Gender Equalities: What Lies Ahead

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Introduction

It is hard to over-estimate the importance of the social sciences in informing us of deepening inequalities at work and how they are likely to play out as the economic crisis generated by the Covid-19 pandemic unfolds. Understanding the long-term impact of the pandemic requires us to think across the intersection of work and society. This is challenging work as part of taking an intersectional position means accepting that transmission thrives on inequality where occupation and occupational risk are often mapped onto class, race, ethnicity, sex and geography (Middleton et al., 2020).

The precision with which we research these intersections is vital to inform policy and practices in the workplace, not only in relation to job losses but also to progression and professional identity. These same inequalities affect whether the ordinary expertise of working somewhere gets captured in our research. Social science alerts us to the silencing and invisibility of the most expert and vulnerable frontline workers, and to the possibility that the erosion of gender equality is often vastly under-represented. This omission distorts the data, misrepresenting problems such as the extent of occupational trauma and mental illness and misunderstanding what actions are likely to minimise these inequalities. The social sciences have been central in mapping the experience of Covid-19 for specific groups of workers, including those with care responsibilities.

In 2020 Work, Employment and Society (WES) carried out a survey for the British Sociological Association (BSA) of academics in relation to the impact of Covid-19 on their research and academic publishing activities. The findings are now familiar but remain concerning, particularly with regard to the impact of the pandemic on people with care responsibilities and the consequences of casualisation for pre-existing inequalities. Of our 302 respondents (80% of whom are UK-based), 60% of those defining themselves as primary carers saw a significant increase in caring responsibilities, including responsibilities for homeschooling. The proportion of primary carers who were able to spend only 0-9% of their working time on research activities jumped from 7% pre-pandemic to 32% in 2020, and the majority of primary carers (59%) reported spending less than 20% of their time on research. Familiar professional inequalities were reflected in a decline in engagement with academic publishing, with 15% of respondents unable to carry out any reviewing work, increasing to 30% for primary carers, and 55% having to reduce their review work significantly. With regard to research funding, 40% of respondents overall have not been able to submit funding applications since the onset of the pandemic, which increases to 70% of primary carers and 65% of Black, Asian and other ethnic minority respondents. Consistent with our casualised employment relations context, 5% of respondents overall and 7% of primary carers experienced termination of contract; 10% overall and 12% of primary carers experienced reduction of paid hours; 20% overall say their performance appraisal has been negatively affected, with this

figure rising to 27% for primary carers and 29% for Black, Asian and other ethnic minority respondents; and 15% overall say their ability to complete probation has been negatively affected, increasing to 20% for primary carers.

The articles in this issue of WES explore the 'stubborn' nature of gender equality at work outside of the Covid-19 context, helping to demonstrate how women's pre-existing disadvantage in the workplace puts them at particular risk from turbulent environmental scenarios such as the current pandemic. In "Women's vulnerability to the economic crisis through the lens of part-time work in Spain", Valeria Insarauto (2021, this issue) researches the impact of the Great Recession on women workers in Spain and the dynamic relationship between underemployment and gender norms that relegate women involuntarily to secondary status. It is argued that part-time work, despite its growth, has served to re-establish women as family-dependent and vulnerable workers as it represents a 'transmission mechanism' through which gender norms are reinforced, highlighted during a period of economic crisis.

Much of the attack on inequalities is silent and evasive. Looking at the UK Labour Party's all-women selection lists in "'I wanted more women in, but…': Oblique resistance to gender equality initiatives", Owain Smolović Jones, Sanela Smolović Jones, Scott Taylor and Emily Yarrow argue that where the social norm for equality cannot be openly challenged, a process of quiet erosion can take place. By defending localized decision-making autonomy, emphasising the importance of meritocracy and failing to challenge established norms and practices, an 'oblique resistance' to the dismantling of patriarchal power is enacted that can go unrecorded and unchallenged.

The embodied nature of inequalities is explored in "The menopause taboo at work: Examining women's embodied experiences of menopause in the UK police service" by Carol Atkinson, Fiona Carmichael and Jo Duberley, who work at the intersection of materiality and discourse to understand gender and how it is lived out in the workplace. Bypassing any squeamishness in academic research of embodied and bodily experiences of the menopause, with the notable exception of Butler (2020), this paper responds to an important omission by exploring experiences of menopause within the UK's police force. The under-theorising in this field of study implies an under-articulation of the policy impact of an older female workforce in key public services where the need to retain experienced staff is significant for the effective delivery of services. This article underlines how sociology widens the scope of legitimate experience that can be included in our theorising about work. It also raises concrete questions about how organisations create cultures in which embodied experiences can be accommodated, rather than devalued - particularly in masculine working cultures such as those found in policing.

In addition to Atkinson et al.'s work, three more articles in this issue address the 'ideal worker' norm in the context of gender. In "Career advancement for women in the British hospitality industry: The enabling factors", Valentine Calinaud, Jithendran Kokkranikal and Maria Gebbels use the work of Acker (2012) to explore the ever-present notion of an 'ideal worker' in the context of an industry where progression is often dependent upon experience of operational roles. These roles typically require long and unsociable work hours onsite, which puts women with caring responsibilities at a disadvantage that then extends to their career progression. Once again, the ideal worker shows himself to be male and without significant responsibilities outside of work.

