

Gender, Work & Organization Conference

28-30 June 2023 | Stellenbosch | South Africa

GENDER, WORK & ORGANIZATION

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Gender, Work and Organization

13th International Interdisciplinary Conference

28-30 June 2023, Stellenbosch, Cape Town, South Africa

Conference theme

Marginalized gender identities - how can intellectual activism transform work and organization?

(Read more about the conference theme on the conference website).

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS/PAPER SUBMISSIONS

STREAM TITLE:

Men in focus - exploring homosocial cultures and sexual harassment in organizations

STREAM LEADERS:

Charlotte Holgersson, Royal Institute of Technology, Sweden

Oystein Gullvåg Holter, University of Oslo, Norway

Monica Lindgren, Royal Institute of Technology, Sweden

Johann Packendorff, Royal Institute of Technology, Sweden

Lotta Snickare, University of Oslo, Norway

Annika Vänje, Dalarna University, Sweden

Anna Wahl, Royal Institute of Technology, Sweden

Sue Williamson, UNSW Canberra, Australia

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As the #metoo movement has revealed, sexual harassment (SH) in organisations remains a widespread and serious problem. In a recent review of literature on SH, Feldblum and Lipnic (2016) have found estimates of SH at work ranging from 25% to 85% for women. SH encompasses a variety of expressions that can be divided into three broad categories: gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion (Fitzgerald & Cortina, 2018). Despite the wide variety of definitions and measurements, studies consistently show that women are more likely to encounter SH than men (McDonald & Charlesworth, 2016). Moreover, studies show that women of colour face the double burden of gendered racism or racialised SH (Cassino & Besen-Cassino, 2019). SH has severe consequences on individual level, including detrimental effects on health, work satisfaction and career progression, but also on organisational level, namely absenteeism, higher levels of turnover and reduced labour productivity. Women who challenge existing power structures, such as women in 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 behaviour or even just by entering traditionally male-dominated contexts (e.g. Berhdal, 2007).

SH appears to be more common in organisational contexts that are characterised by male dominance, in other words, where 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 are accepted and sometimes even encouraged (Hearn & Parkin, 2001).

Homosociality is a theoretical concept developed to capture processes in which men orient themselves towards 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 (Holgersson, 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 organisations are those with low power and status, such as women, younger workers, temporary workers, people of colour and men who are financially vulnerable (e.g. Uggen & Blackstone, 2004).

SH has been linked to norms surrounding masculinity. For example, Schrock and Schwalbe (2009) suggest that SH can be understood as a 'manhood act' performed by men driven 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 a study of initiatives to prevent gender-based violence, Jewkes et al. (2015) have shown how initiatives challenging hegemonic masculinities are more likely to lead to sustainable change. In organisational practice, such masculine norms also tend to become dominant through traditional notions of leadership that promote individualism, competition, aggressiveness and abusiveness (Matos et al., 2018). Research suggests that it is not only those men who actively engage in homosocial circuits who reproduce homosocial cultures. Men who 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 practices (cf. Lipman-Blumen 1976) by orienting themselves towards men, confirming men's superiority and refusing to acknowledge the existence of gender inequalities. For example, McDonald and Charlesworth (2016) in studying atypical forms of SH have found that in certain contexts, women managers may be encouraged or sanctioned to adopt sexualised banter in order to adapt to the dominant gender culture. Furthermore, bystander reactions, namely the reactions of those individuals who are neither the victim nor the perpetrator, that include normalising SH, treating predators as too important to sanction and 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 local workplace cultures that sustain SH. This means that organisational cultures need to be explored as differentiated and fragmented, and studied at different levels and at different places in organisations (Martin, 2002).

Theories on homosociality and heterosociality in which the understanding of how male power and dominance is reproduced is central have indeed been developed over the last decades (Holgerson, 2013). However, these theories are underdeveloped in relation to SH.

In the stream, we therefore seek to debate and analyse homosocial workplace cultures as complex and contradictory spaces where expressions of violence, such as discrimination and SH, take place and become normalised, accepted and hidden. Underlining the importance of understanding the cultural dimensions of SH (Martin, 2002), we seek to improve our understanding of organisational processes of power and loyalties in relation to dimensions of silence, fear and disagreements. We also wish to explore differences and similarities between such homosocial cultures in different economic, historical and cultural contexts. Furthermore, we want to discuss ways to counteract SH in organisational settings, to change and improve workplace cultures, and to understand the roles that men may have in such endeavours, based on the stance that homosocial workplace cultures are not a problem for women only.

Questions that might be addressed by papers in this stream, by no means exhaustive, include the following:

- What facets of SH are available, possible, invisible or impossible in different industries, organisational cultures and local workplace cultures? What similarities and differences can be found in different national contexts?
- How are homosocial and heterosocial practices manifested in different organisational and local workplace cultures, and how are they interlinked? How do different national contexts impact homosocial and heterosocial practices?
- What are the consequences of homosocial and heterosocial workplace cultures for individual and organisational well-being?
- How are (re)constructions of masculinity and prevailing homosocial cultures affected by gender equality work?
- How can theories of homosociality and heterosociality be further developed and used in change initiatives?
- In what way are SH and discrimination addressed in different male-dominated contexts?
- How do managers handle issues around SH and discrimination in different male-dominated contexts?
- What measures and methods can transform homosocial cultures in which men can act as change agents in order to prevent violence and discrimination in organisations?
- What measures and methods can serve to transcend differentiated and fragmented cultures that enable SH?

For stream enquiries, please contact Johann Packendorff at johann.packendorff@indek.kth.se or Lotta Snickare at l.k.snickare@mn.uio.no

Abstracts of approximately 500 words should be submitted directly to the GWO2023 conference website in a ONE-page (A4-size, single-spaced, excluding references, with no headers, footers or track changes) Word document, NOT PDF. Abstracts are invited by the end of day 7 November 2022 (Central Africa Time - CAT), with decisions on acceptance to be made by stream leaders by December 2022. Prospective contributions will be independently refereed. Abstracts should include full contact details, including your name, institutional affiliation, mailing address and e-mail address. We are hoping to circulate abstracts prior to the 2023 GWO conference to those attending the conference.

Subject to full peer review, this stream may select suitable full papers for a special issue of the *Gender, Work and Organization* journal post the conference. If your abstract is accepted for this stream, you are encouraged to submit a full paper (5 000 to 7 000 words excluding references) by 28 February 2023, which may be considered for such a GWO journal special edition.

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