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# European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults - RELA

VOLUME 9    NUMBER 1    APRIL 2018

## Contents

- 7    Editorial: Intersectionality and adult education  
     *Barbara Merrill and Andreas Fejes*

## Thematic Papers

- 13   Intersectionality in Finnish adult education research: insights from the journal  
     *Aikuiskasvatus 2010-2016*  
     *Seija Keskitalo-Foley and Päivi Naskali*
- 29   An institutional ethnography of a feminist organization: a study of community  
     education in Ireland  
     *Maeve O'Grady*
- 45   Developing inclusive later life learning environments: insights from intersectional  
     analysis of ageing and lesbian, gay, transgendered and bisexual identities  
     *Christopher McAllister*
- 61   Marginalised voices in the inclusive recruitment discourse: a dilemma of  
     inclusion/exclusion in the (Swedish) police  
     *Malin Wieslander*
- 79   Change oriented learning and the Greek disability movement - a mutually  
     beneficial encounter between knowledge and action  
     *Anthi Chatzipetrou*

## Open Papers

- 93   Citizenship as individual responsibility through personal investment - an  
     ethnographic study in a study circle  
     *Annika Pastuhov and Fredrik Rust*
- 109 The narrative of 'equality of chances' as an approach to interpreting PIAAC  
     results on perceived political efficacy, social trust and volunteering and the quest  
     for political literacy  
     *Anke Grotlüschen*



## Editorial: Intersectionality and adult education

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### Introduction

The concept of intersectionality emerged in the 1980s and has its origins in feminist theory and anti-racist theory and has since gained in popularity. The term was first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989). For black feminists such as Crenshaw feminism and feminist theory did not relate to the experiences of black women as it reflected only the lives of white women. Instead black feminists argued that black women's lives and identities are shaped by both gender and race. For Crenshaw intersectionality 'is a tool particularly adept at capturing and theorising the simultaneity of race and gender as social processes' (Crenshaw, 1992, p. 403). Since then the concept has been extended to include interaction between other forms of inequality such as class so that as Anthias states the intersectionality of inequalities means that 'classes are always gendered and racialised and gender is always classed and racialised and so on' (Anthias, 2005, p. 33). The focus has, therefore, moved away from just looking at one form of inequality to recognising that people experience multiple forms of inequality and domination in society.

Intersectionality addresses the inequalities, disadvantaged position and oppression of particular groups so this has relevance for adult education and adult students. Historically radical adult education has given voice to working class women and men and has focused on 'really useful knowledge' (Johnson, 1988) to highlight inequalities of class and challenge this. Feminist adult educators went further and looked at the interaction of class and gender in the lives of women adult education students (see the work of Skeggs, 1997; Thompson, 2000). More recently adult education research has looked at the intersectionality of class, gender and race and other forms of inequality such as age and disability (see e.g. Finnegan, Merrill & Thunborg, 2014) and how this has impacted upon the experiences of adult learners. But class, gender and ethnicity in particular can also privilege the positions of individuals in society over others.

Intersectionality also places the concepts of identity, changing identities and power as central to understanding people's lives. Identity is also something which has concerned adult education researchers in researching how working class women and men and

working class black women and men perceive their identity in middle class educational institutions such as universities (see e.g. Reay, 2003; West, 2014), or in more traditional adult education institutions (see e.g. Dahlstedt, Sandberg, Fejes & Olson, 2018). Although higher education institutions have become more diverse adult students often feel marginalised and ‘like fish out of water’ as a result of their age, class, gender, ethnicity or disability. While in adult education institutions, although the majority of students might be working class, other variables such as ethnicity and gender are key aspects in how students perceive others as well as themselves in terms of occupational choice or life chances (Dahlstedt, Fejes, Olson, Sandberg & Rahm, 2017).

However, while intersectionality as perspectives have been fruitfully developed and more and more common within social science research as well as in education research more generally, such perspectives are rather limited within adult education research. Thus, in this thematic issue we have several articles published that in different ways direct attention towards issues of intersectionality and adult students’ experiences and participation in adult education in both enabling and constraining ways.

### **Papers on adult education and intersectionality**

This thematic issue includes five thematic papers that draw on different aspects of intersectionality in analysing adult education. In the first paper, Seija Keskitalo-Foley and Päivi Naskali, provide an analysis of how common the use of intersectionality perspectives were in papers published in the Finnish Journal of Adult Education 2010-2016. During the period, 91 articles were published, and out of these, 20 articles were, based on a first analysis, selected for further scrutiny. Focus was not only directed at if papers explicitly drew on an intersectionality perspective, but also implicit ways of analysing difference. Their analysis resulted in the identification of only 4 articles that drew specifically on intersectionality perspectives. However, yet 16 others implicitly drew on intersectionality, which means that these articles ‘focus on identity in terms of already defined categories rather than defining categories as socially constructed by power relations’ (p. 23). In most of these 16 articles, recognised difference were seen as given. Among categories of difference, ethnicity and race were lacking, while categories of gender, age, social class, education, occupation, and learning difficulties were discussed in the sample.

In the second article, Maeve O’ Grady’s focus on a community education organisation for marginalised working class women in Ireland which because of more neoliberal tendencies in society is moving its purpose from ‘women’s community building’ to ‘individual capacity building’. O’Grady explains that ‘the purpose of the research is to support the need for the organisation to reconceptualise the meaning of the work of the organisation using institutional ethnography methodology to question the extent to which the work can be seen as political and feminist, and adhering to its original ideals’ (p. 29). Employing institutional ethnography and drawing on Bourdieu’s work O’Grady explores how the organisation conceptualises its work by listening to the voices of the working class women learners, staff and voluntary staff. Analysis was based on a four week period of participant observations. The author argues that the research enabled the organisation to reflect on and rethink its purpose and position in a climate of neoliberalism. What comes through is the focus on the subjectivity of the women learners and the need to provide a safe space away from a male dominated society and a place where they are valued, listened to and respected. For many of the working class women it is the first time they have been given voice. This requires the process of unlearning.