Two of the articles in this issue address the 'ideal worker' norm in the context of gender. Many organisations operate according to a work devotion schema emphasising the primacy of work for managers and professionals, who are expected to be fully committed to their work (Wharton et al., 2008). In "Motherhood 2.0: Slow progress for career women and motherhood within the "Finnish Dream", Charlotta Niemistö, Jeff Hearn, Carolyn Kehn and Annamari Tuori demonstrate how the "ideal worker" and "good mother" norms are in constant conflict for professionals in knowledge organisations, where flexibility means being available for work outside of regular work hours and outside of regular work sites. Career success requires masculine career patterns and 'good motherhood' requires high involvement in caregiving. This double burden is not experienced by male professionals and exposes a paradox in Finland, where seemingly gender-neutral societal and organisational structures remain highly gendered beneath the surface.

In Japan, a much less gender-egalitarian culture than Finland and where women still represent a small minority of all managers, Makiko Fuwa's article "Women managers' impact on use of family-friendly measures among hteir subordinates in Japanese firms" examines whether and how female managers affect the 'ideal worker' norm. The author finds that female managers are more likely to have subordinates of both genders who take parental leave and are more likely than male managers to approve men's requests for parental leave and reduced work hours for family reasons. This suggests that if present in sufficient numbers, female managers could be key change agents in gendered organisations.

This issue also explores the issue of professional progression. It is tempting for us to back down from questions about progression and leadership in work in the current climate, but documenting and understanding professional progression or lack thereof is significant both sociologically as well as materially. P1 argues that the visibility of successful women taking up leadership positions such as in politics can provoke misogynistic attacks claiming that discrimination against women is minimal and not 'deserving' of structural change such as quotas. Awareness of this type of resistance to gender equality in career progression links to newfound fears of how employers will respond to their pandemic-era insights into our homes and family lives generated by the rise of working from home, the consequences of career interruptions due to caring responsibilities, and whether demands for 'resilient' workers will be prejudiced against women due to employer assumptions about the primacy of their family role.

The representation of women in the highest positions and the gender diversity of private sector boards remain important issues in the sociology of work and gender. In some countries, gender discrimination has been challenged through the introduction of legislation on gender quotas and direct government intervention. Three articles in this issue of WES deal with the under-representation of women on boards. Based on the findings of an international study using fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis, "Bringing women on board? Family policies, quotas and gender diversity in top jobs" by Helen Kowalewska explores how welfare-state interventions impact women's representation at board level. The authors examine the relationship between the approaches of 22 industrialized countries in relation to welfare states, childcare policies and quotas that may improve women's representation in board positions across private-sector companies, arguing that only women-friendly welfare states and countries with quotas, regulations and direct government intervention can lead to gender-diverse boards.

Drawing on Bourdieu's field and capital concepts, "Broadening of the field of corporate boards and legitimate capitals: An investigation into the use of gender quotas in corporate boards in

Norways" by Cathrine Seierstad, Ahu Tatli, Maryam Aldossari and Morten Huse provides deep insights into the life trajectories of 31 high-profile women who hold executive board directorships under the Norwegian Quota Act. The authors demonstrate how this piece of legislation has pushed structural changes to broaden the composition of corporate boards, challenging gendered ideas about who is suitable to occupy these roles. The article also highlights the role of government regulation and intervention in recognizing women's capital as being legitimate. "Women professors across STEMM and Non-STEMM disciplines: Navigating gendered spaces and playing the academic game" by Colette Fagan and Nina Teasdale also deals with the under-representation of women in the highest positions of organizational hierarchies. Using Bourdieu's concept of 'the game', this article sheds light on how women professors from various disciplines have navigated their organisational and disciplinary settings in the UK Higher Education sector. In their analyses, the authors show how despite recognizing 'the game' as unfair, women who wish to progress in their academic careers are forced to comply with its rules, and thereby find themselves involuntarily reproducing the gendered spaces in which they struggle.

Also relevant to professional progression are gendered stereotypes of leadership and leaders. In "A cross-country comparison of gender traditionalism in business leadership: How supportive are female supervisors?", carly van Mensvoort, Gerbert Kraaykamp, Roza Meuleman and Marieke van den Brink analyse survey data from 22 OECD countries to identify differences in views on the suitability of women for business leadership. Among the respondents, female managers were more likely overall than male managers or subordinates of either gender to disagree that men are better suited to leadership in business. However, there was a wide range in national attitudes, with fewer than 5% of respondents in Sweden reporting gender traditionalist attitudes versus nearly half of respondents in South Korea. These results have clear implications for the advancement of women's careers across cultures, and raise questions about the potential for Norway-style government interventions to help foster changes in the perceived suitability of women for leadership roles in nations espousing more traditionalist views.

Taken together, the articles in this issue demonstrate how gender inequality takes on different forms depending on age, family composition, occupation, and the cultural norms and policy instruments associated with workers' geographical location. Women's experiences of work, of career progression, and of raising families while working vary extensively depending on these factors. This issue of WES also points to an emerging professional paradox expressed in a series of tensions in the organisation of work and our experiences of those tensions. For instance, we can see in the BSA Covid-19 survey results a reflection of the tension between the freedoms from office restrictions provided by remote working during the pandemic and the invasive nature of homeworking during this period. We can also see in those survey results, and in several of the articles, how the flexibility in work hours and location required by employers for career progression is frequently incompatible with the flexibility required by workers to fulfil their care responsibilities at home. Together, the papers in this issue and the Covid-19 survey results demonstrate the variety of ways in which women's compliance with the 'ideal worker' norm remains both structurally impossible and ideologically challenging; women must somehow reconcile societal expectations for being a good worker and a good woman. While this battle can manifest itself in the tensions between 'playing the game' for career success and reproducing longstanding patterns of gendered disadvantage in professional spaces, we also see evidence that over time, stereotypes about women's leadership and men's family role can be undone. Our thanks to the authors featured in this issue for their work at

these intersections as an aid to understanding the often hidden aspects to women's survival and progression as we enter this new academic year.

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