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Justifications of Gender Equality in Academia: Comparing Gender Equality Policies of Six Scandinavian Universities

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ABSTRACT  Gender equality in academia is often perceived as receiving more emphasis in Norway and Sweden than in Denmark. But how do the public research institutions in the three countries approach issues of gender equality differently? This study investigates how activities related to gender equality are articulated and justified in the policy statements of six Scandinavian universities. The analysis reveals some interesting disparities between the countries. In short, the Danish universities seem to be reluctant to deal with gender equality on the basis of rights-based assumptions. While the Norwegian and Swedish universities juxtapose arguments of utility, innovation, justice, and anti-discrimination, the Danish universities primarily refer to aspects of competitiveness, utility, and innovation when justifying activities on gender equality. The article suggests that the lack of justice-oriented perspectives in the Danish statements is an illustrative example of how neo-liberal managerial ideas about workplace productivity and creativity entail new and more instrumental approaches to gender equality issues in academia.

Introduction

The Scandinavian countries are often referred to as gender-equal Nirvanas distinguished by overall similarities regarding welfare regimes and long-term traditions for “women-friendly” policies. Nevertheless, there are currently substantial differences in how gender equality (GE) is interpreted and approached in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. One example is the relatively weak institutionalization of GE policies in Denmark compared to Norway and Sweden (Borchorst & Siim 2008: 218; Melby et al. 2008: 2). This is reflected in the low level of concern for issues of gender inequality in academia. In Norway and Sweden, specific GE stipulations are integrated into the Higher Education Acts, and, unlike Denmark, these countries have implemented official, nationwide committees for GE in academia seeking to raise public as well as political awareness of the topic.¹ The Norwegian and Swedish legislations also provide opportunity for governments to sanction universities that...
do not fulfil institutional obligations to report GE issues on a regular basis. This opportunity is absent in the Danish legal framework (NOU 2011: 47; DO 2012).

These examples indicate a number of overall differences in the emphasis in the three countries on GE-related issues in academia. As pointed out by Roivas (2010), however, there is relatively little comparative research exploring these differences, and there have yet to be any studies investigating how the countries’ universities come to approach the topic differently.

This study therefore adopts a comparative case study approach, investigating the GE strategies, policies, and related documents of six Scandinavian universities. By combining Norman Fairclough’s *critical discourse analysis* and Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot’s theoretical framework of *the orders of worth*, the aim is (1) to gain an in-depth understanding of how GE-related activities and initiatives are articulated and justified in the selected organizational texts, and (2) to investigate how (and why) the Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish universities come to differ with regard to these matters.

The article proceeds as follows. First, I present the selected cases for comparison and outline the empirical scope; second, I introduce the analytical and theoretical framework; and third, I present and discuss the main findings and conclude.

**Case selection**

This study adopts a comparative qualitative case study approach. More specifically, it employs the method known as *structured, focused comparison*, meaning that it deals with only certain aspects of the six selected cases and is systematic in its comparison and collection of data. In order to obtain comparable data, the method requires the researcher to ask a set of standardized questions relevant to each case. These questions should be grounded in a clear, well-defined research objective with an appropriate analytical/theoretical focus in mind (George & Bennett 2005: 67).

The method also calls for clear, specific criteria for case selection relevant to the overall objective of the research. With regard to this study, this implies a selection of cases which can be considered similar on a range of overall characteristics. More specifically, the cases (universities) have been selected on the basis of the following criteria: all of the universities constitute large or medium-sized public institutions of higher education and research which, as opposed to mono-faculty universities and universities for professions, include a broad range of disciplinary domains and fields of research. The selected universities are: Aarhus University, the University of Bergen, the University of Copenhagen, Lund University, the University of Oslo, and the University of Uppsala.

**Empirical scope**

As mentioned earlier, the main objective of the study has been to investigate how the six Scandinavian universities articulate and justify GE activities and initiatives in official organizational texts. In other terms, the analysis limits its focus to a corpus of relevant GE-related documents from each university. On the basis of a pre-reading of a comprehensive sample of potentially relevant organizational texts (including
organizational vision statements, strategy plans, staff policies, internationalization strategies, research strategies, and GE plans), a concise sample of documents (14 texts) has been selected for more extensive and in-depth discourse analysis. The selection criteria in this regard have been to identify texts of particular relevance to the study’s overall objective of investigating articulations and justifications of GE. In other words, while gender issues have been raised in a larger share of the university documents (e.g. staff policies), these texts—primarily consisting of GE plans and university strategy plans—constitute the central and most relevant examples of how the universities frame and legitimate GE activities. The sample of texts was gathered from the university websites in August 2012.