The aim is a changing of the self through personal development and this is seen as a necessary precursor before collective action can take place. The organisation recognises that it has shifted away from its original radical roots but is reworking its original identity and ideals within the context of a changed society.

In the third thematic paper, Chris McAllister's focus is on an under-researched area within the field of adult education and intersectionality. The paper addresses the learning experiences of older (50+) years lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) adults in Scotland. In his analysis intersectionality is viewed and applied as an analytical tool for critical educational gerontology. Learning in later life has the potential to be empowering and inclusive. Such learning allows LGBT adults to reflect upon their painful discriminatory experiences and the processes of coming out in their youth as critical educational gerontology has the power to challenge and counter discrimination and enable them to examine their identity formation and lived experiences. The voices of the participants offer a colourful and varied insight into how they are dealing with the transition and change from work to retirement as an older LGBT person. As the author states 'Participants attached varying levels of significance to being LGBT, mediated by becoming older and the heterogeneous contexts and multiple realities of their later lives' (p. 52). Some feel they have become more resilient about coping with hostility and discrimination while others focused more on the issues related to ageing such as care and the need to build a new identity after leaving work. What is common in all their ageing experiences is the importance of critical educational gerontology and intersectional interrogation as mediated by the LGBT community groups they belonged to in enabling them to 'construct meaningful and inclusive later life learning environments with older LGBT adults'.

In the fourth thematic paper, Malin Wieslander focus on inclusive recruitment within the police in Sweden. Inclusive recruitment is a proactive strategy aimed at overcoming occupational stereotyping and the exclusion of women and minority groups. The aim of the article is to 'analyse how aspects of inclusive recruitment and intersecting categories are constructed and negotiated in conversations between police students (p. 66)'. For this, the author draws on an intersectional approach in which individuals are construed as having multiple belongings and where social belonging (identities) intersect with each other and within social structures. The data comes from a research study on diversity discourses within the police training settings, and analytical wise, a critical discursive approach is mobilised. The analysis illustrates, on the one hand, how the discourse on inclusive recruitment 'reproduces the social order by affirming social categories which are assumed to be inherent in the representatives of diversity' (p. 75), and on the other hand how students contest such an idea. Students from minority groups, are through discourse, positioned as not as qualified as police officers who adhere to the norm (male, white, heterosexual). The former due to them being construed as students who are there only to fulfil politic goals of diversity, while the latter students being there due to their competence. All in all, inclusive recruitment is, a tricky dilemma that can support liberation of groups as well as it might limit individuals in their occupational choices and access.

In the fifth and final thematic paper, Anthy Chatzipetrou direct attention to issues of disability, adults and adult learning. As a new social movement, the Greek Disability movement is in a transitional social context moving from a medical based model of disability to a social model. Based on empirical research the aim of this study was to interrogate whether or not adult educators can make a difference and facilitate the empowerment of disabled people in Greece. Disability and disabled learners is a topic which is under-researched in adult education. The disabled learners in this study were

engaged in non-formal learning and all belonged to the Greek Disability Movement (GDM). Drawing on critical pedagogy, conscientization and transformative learning semi-structured interviews and observation were analysed in order to capture the depth of experience. Both disabled learners and educators were interviewed. Using the voices of the participants Chatzipetrou explores the extent to which this educational programme can result in empowerment for the disabled learners through the processes of the curriculum, educators and teaching approaches. While she concludes that individuals did gain positively from participation in the education programme it did not lead to the level of empowerment expected of a critical education approach. However, optimism is not lost and a plea is made for the future linking of adult education, disability studies and the disability movement to look for ways of transformative learning.

## Open papers

Two open papers are included in this issue of RELA. In the first of these, Annika Pastuhov from Finland and Fredrik Rusk from Norway, direct attention towards the ways democratic ideals of Nordic popular education is played out in an English study circle group (a study circle where participants were to learn the English language) taking place in Sweden. Based on an ethnographic study of such a study circle, drawing on an understanding of citizenship as both acting and being, the authors focus on understanding the participants perspectives of the everyday life of a study circle. The analysis illustrates how the study circle does not very well adapt to the democratic ideals of study circles in which participants are encouraged to be active and engage together in order to develop themselves. Rather, the focus becomes very much on learning correct English, and adapting to the frames of the circle laid down by the circle leader. Or rather the focus becomes highly individualistic, and as argued by the authors ‘the circle is regarded as necessary for tackling the lack of knowledge in English rather than as a motive for participating’ (p. 106).

The second open paper also focus on issues of democracy. Here, Anke Grotlüschen from Germany, draws on large scale data set in order to discuss issues of political and social participation among low and high educated adults. Two questions are posed: ‘Do adults with low literacy skills agree less often on feelings of political efficacy and social trust than adults with high literacy skills? Do they engage less often in volunteering than adults with high literacy skills?’ (p. 113) The analysis, based on PIAAC data, concludes that the three indicators, efficacy, social trust and volunteering all show lower results among adults with low literacy skills. Based on the analysis, the author suggests that there is a need to offer, not only workforce literacy, but political literacy as well. And that didactical settings in civic education attracting adults with low levels of literacy is needed.

