, the dissertation explores whether we may think of motivation as something other or more than individual (i.e., as collective, organisational and/or societal). Therefore, this dissertation contains three empirical studies which focus on the individual, organisational and societal levels, respectively. Each individual study contributes with a unique perspective on and important insights into the motivation to engage in GE work. Nevertheless, it is the dynamic, iterative movement between the three empirical chapters and the different levels of analysis that ultimately enables theorisation about motivation at the aggregate level.

The empirical analyses build on an organisational ethnography and an interview study. The ethnography took place in a Danish multinational engineering company over a four-month period. The fieldwork also included a brief visit to the company’s North American main office. The empirical material produced in relation to the ethnography includes 26 semi-structured interviews, a comprehensive collection of organisational documents, together with an extensive research journal. The interview study is based on 11 in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The research participants in both studies are individuals who are involved in GE work, typically human resources or corporate social responsibility employees and decision-makers at different levels. The two employed approaches and the three empirical chapters are bound together in their anchoring in feminist research methodology. First and foremost, feminist methodology stresses the role of the researcher in shaping the research process. Addressing the role of the researcher in the research process is further inevitable in relation to this dissertation, given the methods undertaken. Participant observation and interviews represent ‘embodied’ research practices, as they are inherently relational and research output is in this manner intersubjectively produced. An important consequence of embodied research practice is that research must be understood as inescapably ‘messy’. The present dissertation embraces this messiness by emphasising, for example, how emotions and politics are key aspects of field and interview interactions, and how interpretation happens as much in the field as during analyses

and writing. The above dimensions pose high demands on the researcher with respect to critical reflexivity, which this dissertation accommodates by transparently relating and discussing ‘tales of the field’ in the first person.

Although the three empirical studies presented in the dissertation employ different theoretical and methodological perspectives, the concept ‘postfeminism’ constitutes a red thread that binds them together as the explicit and implicit theoretical backdrop. In the literature, the postfeminist concept has spurred much definitional debate. Here, postfeminism is understood as ontology as much as epistemology. This means that the dissertation studies expressions of postfeminist culture understood as something that exists ‘out there’ that can be studied. It also means that postfeminism, understood as a ‘critical toolkit’, has shaped the questions asked in this research; the interpretation of the empirical material; and, in turn, the ‘findings’ that have informed an improved understanding of what postfeminism is.

Exploring motivation as potentially something other or more than merely individual and personal essentially means studying it in context. As described above introductorily, the Danish context harbours many ambiguous and often contradictory views and understandings relating to issues around gender and equality which may be considered postfeminist. Danish society is therefore understood and construed in this dissertation as a ‘postfeminist gender regime’. Engaging postfeminism enables scholarship to capture and make sense of a particular patterning of social life. This patterning becomes noticeable in a set of recurrent, complex and often contradictory discourses around gender and equality, as well as the co-existence of multiple and incongruous forms of feminism, leading to material consequences for people. The prevalence or, as occasionally argued, hegemony of postfeminist discourses justifies the understanding of the Danish context as a ‘postfeminist gender regime’. In this dissertation, postfeminism is specifically employed to unfold the struggles entailed by doing organisational GE work. While the overall focus of this dissertation is motivation (i.e., pressures and incentives), engaging postfeminism facilitates a discussion of opposing dynamics; namely, how the widespread, key postfeminist assumption that ‘gender equality is achieved’ displaces the success of feminism to the past while rejecting any further need for feminist activism, politics or action.

Based on the above premise, approach and theoretical framework, this dissertation finds that GE practitioners manoeuvre a minefield of contradictory assumptions and positions in their work. Despite widespread opposition to equality initiatives, most practitioners maintain high levels of intrinsic motivation to contribute to improving gender equality in their respective institutions. Occasionally, practitioners fall into the traps that the postfeminist com-

mon sense pertaining to gender and equality poses for them, which is not generally conducive to gender change. However, it would not appear as though it is their reproduction of postfeminist discourses that is hampering the progress towards gender equality in the Danish academy, owing to their knowledge of and critical reflexivity concerning gendered power relations. Instead, progress appears to be hampered in the meetings between GE practitioners, their work and other stakeholders, who are unreflexively absorbed in the postfeminist gender regime.