**Discourse and practice**

According to Hall (1980), organizational statements are often developed to excite particular responses and “preferred readings” from internal and external actors. Within the frame of this study, however, I will make no assumptions on how the selected texts are interpreted or put into practice at different institutional levels, as this would require comprehensive follow-up studies in each organization. Instead, the main focus will be to provide new information on the various rationalities and discourses underpinning the universities’ arguments for promoting GE. In this sense, the study can be viewed as a necessary first step towards a more in-depth understanding of how the Scandinavian approaches to GE issues in academia differ.

**Organizational discourse and regimes of justification**

As already mentioned, the *structured, focused comparison* case method requires an appropriate theoretical (and analytical) framework relevant to the overall objective of the research. I have chosen critical discourse analysis (CDA) as the main analytical approach. CDA is concerned with the relationship connecting texts and broader societal problems (Deetz et al. 2004: 200), and the approach offers opportunity to produce coherent and detailed understandings of how texts influence organizational practices (Fairclough 2005). Norman Fairclough, the most prominent figure practising CDA, draws on a number of thorough and closely detailed analytical methods related to text linguistics, pragmatics, and rhetoric theory (Wodak & Meyer 2009: 27). This makes his approach highly relevant to the investigation of organizational policy documents, such as GE strategies and action plans. The level of detail related to this type of analysis, however, significantly curtails the opportunity to document thoroughly each of the analytical steps leading to the results presented in this article. The comprehensive, text-oriented discourse analysis constituting the background of this study has focused on aspects of genre, voice of author, and intertextuality as well as semantic and grammatical relations (i.e. issues of diathesis (active and passive forms), nominalization, modality, and speech functions (assumptions and presuppositions)). However, the analytical results included in this article will mainly focus on issues of modality and speech functions as well as the identification of the justifications underpinning the universities’ motives for engaging in GE activities.
In line with Fairclough, I consider the CDA approach to be most usefully conducted in combination with other social theories and types of research (Fairclough 2005). The following pages will briefly outline how to approach GE issues in academia by bringing together CDA and theoretical perspectives from the so-called pragmatic turn in French sociology. Before presenting the theoretical framework developed by French sociologist Luc Boltanski and economist Laurent Thévenot (henceforth B&T), however, I will briefly reflect on the relevance of their analytical model to this study.

Managing disputes over GE at universities

The existing research shows that gender bias in academia is persistently repudiated and underestimated in scale and consequences (EC 2009). Likewise, the resistance towards GE-related structural change initiatives is well documented and constitutes a pivotal challenge to the success of institutional programmes enhancing female researchers’ career opportunities (EC 2011). A quick glance at recent years’ debates on GE in Scandinavian academia reveals a high degree of contestation over the relevance and extent of the problem. A topical example concerns the implementation of GE-related positive action initiatives creating financial incentives for the promotion of female researchers at the universities of Aarhus and Copenhagen. These initiatives have given rise to extensive public debate over the fairness and necessity of discriminative measures in academic promotion. In this light, it seems fruitful to draw on aspects of B&T’s theoretical framework of the orders of worth in order to clarify how universities justify their activities and ward off internal and external criticism.

On Justification

In On Justification (2006), B&T develop a comprehensive theoretical framework exploring how individuals justify their actions in order to command respect from others in situations of public dispute. On the basis of an approach known as the pragmatic turn in sociology, they investigate how situations in social life can be analysed by their requirement for the justification of action. According to the authors, human beings possess a metaphysical capacity—a certain sense of justice—rendering them able to transcend particular dispute situations by referring to specific principles of equivalence (Boltanski & Thévenot 2000: 213; Albertsen 2005: 75). These “senses of justice” must follow certain rules to be accepted by the participating actors, and these rules require a principle of equivalence, which contributes to clarifying what the actors have in common (Boltanski & Thévenot 1999: 361). In this sense, equivalence can be understood as a set of principles—valid for all—which people refer to when managing a dispute (Boltanski & Thévenot 1999: 361, 2000: 212).

