

# Men in focus - exploring homosocial cultures in organizations and developing methods to prevent sexual harassment

by

Charlotte Holgersson<sup>1</sup>

Monica Lindgren<sup>1</sup>

Johann Packendorff<sup>1</sup>

Lotta Snickare<sup>2</sup>

Annika Vänje<sup>3</sup>

Anna Wahl<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Sexual harassment in organizations (SH) remains a widespread and serious problem. Taken together, SH has negative consequences for organizations such as absenteeism, higher levels of turnover and reduced labor productivity. SH appears to be more common in organizational contexts that are characterized by male-dominance. It is argued that it is in these contexts that SH is more tolerated as a result of homosocial cultures that create a space where discrimination, harassment, and SH is accepted and sometimes even encouraged.

In this program we explore homosocial cultures in male-dominated organizations in order to contribute to our understanding of the dynamics of sexual harassment and to develop measures and methods for transforming homosocial cultures into spaces where men in different positions can act as change agents in order to promote gender equality and workplaces free from violence and discrimination. This answers to calls for deepened understanding of processes by which SH is normalized and tolerated in organizational contexts and for improved prevention measures and methods. The aim of the program is therefore two-fold:

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<sup>1</sup> KTH Royal Institute of Technology, School of Industrial Engineering and Management, Stockholm, Sweden.

<sup>2</sup> KTH Royal Institute of Technology, School of Architecture and the Built Environment, Stockholm, Sweden.

<sup>3</sup> Dalarna University, Department for Work Science, Borlänge, Sweden.

1. The first aim is to further explore homosocial cultures in empirical studies in a number of different contexts to contribute to developing our understanding of the dynamics of SH.
2. The second aim is to develop knowledge on measures and methods that transform homosocial cultures into spaces where men in different positions can act as change agents through an action-research oriented project.

By focusing on men, masculinities and homosociality in relation to aspects of organizational cultures that enable men to exercise violence in order to maintain control in organizations, and by developing measures and methods for counteracting SH through organizational development, the program contributes to current research frontiers as well as to the development of new practices in organizational change management.

The program runs from November 2021 to December 2027 and involves Principal Investigator Associate professor Charlotte Holgersson (KTH), Professor Monica Lindgren (KTH), Professor Johann Packendorff (KTH), PhD Lotta Snickare, Associate professor Annika Vänje (Dalarna University), and Professor Anna Wahl (KTH).

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Contact: [charlotte.holgersson@indek.kth.se](mailto:charlotte.holgersson@indek.kth.se)

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## Program presentation

The program explores homosocial cultures in male-dominated organizations in order to contribute to our understanding of the dynamics of sexual harassment and to develop measures and methods for transforming homosocial cultures into spaces where men in different positions can act as change agents in order to promote gender equality and workplaces free from violence and discrimination. This answers to recent calls for deepened understanding of processes by which sexual harassment is normalized and tolerated in organizational contexts and for improved prevention measures and methods (e.g. Chawla et al. 2021). By focusing on men and masculinities in relation to aspects of organizational cultures that enable men to exercise violence in order to maintain control in organizations, and by developing measures and methods for counteracting SH through organizational development, the program contributes to current research frontiers as well as to the development of new practices in organizational change management.

## Sexual harassment as a workplace problem

As the #metoo movement has revealed, sexual harassment (SH) in organizations remains a widespread and serious problem. In a recent review of literature on SH, Feldblum & Lipnic (2016) find estimates of SH at work ranging from 25% to 85% for women. The wide range stems from methodological differences, sample differences, and the definition of SH used. Many legal definitions across countries contain similar elements in the definition of SH, such as descriptions of the behavior as unwanted, and where the purpose or effect results in intimidation, hostility, degradation, humiliation or offensiveness (ibid.). In research, SH is seen as encompassing a variety of expressions that can be divided into three broad categories: gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion (Fitzgerald & Cortina 2018). Gender harassment does not aim to elicit sexual cooperation, but rather expresses sexist attitudes in general and contempt towards women that are perceived as violating norms of femininity. Unwanted sexual attention involves sexual advances that are uninvited, unwanted and unreciprocated. Sexual coercion is when unwanted sexual attention is combined with various job-related pressures and/or threats (ibid.). Despite the wide variety of definitions, studies consistently show that women are more likely to encounter SH than men (McDonald & Charlesworth 2016). Moreover, studies show that women of color face the double burden of gendered racism or racialized SH (Cassino & Besen-Cassino 2019). The consequences of SH on an individual level have been described as “systemic trauma” (Fitzgerald 2017), including depression, burnout, and other forms of detrimental health effects. Adverse consequences on women's careers have also been documented, for example causing women to resign from positions (McLaughlin, Uggen, & Blackstone 2017). Furthermore, SH has negative consequences for organizations such as absenteeism, higher levels of turnover and reduced labor productivity (Gettman & Gelfand 2007).