At the organisational level, cultural narratives may serve in different ways as ‘support factors’ for GE work by contributing to ensuring the events and conditions needed to bring about desired organisational changes. Positive cultural narratives may entail problematic gender dimensions, such as traditionalist, masculine leadership ideals, and negative cultural narratives may hold potentially valuable learning outcomes that may benefit GE work. Therefore, to mobilise the motivational potential of organisational culture, comprehensive evaluation (incl. qualitative analyses), gender-aware, strategic communication and sustained leadership commitment are crucial.

Finally, market dynamics and feminist pressures from outside of Denmark appear to increasingly drive GE work in the historically Danish engineering company, while the Danish context seemingly holds little motivation for the company to pursue GE change interventions beyond the legal minimum. According to Danish research participants, these dynamics and pressures stem from, in particular, the United States and the United Kingdom, which may seem surprising given how these contexts are generally perceived to be less egalitarian and gender-equal than Denmark. This finding may be understood as an outcome of differences in welfare regimes and labour market structures, in which the US and UK, for example, have historically been less inclined to legislate on regulating working time or parental leave provisions, but rather to leave such aspects to market forces. Furthermore, both the US and UK are comparatively diverse populations, which implies strong legitimacy pressures in these contexts to tackle racism and discrimination (incl. gender equality). Already in the 1970s–80s, Denmark was among the world leaders with respect to female labour-market participation and access to public childcare services. Presumably because of such previous success, Danes generally now agree with the postfeminist myth that gender equality has been achieved. A strong faith in liberal equality and meritocracy prevails, which, for decades, has left Danish politicians more prone to repeal existing GE legislation than to push for further legal initiatives. This passivity has presumably also been ‘allowed’ given a weakening of the previously strong Danish, feminist movement in the 1990s.

Today, Denmark is simultaneously topping international GE indexes while consistently descending such charts year after year. Denmark, in other words,

presents a highly complex picture of success and progressiveness alongside stagnation, reluctance and opposition. Undoubtedly, Denmark has much progress to celebrate when it comes to gender equality. Still, there seem to be aspects, generally pertaining to women's lives, which continue to present a thorn in the side of Danish society, including economic and political empowerment. Denmark cannot rest on its laurels. While it may be convenient, it is simply untrue to claim that gender equality has been achieved once and for all in Denmark. Therefore, to address persistent as well as new, emergent inequalities, we must understand them in light of and through their relationship with the changes to gender relations which have already occurred. In other words, as contexts change, so too do the roots and manifestations of inequality. Gender equality remains an unfinished project, and the Danish context stands out as immensely complex in this regard. It may be an improved understanding of this complexity that will take us on from here. Through its capacity to bring complexity and contradiction to the fore, the postfeminist concept may prove key in this respect. If Denmark is to live up to its reputation as a global spearhead nation in the future, action is required. And as long as politicians remain hesitant to promote the gender agenda, it will fall on work organisations to lead the way. As this dissertation also vividly illustrates, however, doing organisational GE work is hardly straightforward owing to the many opposing tendencies which may be linked with, and certainly unfolded through, post-feminism.