According to B&T, a plurality of different principles of equivalence is available in modern society; in order to identify these principles, the authors construct the model of analysis of the orders of worth (modèle de cité). On the basis of a reading of classical texts stemming from political philosophy, they develop a series of coexisting orders of worth, each characterizing an established order “according to which agents place value on people and things” (Thévenot 2002: 11). The idea behind this analytical
approach is that the “…. orders of worth that are clarified and formalized in these political philosophies are also embodied in the objectified devices that make up daily situations” (Boltanski & Thevenot 1999: 366). These orders of worth are termed cités in the following.

In On Justification, B&T outline six coexisting cités—the so-called “common worlds”. These common worlds all differ with regard to superior principles of equivalence and function as separate “grammars” of justification (Dequech 2008: 529). A person’s greatness within a common world can be assessed by her worth in terms of a given standard relevant to this specific cité (Fairclough & Chiapello 2002: 190). According to Boltanski, however, the six cités identified in On Justification (first published in 1987) do not offer an entirely adequate model for the justification regimes present in modern capitalist society, as new societal conditions call for new principles of equivalence. In their famous 1999 book Le Nouvel Esprit du Capitalisme, Boltanski and co-author Éve Chiapello therefore identify a seventh order of worth—the renowned, projective cité. In the following, I will outline each of the seven cités and exemplify how they are used in the six universities’ justifications of GE. Before doing so, I will briefly touch upon the question of how to combine elements of Fairclough’s CDA and B&T/Chiapello’s modèle de cite.

Bringing together CDA and the modèle de cite: moving from actors to texts

Three years after the publication of Le Nouvel Esprit du Capitalisme (henceforth LNEC), Norman Fairclough and Éve Chiapello (henceforth F&C) co-wrote an article paving the way for trans-disciplinary dialogue between CDA and the modèle de cite. Following this article, each of the cités outlined below can be considered discourses (Fairclough & Chiapello 2002: 192), and the authors argue that a collaboration between CDA and Boltanski’s approach opens an opportunity to elaborate and deepen the text analysis related to identifying and classifying the pre-established analytical categories of the cités (Fairclough & Chiapello 2002: 206). I will now present the seven cités and exemplify how they are put into play in the universities’ articulations and justifications of GE activities.

The seven cités

An argument permeating all of the universities’ justifications for engaging in GE issues and diversity relates to the ambition to create more inspiring, creative, and innovative research environments. These justifications can be interpreted as indicative of the inspirational cité, which values actors and things marked by creativity, inspiration, originality, and authenticity.

Several of the university statements also refer to inviolable and founding organizational values and principles when justifying GE-related activities. This can be interpreted as a way of appealing to the grammars of the domestic cité, which emphasizes the importance of tradition and proximity, and gives priority to organizational dependencies, hierarchy, and tradition (Boltanski & Thevenot 1999: 370, 2006: 90).

In the cité of renown, an actor’s greatness depends on the public opinion and this regime favours fame, recognition, and success (Boltanski & Thevenot 1999: 370).
Regarding this study, it is reasonable to interpret the universities’ recurring emphasis on GE as a means to obtain international reputation and recognition as justifications cast in the grammars of this cite´.

In the civic cite´, an actor’s worth originates from her/his concern with the common good. The great one in this regime is the one who expresses the general will of the public (Boltanski & Thevenot 1999: 371; Fairclough & Chiapello 2002: 190). As elaborated on further below, all of the universities’ justifications of GE draw on the grammars of this civic cite´; however, this is done in rather different ways. In short, the justifications cast in this regime emphasize matters such as democratic obligations, contributions to national welfare, and questions regarding justice and equal rights.

Several of the universities also substantiate GE-related activities by referring to the grammars of the market cite´. The market cite´ values the competitive behaviour of opportunistic actors striving to acquire wealth by seizing the opportunities of the market (Boltanski & Thevenot 1999: 371). This type of justification becomes visible in the universities’ emphasis on contextual features, such as the increasing international competition over talent in a world-wide, expanding knowledge economy.