## Sexual harassment and homosocial cultures

SH appears to be more common in organizational contexts that are characterized by male-dominance, i.e. that a majority of jobs and tasks are male gendered (Fitzgerald & Cortina 2018). It is argued that it is in these contexts that SH is more tolerated as a result of

homosocial cultures that create a space where discrimination, harassment, and SH is accepted and sometimes even encouraged (Hearn & Parkin 2001).

Homosociality is a theoretical concept developed to capture processes in which men orient and identify themselves with other men. Although gender is the power relation in focus when using the concept of homosociality, other power relations such as class, ethnicity, race and sexuality are also present and simultaneously reproduced through homosociality (Holgerson 2013). In homosocial processes, men collectively create a common ideal form of masculinity and confirm the group's superiority by distancing themselves from women or other men (ibid.). Indeed, those who are the most vulnerable to SH in organizations are those with low power and status, such as women, younger workers, temporary workers, people of color and men who are financially vulnerable (e.g. Uggen & Blackstone 2004). However, women that challenge existing power structures, such as women on leadership positions can also be targets of SH (e.g. McLaughlin et al. 2012) as well as women who transgress gender norms, either in terms of behavior or even just by entering traditionally male-dominated contexts (e.g. Berhdal 2007).

Indeed, SH has been linked to norms surrounding masculinity. For example, Schrock and Schwalbe (2009) suggest that SH can be understood as a "manhood act", an act performed by men to claim privilege and elicit deference. It is thus just one of many manhood acts that range from controlling behaviors to risky behaviors. These behaviors are all characterized by the desire to confirm membership in a privileged category while reproducing societal inequalities (ibid.). SH is also understood as a result of men attempting to maintain the boundaries of masculine norms when other men deviate from hegemonic masculinity (Lee 2000). In organizational practice, such masculine norms also tend to become dominant through traditional notions of leadership that promotes individualism, competition, aggressiveness and abusiveness (Matos et al. 2018).

Research suggests that it is not only those men that actively engage in homosocial circuits that reproduce homosocial cultures. Men that practice more passive forms of masculinity, so called complicit masculinities, that do not challenge homosocial processes and thereby earn a male dividend contribute to the reproduction of homosocial cultures (Wahl 2014). Moreover, it can be argued that women are also involved in sustaining such cultures through heterosocial behavior (cf. Lipman-Blumen 1976), that is by orienting themselves towards men, confirming men's superiority and refusing to acknowledge the existence of gender inequalities.

For example, McDonald & Charlesworth (2016) studying atypical forms of SH find that in certain contexts, women managers may be encouraged or sanctioned to adopt sexualized banter in order to adapt to the dominant gender culture. Furthermore, bystander reactions, that is the reactions of those individuals that are neither the victim nor the perpetrator, that include normalizing SH, treating predators as too important to sanction and by treating targets as villains (Dougherty & Sorg 2020) can be understood in light of specific homosocial cultures. Women's unwillingness to report harassment against themselves or others out of fear of retaliation (Johnson et al. 2016) can also be linked to organizational cultures that sustain SH. For the study of homosocial cultures and SH, this means that organizational cultures need to be explored at different levels and at different places in organizations.

Theories on homosociality and heterosociality have indeed been developed over the last decades in a number of ways, where the understanding of how male power and dominance is reproduced is central (Holgerson 2013). However, theories on homosocial cultures in

relation to SH, as organizational cultures that enable men to exercise violence in order to maintain control in organizations, are still underdeveloped.

### Counter-acting SH in organizations: Interactive and participatory approaches

There is also lack of knowledge in current literatures regarding how homosocial cultures can be changed so that men in different positions can act as change agents. Much of the actions taken to address the issue of SH in organizations has consisted in establishing SH policies at top management and HRM levels, implementing grievance procedures and offering training to managers and employees. However, scholars conclude that the methods for change are not sufficiently effective. For example, in a study of SH programs in US contexts, Dobbin and Kalev (2019) find that these programs do not necessarily reduce harassment. In fact, they can even exacerbate the problem. SH grievance procedures appear to incite retaliation and trainings can backfire when legalistic approaches that address participants as suspects are applied. Nevertheless, Dobbin and Kalev find that training programs that position managers as allies to victims and provide them with tools to recognize harassment and to intervene in a constructive way can have a positive effect. This approach in training programs has also been shown to have positive effects in studies on college campuses and in the military.

Trainings on their own are, however, unlikely to fully address a systemic problem like SH due to the differentiated and fragmented nature of organizational cultures – what is needed is an organizational development approach that engages in more systemic change (Perry et al. 2019). Indeed, organizational contexts matter. As noted by Halford and Leonard (2006), inequality practices may differ between different parts of organizations, depending on what local cultural values that are legitimate. Martin (2002) suggested that organizational cultures cannot only be studied as *integrated* and homogenous, but also as *differentiated* (into a variety of subcultures) and *fragmented* (into a variety of contexts and situations). This implies that organizations that work ambitiously on top management level to counteract SH may still harbour a variety of local homosocial cultures in which several aspects of SH are more or less tolerated, more or less unavoidable for those working there. Fundamental changes in workplaces is necessary in order to come to terms with SH. Scholars such as McEwen et al. (2021) also remind us that in the current era of neoliberalism and postfeminism – in which individuals tend to be blamed themselves for any problems they experience – it is particularly important to shift our focus away from the individual level and instead problematize organizational cultures.