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## Intersectionality in Finnish adult education research: insights from the journal *Aikuiskasvatus* 2010–2016

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### Abstract

*The article studies intersectionality in Finnish research on adult education. Specifically, we investigate the kinds of discussions on differences and their relations that are going on in such research. To this end we seek to identify intersectional approaches in the articles published in the journal Aikuiskasvatus between 2010 and 2016, a period marked by an increase in multiculturalism and social division as well as in gendered and sexual diversity in Finnish society. We understand intersectional differences as performative processes, not stable essences. Our study indicates that only few articles analysed intersectional differences explicitly. Implicitly recognised differences were mostly seen as givens. Categories such as ethnicity and race were found to be lacking in the data, but age, gender, social class, education, occupation and learning difficulties were discussed.*

**Keywords:** adult education; categorisation; discursive reading; Finland; intersectional differences

### Introduction

We approach the Finnish research on adult education from the perspective of intersectionality by analysing the articles published in *Aikuiskasvatus* (Adult education), the leading academic journal in the field, during the years 2010-2016. Our aim is to inspire theoretical and methodological discussion in adult education. We assume that focusing on transverse power relations helps to reveal hidden relations of subordination and thus inform identity politics. As researchers, we engage with the feminist adult education tradition and embrace the theoretical discussions in which the intersectional approach has a long history.

The journal “Aikuiskasvatus” is a window on the discussions going on in the Finnish adult education community and a forum having the power to create the canon in the field. The journal is a leading academic publication in its field in Finland. Its overarching aim is to advance adult education in what is a changing society and examine educational topics from the perspective of humanist educational ideas (Aikuiskasvatus, 2017).

Recent years have seen an increase in intersectional research in adult education. For example the “European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults” (2014) published a thematic issue on European migration with articles on topics such as whiteness and the multi-ethnic environments in which adult education takes place. A number of edited volumes have appeared as well, such as those by Greyerbiehl, Simmons & Mitchell (2014), Davis, Brunn-Bevel, Olive & Jones (2015), and Griffin & Museums (2011a; 2011b). Despite this trend, Kalwant and Uvanney (2014, pp. 2–3) call for increasing intersectional research on race, class and gender in the areas of school and adult education.

The rationale for examining the years 2010 to 2016 lies in the changes seen in Finnish society during the period and the challenges these have posed to adult education. Three trends in particular can be cited. First, the country has become more multicultural. Second, the neoliberal policies of the state have diminished the country’s status as a prominent Nordic welfare state, increasing social class divisions and gender inequality (Saari, 2015). Third, considerations of equality have drawn attention to the rights of gendered and sexual minorities and other marginalised groups, such as people with physical or other disabilities (e.g. Brunila, Hakala, Lahelma & Teittinen, 2013).

Our hypothesis is that despite the social changes noted above, mainstream adult education research in Finland has not embraced the intersectional viewpoint to any significant extent. We assume that categories and differences nevertheless inform research approaches and, accordingly, undertake to identify the influence of intersectional approaches in particular.

We first provide a brief review of intersectionality as a controversial concept. After describing the selection of data, we proceed to the analysis, which applies insights into the intersectional approach gained from the work of Lykke (2005, 2012) and McCall (2005). The results are described in terms of the explicit and implicit approaches to intersectionality, with the latter further divided into intercategory, additive and intracategory approaches. We conclude that while the articles studied do apply differences among and between identity categories in their analyses, intersectionality can be seen as only recently emerging as an explicit principle of research.

### **Intersectional approach to differences**

Crenshaw (1989; 1991) has been acknowledged as the first scholar to use the term ‘intersectionality’. She studied experiences of oppression among black women and faulted the feminist research of the time for excluding their experiences. The intersectional approach was seen as an answer to the question how multiple categories produce differences among women and men who were no longer seen simply as representatives of homogenous gender groups, but also as white and black, young and old, poor and rich, homo- and heterosexual. These axes of differences were seen as constituting new experiences of exclusion and suppression (Davis et al., 2015; Karkulehto, Saresma, Harjunen & Kantola, 2012).

Differences among groups had been studied earlier in feminist research using the concepts of “double-disadvantage”, “multi jeopardy”, and “triple oppression”

(Gregoriou, 2013, p. 180). However, such categorisations may overlook the nature of power as a relation. If power is viewed as productive rather than as one-directional oppression, people in marginal positions gain agency that may lead to resistance (Prins, 2006, pp. 279–280). Moreover, when applying the concept of double or triple oppression, different positions are understood as being unconnected, potentially resulting in lists of differences in what is known as “additive” (Lykke, 2005) and “cumulative intersectionality” (Davis et al., 2015). These approaches embody the essentialist notion that people’s identities are known and constant, not socially constructed. Analyses should address not only identities, but also power relations that position people in different social, economic and political orders (Wijeyesinghe & Jones, 2014). Focusing on supposedly stable categories may prevent perceiving differences as historical and cultural processes of “categorisation” (Christensen & Jensen, 2012, p. 111). More important than asking what the differences are is to ask how differentiation has taken place and what kind of power is responsible for it (Levine-Rasky, 2011, pp. 242–243).

Methodologically, it is difficult to consider many differences simultaneously, one consequence being a focus on the most obvious and visible differences, such as sexuality, class and ethnicity, with the rest subsumed under “etc.” This “politically correct” list has been called ‘the North American politically correct feminist litany’ (Vuola, 2002, p. 182). Such lists do not help to avoid marginalisation, however, for those defined as “different” may be relegated to the position of “Others”, who, although included, do not challenge the power of the majority (Cerwonka, 2008, pp. 818–920).