Arguments related to matters of quality, efficiency, productivity, and increased utilization of knowledge, abilities and ambitions also permeate all of the universities’ justifications of GE. These justifications can be seen as indicative of the industrial cite´. In this cite´, worth is connected to efficiency, and a person’s greatness relies on his professional capabilities. This cite´ focuses attention on planning and investment activities.

The last of the seven cite´s, the projective cite´, values connectionist project activities. An actor’s greatness in this regime depends on her employability (mobility, availability) and network relations (Fairclough & Chiapello 2002; Albertsen 2005). Several of the universities draw on this cite´ by placing emphasis on the benefits of fostering flexible and diverse research environments.

**Articulations and justifications of GE**

The text-oriented discourse analysis reveals some interesting similarities as well as disparities between the universities in the three countries. Obviously, it is relevant to bear in mind that the universities are also characterized by institutional differences irrespective of national belonging. However, this article limits its focus to the overriding national differences. The following pages outline the key results and sum up pivotal trends and characteristics. Table 1 displays how each of the six universities legitimates and justifies organizational GE initiatives by combining arguments anchored in the seven cite´s.

One of the first things to catch one’s eye when examining the display is the absence of rights-based motives for engaging in organizational work on GE in Danish universities. While arguments regarding quality enhancement, innovation, and international reputation permeate all of the texts in a highly salient manner (I return to this below), assumptions related to matters of justice and equal rights mainly recur in the Norwegian and Swedish policy statements. More specifically, this is reflected in the universities’ different ways of appealing to the grammars of the civic cite´. As outlined above, the Aarhus and Copenhagen statements primarily touch upon the grammars of the civic cite´.
Table 1. Institutional justifications for engaging in GE work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cité / University</th>
<th>Aarhus</th>
<th>Copenhagen</th>
<th>Bergen</th>
<th>Oslo</th>
<th>Uppsala</th>
<th>Lund</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspiration</td>
<td>Inspiring environments</td>
<td>Innovation through diversity</td>
<td>Creative environments</td>
<td>Diversity (creativity)</td>
<td>Creative environments</td>
<td>Creative environments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>Competition and quality as inviolable principles</td>
<td>GE as a founding principle</td>
<td>GE as a founding principle</td>
<td>GE as a founding principle</td>
<td>GE as a founding principle</td>
<td>GE as a founding principle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renown</td>
<td>International reputation</td>
<td>International reputation</td>
<td>International reputation</td>
<td>International reputation</td>
<td>International reputation</td>
<td>International reputation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic</td>
<td>Contributing to welfare/Initiatives beneficial to both women and men/Diversity beneficial to society</td>
<td>Societal obligation (democracy)</td>
<td>Inclusion Prevention of discrimination/Equal opportunities/Justice/Job satisfaction/Differential treatment</td>
<td>Contributing to national welfare/Counteract discrimination/Equal opportunities/Equal treatment</td>
<td>Contributing to welfare via quality/Prevention of discrimination</td>
<td>Contributing to welfare via quality/Prevention of discrimination/GE as fundamental human right and value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market</td>
<td>Competition for research talent</td>
<td>Competition for research talent</td>
<td>International competitiveness</td>
<td>Quality/Recruitment of personnel/A broad recruitment base/Diversity enhances productivity/Women as unused potential</td>
<td>Quality/Utilizing knowledge and ambitions/Recruiting the very best staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial</td>
<td>Recruiting the best staff/Better research environments/Attractive environment/Strengthening research and teaching</td>
<td>Improvement of abilities/Realization of potential</td>
<td>Enhancing efficiency and working skills/Knowledge and research development</td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projective</td>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>Dynamic environments</td>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>Diversity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
when justifying questions concerning democratic obligations and contributions to the work environment and national welfare; whereas the Norwegian and Swedish statements tend to place far more emphasis on justice-oriented arguments regarding matters of discrimination, prevention of unequal treatment, equal rights, and justice. This point is further outlined in the analysis of three excerpts below, which also functions as an illustrative example of the analytical approach employed in the background study.