Pursuing such fundamental change has been in focus of literature on gender and organizational development. This literature proposes approaches that build on principles developed within participatory action-research and interactive research as well as feminist research methods (e.g. Ely & Meyerson 2000). One such basic principle is that focus on doing research with people not on people. The goal is to produce knowledge through a research process that not only generates in-depth understanding of the context of the participants while increasing their capacity for autonomous action and self-reflection. These approaches draw on the gender and organization literature, most often Acker's (1990) gendered organization framework. A common feature of the methodologies employed is an interactive process of critique in which practices are identified, revised and tried out. For example, Amundsdotter (2009) details three processes: learning and exploration, mobilization and change. The participants initially collaborate on creating knowledge about how gender is done in their

organizational context and thereafter move on to mobilizing for change by developing strategies and deepened understanding of gender and power in organizations. These strategies are then implemented as work for change within the participant's organizational context. There is an on-going discussion where the change effort can be located, for example de Vries & van den Brink (2016) find that in their approach, the change effort rests with individuals, since it is designed to create a "small wins" ripple effect, while others such as Perry et al (2019) suggest that HR professionals adopt a wider strategy and engage the entire organization in data collection, diagnosis, and intervention development.

A key challenge in initiating and implementing fundamental change in organizations is involving men, both on managerial and other organizational levels. It is often men who resist change and the lack of success of change initiatives is often linked to the lack of engagement of men. An emerging body of literature seeks to deepen our understanding of the role of men as agents for change in organizations, in particular on leadership positions. One line of research is analyzing the popular approach of involving male managers in leading change as champions or allies. This approach has the potential to contribute to change but it requires that men acknowledge their power position and see the of putting that power into practice to promote gender equality. There is also an increasing interest in examining men as deliberate agents of pro-feminist change, in particular in relation to prevention of violence against women within the literature on men and masculinities. Although few scholars focus on men and violence prevention in the workplace, much can be learnt about men's activism in political parties and social movements. For example, Flood (2020) identifies key challenges in men's efforts for change: overcoming one's own sexist and violence supportive practices, addressing one's own perpetration or contribution to sexism and violence, adopting gender egalitarian everyday practices and resisting everyday privilege. This emphasizes the importance of critical self-reflection for activist men involved in preventing violence against women in order to understand in what way they can engage in work for change.

### Aim and research questions

In order to achieve such fundamental changes and transform work organizations into transparent and sustainable contexts free from violence and discrimination, in which all human beings irrespective of gender can thrive, treat each other with respect and dignity, and openly exchange views and ideas, we need more knowledge about the dynamics in organizational cultures that facilitate SH and about measures and methods that can transform these organizational cultures. The aim of the program is therefore two-fold:

1. The first aim is to further explore homosocial cultures in empirical studies in a number of different contexts to contribute to developing our understanding of the dynamics of SH. These dynamics include several possible gendered positions such as perpetrators, supporters, bystanders, managers, active men, passive men, complicit men, heterosocial women, exposed and harassed women and other gendered categories.
2. The second aim is to develop knowledge on measures and methods that transform homosocial cultures into spaces where men in different positions can act as change agents through an action-research oriented project.

The first aim is relevant as a first step to develop understandings of homosocial workplace cultures as complex and contradictory spaces where expressions of violence, such as

discrimination and SH, take place and become normalized, accepted and hidden. The program builds on previous research that underline the importance of understanding the cultural dimensions of SH, contrary to common understandings of discrimination and harassment as limited to individual behavior or bias.

In order to challenge these organizational protected zones of violence, there is a need to deepen the understanding of processes of power and loyalties in relation to dimensions of silence, fear and disagreements. This first aim will be fulfilled through four interlinked work packages seeking answers to the following questions:

- What masculinities are made available, possible, invisible or impossible in different industries, organizational cultures and local workplace cultures?
- How are homosocial and heterosocial practices interlinked?
- How are constructions of masculinity and prevailing homosocial cultures affected by gender equality work?
- In what way is SH and discrimination addressed in different male-dominated context?
- How do managers handle issues around SH and discrimination in different male-dominated context?

WP 1 explores the Swedish university sector, which by tradition is a paternalistic and nepotistic context – at the same time as there are current trends both towards increased gender equality and intolerance against SH, as well as towards increased individualism and competitiveness. This is a sector traditionally characterized by differentiated and fragmented organizational cultures, based in different subject areas and in notions of academic freedom and autonomy, but also a sector in which current managerialist developments imply an emergence of new masculinities.

WP 2 inquires into the fintech sector – a currently fast-growing part of the Swedish startup-scene. While this industry is itself rather new, it has its cultural roots in several highly gendered fields such as the finance industry and the ICT industry, but also in the entrepreneurship discourse which has for long promoted men, masculine habits and appearances, and male-dominated industry sectors. Firms are usually fairly small and thus less differentiated/fragmented than the sectors studied in the other WPs.