Karkulehto et al. (2012) point out that if intersectionality is investigated only as a combination of subordinate positions affected by sexism, racism and social marginalisation, research in that vein may lose its power to see the breaks and exceptions in those categories. Moreover, not only subordinate positions but also “the other side of the power relations” – the inner relations of whiteness and upper classes – should be investigated. Levine-Rasky (2011, p. 251) observes that white and middle-class positions may both strengthen each other and clash. In any event, a researcher must remember that differences are hierarchical and are thus not valued equally. In some contexts and schools of thought, social class may be seen as the most important category; in others, ethnic, racial or educational privileges figure prominently (Naskali, 2013). In a comment on categories, Lykke (2012) points out that intersections of categories can be analysed without “explicitly” using the term “intersectionality”, an approach she calls “implicit” intersectionality. As noted above, we adhere to this same distinction in analysing the articles.

Crenshaw (1991) distinguishes structural, political and representational intersectionality. Structural intersectional research asks how racism, for example, intensifies sexism and when and how homophobia strengthens racism (Verloo, 2006, p. 213). For example, this approach has been used in analysing the equality policy of the European Union (Kantola & Nousiainen, 2009; Verloo, 2006). Political intersectionality addresses the question how intersectionality is constructed in political discourses and practices, and representational intersectionality analyses the inequality and suppression that are constituted in the matrixes of cultural representations of gendered and other identities (Crenshaw, 1991). In another approach, performative intersectionality proposes a knowledge interest that exceeds the traditional boundaries between structures, politics and representations as well as the boundaries between academic disciplines. Research informed by the idea of performativity (see Butler, 1990) investigates how ‘norms, rules, systems, structures, institutions, as well as discourses and representations, reproduce differences and make them real and how they construct states of affairs and meanings’ (Karkulehto et al., 2012, p. 25). We share this understanding of intersectionality as an

approach that does not view categories and differences as essential identities or characteristics of individuals but as complex cultural and historical *processes*.

In both feminist and adult education research, intersectionality has been criticised as a ‘common nodal point’ (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013), a ‘black box’ (Lykke, 2012) or ‘buzzword’ (Davis, 2008; Jones, 2014), meaning that the term has become a rhetorical device that is an explanation in itself. If one is to respond to the challenges and questions prompted by the manifestations of phenomena in time and place, individual differences need to be analysed. Intersectionality does not guarantee the superiority of a piece of research, but an ethical undertaking requires that differences and differentiation be recognised. Intersectional research may reveal hidden power structures and thus support identity politics among adult education students from different backgrounds. We share the viewpoint of Davis (2008), who argues that precisely because of its open-endedness intersectional theorisation is valuable, for it keeps the discussion going and challenges researchers to explore what is a contradictory and complicated world.

## Data and analysis

The journal “Aikuiskasvatus” has been published four times a year since 1981. It features scientific articles, book reviews, and survey articles dealing with education policy and practices and has regularly published special thematic issues. Our data include two such issues on ‘gender’ (3/2011 and 3/2016). Among the other themes featured are ‘teacher as developer’ (1/2011), ‘age, education and work’ (3/2012) ‘expertise’ (4/2012), ‘lifelong learning’ (2/2013) and ‘liberal adult education’ (3/2013).

In the period 2010 to 2016 (the last issue of 2016 was not available while writing the article) 27 issues have been published containing a total of 91 refereed articles. After familiarising ourselves with the material as a whole, we decided to omit articles on topics such as research methodology, pedagogical theories, leadership, adult educational policy, and the history and philosophy of adult education. We also excluded articles that described the groups studied using terms like “students”, “adults”, “citizens”, “interviewees” and “workers” as uniform groups without mentioning the positions or identity categories of the people. Applying these criteria yielded a dataset of fourteen refereed and six survey articles addressing.

We subscribe to social constructivism as an epistemological approach. Accordingly, in studying cultural artefacts such as a scientific journal, the focus is on the use of language and construction of meanings, not the thinking or purposes of the authors. In this respect, our analysis adheres to the tradition of “discursive reading” (Fairclough, 2003) and the idea of performativity of language (Austin, 1962), according to which reality can only be reached via language; language is an act and has the power to make things happen. Moreover, we understand values as a part of meaning systems; value-neutral knowledge does not exist but we can pursue strong objectivity by making our starting points clear (Tanesini, 1999, pp. 12–13, 269; Harding, 2004, pp. 132–136). This way of thinking emphasises the ethical value of describing the complexity of social life instead of seeking generalisations and sameness (McCall, 2005). The purpose of our analysis is affirmative: we want to open up theoretical and methodological discussions in the field of adult education research.

In practice, we read the articles carefully by asking questions about the assumptions made in them regarding differences and categories. This approach to reading focuses attention on expressions and details that seem self-evident because they are firmly established culturally. The reading is attuned to what is said, and how, but also to what is



not said; that is, we try to determine what elements have been left out of the text (Reinharz & Kulick, 2007, p. 259).

To do justice to the articles, we did not decide beforehand whether an article used an intersectional approach. As analytic tools we draw on the frameworks applied by Lykke (2005; 2012) and McCall (2005). Lykke distinguishes analyses that theorise intersections explicitly using the term “intersectionality” and analyses that do so implicitly, without using the term. She points out that referring to differences and their connections is possible using other concepts, such as a rhizome. McCall (2005) refers to an approach that presupposes existing social groups and inequality between them as “intercategorical”. The categories may be used strategically for improving the position of suppressed people, but the approach minimises the complexity inside the groups studied. The wealth of differences within categories is taken into account in the “intracategorical” approach, which is often used to reveal the hidden power relations within groups. A third approach, the “anticategorical”, refers to deconstructive research that endeavours to uncover the complexity of social life without defining any categories. The problem in such research is that language in itself creates categories and some degree of uniformity is needed for identity politics.

