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Gender, diversity and intersectionality in professions and potential professions: analytical, historical and contemporary perspectives

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Few women even now have been graded at the universities; the great trials of the professions, army and navy, trade, politics and diplomacy have hardly tested them. They remain even at this moment almost unclassified. (Woolf, 1929: 82)

Introduction

The fields of gender studies, gender and organizations, diversity and diversity management, and intersectionality studies have all grown extensively in recent years as ways of analyzing social divisions. Each and all of these have major implications for the analysis of professions, even if the issues they raise have often not been at the forefront of mainstream studies. In this chapter we consider the relevance of gendered intersectional analysis for the understanding of professions, potential professions and professionalization. Indeed put this way, we may ask: is it really possible to analyze professions and professionalization without considering gender and gender relations? To read some of the classics in the vast literature on professions, you would think so.

The first part of the chapter considers some issues of gender, diversity and intersectionality that are relevant in the analysis in and around professions. This section continues by turning to the examination of the intersectional gendered structures, processes, and other issues within professions. The next main section examines the historical gendering of professions. The chapter continues with two contemporary case studies that set out some of the complexities of gendered intersectional analysis of professions. The first is on an established profession, namely law. The increasing entry of women into such traditionally male-dominated professions raises new questions regarding still limited inclusion of women across the profession. The second concerns a less clear cut case of a profession, namely business management, with a focus on women managers opting out of successful careers. The chapter concludes with a short consideration of future changes for gender, diversity, intersectionality and professions.

Professions, ‘neutrality’ and power

Professions and analysts of the professions alike have characteristically valued the neutralized lists of traits of professions or professional traits; universalistic standards; specificity of professional expertise; affective neutrality; status achieved through individual performance; decision-making based in the client’s interest not the practitioner’s self-interest (the service ethic); and control by voluntary association (extended expert training, internalized codes of practice, and control by peers (Blau and Scott, 1963: 60-63). As Blau and Scott put it so clearly, in contrasting professional and bureaucratic orientations: “(p)rofessionals in a given field

constitute a colleague group of equals.” (p. 63). Seen thus professions appear to embrace voluntaristic and communal reason and reasonableness, even progressive reasonable critique; they are open-minded and powerful – and gendered throughout. Indeed what is more honourable than the (gender-)neutrality of the ‘true (male) professional’, with identifiably separate occupational status. All this has in sum provided firm ground for neutral(ized), ‘gender-neutral’, analyses of the occupational separation and ‘specialness’ of professions.

Interestingly, the study of professions was itself long, and historically, dominated by high-ranking professional white men commenting on other high-ranking professional white men, such as Carr-Sunders and Wilson (1933) and Hughes (1963). The operation of the ‘established professions’ intermingled with their analysis by men not so dissimilar to themselves. Analysts have taken the Schutziian imperative – that analytical concepts should be such that they would be understandable to the (in this case, professional male) actors themselves and those (other professionals) involved around them – at its word. Classic texts, such as *Professional Men* (Reader, 1966) and *Boys in White* (Becker et al., 1976) say it all. In this context it is no wonder that these presumed ‘neutral’ occupational democracies became, from the 1970s, subject to critique, as forms of ideological, privileged power blocs (Elliot, 1972; Johnson, 1972), primarily in terms of class and occupation,¹ rather than gender or other social divisions.

Gendering, diversifying and intersectionalizing professions

In contrast to class-based approaches to professions and power, professions are often characterized by a variety of social divisions and social differences, including but not only occupational class. These include social divisions: internally within professions; externally in relations to those outside, including other professions; and between those within professions and those served, or not, by the professions. For example, in medicine there are characteristically gender and status divisions between physicians, in internal medical specialisms; between physicians, medical management, and nurses; and between physicians and patients. Such social divisions and social differences in and around professions have at times been clear and categorical, as in the historical construction of some professions as the sole territory of men, the gendering of professional men and masculinities, and what it means to be professional.