WP 3 focuses on a more traditional but highly influential sector – construction. It is an industry with its roots in masculine notions of strength and technical prowess, and characterized by a tradition of construction site autonomy that tend to differentiate cultures. In relation to the other WPs, it is a sector that harbours different notions of class and ethnicity in the workforce. At the same time it is also a sector that is working ambitiously with values connected to gender, safety, employer attractiveness and sustainability.

WP 4 explores the Swedish cultural sector, specifically the performing arts. It is a sector with a tradition of male stars and geniuses, in which aesthetic and artistic accomplishment, boundaryless organizing and individual status naturally comes before decent working conditions, workplace civility or organizational cohesiveness. At the same time, this is also the context in which #metoo emerged – linked to the sector and its employees as being generally admired in society – in which active measures are underway in order to reconstruct organizational values and policies.

The selection of male-dominated contexts for WP 1-4 has been made in order to provide the program with an empirical base from a variety of cultural values that underpins homosociality, SH, leadership and organizational development work. Thematically, the empirical studies are divided into three focus areas which are linked to the work packages in the following way: new masculinities (WP 1, 2); homosocial cultures (WP 1, 2, 3, 4); and preventing discrimination and violence in organizations (WP 3, 4).

The second aim of the program, to develop knowledge on measures and methods that can transform homosocial cultures into spaces where men in different positions can act as change agents, will be fulfilled in the final work package. The fifth work package, WP 5, includes an action-research oriented project that seeks to create organizational change that prevents discrimination and SH in male-dominated contexts building on the deepened understanding of the complexity of homosocial cultures developed in the first four work packages. The following research questions will be answered:

- Under what conditions can homosociality contribute to work for change?
- What measures and methods can transform homosocial cultures in which men can act as change agents in order to prevent violence and discrimination in organizations?
- What measures and methods can serve to homogenise cultural values in organizations and transcend differentiated and fragmented cultures

A common theoretical point of departure within the program is that social power relations such as gender are embedded in organisations and reproduced through processes that result from people's activities and perceptions. Thus, we do gender through our everyday actions. The meaning of gender is always situated and derives from a specific social context and is intertwined with other social relations such as class, race, ethnicity and sexuality (Acker 1990). In the current gender order, men dominate in most organizations and societies. However, this dominance is characterized by both stability and change, continuously re-established, subverted and destabilized (Hearn & Parkin 2001). This theoretical point of departure also informs the program's approach to work for change. It implies that change consists of emergent, localized processes of incremental change that involve identifying and revising oppressive social practices (Ely & Meyerson 2000).

The program team is well-positioned for exploring how homosocial cultures in organizations are reproduced and challenged. All researchers on the team have extensive experience of doing research on gender in organizations, in particular men, masculinities, leadership and work for change, and of carrying out research and development projects focusing on gender equality. In her research, PI Assoc. professor Charlotte Holgersson has explored the concept of homosociality in relation to executive recruitment and practices of sexual entertainment, male managers perceptions of gender equality and methods in work for change promoting gender equality and diversity. The research of Professor Monica Lindgren and Professor Johann Packendorff focuses on leadership, entrepreneurship, new forms of work organizations and profession-based and knowledge-intensive organisations from a gender perspective. The research interests of PhD Lotta Snickare include leadership and organizations from a gender perspective with a special focus on men and masculinities. Docent Annika Vånje has long experience of action/interactive research projects on gender, work and change conducted in close collaborations with employers and employees in the engineering, construction and public sectors. Professor Anna Wahl is a pioneer in the field of gender research in management in Sweden. Her research focuses on power relations in organizations related to processes of change and resistance, constructions of masculinities,

women's survival strategies and gendered organizational cultures. All team members contribute to the gender mainstreaming efforts at KTH and have long experience of carrying out trainings and workshops to promote gender equality and diversity.

The goal of this program is to strengthen and develop the environment for research on gender and organization at KTH that will continue to attract research collaboration with masters students, PhD students, post docs and established scholars; and that can continue to contribute to the organizational development efforts at KTH and other organizations in order to promote organizations free from discrimination and violence.

## Program design and methodology

As described in the previous section, the program is structured around five research work packages (WP) of which the first four explore homosocial cultures in different male-dominated contexts and provide the foundation for fifth WP. An additional WP (no. 6) covers administration, communication and dissemination. Each of these research WPs will be presented separately below, including design and methods.