We emphasise that the boundaries between the approaches are not sharply defined; a given article belonging mostly to one approach may cross the boundaries (see McCall, 2005). First, we divided the articles into two groups: those applying implicit intersectionality and those applying explicit intersectionality. Within the first group we further distinguished articles using intercategorical, additive and intracategorical approaches. We then proceeded to analyse closely whether differences were understood in terms of already defined, essential characteristics or constructed by power relations, that is, performatively. The first group comprised twelve refereed and four survey articles. The second was quite small, containing two refereed and two survey articles. The decisions on the group to which an article was assigned were made in a joint discussion after we had grouped the texts independently.

## Implicit Intersectionality

### *Intercategorical approach*

Gender is an often-used background variable in much survey research in the social and educational sciences, and it has been examined in qualitative research as an important social category. Discussion of gender in “*Aikuiskasvatus*” has increased in recent years. Vuorikoski and Ojala (2006) analysed scientific articles published in the journal between the years 1981 and 2005, investigating the incidence of gender in them. Their research shows that only nine articles discussed gender issues (Vuorikoski et al., 2006, pp. 318–319). In recent years, gender has figured more prominently as an analytical tool; our data contain thirteen articles that discuss gender. Eight of these are refereed and five survey articles.

Identifying the educational opportunities of women and men is important for advancing equality. However, gender can be discussed without subscribing wholeheartedly to contemporary feminist approaches and thus succumbing to reproducing gendered stereotypes and dichotomist thinking. For example, the article ‘The Story of Chief Shop Steward Aliisa’ (3/2014) seeks to challenge gendered and generation-oriented ways to act but the results of the study are broken down in terms of masculine and feminine stories: ‘The masculine story plays out on the stages of formal and informal meetings, the feminine in quiet corners where women share their experiences, concerns

and feelings' (p. 166). The gender dichotomy is not questioned, and the impossibility of breaking out of the feminine story seems to be attributed specifically to the personal characteristics of Aliisa.

Much as the story of Aliisa does not consider differences other than gender, neither does the article 'Female Researchers in a Gendered University Organisation' (1/2016), which analyses women's position in the university context. The article is based on a survey carried out in a Finnish university and analyses the qualitative data collected. The questionnaire was sent to female employees only, underscoring the assumption that women's position in universities is worse than men's. The study does not consider differences among female employees and thus possible oppression caused by prejudice against transgender people and sexual minorities may be ignored. The age distribution of the respondents is described, but the article does not examine its significance for a person's position in the university. While it is occasionally necessary to concentrate on a single category to bring suppressive power relations to light, many studies have shown that gendered relations in universities (e.g. Lempiäinen, 2014) are complicated and not restricted to a single category. Focusing on women only may emphasise the idea that "female" is tantamount to "gender". This mind-set harkens back to the long-refuted view that a man is representative of mankind and humanity at large, and a woman of the Other, as Simone de Beauvoir (1949/1987) has described the position.

The image of a feminine citizenship – one that can be distinguished from "real" citizenship that is gender neutral but male – is also found in special issue 3/2016, which examines women's vocational education and care as topics representative of "female citizenship". The articles in this issue are linked together, forming a narrative of an average girl and woman and her role in transforming Finnish society. The description of how an imaginary obedient girl becomes a caring woman constitutes a story that reproduces women as a uniform category.

One refereed article and several of the survey articles take up issues of masculinity. The articles seem to view men and masculinities as coherent groups and fail to problematise them as culturally constructed categories. This interpretation resonates with the findings of Hearn (2012) that studies of men have neglected intersectional analysis. For example, one of the articles in our data, 'Is Gender Decisive in Education? Male Academics' Experiences of their Studies and of the Labour Market' (3/2011), discusses the experiences of male media education students and claims that the male gender identity is undergoing a transformation because of the changing demands of the labour markets. Male students' experiences are contrasted with those of female students, in which respect the article sustains the gender dichotomy and adheres to an intercategorical approach.

Recent years have seen increased attention paid to age in social studies. One special issue on age was published during the period studied. Entitled 'Age, education and work' (3/2012), the articles consider a range of topics spanning age as an economic problem, conflicts between generations, educating elderly persons in working life, age and the educability of elderly women, ageing policy and lifelong learning. These themes attest to the fact that the population in the Nordic countries is ageing rapidly and that this development is associated with economic regression and viewed as a challenge to the Nordic welfare model (Keskitalo-Foley & Naskali, 2016).

The group commonly referred to as "adults" is diverse, and looking at a range of different social and cultural factors would help in giving a valid picture of the complexity of adulthood. In our data, adulthood is often discussed as a background factor that is not explicitly identified. Age, signifying adulthood, is subsumed in terms such as "lifelong learning", "citizenship", "adult pedagogy", "labour markets", "generation", "liberal adult education" and "expertise". For the most part, age is not defined in the data, because

working life, for example, is delimited as being between youth and retirement age. “Youth”, meaning “young adults”, are the focus of articles discussing the risk of exclusion and voluntary work. “Young adult” is defined explicitly, but in two different ways: in one article, appearing in 4/2012, the age range is 17 to 30 years; in the other, published in 1/2013, it is 21 to 36 years.