The proposal from the Rectorate should therefore be seen in the light of the Strategy Destination 2012 target that the University should become “a highly esteemed university, and one of the absolute top universities in Europe.” This means that the University must substantially improve its ability to (also) realise the potential of women research talents—without compromising the fundamental principles of free competition and quality of research. (University of Copenhagen 2008: 6)

Activities at Lund University are founded on gender equality, equal treatment and diversity—together with the strategic plan and the Discrimination Act. This means that employees and students, as well as job applicants and potential students at Lund University are to be treated and assessed without inappropriate consideration of sex (…). (Lund University 2011: 1)

The University’s objective in regard to equality between the genders is based on both a justice perspective—that men and women shall be given equal opportunities in terms of education, employment, and professional development—and that we should benefit from the experiences of both sexes in the development of knowledge, research and work environment. (University of Bergen 2011: 4)

The first excerpt, taken from the sixth page of Copenhagen’s organizational memorandum on gender equality, conveys the most central motive for working with GE issues present in the text. It can be reasonably contended that the first sentence of this paragraph falls within the *cité* of renown, as the university’s greatness here connects to aspects of fame, recognition, and success. However, the strong rhetorical emphasis on the *improvement of abilities and realization of potential*, via the use of the deontic modal verb *must* in the second sentence, also calls up the industrial *cité* as a significant order of worth. In the last part of the second sentence, the organizational values underpinning the university’s approach to gender diversity become crystal clear. Actions on gender diversity *must* be taken “without compromising fundamental principles of free competition and quality of research”. In this sense, the organizational action plan is anchored in the domestic *cité*, as work on gender diversity is made subject to superior institutional principles. In addition, one might argue that these superior principles also draw on the grammars of the market (free competition) and the industrial *cité* (quality of research). Copenhagen’s use of the term gender *diversity* rather than *equality* might also indicate an approach that gives priority to arguments of competitiveness and utility. I return to this below.
The second excerpt, taken from the introductory section of Lund’s GE action plan, is held in a declarative tone, and this grammatical feature serves to epitomize the university’s activities as regards issues of GE as indispensable organizational requisites which cannot be challenged. More specifically, *gender equality*, *equal treatment*, and *diversity* are represented here as founding principles of the university. In this case, it is reasonable to contend that the motive for working with issues of gender equality is cast in the domestic *cité* giving priority to organizational dependencies, hierarchy, and tradition. It is, however, also reasonable to assume that this way of articulating *gender equality* as fundamental organizational principles arises from a broader idea about serving the “common good”, which is indicative of the civic *cité*.

An immediately striking feature of the third excerpt, taken from Bergen’s equality plan, concerns the juxtaposition of *justice* and *difference* as complementary motives for engaging in organizational work on gender equality. The use of a deontic modal verb (“*shall*”) and the rhetorical shift from a declarative mood to an imperative grammatical mood after the hyphen reveals that equal opportunities are not yet considered achieved at the university. It is reasonable to contend that the rhetorical emphasis on *justice* is indicative of the civic *cité*, while the subsequent argument of *difference* is anchored in several of the *cités*. On the one hand, *difference* in line with diversity can be interpreted as a concept reflecting managerial interests and ideas about how to enhance work-place productivity and creativity (Edelman et al. 2001), which points to the industrial, inspirational, and projective *cité*. However, on the other hand, *difference* may also be understood as an institutional approach, which acknowledges *differential treatment* as a necessary means to achieve equal opportunities (Leiva 2011), which is indicative of the civic *cité*.

As mentioned in the introduction, the existing comparative literature on gender equality has revealed substantial differences in the Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish ways of interpreting and approaching gender equality. These differences are reflected in the academic, political, and public understandings of the topic. Borchorst et al. (2002), for instance, argue that feminist disputes over theoretical perceptions and interpretations of gender issues have been more pronounced in Sweden and Norway, which have contributed to sustaining the relevance and visibility of the topic in the public and political arena, thus having an impact on public policy development (2002: 248–255). On the basis of a comparative study, Drude Dahlerup also claims that the discussions on issues of structural discrimination and gender justice appear to have been rendered unnecessary in the Danish context as a result of the fact that GE is already considered a reality by most Danish politicians (Dahlerup 2002; 2008).

These theoretical arguments might serve to explain some of the variation between the countries when it comes to the universities’ different ways of appealing to the grammars of the civic *cité*. As shown in the following pages, the Danish universities appear to approach GE issues in more precautious and careful ways than do the Norwegian and Swedish universities.