### WP 1 Masculinities and homosociality in Academia

In this WP, we inquire into how masculinities in the Swedish university sector are produced and re-produced in a discursive context of an emerging enterprise culture - the new form of managerialist, individualised, performance-based workplace culture that have emerged in many universities across the globe in the wake of neoliberalism and New Public Management (Ekman et al, 2018). In contrast to earlier patriarchal and nepotistic cultures, gender equality and diversity perspectives are now often promoted and integrated in managerial agendas – implying that many men with senior academic and/or managerial posts are not only expected to work with such issues, but also to embrace them as natural parts of modern, professional, transparent and effective academic leadership. The transparent and objective 'hard facts' emerging from research assessment exercises, bibliometrics, merit valuation procedures, recruitments and promotion regulations etc. supposedly cuts through personalities, charisma, reputations and homosocial relations – implying that the leeway of senior male academics to have their way without being questioned or challenged is not as significant as before

At the same time, there is a significant stream of literature criticising such workplace cultures and leadership practices for still discriminating against women and other minorities – but in new and subtler ways than traditional nepotism and favouritism (cf. Helgesson Svedberg & Sjögren 2019). In this project, we ask how this happens and how it is related to emergent forms of masculinity and homosociality. We therefore focus our attention on the consequences for men in Academia – on the new masculinities emerging as part of the enterprise culture – but also on the consequences for Academia of influential men adopting these new masculinities.

Harley (2003) suggests that masculine dominance in Academia is reconstructed and sustained by use of new arguments, through new managerialist values and behaviours – and that the traditional structural subordination of women live on in new ways and through new practices.

It happens through invisibilisation of womens' relational responsibilities outside work and the expectations to bring these responsibilities also into the workplace, through over-subjecting women to detailed performance criteria and workplace regulations, through normalizing mens' career patterns and thereby downplaying womens' merits (Van den Brink & Benschop 2012), through organizing important academic events in a way that promotes homosociality whilst allowing for sexism and harassment against women (Biggs et al, 2018). As noted by Armato (2013) this tend to happen through masculinities characterized by 'enlightened sexism', i.e. men who openly support gender equality and feminism in academic workplaces and accrue status and privileges as a result of this, while enabling many existing discriminatory and sexist cultural practices to continue. Harley (2003) notes that apparently contradictory academic masculinisms seem to blend well together; aggressive, competitive and self-promoting behaviours in combination with a patriarchal superiority exercised through references to reason, objectivity, merit and factuality. Trying to understand how this is sustained over time, Pruitt et al. (2021) suggest that toxic masculinities in academic settings operate through a form of indirect violence, one that prevents 'others' in the workplace to voice their concerns, implying that alternative stories and perspectives remain untellable or untold.

In this study we want to probe into these new masculinities – emerging in academic workplace cultures characterized by managerialism, entrepreneurialism, performance-based governance and careerism. These are masculinities that tend to embrace and promote all sorts of organizational policies and values – such as gender equality and diversity – because it is the modern, smart, decisive, coaching and transparent thing to do, but also because it is a way to retain power and leeway. Men aiming at successful careers in such contexts will be expected to adjust to these cultural expectations, in order not to become mobilized out of homosocial communities and rendered unfit for academic leadership roles. At the same time, traditional structural subordination of women may well live on and the reconstruction of inequalities, may well happen in new arenas and in new ways.

In this project, we intend to do the following fieldwork:

- Interview study of male academics at four/five Swedish business schools/technical universities. This fieldwork serves to identify how and why homosocial processes unfold in academic workplaces and what forms of masculinity are legitimate/illegitimate in different workplace settings.
- Netnography in net-based forums (Facebook/similar) where influential academics discuss current matters in the Swedish university sector under their real names. This fieldwork serves to contextualise interview data by identifying not only common values and debates related to gender equality and gender research, but also how homosocial processes in Academia happen outside specific workplace contexts.

Given the general aim of the study - to analyse how emergent academic masculinities and homosocial cultures are produced and re-produced at senior levels in Swedish Academia – the following empirical questions are of interest to explore in the project:

- What are the main concerns and experiences of male academic leaders and managers in their daily work? What main messages and perspectives do they articulate, how are organizational goals and agendas at different levels experienced?

- What different discursive resources are invoked, how are emergent notions of enterprise combined with extant traditional professional academic norms? What ideals are constructed and how?
- What are the consequences for men in terms of what various masculine subject positions that are made available, possible, invisible or impossible?

As to the scope of our analysis, the focus is on how discourses relating to Academia, professionalism and gender are drawn on and combined, thus coming to constitute certain subject positions analysed through the meanings that individuals give to what is happening and to the concepts they use.

WP 1 lead: Professor Johann Packendorff

WP 2: Masculinities and homosociality in the Swedish fintech industry

Financial Technology (fintech) is part of the financial industry and can be described as the interface between IT-technology and the financial world where new products and services are created. Fintech companies are often described as pioneering, innovative startups that are breaking into markets where large financial players previously dominated, but the fintech market consists of many different types of companies and services. Financial institutions are becoming increasingly tech-focused in order to, for example, individualize and simplify the customer meetings and offers; the large and global tech companies are developing new payment solutions via their digital and social platforms, and e-retailers offer payment, financing and insurance solutions in connection with the purchase of their goods and services. At the same time, startups are developing services and products that until recently were only available through banks and financial advisers. That Sweden and especially Stockholm has a strong fintech industry is often emphasized as something very positive by both government and city representatives. Stockholm Business Region (SBR), a company wholly owned by the city, emphasizes for example on its website, that fintech is one of the “hottest” tech investment areas in the world and Stockholm-based companies has received 18 % of all private placements in fintech companies across Europe (SBR, 2021).