In considering social divisions and social differences in professions, we begin with the question of gender (Hearn, 1982; Davies, 1986; Witz, 1992; Riska, 2014). Despite some clear historical, and indeed contemporary, social divisions in the professions and professional work, much mainstream analysis of the professions has been and still often remains distinctly non-gendered. These issues have not been at the centre of mainstream analysis of professions and professionalizations. In this sense, professions could be said to be not so different from other work, organizational and institutional phenomena. Gendering occurs in gendered distributions and gendered practices, and even when professions and professional organizations comprise only men or only women. Typical patterns include:

- *gendered valuing of public domain professional work over work in the private domains.* Men’s professional work has frequently been valued over women’s. Women typically carry the double burden of childcare and unpaid domestic work, even a triple burden of care for dependents, old people, and people with disabilities. In addition, the professions are often involved in work across the public-private boundary, with gendered expertise to

advise and seek to resolve problems and issues in the private domain and/or close to the body (Stacey and Price, 1981).

- *gendered divisions, inclusions and exclusions of professions and professional labour and authority*, including between professions and other occupations, and between professionals and those professions may seek to assist. Women and men tend to specialize in particular types of professional labour or sector, creating vertical and horizontal divisions. Gendered valuations of formal authority and informal status and standing also vary within and between professions. Moreover, women are more likely to face contradictory messages about the gender-appropriate professional behaviour, which, on one hand, sustain gendered divisions, but, on the other, may provide women with some flexibility how to respond to the gendered professional norms (Pierce, 2010).
- *gendered processes between the centre and margins of professions*. These may be literally or metaphorically spatial in distributions of power and activity between the centre and margins of professional organizations. ‘Front-line’ professional activities are often staffed by women; ‘central’ and managerial activities more often by men. The ‘main aim’ of professions tends to be dominantly defined by men (cf. Cockburn, 1991).
- *gendered processes in sexuality*. Most professions have reproduced dominant heterosexual norms, ideology and practices. Indeed (hetero)sexual arrangements in private generally provide the base infrastructure for professional organizations, principally through women’s unpaid reproductive labour (Hearn and Parkin, 1987/1995). These contexts may impact and influence professional activities, such as the sexual dynamics in counselling, therapeutic or mentoring relations, including with those of dissident sexualities (Morgan and Davidson, 2008).
- *gendered processes in harassment, bullying and physical violence in and around professions* have been a relatively neglected aspect, but one that impacts on all the other features in profound and constraining ways (Hearn and Parkin, 2001). This includes such activities by, to and between professionals, for example, violence and abuse experienced within the health system.
- *gendered processes in professional interactions, and individuals’ internal mental work*, that maintain, or disrupt, other gendered patterns, and concern how professionals and those people served, or not, by them make sense of gendering (Acker, 1992), such as the emotion work of both professionals and their clients (Hearn, 1982).
- *gendered professional symbols, images and forms of consciousness*, for example, in media, decor, and material, technical, scientific and professional objects (Acker, 1992), for example, the props of professional expertise, such as legal attire or the white coat.

All of these basic issues of organizational and organizing are highly relevant to the professions, professional organizations, their internal dynamics, and their relations with other professions and occupations, including those that formally or informally aspire to become labelled as professions. In summarizing these issues some of the examples above refer to ‘women’ and ‘men’, and thus it should be made clear that gendering applies as much to men and masculinities as to women and femininities: gender is not a synonym for women. Moreover, these are not the only gender categories; gender and sexual categories have expanded, as, for example, with LGBTIQ+ (lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, intersex, queer, and further non-normative gender and sexual positions). Gender is thus much more than cisgender,² and indeed debates on the very

meanings of gender have become more complex and contingent as studies of gender, work, organizations and professions have become more established (Hearn and Husu, 2012).

Similarly, and more generally, professions are characterized by comparable processes in relation to other social divisions and social differences, such as ethnicity and racialization, in terms of, for example, inclusions and exclusions. This becomes clear when locating professions in international, comparative and transnational contexts. Indeed, much of the historical development of professions has been influenced by processes of imperialism and colonialism, for example, in the Anglophone world, professions and professionals have historically been more often white, and educated in the metropole(s). In the latter half of the last century professions have become much more diversified in terms of ethnicity and skin colour, whether educated in the metropole(s) or locally, and sometimes also continuing to serve metropolitan populations.