**Contextualizing GE activities**

In opposition to the rest of the GE action plans, the Copenhagen statement comprises a number of references to national and international policy and research
examples. These examples all serve to contextualize and justify the importance and topicality of engaging in initiatives on GE by underlining the strategic advantages of retaining “more women in research” (University of Copenhagen 2008: 1–3). As I shall return to, this way of legitimating activities differs from the Swedish and Norwegian policy statements, which, in most cases, presuppose discrimination as an existing organizational problem and articulate the GE question as a self-evident and pre-given organizational value.

As illustrated in the excerpt below, the Aarhus University GE plan also refers to a number of indispensable structural conditions defined by the internal as well as the external world in order to specify and explain the varying degrees to which issues of GE exist within the organization. One might argue that this way of contextualizing GE activities illustrates a certain sense of caution, which serves to downplay the accusing finger that these formulations might otherwise signal to the faculties, departments, and centres faring less well on GE parameters. In addition, this excerpt constitutes an indicative example of how Danish university GE initiatives call for substantial and detailed arguments to gain acceptance and support by internal receivers (e.g. research staff) as well as external audiences.

It should be noted that Aarhus University (AU) is a multifaceted organisation with considerable variation between individual faculties and departments/centres as regards the style of human resource management practised in the individual areas; the conditions defined by the national and international world of science for practices within individual research fields; and the degree to which gender equality issues exist—and in what form. Some of the ideas suggested in this report are therefore already being applied at some faculties/departments/centres, while they are unknown or poorly implemented in other places. (Aarhus University 2009: 2)

Assumptions and presuppositions

According to discourse analyst Ruth Wodak (2007), assumptions or presuppositions may often be incorporated into texts for the purpose of triggering audience consent to a particular statement or view of the world. In other words, presuppositions contribute to stimulate particular interpretations of a text by representing ideologically loaded assumptions as if they were widely accepted truths (Saarinen 2008: 37). For instance, while discrimination of women is existentially presupposed as a problem in the Norwegian and Swedish statements, this does not appear to be the case in the Danish. Rather, it seems as though GE in the Danish context is primarily represented as a problem connected to the women, while arguments concerning discrimination and subordination are considered illegitimate. I will elaborate on this by including a few examples.

In the first excerpt presented below, a statement of fact with a declarative grammatical mood serves to represent discrimination against women as a pre-given and self-evident problem at the University of Uppsala. In a somehow similar snippet from the Bergen statement (outlined in the second quotation) discrimination is also existentially presupposed and stated as something the university management will work actively to prevent.
Gender-related differences in working conditions, influence, etc. within the University in general have been and still are detrimental to women, which entail consequences for the direction of work for gender equality. (University of Uppsala 2011: 3)

The work on equality is anchored in UiB's Strategy (2011–2015), which underlines that the university will work actively to prevent discrimination. (University of Bergen 2011: 3)

The excerpt from the Copenhagen statement, in opposition to this, takes on a less structure-oriented approach to the topic by emphasizing the organizational challenge of attracting and retaining female research talent.

Analyses show that Danish universities (including the University of Copenhagen) by no means excel at attracting and retaining women research talent. (University of Copenhagen 2008: 3)

It is reasonable to conclude that this choice of wording serves to represent the problem of gender inequality as an effect of female researchers' own deliberate decisions of opting out rather than as a result of structural bias or discrimination. Another interesting feature of the Copenhagen statement concerns the recurring absence of the notion GE. In this document, GE is substituted with words such as “more women in science” and “gender diversity”, which might reflect an approach that gives priority to arguments of competitiveness and utility while downplaying normative questions of justice and equality.

In the Aarhus statement, a journalistic interview with a prominent Danish professor and director of a Centre of Excellence is featured (see excerpt below).

**Active research management promotes gender equality**

One of the ways to get more women established in senior research positions is via the managers, according to the professor. It is primarily the responsibility of research managers and heads of department to actively identify and support talented people of both sexes. This would especially benefit female research talents, who often need more management support than their male colleagues to become motivated to pursue a career in the research world. (Aarhus University 2009: 6–7)

