

Gendered practices in alternative organisational settings

Supervisors: Dr [Owain Smolović Jones](#), Professor [Jo Brewis](#) and Dr [Caroline Clarke](#),
Department of People and Organisations

Project Description:

A rich body of work in organisation studies explores how and why certain organisational settings become dominated by a particular gender (French and Strachan, 2015; McDonald, 2016; Ness, 2012). Such segregation can lead to women being excluded from entire areas of work, because of what Treanor (2016) calls ‘fit work’, the parts of an organisation that are deemed to be ‘fit’ for women to occupy, or, more narrowly, from certain hierarchical positions within an occupation. It also carries implications for the practised culture of these organisational settings, with heavily masculinised practices being problematic for the entry and everyday working lives of anyone who prefers other ways of relating and practising.

To date, the majority of studies in this area have focused on mainstream organisational settings, in particular engineering, construction, the extractive industries, IT and veterinary medicine (e.g. Johansson and Ringblom, 2017; Knights and Clarke, 2018), and on more traditional assumptions and notions of entry and progression. The emphasis within these studies has tended towards exploring the causes of segregation, rather than upon how such regimes are challenged and desegregated. It is worth considering, however, whether, and how, gender segregation may be similar or indeed differ in terms of practices and norms within other spheres of organisational life.

In particular, gender has recently become a source of overt struggle in alternative leisure industries, with sexist and misogynist norms within gaming and underground or DIY music being challenged by scene writers and practitioners. In the underground heavy metal scene, for example, lyrics focusing on violence towards women within the subgenre of death metal, in particular and allegations of rape against individual alternative rock musicians like Michael Gira of Swans and Maynard Keenan of Tool have received media scrutiny (eg, *Guardian Music*, 2016, 2018). These scenes can be described as traditionally heterocismasculine, but an increase in political participation and interest amongst ciswomen, and people who identify as transgender, has generated intense internal debate concerning how these practices can be resisted and transformed. They are also of specific interest to scholars of organisations, especially in the #MeToo era, because the supposed ethos is non-commercial, grass roots, small-scale, egalitarian and accessible. As such these scenes are quite literally alternative: members apparently eschew forms of mass leisure consumption and their associated practices. We might expect then that they would also be characterised by more progressive gender politics.

Some anecdotal evidence exists concerning the experiences of people who identify as other than cismen in such scenes, detailing the casual and taken-for-granted heterocismasculine assumptions at play, such as the experience of women in heavy metal and punk bands (e.g. Cherry, 2018; De Gallier, 2016). Moreover, an increasing number of bands in the underground heavy metal scene have adopted overtly feminist, anarchist and radical left themes, subverting dominant hyper-masculine conceptions of war, fantasy and violence. For example, the band Venom Prison adopts the musical conventions of death metal but composes its lyrics around themes that challenge aggressive masculinity. The same ethos around feminism, anarchism and radical left politics is also visible in other underground music scenes, like DIY pop, as exemplified by the annual [Indietracks](#) festival in the UK's East Midlands.

Such a backdrop presents an opportunity to better understand how gender norms may be challenged and subverted more generally, particularly within industries and organisations traditionally dominated by men and masculinity (Bastalich et al., 2007; Hearn, 2004). Extending the current emphasis within organisation studies, we posit the study of gendered norms and practices as something that can incorporate the empirical perspectives of a range of stakeholders, such as customers/consumers, critics, commercial partners and volunteers, as well as practitioners themselves. Applicants may also present their own examples of alternative organisational scenes that are characterised by problematic heterocismasculine practices, where similar experiences and struggles are evident.

In sum, this project seeks to move from the anecdotal and piecemeal to a more in-depth and qualitative understanding of experiences of challenging masculine hegemony within these alternative organisational settings. Although we are open to ideas on how the project may be approached, we particularly welcome proposals that seek to work with queer feminism (e.g. Butler, 2004), post-humanism (e.g. Barad, 2007; Braidotti, 2013) or political theory (e.g. Apter, 2017; Connolly, 2010), to better understand how, and where, gender norms are constituted and challenged through everyday acts.

The focus of the successful applicant's project will be upon the everyday presentations of, and engagements with, problematic gendered practices in the relevant scene. In methodological terms, the successful proposal could make use of interview data, observation, ethnography, auto-ethnography, and/or the systematic analysis of media sources.

About the supervisors

Owain's research interests focus on the political and ethical within leadership. Jo's research interests include the intersections between the body, sexuality, gender, identity and organizations. Caroline's interests are focused on identity, gender, embodiment, ethnographic writing and post-humanism.

Reference / readings:

- Apter E (2017) *Unexceptional politics: On obstruction, impasse and the impolitic*. London: Verso.
- Barad K (2007) *Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

- Bastalich W, Franzway S, Gill J, Mills J and Sharp R (2007) Disrupting masculinities: Women engineers and engineering workplace culture. *Australian Feminist Studies* 22(54), 385-400.
- Braidotti R (2013) *The posthuman*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Butler J (2004) *Undoing gender*. Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge.
- Cherry S (2018) Svalbard's Serena Cherry on underground metal's enduring gender bias. *Decibel* 17 May. Accessed at: <https://www.decibelmagazine.com/2018/05/17/svalbards-serena-cherry-on-underground-metals-enduring-gender-bias/>
- Connolly W (2010) *A world of becoming*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- De Gallier (2016) Venom Prison combats death metal misogyny with brute force. *Noisey* 3 November. Accessed at: https://noisey.vice.com/en_uk/article/jm5vdg/venom-prison-combats-death-metal-misogyny-with-brute-force
- French E and Strachan G (2015) Women at work! Evaluating equal employment policies and outcomes in construction. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal* 34(3): 227-243.
- Guardian Music (2016) Michael Gira acknowledges 'intimate encounter' with woman who has accused him of rape. 27th February. Accessed at: <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/feb/27/michael-gira-acknowledges-intimate-encounter-larkin-grimm-accused>.
- Guardian Music (2018) Tool lead singer Maynard James Keenan calls rape claim 'despicable'. 28th June. Accessed at: <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2018/jun/28/maynard-james-keen-an-claim-denial-tool-singer-latest>.
- Hearn J (2004) From hegemonic masculinity to the hegemony of men. *Feminist Theory* 5 (1): 49-72.
- Knights D and Clarke C (2018). Living on the edge? Professional anxieties at work in academia and veterinary practice. *Culture and Organization*, 24 (2): 134–153.
- McDonald J (2016) Occupational segregation research: Queering the conversation. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 23(1), 19-35.
- Ness K (2012) Constructing masculinity in the building trades: 'Most jobs in the construction industry can be done by women'. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 19(6): 654-676.
- Treanor L. (2016) Why aren't more veterinary practices owned or led by women? *Veterinary Record*. Oct 28;179:406-7.