The financial industry is often portrayed in movies and television series. Most recently in the Norwegian television series *Exit* that describes an industry populated by men who work constantly, earn large amounts of money and then spend it and where women are either the exception or subordinates, and where terms such as men/women and masculinity/femininity are taken for granted and regarded as stable and unambiguous.

Fintech is a male-dominated area of the financial sector also in real life. It is gender-segregated both in terms of the use of the products (see e.g. Shin et al., 2021) and regarding owners and employees. Fintech companies, globally, founded by women have received 50 % less capital than companies founded by men in the last five years (Sparks & Eckenrode 2020). While men were seen as aggressive, promising entrepreneurs by investors, women were described as enthusiastic but weak (Malmström et al. 2017). It is also mainly men, between 36-40, that lead fintech companies in the Stockholm region. 94 percent of fintech CEOs is men. In smaller fintech companies, the startups, 62 percent of the workforce consists of men. On the IT and development side, the proportion is higher with 83 percent of the total workforce and 85 percent of the leading positions held by men (Gromek 2018). A report from

the venture capital company Atomico showed that almost half of all women in the industry had experienced some form of discrimination against women (Atomico 2019).

The financial industries division in male- and female-dominated occupational roles and positions have been noted in a number of studies (see e.g. Renemark 2007). Several studies have investigated how the gender segregation is established and maintained or the effects of women's minority position within finance (see e.g. Blomberg 2009). The focus on women and their conditions in male-dominated occupational roles and position does not imply that men and masculinity are absent; on the contrary, they form the background that these studies take as their point of departure. However, as representatives of the norm against which women in minority positions are received and judged, the notions of men and masculinity are unavoidably defined as more stable, uniform categories. In a study of men and masculinity within investment banking Snickare and Holter (2018) confirms a strong linkage between masculinity and finance, in terms of the organization, structure and culture of the industry. They describe a hierarchical organization with elements of subordination, including in the form of humiliation. The ability to subordinate yourself is part of the construction of masculinity. The constructions of masculinity that have long remained stable are, however, encountering new challenges and coming under pressure.

The aim of this project is to examine the construction of masculinity and homosocial cultures within in the Swedish fintech industry. We are going to concentrate on the most male-dominated part of the industry; startups like Bambora, iZettle, Klarna, Northmill and Tink.

The data collection will involve interviews with male and female employees in four or five fintech start ups; interviews with representatives for organizations financing fintech startups; interviews with HR representatives in four or five fintech start ups; and a study of HR policies and employee benefits regarding parental leave, work life balance etc.

Given the overall aim of the study - to examine the construction of masculinity and homosocial cultures in the Swedish fintech industry – the following research questions will be explored:

- What are the main concerns and experiences of male and female employees in their daily work? What main messages and perspectives do they perceive, how are organizational goals and agendas at different levels experienced?
- How is the work culture in the companies affected by expectations from the society for example the Swedish gender equality policies? By expectations from external investors? Or by “the logic of loyalty” where almost all companies start with low salaries and no benefits but some of them, if they succeed, gives extremely high returns to those that have stayed through the whole process?
- What are the consequences for men in terms of what various masculine subject positions that are made available, possible, invisible or impossible?

The scope of the analysis is the linkage between the construction of professional identities within fintech and the construction of masculinity and homosocial cultures with a specific focus on subordination.

WP 2 lead: PhD Lotta Snickare

### WP 3: Masculinities and homosociality in construction sites

The construction sector is worldwide characterised by a relatively high degree of death accidents as well as reported work injuries. One background to this is a strong homosocial culture among male workers consisting of risk taking practices and difficulties to set limits at work. Further, status in the work teams at construction sites is gained through fulfilment of traditional gendered values around men, as being physically strong and heterosexual (Norberg & Johansson 2021). This can be described as a hegemony where men through their biological sex are attributed with, and through their practices and language reinforce, qualities that give them status in the organisation (Budgeon 2014). The backside of the coin is that these gendered values and practices have negative consequences for the organisation as a result of discrimination and violence against not just women, but also men that are perceived to be “weak” in relation to the prevailing masculine norm.

The WP builds upon a recently completed action research (Aagaard Nielsen & Svensson 2006) project performed in close collaboration with a large Swedish construction company. The starting point for that project was the company’s investment in gender equality by recruiting a group of women into the position as adult apprentices. The approach was to work with different learning activities aiming for improving gender awareness at the construction sites and through this deconstruct a strong homosocial work culture. The empirical findings pinpoint some prominent intersections as the fact that the female apprentices did not live up to traditional gendered expectations by being more aggressive in language and practices than anticipated, and thus support the prevailing norm of masculinity. Another finding was a tendency to a shift in the male workers’ attitudes and practices in relation to how they perceived the gender equality investment and their work culture.