10. Dansk referat

Danmark må betragtes som en højst kompleks og modsætningsfuld kontekst, hvad angår køn og ligestilling. Der er i Danmark indført lovgivning, der forpligter de største offentlige og private virksomheder til at adressere kønsbalancen i de øverste ledelseslag. Derudover accepterer danskere generelt det argument, at ligestilling og mangfoldighed er godt for bundlinjen. Ikke desto mindre udviser danskere i internationale sammenligninger en bemærkelsesværdig høj grad af modstand mod politisk indgriben for at fremme kvinders deltagelse i magtfulde roller i politik og ledelse. Danskere er overordnet mere tilbøjelige til at støtte, at ansvaret for at fremme ligestilling placeres på individuelle organisationer baseret på frivillighed og reguleret af markedskræfterne. Danmark betragtes almindeligvis som en del af de Nordiske lande, hvad angår køn og lighed, og i Danmark lever en meget udbredt antagelse om, at ligestilling er opnået. Denne antagelse er tilsyneladende en kilde til megen stolthed, hvilket har medvirket til, at kønsligestilling, fra politisk side, er udnævnt som en helt central, dansk kerneværdi. Samtidig er kritik af og modstand mod feministisk aktivisme og politik påfaldende hård i Danmark. I internationale undersøgelser udviser danskere stærkt traditionelle og kønsstereotype opfattelser af eksempelvis kvinders og mænds kompetencer, ambitioner og ønsker med hensyn til karriere og familie. Overordnet set er den danske kontekst kendetegnet ved at komplekse og ofte selvmodsigende antagelser om køn og ligestilling lever side om side. Dette kendetegn gør Danmark til en særligt interessant case til et studie af, hvordan organisationer arbejder med forskellige tiltag med det formål at forsøge at forbedre ligestilling.

Mere konkret undersøger denne afhandling, hvordan videnstunge virksomheder og universiteter kan blive motiverede til at engagere sig i ligestillingsarbejde, for eksempel med et fokus på at forbedre kønsbalancen blandt ledere eller professorer, eller på at skabe en mere inkluderende kultur for kvinder. Intuitivt kan motivation forstås som pres eller incitamenter, som leder til en handling. I den danske kontekst eksisterer både pres og incitamenter, som, vi kunne have forventet, burde kunne lede til handling på ligestillingsområdet. Danske virksomheder og universiteter har imidlertid vist sig yderst tilbageholdende, hvad angår konkrete initiativer med henblik på at forbedre vilkår for kvinder. Dette paradoks kan få én til at undre sig over, om der måske er noget omkring motivation i relation til ligestillingsarbejde i organisationer specifikt, som vi endnu ikke forstår, eller om en intuitiv forståelse af, hvad motivation er, simpelthen ikke er i stand til at fange, hvad der er på spil her.

Forskningen inden for feltet køn, arbejde og organisationer er efter alt at dømme interesseret i spørgsmålet om, hvordan organisationer kan motiveres til at engagere sig i ligestillingsarbejde, selvom ordet 'motivation' sjældent optræder. Derfor, eftersom ideen om motivation i forhold til ligestillingstiltag er ny i litteraturen, tager denne afhandling en eksplorativ tilgang. Ved at benytte flere forskellige metodologiske og teoretiske perspektiver stræber afhandlingen efter at producere forskellige former for viden om motivationsbegrebet i et tentativt forsøg på at indsnævre, hvordan vi bedst kan forstå det. Baseret herpå udforskes det, om vi kan forstå motivation som noget andet eller mere end individuel og personlig, nemlig som kollektiv på både organisations- og/eller samfundsniveau. De tre delstudier af henholdsvis individ-, organisations- og samfundsniveau bidrager hver især med et unikt perspektiv på og vigtig indsigt til spørgsmålet om motivation og ligestillingstiltag i organisationer. Det er dog den dynamiske fortolkning på tværs af de tre delstudier, der gør det muligt at teoretisere om motivation på det aggregerede plan.