Moreover, social divisions and social differences do not operate separately, but in diversity and in intersectional ways. Having said this, diversity and intersectionality can mean many things. The concept of diversity tends to be used more descriptively to the diverse range of social categories in a given situation, occupation, organization or, in this context, profession. The term, intersectionality, generally refers to intersections between categories, social divisions or social differences. Beyond that, it has, however, been used in many different ways – between relatively fixed social categories, in the making of such categories, in their mutual constitution, in transcending categories. McCall's (2005) clarification of different interpretations of intersectionality is especially useful, distinguishing approaches that are:

- inter-categorical: adopting existing analytical, relatively fixed categories, with the focus on relations between them, as in gendered, ethnicized/raced labour markets amongst health professionals;
- intra-categorical: using more provisional categories; acknowledging stable, even durable, relationships that social categories represent at given point in time; maintaining a critical stance toward categories; and focusing on particular social groups at neglected points of intersection: “people whose identity crosses the boundaries of traditionally constructed groups”, such as the Afro-Caribbean upper middle class barrister;
- anti-categorical: not seeing categories as basic, and instead deconstructing categories, such as the white heterosexual able-bodied bishop.

This framework moves, in broad terms, from more modernist inter-categorical conceptions of intersectionality to more ambiguous intra-categorical conceptions, to poststructuralist anti-categorical conceptions. These distinctions also mirror, to some extent, discussions of more essentialist and more constructionist approaches to difference. More essentialist approaches to differences tend to highlight differences between groupings and treat groupings as relatively internally homogeneous, whether members of a profession or marked (for example, black or minority ethnic) or unmarked (for example, white or majority ethnic) category of professionals; more constructionist approaches tend to focus more on variations within groups: for example, not all women physicians are alike; not all minority ethnic lawyers are alike.³

Gender, diversity and intersectionality are also extremely relevant for the analysis of inter-professional relations, where, for example, one professional group is granted higher status than another, in part by virtue of its association with a higher status social category or combination of social categories. On the other hand, it is quite likely that the combination or intersection of status categories may conflict or be ambiguous in relation to professional status, for example, when a black working class background doctor treats a white upper class patient.

Historical perspectives

These various gendered and intersectional processes and approaches noted in the previous section take specific historical and dynamic forms. The historical gendering of professions has moved from the incipient pre- or proto-professions, sometimes with strong presence of women, to what were often originally virtually men-only, or sometimes strictly men-only, established professions (for example, law, medicine, clergy), and their own growing gendered complexity, onto the development of the welfare professions and what were sometimes, disparagingly, called the ‘semi-professions’ (Etzioni, 1969) with many women in their so-called rank and file, to the emergence of a whole host of newer modern or even postmodern professions, with more flexible gendered definitions and gendered occupational practices. Here we use the terms, potential professions and aspiring professions, here in preference to such critiqued terms as ‘semi-professions’, or even ‘the other professions’ (Abbott, 1988).

In broadly non-industrial society women were engaged in tasks, activities and spheres of responsibility that were later to be taken over by the men of the professions. This may be clearest in the area of medicine and the care of the body (for example, Ehrenreich and English, 1973, 1974), but also applies to some extent in the arenas of divinity and law, through various forms of ‘wise women’, ‘healers’, operating across of the boundaries of life and death. Indeed, in the Christian world “for eight ... centuries. From the fifth to the thirteenth, the other-worldly, anti-medical stance of the Church ... stood in the way of the development of medicine as a respectable profession.” (Ehrenreich and English, 1974: 13). According to early Christian missionary and Norman practices, “Male physicians were rare, since time and desire for study were almost confined to monks, Jews and others debarred from the supreme masculine occupation of fighting.” (Manton (1965: 57). This pattern was disrupted through a combination of the church, state, universities, science and capitalism, and the men who dominated there: in “... the medical occupations the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries witnessed an increasing division of labour and a concomitant exclusion of women from the higher and more lucrative branches which were emerging.” (Parry and Parry, 1976: 164).

In eighteenth century England the high status professions, such as barristers, became an occupational route for sons, especially the younger sons, of the gentry, while men or the subordinated “lower branches” (Reader, 1966), and aspiring groups, such as attorneys and solicitors, were recruited from the families of tradesmen and artisans. This points the ways in which gendered divisions, between classed men, have been (re)produced in and by the professions. Most importantly, until the end of the nineteenth century, and often later, higher education, one of the prerequisites for entry into the ‘established professions’ was denied to women in most countries. With women’s entry into higher education, albeit in an uneven way internationally, higher education, universities and science in its broad meaning themselves became arenas for professional contestation.