This interview contributes to support and strengthen the communicative purpose of the policy statement by offering concrete recommendations on the arduous question of how to approach and handle the GE problem in academia. Thus, the interview is instrumental in inspiring and shaping the actual initiatives implemented in the organization, and the managerial reflections included in this part of the text can be seen as perfectly legitimate personal recommendations on how to retain more female researchers. In the context of the Aarhus policy statement, however, they come to represent a certain interpretation of the GE problem; an interpretation in which GE
issues are primarily connected to the women, while aspects of structural discrimination and injustice go unnoticed. As Table 2 illustrates, the interview is structured around a number of recurring contradictions opposing male and female researchers in separate chains of equivalence. Although it might not be the intention, the intrinsic contradictions between women and men serve to represent female researchers as soft actors in a hard world of science. This is a world mainly inhabited by risk-taking, self-confident men. In other words, female researchers are pictured as deficient agents requiring extra management support in order to remain motivated and meet the demanding standards of the academic system. The segregating structures of the academic system are epitomized here as pre-given and indispensable organizational requisites that cannot be challenged; in this sense, gender inequality comes to be represented as a problem related to the women rather than to the organization.

**Strategy of silence**

In sum, the Aarhus and Copenhagen statements convey a sense of caution serving to downplay the “accusing finger” and warding off some of the expected criticisms that organizational initiatives on gender inequality might otherwise entail. One interpretation could be that the rights-based principles of GE are intentionally watered down and sweetened by giving priority to matters of utility, innovation, and diversity.

One might thus argue that the very notion of GE in the Danish setting is de-politicized through a strategy of “silence”. According to Michel Foucault, silence can be seen as an “integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses” (Foucault 1990: 27). This means that the absence of justice-oriented perspectives on GE in the Danish policy statements might function alongside the things said as a constitutive element in the establishment of a new and more instrumental approach to the topic. This approach de-politicizes and neutralizes GE issues by framing them

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>often need more management support to be motivated to pursue a career in the research world</td>
<td>(do not need the same management support)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are often not as good at drawing attention to themselves and are therefore not considered for permanent positions</td>
<td>(are better at drawing attention to themselves and are therefore considered for permanent positions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>don’t dare believe in a university career and go for it</td>
<td>(dare believe in a university career and go for it)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is also possible that women consciously choose not to go for a research career because it often takes a very long time before you get a position (…) They typically need to feel in control of their future and their career.</td>
<td>(take risks and do not need to feel in control of their future and career)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
as means to reach other goals such as global competitiveness, innovation, and the establishment of long-term academic recruitment bases (Jalušić 2009: 58).

GE and the new spirit of capitalism

As displayed in Table 1, all universities highlight arguments which appeal to the inspirational and industrial cité, as well as the cité of renown, when justifying GE. More specifically, this is reflected in the universities’ rhetorical emphasis on matters such as international reputation (renown), the fostering of creative and innovative research environments (inspirational), and the utilization of knowledge and abilities of the whole talent pool (industrial). The following excerpts from Copenhagen’s and Lund’s GE statements constitute illustrative examples of this tendency.

In an age when competition for research talent is intensified by factors such as internationalisation, the ambition of attracting and retaining more women researchers has become a key focus area. (University of Copenhagen 2008: 2)

Lund University’s target is to be one of the very best universities in Europe. To reach that target, the knowledge and ambitions of employees and students must be utilised . . . Gender equality, equal treatment and diversity lead to improved quality in the organisation. (Lund University 2011: 1)

It is reasonable to conclude that this type of argument is characterized by an output-oriented approach to GE, which arises from a shared set of assumptions concerning the inexorability of globalization and economic change. It takes part in a particular view of the world, in which “economic change” is represented as an inevitable global process transforming the basic conditions and prerequisites of modern universities (Fairclough 2003: 44–46).

In their book, LNEC, Boltanski and Chiapello investigate how Western capitalism and its spirit have developed and changed over the last four decades in order to legitimate its activities and obtain commitment from new generations. One of the book’s main arguments is that contemporary capitalism is characterized by a capability to absorb and utilize the different types of criticism directed against it (Boltanski & Chiapello 2006: 163–164). According to Boltanski, “it is the critique which has the responsibility of finding justifications, which in turn are taken over by capitalism and absorbed by its ‘spirit’ (Boltanski in Basaure 2011: 368)”.

Inspired by this theoretical point, Nancy Fraser (2009) contends that feminism has unwittingly supplied a key element in the development of capitalism’s new spirit. More specifically, the classical feminist critiques regarding gender justice and equality have been absorbed by contemporary capitalism and integrated into its chains of command as a new, legitimating source of excitement. It is plausible that this process has also brought along an instrumentalization of the very notion of GE in academia, which is now reflected in managerial ideas about work-place productivity and creativity connected to the spirit of contemporary capitalism.