De empiriske analyser bygger på et etnografisk studie og en interviewundersøgelse. Etnografien blev gennemført over fire måneder i en dansk, multinational ingeniørvirksomhed. Et kort besøg i virksomhedens amerikanske kontor var også en del af feltarbejdet. Det empiriske materiale indeholder 26 semi-strukturerede interviews, en omfangsrig samling dokumenter, samt en omfattende feltdagbog. Interviewundersøgelsen er baseret på 11 dybdegående, semi-strukturerede interviews. Forskningsdeltagerne var i begge tilfælde ligestillingspraktikere, typisk medarbejdere i Human Resources eller Corporate Social Responsibility, samt ledere på forskellige niveauer. De to anvendte forskningsmetoder og de tre empiriske delstudier er bundet sammen gennem deres forankring i feministisk epistemologi, som først og fremmest understreger forskerens rolle i forhold til at skabe og forme forskningsprocessen. Bevidstgørelse af forskerens rolle i forskningsprocessen bliver kun mere presserende, når der anvendes 'kropslige' forskningsmetoder. Deltagende observation og interviews kan betragtes som 'kropslige' i kraft af deres fundamentalt relationelle natur, hvilket også betyder, at viden skabes på intersubjektiv vis. 'Kropslige' metoder har den konsekvens, at forskningsprocessen uundgåeligt bliver rodet. Denne afhandling omfavner dette rod, da det understreger, at følelser og politik er helt centrale dimensioner af interaktioner i felten og i interviews, samt hvordan fortolkning foregår ligeså meget under feltarbejdet som i analyse- og skrivefasen. Disse faktorer stiller store krav til forskerens kritiske selv-refleksion, hvilket denne afhandling søger at imødekomme ved åbent at berette førstehåndshistorier fra felten.

At undersøge motivation som noget potentielt andet eller mere end blot personlig og individuel, betyder grundlæggende at studere den i kontekst. I denne afhandling konstrueres den danske kontekst som et 'postfeministisk

kønsregime'. Som beskrevet indledningsvist ovenfor, lever mange tvetydige antagelser om køn og ligestilling side om side i Danmark. Anvendt som et kritisk analytisk greb er 'postfeminisme' i stand til at fange og belyse et særligt diskursivt mønster. Dette mønster opererer gennem et sæt meget udbredte og komplekse diskurser, der relaterer sig til køn, ligestilling og feminisme, og som har konkrete konsekvenser for folk og deres liv. Dette betyder, at postfeminisme udgør både ontologi og epistemologi. I denne afhandling anvendes det postfeministiske begreb særligt med henblik på at diskutere de udfordringer, der er forbundet med at lave ligestillingsarbejde i organisationer. Selvom afhandlingens primære fokus er motivation, det vil sige pres og incitamenter, muliggør anvendelsen af postfeminisme og konstruktionen af Danmark som et postfeministisk kønsregime en diskussion af modsatte dynamikker og eksplicit modstand – nemlig hvordan den postfeministiske kerneantagelse om at 'ligestilling er opnået' fortrænger feminismen og dens succes til fortiden, hvorved yderligere feministisk aktivisme, politik og handling bliver overflødig.

Med udgangspunkt i den ovenfor beskrevne præmis, tilgang og teoretiske ramme, finder denne afhandling, at danske ligestillingspraktikere manøvrerer i et minefelt af komplekse forståelser af og holdninger til deres arbejde. Trods udbredt modstand mod ligestillingstiltag tyder denne afhandling dog på, at praktikere besidder og kan fastholde et højt niveau af indre motivation til at bidrage til arbejdet for ligestilling i deres respektive organisationer. Det sker, at praktikere falder i de 'fælder', som det postfeministiske kønsregime rummer, som generelt ikke er fordrende for at skabe kønsforandring. Tilsyneladende er det ikke praktikernes reproduktion af postfeministiske logikker, som hæmmer ligestillingsarbejdet, fordi de ofte udviser kritisk refleksivitet omkring forskellige forståelser af og tilgange til problematikken. Ligestillingsarbejde hæmmes derimod nærmere i mødet mellem praktikere, ligestillingstiltag og øvrige aktører, som øjensynligt er ukritisk indlejret i det postfeministiske kønsregime.