In addressing such historical complexities, it is very important to distinguish professional activity and professional institutionalization. For example, women have been involved in professional activities and tasks throughout the history of education and science, but became excluded with its institutionalization (Schiebinger, 1999). In the late eighteenth century women were hired as ‘professional’ astronomical ‘computer’ women, yet with low pay and no opportunities to advance in their career; observatories, such as Harvard College Observatory, hired numerous women as ‘computers’, to perform star observation and arithmetic work (Rossiter, 1982).

The international historical literature on the women pioneers in the professions in their modern form is extensive. The position of women entering, or re-entering, medicine in nineteenth century US has been recorded by the sisters, Elisabeth and Emily Blackwell (1860) in *Medicine as a Profession for Women*. A major early overview of women’s entry into the professional associations in the US was that by Breckenridge in her 1933 report, *Women in the Twentieth Century*, sometimes initially though the formation of parallel women’s professional associations, such as the Medical Women’s National Association. There are many other accounts of women entering law, higher education, veterinary surgery, and so on.

A classic account is that by Agnes Sjöberg (1964/2000), the first woman to become a veterinary surgeon in Europe and the first woman in Europe to obtain a doctorate in Veterinary Medicine. The Rector who admitted her to study at the University of Dresden in 1911, did so first on a probationary basis, assuming that “a woman would be especially suited to treat small animals” (p. 32), even if her specialism was horses. In her autobiography, Sjöberg goes on to describe in vivid detail the responses from the other, all male, students, in the lecture theatre (“... a terrible noise was created in the hall. The students stamped their feet and shouted “hinaus” [“out”].) (p. 34), and more generally (“They said: ‘... if we could get this first devil woman away, so there would not be more of them, but if she is able to continue, next year there can be many more hags on these benches.’”) (p. 35).

There are well developed arguments, both for and against women being in the professions, often tending to emphasize either sexual/gender difference or gender/sexual sameness. Difference arguments against women’s inclusion have sometimes relied on forms of essentialist biologism, such as that intellectual work may damage the ovaries, as reported in the *Norwegian Journal of Medicine* in 1892 (see Husu, 2001: 33). Such thinking is not dead, as when Harvard President Lawrence Summers explained the under-representation of women in some natural science fields:

It does appear that on many, many different human attributes—height, weight, propensity for criminality, overall IQ, mathematical ability, scientific ability—there is relatively clear evidence that whatever the difference in means—which can be debated—there is a difference in the standard deviation, and variability of a male and a female population. (Berman, 2013)

This highlights the question of men’s responses, discriminations and resistances to women’s entry, and how women themselves, and some men, articulated arguments in favour of women coming into the professions. Arguments for women’s inclusion have included women’s special contribution, for example, in midwifery that might thus benefit from women’s contribution, and

the more fundamental argument of justice for women in broadening their own occupational choices. These twin arguments of gender complementarity (difference) and gender comparability (sameness) are also paralleled by arguments for diversity in various occupational fields, and in relation to gendered, sometimes intersectional, labour markets. For example, increasing women's representation in natural science, technology, engineering and mathematics can be justified (and opposed) in relation to women's choices, women's contribution and potential, industrial and labour market demands, and justice and equality. Likewise, gender or intersectional equality can be framed, alternatively: as a matter of individual choice, potential and contribution; as matters of organizational, occupational and labour market dynamics; or a matter of the structuring of (professional) knowledge itself and what counts as (professional) knowledge (Hearn and Husu, 2012; Schiebinger, 1999). This last approach might be rather easily understood in professions such as law and medicine, but may be less obvious in, say, physics.

The very project of professionalization can be understood in some instances as patriarchal in form and content. Innovative feminist action can be incorporated into male domination through serving a man or an existing profession, as with nurses and care assistants, mainly of women, often lower class or ethnic status, subordinated to medical doctors, often of men, often higher class or ethnic status – in gendered, ethnicized professional hierarchies. Other mechanisms include reinforcement of the 'patriarchal feminine', advantageous positioning of men in sectors and hierarchies, and managerialist takeover (Hearn, 1982). Patriarchal relations can also be reproduced through professions being embedded within and mediated by patriarchal contexts (Witz, 1992). Collective action, between professions, aspiring or potential professions, and other occupations, involves the intersection of various (internal, intra-professional) exclusionary strategies and (external, inter-professional) demarcatory strategies of closure by the dominant group, and various inclusionary and strategies by subordinated groups in response. These strategies, for example, around and through legal and credential controls and tactics are enacted by gendered (and indeed intersectional) collective actors, not socially 'neutral' actors. This may be clear in using, say, other external, inter-professional collective actors, such as the state and the courts, with their own gendered intersectional structures and processes. In this way framing some women, individually and collectively, can pursue the project of professional recognition, more or less successfully in the intersections of occupation, class, gender and further social divisions.