Age and gender are also mentioned in studies where the data have been collected using surveys or quantified from data collected by interviews. However, qualitative approaches dominate, as only four articles in the data are based on quantitative methodologies. In those articles, categories of people are considered as background variables which, it is assumed, will have an explanatory power with regard to the phenomena examined. For example, the article titled ‘The Portrait of an Open-University Student in the 2010s’ (4/2014) uses a survey to explain the reasons and motives for studying in the Open University. Differences in motivation are explored by correlating them with typical background variables, for example, age, gender, occupation and education.

Examining background variables as factors helps to determine differences between groups of people, but such variables are given by the researcher; the groups subsumed under them are considered uniform, and differences within the groups become blurred (McCall, 2005). Moreover, correlations between variables are readily interpreted as causal relations, a tendency that runs counter to the intersectional idea that emphasises differences as the products of multiple power relations.

Yet, survey-based research does not prevent critical analysis that avoids essentialist or deterministic interpretations. The article ‘Adults, Too, Need Help with Learning Difficulties’ (2/2011) highlights learning difficulties as a difference discussed in the adult education context, albeit rarely. Gender is approached as a background variable, as are age, education and occupation. However, the article analyses critically what it sees as a self-evident supposition made in previous research: that men have more learning difficulties than women. The article goes on to suggest that this shortcoming may result from the underdiagnosing of women, who as a result received far fewer services than men during their school years (pp. 129-130).

Despite the limitations of this kind of intercategorical approach, it may be an important tool in critical research because it highlights inequalities within a given population. Statistics and quantitative research are needed to illustrate the economic and social conditions of different population groups; in doing so they help to construct an identity category that has strategic meaning in the political struggle for social and educational rights.

### *Additive Intersectionality*

The articles exemplifying additive intersectionality show an awareness of differences as important factors in constructing identities but do not consider them as being connected to each other. Differences are either mentioned as starting points of the research or listed as important identity positions. This interpretation typifies additive intersectionality, which according to Lykke (2005), incorporates the essentialist thought that people’s positions are already known (see also Davis et al., 2015).

The use of additive intersectionality may also be seen as reflecting the methodological challenges of addressing the differences among many categories. Sometimes the challenge to pay attention to differences comes from the data. This is the case in the article ‘How Ageing Employees View Change in Retail Trade’ (2/2011), which analyses the experiences ageing employees have had of the changes in the business

sector. Age is seen as the sole relevant factor even though the sector is one of the most gendered in the labour market. The article does not comment on this in any way, but mentions that six of the managers in the data were men and thirty-eight of the workers women. Gender comes up in the article through the interviews. The employees describe age discrimination combined with gender discrimination, with the latter reflected in the importance given to appearance. The article calls this a ‘double standard’: both age and gender contribute to discrimination against women in working life. This conclusion in the text reflects the view that differences are cumulative sources of oppression.

In a similar fashion, the article ‘Hooked On Feelings – the Therapeutic Ethos in Education for Young Adults at Risk of Social Exclusion’ (4/2012) lists the categories age, gender and social situation in examining groups of people who are at risk of being excluded from society and are therefore targets of educational interventions. The focus of the article is on educational projects as a facet of the culture of therapisation. Although it adopts a constructivist point of view, the article fails to analyse the relations between different categories: it introduces and applies them in an additive manner.

Differences such as age, gender, social background and occupation easily form a list that is repeated and applied in different studies without the researcher stopping to ask what differences are missing. The present data contained such a case, with the exception that the overlooked differences were internationally crucial ones, such as race and ethnicity. Geographical location is another difference that is seldom taken into account in intersectional research and this shortcoming has evidently led to researchers making generalisations and assumptions that nations are coherent entities. From a feminist point of view, knowledge is connected to its material basis, and the situatedness of knowledge and place shape agency (Naskali, 2013; Tanesini, 1999). Our data contain one article, ‘The Values in Young Adults’ Volunteering’, (1/2013) that took into account the importance of place and thus of geographical differences. The data on which the article is based are explicitly located in metropolitan Helsinki. However, although the area is highly fragmented into wealthy and poor districts (Keränen, Vaattovaara, Kortteinen, Koski, Ratvio & Rantala, 2013), the differences within the capital area are not discussed. Moreover, at the end of the article, the results are generalised as applying to the country using terms such as ‘Finnish young adults’: ‘Finnish young adults thus appear [...] to find volunteer work interesting particularly because it involves helping others’ (p. 34).

As noted above, it is difficult to draw a clear line of demarcation between analytical groups. This became evident in two articles in particular. The article ‘Attention Must Be Given to the Masculine Occupational Identity in Education and Counselling’ (3/2014) analyses male-dominated professions from the viewpoint of the masculine culture that should be taken into account when providing counselling on a healthy way of life. The article assumes that belonging to a masculine community, with its longing for freedom and resistance to control, is an important part of the identity of working-class employees and that this will be transmitted from one generation to the next. The focus is on how the identities of the men studied should be taken into account in education. The article considers both gender and social class and in this respect can be seen as using an intracategorical approach. However, gender and social class are taken as given in the article. As the text does not reflect on these categories or analyse the interaction between them, we view the approach used as additive intersectionality.