The aim with this WP is to further explore the homosocial culture at construction sites, where there have been investments in change projects with focus on gender equality. As such the WP will continue where the project described above ended and include already gathered data, but also extend to gain deeper knowledge by include (i) work sites at two more large construction companies and (ii) what kind of images stakeholders convey about the construction sector and about women and men working there. The two research questions that will be elaborated further in this WP are:

- What impact do gender equality investments at construction sites have on constructions of masculinities and the prevailing homosocial culture?
- How are women and men working in the constructions sector discursively described by stakeholders in digital newsletters and at websites?

The WP takes its point of departure in data that was gathered between 2018 – 2020 and that includes 16 semi-structured interviews with men and women working at construction sites, notes and work-material from three learning seminars as well as notes from participative observations. This data will be, in order to answer the first research question, supplemented with follow-up interviews with the previous interviewees as well as completely new semi-structured interviews at two more companies. Both men and women will be interviewed, through this we will be able to mirror men’s and women’s views on homosociality. In total 30 new interviews (approx. 20 men and 10 women) with trade workers and managers working in the three different companies will be performed.

The second research question will be answered by analysing Svensk Byggtjänst (knowledge hub for the Swedish construction sector) digital newsletter Jämnt på Jobbet (Equal at Work) and material published at their and the social partners' websites. Jämnt på Jobbet is an investment that Sveriges Byggindustrier initiated as a response to the #metoo movement Autumn 2018, and it aims for counteracting sexism and inequalities in the sector by knowledge dissemination.

WP 3 lead: Associate Professor Annika Vänje

#### WP 4: Homosociality and heterosociality in the performing arts

WP 4 aims at developing knowledge concerning violence in the performing arts and the organizational dimensions in the creative industries that produce and reproduce gender inequalities, discrimination and sexual harassment (SH). Previous studies suggest that many women in the performing arts consider SH to be part of a dominant occupational culture that they have to accept. The most important factors that influence the organizational conditions are competition for work, industry culture, gendered power relations and the importance of informal networks (Hennekam & Bennett 2017). Similar results was found in a study of prevalence of sexual harassment in the theatre world, where it was stated that is a more common phenomenon in the performing arts than in work life in general. Several risk factors were pointed out to explain the high prevalence of sexual harassment, where the informal nature of the recruitment processes and hard competition were both crucial. Charismatic leadership and authority is producing a work culture where notions of art is more important than other consideration. The dominant culture reproduces gender stereotypes and discrimination (Kleppe & Röyseng 2016). In November 2017, employers' organisation the Swedish Performing Arts Association and trade union the Swedish Union for Performing Arts and Film appointed a Commission against harassment in the performing arts as a consequence of the outcry against misconduct in the work environment and the #metoo testimonies regarding sexual harassment. Witness accounts in the field were analyzed and structured interviews with various groups, active in the field, were conducted. Results confirms that, while there is a clear hierarchy within the performing arts, it appears that informal power structures are allowed to dominate. This creates ambiguity in the work environment. The fact that certain individuals with "star status" become important to a production runs the risk of creating problems with harassment and discrimination if leadership is unclear. It was noted that artistic freedom is used as an argument in favour of taking liberties at the expense of others. The fact that the performing arts are characterised by temporary working communities results in organizational cultures where individuals are dependent on formal and informal leaders in order to survive (Commission against harassment in the performing arts 2018).

The WP aims at problematizing working cultures as fluid in time and space and explore how the creative industries share many characteristics of homosociality and heterosociality in a broader sense. The dominant culture of silence includes fear of reacting as victim of harassment and also to a situation where bystanders do not dare to intervene. Managers fail to take responsibility for the issue, with a lack of knowledge and influence.

The fieldwork builds on previous results and will thus focus on the industry instead of a particular organization. Group interviews that represent specific professions in order to work in interaction with the participants to capture the dynamics of the complex forms of

homosocial culture and heterosocial response that exist. Group interviews will be carried out with actors, dancers and singers (women and men); artistic leaders, directors and choreographers (women and men); and managers and leaders (women and men). Since the study has an action research oriented approach, the group interviews will allow for the development of measures for challenging the forms of homosociality and heterosociality identified.

Empirical questions that guide the study are:

- How is homosociality embedded in the industry culture?
- How can heterosocial expressions be interpreted as part of a fluid homosocial culture?
- How can values of artistic values be challenged culturally in relation to expressions of gender based violence?

The WP leader chaired the Commission against harassment in the performing arts and has led several leadership programs for women as well as a research and development project for women and men within the film industry.

WP 4 lead: Professor Anna Wahl

#### WP 5: Changing homosocial cultures

This WP consists of an action-research project that will explore and develop measures and methods that aim at turning homosocial culture into arenas where men in different positions can act as change agents in gender equality work, in order for these “other” positions to become culturally normalized. The purpose is to promote organizational change in male-dominated contexts that results in decreased expressions of violence, discrimination and sexual harassment. To point out and elaborate on what the needed preconditions are in order for men in a collective setting to change cultural behavior is of highest priority in this action-oriented initiative for change.