Such accounts have been much complicated in more recent times in several ways. First, the established contrasts between professions, on one hand, and bureaucracy, organizations, management and the state, on the other, have become less and less tenable. The well-established contrast of professions and bureaucracy no longer holds so true. In some instances gendered changes in these various forms of professions and professionalizations are bound up with shifting relations of state and capitalism. This prompted greater consideration of the variable relation of professions and the state (for example, as financier and regulator; through state education; and in state welfare professions), with hybrid forms of professionalized bureaucracies and bureaucratic professions (Noordegraaf and Stein, 2013). Professional independence, often male gendered, and allegiance to a professional association can be overridden by state or other employer power.

Second is the greater attention to comparative approaches to the professions, from the 1970s (Larson, 1977), but now accelerating, not least through greater international research cooperation. For example, the Continental European model has often involved more direct state

direction of professions than in the historical Anglophone supposedly ‘gentlemanly’ model, noted above. The status of certain professions is also highly variable when seen in comparative terms. In the Soviet Union the medical professional tended to be coded as women’s work rather than as a male bastion into which women sought entry. Veterinary surgery has been men’s arena into which women are entering in greater numbers in some countries (Lofstedt, 2003), while in Finland it has long been dominated by women. Dentistry in Finland has been a traditionally female-coded profession, in clear contrast with other Nordic countries (Haavio-Mannila, 1975). In some post-socialist countries there is a significantly higher proportion of women in the university professoriate and in STEM research than in some Western Europe countries (*She Figures*, 2013). Similarly, while there are some broadly consistent patterns in professional specialisms, there are also great variations across countries, for example, child psychiatry has been much more of women’s specialism in Finland than the Scandinavian countries; medicine has generally been more male-dominated in Denmark than other Nordic countries, but not so in radiology (Riska, 1998).

Third, there have been more recent trends in many countries for the entry of greater numbers of women, including women from less privileged status groups, into established professions (Walby, 1997), alongside more men entering and rising up professions formerly seen as women’s arenas (Simpson, 2005). We continue with this theme in more detail below.

Thus there are multiple and various possible historical, local, national, comparative, international and transnational forms of gendering, diversifying and intersectionalizing of the professions. To illustrate this complexity, the next main section addresses two contemporary international case examples: first, women working in an established profession, law, in two European countries, one post-communist, the other not; and then women leaving, or so considering, what might be seen as the incipient profession of business management, across Finland and USA. These both, albeit in different ways, examine intersections of gender, occupation and national context.

Contemporary international cases

Women lawyers in Finland and Poland: Managing competitive pressures, expectations and identities

The increasing entry of women in the male-dominated professions, such as the legal profession, raises many questions regarding the still limited inclusion of women lawyers across all segments of the profession. Changes in legal education and the market for legal services have contributed to the greater number of women entering the legal profession. The opening of law to women has resulted in what may appear as equality of career opportunities between women and men, which in turn normalizes women lawyers’ less favourable professional status and fewer career opportunities. While women are increasingly entering legal education and the legal profession, they are underrepresented in the upper levels of law firms across countries (Bolton and Muzio, 2007; Pinnington and Sandberg, 2013; Choroszewicz, 2014). Due to the increasing role of law firms as sites in the social reproduction of the professional elite, scrutiny of women lawyers’ professional status has shifted towards women practicing law within the corporate segment of the legal profession (Kay and Hagan, 1998; Walsh, 2012).

