Gender, Work and Organization

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Transforming Contexts, Transforming Selves: Gender in New Times

Stream proposal

Beyond the gender binary:
Empirical research and conceptual developments in times of transformation

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More than thirty years after the groundbreaking work on *doing gender* and the outstanding international and interdisciplinary career of the concept, researchers have called for more reflexive takes on gender analyses and interrogated how theoretical assumptions predetermine the possible results of any research. Although the heterosexual matrix and the gender binary still form crucial institutions in late-modern societies of the global North, gender is neither considered as omnirelevant nor as a category with a general master status (Hirschauer, 2001; Poggio, 2006; Pullen & Knights, 2007; Risman, 2009). Developing our understanding of the major transformations in gender relations, the notion of *undoing* has entered the debate (Deutsch, 2007). As a matter of fact, conceptual and empirical foci have shifted towards context-dependency, situatedness and the simultaneity of diverse forms of *doing differences* (West & Fenstermaker, 1995; Kelan, 2010). These developments reveal varieties within sex categories and highlight how gender is done differently according to the respective context and situation. While gender is done in one context, it might be *undone* in another or *not done* at all. If doing gender is part of the varied practices of doing difference, it remains an empirical question which differences are made more (ir-)relevant than others in particular settings and situations, and which institutions and political settings strengthen or weaken difference and social inequality. As a matter of fact, these theoretical developments request for both intensified empirical scrutiny and reflexivity upon the historical moment in which theories are constructed. For example, how might discourses of neoliberalism impact on understandings of (un)doing gender and differences, resulting in a decoupling from questions of collective power struggles against social inequalities?

"Doing gender" has been applied in multiple ways and focused on different elements of interactional and institutional settings and situations (for an overview see Nentwich & Kelan, 2014). Conceptual considerations of doing difference, undoing and not doing gender vary with regard to theoretical references, empirical results and understandings of what undoing, not doing and (un)doing differences can mean: Is it a form of Butlerian subversion (Butler, 1990), a reduction of differentiation (Deutsch, 2007) or an accomplishment that is not necessarily always ongoing and hence a contingent category (Hirschauer, 2001; 2014)? For instance, scholars have discussed the example of women in top-positions. Should we interpret their downplaying of femininity in a male-dominated workplace as *doing* or as *undoing gender*? (e.g. Kelan 2010). Furthermore, from the backdrop of a postfeminist framing

(Lewis, Benschop & Simpson, 2017), shouldn't it be interpreted as merely silencing gender norms and hence an instance of "rhetoric modernisation" (Wetterer, 2003)?

Identifying and "showing" something that is *undone* or *not* going on is indeed a challenge for empirical projects. How can we address the possibilities of doing, but also undoing or not doing gender at all? Is it possible to empirically „show" that *undoing* and not *doing* is what is happening at a certain moment and a certain place without either reifying old gender binary thinking or downplaying and overlooking the postfeminist rhetorics of equality and individual agency? What are the respective implications for sampling, research design, and data analysis? While established methods of data collection such as interviews, documents, visual analyses and observations are suitable for reconstructing happenings, doings and sayings, those methodological reflections are still under development that aim at reconstructing something that is being avoided, not talked about, forgotten or even set aside. For instance, we should focus on affective practices, intensities or instances of episodic initiation or suspension of differentiation (Pullen, Rhodes & Thanem, 2017). Moreover, following Gherardi's (2018) provocative question *"do we need 'gender' any longer?",* what ideas can we gain from post-humanist research practices and post-qualitative methodologies for the conceptualization and exploration of un/doing gender? Instead of un/doing gender should we talk about gender as "becoming with" other elements in the intra-actions of human and non-human agents (Barad 2007)? Would this kind of framing affect our research processes, methodologies, theoretical readings and understanding of power relations? Would it help us to see the *undoings*, invisibilities, silences and understand their meanings, or agencies, better, or differently?

Our stream invites contributions that aspire to bring together theoretical, methodological and empirical reflections of researching *doings* and *undoings* of gender as well as other doings of differences. The following questions may be relevant, but are of course not exhaustive:

- How can we conceptualize and empirically investigate different possible ranges of *undoing* and *not doing* gender? We suggest that understandings of not doing and undoing gender need to be specified with regard to different levels of analysis, such as materialities, discourses, institutions and interactions. Even if only separable analytically, empirical investigations should differentiate in order to determine and empirically depict possible ranges of undoing and not doing gender.

- How can we empirically capture the complexity of differentiation processes (by gender, age, class, race, ability, citizenship, etc.) and conceptualize them? Moreover, how can "(un)doing differences" be conceptualized and taken up empirically?

- How should we conceive the relation between theory and methods? As our above considerations show, theory and methods always constitute each other and can best be thought of as theory-methods packages, which „produce" or generate their very subjects. Which "packages" can tackle the complexities of persistence and change relevant for understanding recent transformations?

- What kind of methods and methodologies have been developed for the analysis of (un)doing? Where can we identify needs for future developments, and how can we address these needs?

- How and in what ways are questions of *undoing* and *not doing* gender related to questions of structure and agency? What are conceptual expansions that are promising and fruitful?

- What are the affective practices and different intensities of (un)doing gender? How useful is the recent turn to affect for studying doing gender and differences?

Abstracts of approximately 500 words (submitted direct to stream leaders, ONE page, WORD NOT PDF, single spaced, excluding any references, no headers, footers or track changes) are invited by Friday 1st November 2019. Decisions on acceptance of abstracts will be made by stream leaders within one month and communicated to authors by Monday 2nd December 2019. All contributions will be

independently refereed. Abstracts should include FULL contact details, including name, institutional affiliation, mailing address, and e-mail address. Abstracts should be emailed to:

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Julia Nentwich is an associate professor at the University of St. Gallen, Switzerland where she teaches psychology and critical thinking. In her research, she is interested in social and discursive practices of doing gender and diversity, organizational change, change agency and resistance. She has published widely on these topics, both in English and German.

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