På det organisatoriske niveau kan kulturelle narrativer på forskellige måder udgøre 'støttefaktorer' for ligestillingstiltag ved at bidrage til at sikre de omstændigheder, der øger chancen for, at interventioner skaber den ønskede effekt. Positive kulturelle narrativer kan rumme problematiske aspekter, som for eksempel stereotype kønsopfattelser eller et maskulint ledelsesideal, som kan undergrave velmente ligestillingsinitiativer, og negative kulturelle narrativer kan indeholde potentielt værdifuld læring, som kan komme fremtidige initiativer til gode. Denne afhandling peger derfor på vigtigheden af holistisk evaluering inklusive kvalitative analyser, kønssensitiv strategisk kommunikation, samt vedvarende ledelsescommitment, for at det motiverende potentiale af kulturelle narrativer kan mobiliseres.

Derudover fremstår dynamikker i det internationale marked samt feministiske bevægelser i udlandet som centrale 'drivere' af ligestillingsarbejde i den historisk danske ingeniørvirksomhed, hvorimod den danske kontekst efter alt at dømme ikke huser tilsvarende mekanismer, der kan motivere organisationen til at engagere sig i ligestillingsarbejde ud over det lovmæssigt påkrævede minimum. Dette kan forstås som en konsekvens af forskellige velfærdsmodeller og markedsstrukturer, da USA og Storbritannien historisk har været mindre tilbøjelige til at lovgive for at regulere for eksempel arbejdstid og adgang til forældreorlov, men i stedet lader virksomheder og markeds kræfterne styre sådanne vilkår. Derudover har både USA og Storbritannien markant mere mangfoldige befolkninger, hvilket betyder, at legitimitetspresset til at adressere racisme og diskrimination er tilsvarende stærkt i disse kontekster. Allerede i 1970'erne og 1980'erne var Danmark blandt de mest ligestillede lande i verden i forhold til eksempelvis kvinders deltagelse på arbejdsmarkedet og offentlige børnepasningsmuligheder. Denne tidligere succes har antageligvis medført, at danskere i dag i langt overvejende grad abonnerer på den postfeministiske myte at 'ligestilling er opnået'. En stærk tillid til den liberale forståelse af lighed samt det meritokratiske ideal har øjensynligt medført, at danske politikere i årtier har afstået fra at gå aktivt ind i den ligestillingspolitiske agenda. Denne passivitet er muligvis også et produkt af, at den ellers historisk stærke danske kvindebevægelse svækkedes især i løbet af 1990'erne, hvormed presset nedefra forsvandt.

I dag topper Danmark internationale ligestillingslister, samtidig med at vi klarer os konsekvent dårligere i internationale sammenligninger år for år. På denne måde giver den danske kontekst et billede af succes og progressivitet side om side med stagnation, tøven og modstand. Danmark kan med rette fejre mange store fremskridt. Der synes dog stadig at være punkter, som generelt vedrører kvinders politiske og økonomiske empowerment, som bliver ved med at være en torn i det ellers så umiddelbart ligestillede danske samfunds øje. Det er bekvemt, men ikke sandt, at fastholde, at ligestilling er opnået i Danmark. For at kunne adressere sejlivede, gamle samt nye fremspirende uligheder, er vi nødt til at forstå dem i konteksten af de forandringer i forhold til kønsrelationer og -roller, som er sket i Danmark. Med andre ord; når kontekster forandrer sig, gør årsager til og manifestationer af ulighed det også. Ligestilling udgør et ufærdigt projekt, og den danske kontekst fremstår som særligt kompleks i forhold hertil. Det kan være en forbedret forståelse af denne kompleksitet, som vil kunne bidrage til at tage os videre herfra. I kraft af dets evne til at få tvetydighed og selvmodsigelser til at træde i forgrunden, kan det postfeministiske begreb potentielt spille en afgørende rolle i den forbindelse. Det kræver handling, hvis Danmark fremadrettet skal leve op til sit ry som en verdensleder på ligestillingsområdet, og så længe danske politikere

ikke reagerer, vil ansvaret for handling ligge hos individuelle virksomheder og universiteter. Som denne afhandling beskriver, er det at lave ligestillingsarbejde i organisationer langt fra et ukompliceret forehavende, hvilket kan have med det postfeministiske kønsregimes mange modsatrettede tendenser at gøre.

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