Gendering processes within the legal profession also involve women's active participation in the reproduction of career choices perceived as appropriate for them due to their certain skills, competence and life experience (for example, Bolton and Muzio, 2007; Pierce, 2010). Further insights into such gendering processes arise through cross-national research, as, for example, of Finnish and Polish women lawyers.⁴ Specifically, some of women's professional choices are not only informed by their sense of what is occupationally advantageous, but also by their gendered identity about the professional expectations and career opportunities marked as appropriate for them as women lawyers. In both Finland and Poland women's professional labour market position is being enhanced by their competitive potential, particularly with regard to quality of client service. The basis of competition in the market for legal services, in the globalizing economy, is shifting from traditionally formulated competences based predominantly on legal knowledge and legal reasoning towards other qualities which facilitate the good rapport with clients. Lawyers and law firms experience increased pressure to differentiate themselves in the market in terms of market niche and quality of legal services. This has facilitated recognition of attributes associated with the hegemonic ideals of femininity as a set of powerful resources, which have been undervalued in traditionally male-dominated professions, in order to be more attentive to clients' needs and satisfaction. Thus, women lawyers' competitiveness is enhanced by their interpersonal and cooperative abilities as nowadays sought after in law firms.

The emerging asymmetry in the relations between lawyers and their clients exposes lawyers to pressures to conform to their clients' expectations in order to retain enduring relations with them. Lawyers, like other service providers, are increasingly expected to engage in intensive interactions with valued clients. This pressure is particularly salient in law firms in which lawyers are subject to the influence of prestigious and influential clients who consider it legitimate to demand legal assistance specifically tailored to their needs. Some Finnish and Polish women lawyers feel particularly prone to display care and concern for their clients along with the legal assistance. In legal specializations that provide legal advice for weaker and disadvantaged clients, they are expected to display emotional labour not necessarily expected from male colleagues (Pierce, 2010: 181). This applies in such legal specializations as family and inheritance law, and compensation lawsuits, which provide women lawyers with flexibility to draw on skills that they, as women, are expected to possess. However, such specializations are usually characterized by slower career advancement, lower wages, and less power and authority.

In these ways challenges linked to gender equality in the legal profession in Finland and Poland appear somewhat similar in both countries. In order to retain their competitiveness and move towards legal specializations and positions of greater salary, influence and authority in the legal profession, women lawyers are expected to be able to live up to the traditional understanding of success. As lawyers, women have clearly more agency with regard to career choices and greater opportunities to devise their own ways of combining career and personal life, which are not necessarily available to women of other occupational groups. They are also subject to more competitive professional pressures and expectations to fit traditional model of success, particularly strong in the most prestigious positions within the legal profession. This gendered notion of success is built upon the stereotypically masculine working patterns and career advancement which only increase nowadays in terms of working time and availability of lawyers to clients – due to the asymmetry in the relations between lawyers and clients. It is not enough that women lawyers are formally granted equal career opportunities if their access to the most

professionally favoured positions is still conditioned by women's ability to fit into men-tailored professional expectations, working patterns and career commitment.

At the same time, the pattern of Finnish and Polish women attorneys' careers demonstrates that national contexts, Nordic and post-communist respectively, shape in different ways the competitive potential of women attorneys. Women's access to the most prestigious positions is dependent on women's support systems, including formal work-life reconciliation policies, flexible working arrangements, professional autonomy, equal career opportunities, workplace mentoring, and spousal and family support. Women lawyers in Finland benefit from the Finnish welfare state that provides women with greater opportunities to realise their career aspirations and orientation towards a balanced life. Finnish women lawyers have more flexibility to use and benefit from gender-appropriate attributes and competencies across legal specializations, work positions and law firms compared to their Polish counterparts. By contrast, the career opportunities of Polish women attorneys are undercut by their greater family responsibilities compared to male spouses, less flexible working arrangements, and lesser gender equality and work-life reconciliation policies. Thus, Polish women attorneys tend to opt for more independent or joint law practices in order to avoid the acute trade-offs between a rewarding career and a fulfilling personal life posed by many law firms in Poland. In this respect, the operation of gender as an axis of social inequality continues to persist underpinned by gendered professional expectations and conditions which encourage women and men to enact different qualities, competences and orientations. Gender, as a source of embodied cultural capital still shapes women's professional experience and career choices in both Finland and Poland, if in rather different ways. These gendered expectations and conditions hamper equality in the legal profession in both Finland and Poland.

Business management in Finland and USA: opting out from a new profession?