Increasing gender awareness both on an individual and organizational level is crucial when challenging inequalities in organizations. On an individual level it means more gender-aware men in positions of power, that on a deeper level understand that they have to take action for increased gender equality. It implies an insight in men that they have to move from passive support to action in order to be accountable for change. On an organizational level, it means challenging homosocial cultures and men’s privilege in the organization and industry.

The questions explored in this WP are:

- What characterizes the relational dynamics of homosocial cultures?
- How can homosocial cultures become arenas for men’s change agency?
- How can insights on homosocial cultures contribute to the development of measures and methods for change?

The project builds on knowledge from participatory action-research and interactive research as well as feminist research methods (e.g. Ely & Meyerson 2000; Andersson 2012). It also draws on the theoretical model on different dimensions in gender equality work, including

content, participants and format, which impacts processes and results in gender equality training and development programs (Benschop et al. 2015). The model illustrates the complexity in gender equality work, and is here used as a platform for the design of the project.

The project involves working with four groups consisting of women and men from different organizations and industries explored in WP 1-4. The participants will come from contexts characterized by male dominance and homosocial cultures. They will work both in all male and all female groups as well as in mixed groups. The groups will be facilitated by the research team at six occasions. The purpose of these occasions is to jointly develop strategies for change on both an individual and organizational level, working interactively with theoretical knowledge, reflection and discussion. The goal is to develop groups where everyone's voice is heard and respected. The discussions will be documented and followed-up on in focus group interviews.

The project builds on the research team's previous experience of research and development projects that have had a strong focus on applying gender research and interactive approach (Women power resources in change and innovation processes; Harriet - Applied Gender Research at Hero-m; Gendered Conditions in Management; Eivor & Mai – Research and Development project for gender equality work with a power perspective, all funded by VINNOVA).

WP 5 lead: Associate Professor Charlotte Holgersson

#### Brief presentations of involved researchers

Charlotte Holgersson is Docent and Associate Professor at the Department of Industrial Economics and Management at KTH Royal Institute of Technology. Since 2009 she has been expert advisor to KTH management in issues of gender equality and diversity. Her research is located in the intersection of organization studies and gender studies. Her main empirical concerns are the perpetuation of men's dominance on top positions in organizations, and processes of change. Several of her research projects focus on equality, diversity and inclusion practices in organizations. She also has extensive experience of research and development projects regarding gender equality and diversity.

Monica Lindgren is Professor of Industrial Economics and Management with specialization in Organisation and Management of Technology-Intensive Firms at KTH Royal Institute of Technology. Her research interests include leadership, entrepreneurship and new forms for work organisation, often studied from perspectives such as gender, identity construction and social constructionism. She has extensive experience in research on profession-based and knowledge-intensive organisations and has recently been part of a program focusing on performance-based governance of Swedish academic organisations.

Johann Packendorff is Professor of Industrial Economics and Management with specialization in Industrial Project Management. His research interests include leadership, entrepreneurship and project work, often studied from perspectives such as gender, identity construction and social constructionism. He has extensive experience in research on profession-based,

knowledge-intensive and project-based organisations, and has recently been part of a program focusing on performance-based governance of Swedish academic organisations.

Lotta Snickare is Researcher at KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Department of Real Estate and Construction Management, and at the Centre for Gender Research, Oslo University. Her research interests include leadership and organizations from a gender perspective with a special focus on men and masculinities. Currently she is part of a research project founded by the Norwegian Research Council focusing on men and masculinities within academic organizations. She is also the editor for a special issue of the journal *Gender, Work and Organization* with the theme caring masculinities. Between 2013-2016 she was part of a research project focusing on hegemonic masculinity and power structures within investment banking, the military and the Norwegian Oil industry funded by the Norwegian Research Council. She is presently responsible for the development program for Assistant Professors at KTH, Partners in Learning (PiL), together with Professor Johann Packendorff.

Annika Vänje is Docent in Technology and Health with specialisation in Gender and Organisational Change, at the Department of Biomedical Engineering and Health Systems, KTH Royal Institute of Technology. She has been principal investigator for several externally funded action/interactive research projects about gender, work and change. These have been conducted in close collaborations with employers and employees in the engineering, construction and public sectors.

Anna Wahl is Professor in Gender, Organization and Management, at the Department of Industrial Economics and Management, KTH Royal Institute of Technology. She is a pioneer in the field of gender research in organization and management studies in Scandinavia. Her main research areas of interest are power relations in organizations related to processes of change and resistance, constructions of masculinities, women's survival strategies and gendered organizational cultures. She is presently Vice President for Gender equality and values at KTH and member of the Gender Equality Commission at the Swiss National Science Foundation. She has lead several government commissions on gender in management in Swedish private sector, published in Government reports SOU 1994: 3, SOU 2003:16 and SOU 2014:80. She has been involved in management training and gender equality projects in most areas of working life for more than twenty years, and is a well-known keynote speaker in the field of gender and management, gender equality and feminist theory.

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