The article ‘Reflexivity and Gender in Career Counselling’ (3/2011) seems to have ingredients allowing it to be assigned to either the additive or intercategorical group. Fundamentally, it can be seen as addressing the need to recognise the intracategorical differences between men and women. For example, it quotes the following statement from Hyvärinen, Peltonen & Vilkkö (1998, p. 185): ‘The difference between genders

should be conceptualised such that it provides an opportunity to thematise the differences among women, for example, as well as the differences within one and the same woman'. Despite embracing this principle, the article converts the differences into background variables when analysing the data, as the following statement indicates: 'Acquiring self-reflection skills is heavily dependent on a person's age, generation, social class, educational background, profession, and gender' (p. 186). This approach constructs quite stereotypical gendered categories, that is, 'personal women' and 'selfish men'. Men are seen as analysing their positions on the general level, rationally, whereas women's reflection is more personal and emotional. The conclusion underscores the traditional gender roles: 'The men and women in the study behaved largely in keeping with the gender roles characteristic of their generation' (p. 191). In this light, we assigned the article to the group applying additive intersectionality, not to that using intracategorical approach, the form of implicit intersectionality which we will take up in what follows.

### *Intracategorical approach*

In the group of implicit intracategorical research, the articles demonstrate an awareness of the importance of differences in striving to understand the complexity of life. The analyses take into account the intersection of many differences, but the term 'intersectionality' is not used. The articles in this category also reflect on the differences and take a critical stance towards readymade categorisations.

In the article 'Age and the Dilemmas of Educability in the Narratives of Women in Their Fifties and Sixties' (3/2012), age is connected to other differences. The article starts from the principle that not only age but also gender and social class must be taken into account in analysing narratives on educability: 'Age, gender and social class are defined in this article as lived social relations, not abstract or static positions, and they involve tensions and negotiation' (p. 193). We interpret this expression as the text defining differences in accordance with constructionist theory; that is, differences are not essential characteristics of individuals but processes that are negotiated in social interactions. The analysis is critical of the categorisation of students according to their cognitive achievements and of social age norms (e.g. matriculation) that define educability. The research analyses differences between the age groups comprising people in their fifties and in their sixties: for the former, education can be interpreted as a resource in the labour market; for the latter, a completed qualification is seen as part of self-development, with the group defined as being on the margin of the labour market (pp. 197-198).

The article 'Justification for Studying at an Older Age' (2/2013) can also be placed into the intracategorical group. It recognises differences within the group of elderly people studying at the University of the Third Age. The article asserts that if elderly people are expected to be studying only at the University of the Third Age, they will be marginalised vis-a-vis other students: 'Even as the policy of lifelong learning and Universities of the Third Age increase social inclusion, they create exclusion as well' (p. 92). This 'double-edged sword' is said to lead to a situation where 'people of retirement age, who end up in the margins in terms of the policy on lifelong learning, enter the educational spotlight in Universities of the Third Age and represent a retired elite to people of the same age who are excluded from the University of the Third Age' (p. 92). The marginal position of elderly students is produced in relation to younger, "proper" students, but this becomes an elite position in relation to retired people who lack the resources to attend a University of the Third Age. In other words, the article recognises age and class positions within a group of elderly persons that is usually represented as homogeneous.

## Explicit Intersectionality

Our data set contains only two refereed and two survey articles that explicitly locate their theoretical starting point in intersectional theorisation. The interdisciplinary background of these articles lies in feminist adult education, and the themes relate to teaching in the university and feminist pedagogy. Also identifiable in this group, is the challenge of analysing the multiple interplays of differences and the power structures that underlie them. According to our analysis, one article adheres to the principle of performative intersectionality in demonstrating how multiple differences do not exist as essential characteristics but are constructed in power structures and reciprocal interaction.

The article 'Feminist Pedagogy in Gender Equality Training: From Theory to Practice' (2/2013) analyses teaching episodes from the perspective of multiple power relations. The article could also be seen as applying an anticategorical approach (McCall, 2005) given its openly stated purpose of deconstructing the dichotomous and essentialist thinking in gender equality. Indeed, it emphasises the connection between gender and age, class, ethnic background and sexual orientation, as well as differences and multiple power relations within these categories (p. 120). The article gives the following episode as an example of analysing multiple power relations: 'In equality education, power relations in the workplace affect the dynamics among participants [...] At one session, an older man who belonged to the senior management said at the very outset that inequality in the workplace could be explained by the fact that women do not want to become managers. In such a situation it is difficult for women working on the lowest levels of the hierarchy to start arguing' (p. 125).

The article points out that the intertwining of gender, social hierarchy and age produce different power positions and spaces. In the example, power is highlighted as reproducing traditional gendered positions between women and men. Sexuality and race are also recognised as constructing power positions in teaching situations: 'When a white male professor, for example, questions his own identity and emphasises the rights of women and minorities, he is a hero, whereas a lesbian who emphasises the acknowledgement of differences is easily labelled a fanatic' (p. 123). The position of a teacher as a representative of the "neutral" dominating majority is deconstructed and situated in the categories of whiteness and heteronormativity, which are not accepted as positions of the universal knowing subject.

The second article in this category, 'Teaching and Gender in the Neoliberal University', (3/2011) analyses the gendered effects of the changed university politics and working culture. It proceeds from an assumption that gender is a fundamental category in the hierarchical academic organisation and stresses that 'it is important to remember that gender becomes intertwined with other divisions, such as age, socio-economic status and social background' (p. 165). Moreover, intracategorical (McCall, 2005) differences are emphasised: 'Women (like men) differ; they all have different experiences and they interpret their experiences differently. The power relations associated with academic hierarchies have impacts within the categories "men" and "women" as well' (p. 166). However, the article chooses to focus on the position of women because previous research has shown that women still have difficulties being recognised as distinguished researchers, receive less encouragement during their careers and are expected to take more responsibility in teaching and administrative tasks.

Our interpretation is that the article is very much aware of the differences within and between categories. However, implementing this principle in methodological practice is challenging, and the text does not take the opportunity to make the differences and the power visible.