This second case shows some similarities and differences. This concerns a less clear cut case of professions or possible potential profession, namely business management, with a focus not on working within the profession but on women opting out of successful careers. Traditionally, business management has not been considered a profession, and there has been disagreement regarding whether or not it should be, and whether or not business managers have a professional orientation. However, there are several aspects of management, many of which are also gendered, that are comparable to professions. Management assumes many of the appearances of professions, although it may play down or evade certain ethical responsibilities and obligations (Khurana, Nohria and Penrice 2005), which can be seen as intersectionally gendered. Similarly to certain professions where male power and prestige have historically dominated and often persist, corporate environments tend to follow masculinist norms and ideals. Business management, with its particular forms of professional commitment – corporate, vocational, expert – which relate in turn to gender and other axes of power and inequality, is an interesting case to consider when examining gender, diversity and intersectionality in professions.

These masculinist (professional) corporate environments in turn provide the backdrop for various forms of career development, coping, sense-making, and indeed resistance. One such, and sometimes rather dramatic, form of response is opting out from the professional corporate life, examined here through the study of interview narratives of 15 women between 30 and 50 from

Finland and USA who opted out of successful business careers to adopt new ways of living and working that accommodate different interests and areas of life.⁵ This perspective – of exit – raises a further set of gendered professional processes that may intersect with age, generation, family situation, national location and other social divisions and differences. And what is the significance of opting out in terms of gender and diversity? Could opting out be seen as gendered professional, or indeed unprofessional, behaviour?

The case of women opting out of successful careers in business management helps create an understanding of the gendered experiences of women professionals in masculinist professional cultures; what it is that pushes them out and what they are looking for in the new lifestyles they opt in to instead. For example, some successful women managers reported difficulties creating coherent narratives of their lives and work in the masculinist working environment, as they combine having a career with motherhood. Women with children are typically drawn between the individualistic world of work and the self-sacrificing motherhood schema, and while work often spills over into the private sphere, care responsibilities have to be kept invisible in the office (Blair-Loy, 2003). Women who opt out often leave their high-powered careers to adopt new lifestyles where they can live and work on their own terms, and where they can combine different interests and areas of life (McKie et al., 2013; Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006). After opting out of the corporate environment, women generally experience a sense of authenticity and control, of finally being able to be themselves.

Finland and the US are both Western countries, however, the culture, political, and social systems differ. Finland is a welfare state and rated one of the most gender-neutral in the EU, and after having had children, Finnish women face a reality quite different from that of US women. In Finland there is a tradition of both partners working, and mothers and fathers have a right to subsidized maternity, paternity, and parental leave until the child is three years of age, after which they are guaranteed employment by their employers upon their return to work. In addition, there is high quality subsidized day care in Finland, while in the US there is a nanny and stay-at-home ‘mom’ tradition mainly as a result of expensive and poor availability of high quality day care. Despite these differences, the narratives of the US and Finnish women were remarkably similar. The women and their narratives were bound together, to some extent, by their expertise, agentic and other resources, educational and work experiences, and occupational potential and possibilities; though national differences seemed less significant, or at least less apparent, intersections of gender, work and family were important.

Interestingly, none of the women interviewed originally planned to opt out. They were all ambitious with plans to pursue a career, and reportedly liked their jobs. Although having children was not the main cause of their desire to opt out, the situation became especially poignant for these women after they became mothers – it became increasingly challenging to combine a career with their care responsibilities, and it also became more difficult for these women to create coherent narratives about their lives and work. Previous research has argued that due to the hectic nature of living in contemporary society, it is, in fact, difficult for individuals to create coherent life narratives (see, for example, Elliott and Lemert, 2006), and for women combining careers with children it becomes even more so. With current technology, employees – especially those pursuing careers – are expected to be available 24/7, and thus work often spills over into the private sphere (Blair-Loy, 2003). Working mothers thus find themselves answering emails

and phone calls while caring for their children. However, ironically this does not go both ways; issues pertaining to the home and to their children are generally expected to be kept invisible at work, making these women feel that it was not appropriate to reveal their maternal selves in the workplace, and correspondingly many women in the study felt that they could not be themselves before they opted out. At the same time, career women with children are typically drawn between two very contradicting schemas: the individualistic world of work on the one hand and self-sacrificing, intensive motherhood on the other (Blair-Loy, 2003). Both schemas demand complete availability and devotion and are fundamentally ideological opposites. As a result, many successful female managers, especially with children, tend to find it challenging to consolidate the two detrimentally different ideologies, adding to the difficulty to create coherent narratives about their lives and their work. There is an intimate link between coherence and a sense of well-being (Linde, 1993), and correspondingly, these women reported feeling exhausted and overwhelmed by the time they made the decision to opt out.