As Judith Squires (2007: 2) points out, the “desire to render the pursuit of GE compatible with wider policy objectives and existing institutional practices has
encouraged feminist actors to adopt utility-based arguments in order to justify greater
gender equality, and technocratic processes in order to promote it”. It is reasonable to
interpret the strong emphasis on utility-based arguments for GE, which permeates all
of the analysed university statements, in the light of this process. As already stated,
increased emphasis on quality enhancement, globalization, and innovation might
serve as a strategy to ward off the most negative arguments against GE work.
However, this strategy does not necessarily imply that universities will have to throw
out the baby with the bath water by applying a blinkered output-oriented approach to
GE that leaves out organizational perspectives on anti-discrimination and justice.
Nevertheless, this appears to be the current trend at the universities of Aarhus and
Copenhagen.13

Following the perspective of Skjeie and Teigen (2005: 192), this brings about the
questions: “What if women’s equal participation does not change priorities or
enforce productivity? Should the existing regulations for gender balance then be
abolished?” These questions address a key issue in the current debate on the role and
position of women in the fields of science and research and point to the increasing
importance for feminist scholars as well as *femocrats* to re-emphasize the GE
issue in academia as an end unto itself rather than as a means to achieve wider policy
objectives. One might also question whether the existing measures of scientific
productivity and quality in academia are themselves biased tools making
organizational strivings for enhanced productivity and quality through GE a long,
arduous, and self-defeating journey.

**Concluding remarks**

The comparative discourse analysis of university policy statements presented in this
article reveals some interesting similarities and disparities in how Swedish, Norwegian,
and Danish universities approach GE issues. While all of the universities draw
on utility-based arguments when justifying organizational GE work, rights-based
assumptions mainly recur in the Norwegian and Swedish documents. The article
suggests that the more precautious and careful ways of articulating and justifying GE
issues in the Danish universities should be interpreted against the backdrop of a more
modest concern for issues of gender justice in the Danish political arena.

Additionally, the article proposes that the recurring emphasis on utility-based
arguments permeating all of the universities’ policy statements represents a new and
more instrumental approach to GE issues in academia connected to neo-liberal
managerial ideas about productivity and creativity. These findings delineate the
complex and interwoven organizational rationalities setting the scope of GE-related
activities in Scandinavian academia and point towards the increasing importance
of investigating how current trends of internationalization, marketization, and
managerialization in academia redefine and restructure the topic.

**Notes**

1 The Swedish committee ended its activities in 2010. However, a number of projects funded by the
committee were still running in 2012.
When using the terms large- and medium-sized universities, I refer to the relative sizes of the institutions in the Scandinavian context. The size of academic staff varies from 3,000 to 11,000, while enrolment ranges from 16,000 to 40,000.

Readers interested in further documentation are directed to Nielsen (2013). This document also includes references for the final 14 texts undergoing in-depth analysis.

For a brief introduction to the concept of difference in a Norwegian context see Skjeie and Teigen (2005).

It is, however, relevant to note that Sweden might have undergone some changes in recent years. According to Carbin and Rönnblom (2012), issues of gender equality in the political and public arena are not as pronounced today as they were 10 years ago.

For instance, references are made to activities by US Ivy League universities, and the International Alliance of Research Universities (IARU).

Equivalence is a useful theoretical concept in the textual investigation of how entities (i.e. people, organizations, objects) are categorized and how similarities and differences between them are textured and collapsed via chains of equivalence (Laclau & Mouffe 2001; Fairclough 2003: 88).

The spirit of capitalism is “the ideology that justifies people’s commitment to capitalism and which renders this commitment attractive” (Fairclough & Chiapello 2002: 186).

According to Boltanski Chiapello, excitement is the source that generates enthusiasm and encourages people to become involved in the capitalist system (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005).

Another explanation could be that GE issues in academia historically have received less emphasis in Denmark than in Norway and Sweden. In other words, the justice-oriented approach might never have found a real inroad in the Danish university system. It has, however, not been the objective of this study to provide an account of the historical developments in the use of GE policies among Scandinavian universities.

References


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