However, it was not until the situation became untenable and the women experienced some sort of a crisis that they finally decided to take the step. Although children are factored in, this was often not the main reason for opting out. Previous research has shown that women often use children as a reason to explain why they leave, as they are generally applauded for being good mothers, and this is easier than confronting an employer with the real reasons for leaving, such as gender discrimination, an unsupportive corporate culture or simply difficulties combining career and motherhood (Stone, 2007; McKie et al., 2013). However, contrary to much other research on opting out, only two of the women in this study became stay-at-home mothers, and all 15 women were all highly ambitious and had a desire to continue working, either immediately or eventually. They left to create new lifestyles where they could combine meaningful work with other areas of life, where they had control over their time and their lives, and where they themselves could decide when and how they worked and when they spent time with their children, instead of having it decided for them by an employer or demands of the corporate culture.

All the women expressed how, in their new lifestyles, they finally felt like they could “be themselves”. They felt a sense of authenticity, which they did not feel in their previous careers, and this sense of authenticity, in turn, added to a sense of coherence and contentment. What was notable in all the narratives was that whatever it was these women ended up doing instead, they did so with a new mindset. No longer did they conform to the expectations and demands of the masculinist corporate culture and career model, they no longer worried so much about how others perceived them, and they were determined to live and work according to their own values and standards. So while opting out could be seen unprofessional behaviour, these women had a will to continue being professional, but simply to do it on their own terms, in a sustainable way.

Some concluding remarks on the future ...

The field of gender, diversity and intersectionality in and around the professions is very far from stable. There are numerous changes and challenges in and for both the professions and their analysis. First, there are shifts in the international gendered intersectional divisions of labour, partly through huge migrations, bringing greater inter-ethnic, and inter-racialized professional processes and encounters. Second, transnational formations, such as virtual collaboration, are increasingly powerful transnational constructors of professional knowledges. Information and communication technologies themselves bring new forms of gendered intersectional professional

work at the interface and mutual construction of humans and technologies. Transnational professionals may learn and need to learn what has been called (gendered, intersectional) epistemic arbitrage (Seabrooke, 2014), within transnational inter-organizational contexts. Third, there is the impact of neoliberalism, especially pressures towards privatization and individualism. In this situation the professionalization project may become more individualized, more separated from professional associations and specific employers. This may lead to concerns with the ‘professionalization of everyone’ (cf. Wilensky, 1964) but now in neoliberal form: portfolio careers, organizations as temporary employing ‘hotels’, and the professionalized, self-monitoring, entrepreneurial body as an individual project. Finally, we note the emergence of new professions and powerful professional expertise, for example, linked to biotechnologies or climate change, highlighting new intersectionalities with non-humans and the environment more broadly (Kaijser and Kronsell, 2014). The combination of such various trends and moves may even make professions in their current forms redundant.

Thus the gendered and intersectional structurings of and in professions and professionalization projects, at macro, meso and micro levels, are both historically well established and taking new forms. To approach the study and analysis of professions and professionalization as neutral phenomena and without attending to gender and intersectional structures, processes and change is unscientific and careless indeed.

NOTES

1. Interestingly, Marx and Weber had rather little to say on professions, preferring to focus on class and bureaucracy as key concepts. This can be understood to some extent in terms of how the professions were formed and established at their time of writing. Rather, one might argue that both Gramsci (1971), on hegemony, organic intellectuals and those professionally engaged in cultural work, and Althusser (1971), in terms of repressive and ideological state apparatuses, have more to say here.
2. Cisgender refers to an equivalence, assumed equivalence or match between gender assigned at birth, people’s bodies, and their personal identity or self-perception (Schilt and Westbrook, 2009).
3. The concept of intersectionality has a rich feminist and anti-racist history (see, for example, Crenshaw, 1989; Brah and Phoenix, 2004), and is sometimes seen as one of the major contributions of feminist thought. Intersectional perspectives, and the complex social phenomena to which they refer, go under many different names, including interrelations of oppressions, multiple oppressions, multiple social divisions, mutual constitution, multiple differences, hybridities, simultaneity, multiple oppressions, multiculturalisms, multiplicities, postcolonialities, as well as diversity.
4. The remainder of this section draws extensively on recent research Finnish and Polish women lawyers (Choroszewicz, 2014).
5. The remainder of this section draws extensively on recent research on women who have opted out of business management (Biese, 2013).

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