In the Nordic countries, especially Sweden, intersectionality has had a particularly strong position in feminist studies, where the concept was introduced in the early 2000s in order to criticise ‘hegemonic white/Nordic feminism and its blindness to race and ethnicity’ (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013, p. 235). The article ‘Nordic Research Co-operation on Gender Issues in Education’, published in the section of survey articles (3/2011), uses the term “intersectionality” explicitly in discussing the change that has taken place in Nordic research on education and gender: ‘[...] the ways in which gender is understood have changed over the years and in the 2000s intersectionality in particular – the examination of gender alongside other distinctions such as social class, ethnicity and sexuality – has become common’ (p. 207).

Intersectionality as a principle is also mentioned in the survey article ‘Older Women in the University of the Third Age’ (2/2011). It discusses active ageing and stresses that studying and other activities of elderly persons must be analysed in the context of the relevant social and institutional practices if we are to understand how class, age and gender construct differences among elderly people. We submit that such statements can be seen as a strategy on the part of the researcher to locate her-/himself in the theoretical field even though he/she does not apply intersectionality to any significant extent in the analysis.

### Concluding remarks

On the basis of our analysis, we suggest that intersectionality is coming to the Finnish adult education discussion but has not yet worked its way into the research frameworks to any noteworthy extent. To avoid amplifying the use of what is a topical concept as a “buzzword”, we sought to analyse the implicit ways of examining differences, which we consider an important ethical principle if we are to capture and comprehend the complexity of adult education. For the most part, the articles examined here represent implicit intersectionality; that is, they focus on identity in terms of already defined categories rather than defining categories as socially constructed by power relations. Differences are also seen as background variables and separate or additive categories that are comparable; little consideration is given to intracategorical differences, and performative intersectionality was found only in one article.

Differences such as age, gender, geographical location, social class, education, occupation, and learning difficulties are recognised as salient factors in discussing adult education issues. By contrast, ethnicity and disability are lacking among the differences studied, and sexual and gender minorities are not discussed either. In this respect, the journal paints a rather coherent picture of the people who are involved in Finnish adult education.

One particularly interesting finding is that ethnicity and race are not discussed in the issues analysed here. Finland has seen an increased number of people coming from different cultures as immigrant workers or refugees and multiculturalism has been a focus of research in education (Souto, 2011) and the social and cultural sciences (Tuori, Mulinari, Keskinen & Irni, 2009). In an editorial in the issue 3/2011, the chief editor points out that the situation in Finland should be seen in relation to that in the rest of the world. He describes how indigenous people, poor people in rural areas, other minorities, the disabled and, in particular, girls suffer from being in an unequal position (Silvennoinen, 2011, p. 163). Yet this awareness cannot be seen in the journal articles, and the opinion of the chief editor can be interpreted as detaching these marginal groups

from the Finnish context: talk about diversity as such presupposes a “we” as representatives of “same”; the problems are “out there” (see Ahmed, 2012).

The articles that had their starting point in feminist theory were based on post-structural epistemology, which assumes that differences are not determined by biological characteristics or social structures but are constructed in ongoing processes. In this understanding, the boundaries between gender, class and age are not fixed but flexible, and are constructed in social processes. Yet, in many articles, the analyses failed to take the multiple power structures into account; it would seem that intersectionality remained more of a declaration of “political correctness” demonstrating that the author was in touch with, and wanted to be recognised as adhering to, the canon.

In feminist research, intersectionality has been a subject of spirited discussion and also an object of intense criticism. It has been pointed out that taking minorities into account does not mean that the gaze is directed to the majority still in power, and talk about categories may at the same time keep the categories alive (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013). As Ahmed (2012, 182) has remarked, attention to a group defined as different in terms of ethnic or racial definitions may hide whiteness. She also points out that it is not categories as such that are a problem but the way they are used. Categories are a part of our social existence and do not disappear because ‘they should not matter’.

Intersectionality has been criticised for becoming a ‘catch-all phrase’ and ‘all-inclusive’ travelling theory. Nevertheless, it may offer the ‘promise of complexity’, of being critical and of overcoming divisions (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013, pp. 237–238). Like all theoretical approaches and concepts, it must be applied reflectively, taking into account the context and purposes of the research; it is only then that we will find in it an important vehicle for analysing both the intercategorical and intracategorical complexities of the phenomena we encounter in adult education.

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## The data

- 2/2011 How Ageing Employees View Change in the Retail Trade (Kaupanalan muutos ikääntyvien silmin)
- 2/2011 Adults, Too, Need Help with Learning Difficulties (Myös aikuiset tarvitsevat tukea oppimisvaikeuksiin)
- 2/2011 Older Women in the University of the Third Age (Vanhat naiset ikäihmisten yliopistossa)
- 3/2011 Teaching and Gender in the Neoliberal University (Opetustyö ja sukupuoli uusliberalistisessa yliopistossa)
- 3/2011 Reflexivity and Gender in Career Counselling (Refleksiivisyystaidot ja sukupuoli ohjaavassa koulutuksessa)
- 3/2011 Is Gender Decisive in Education? Male Academics’ Experiences of their Studies and of the Labour Market (Sukupuoli ratkaisee kasvatustieteissä? Mieskasvatustieteilijöiden kokemuksia opinnoista ja työelämästä)
- 3/2011 Nordic Research Co-operation on Gender Issues in Education (Pohjoismaista tutkimusyhteistyötä kasvatuksen ja koulutuksen sukupuolikysymyksissä)
- 3/2011 Glances into the Worlds of Men’s Studies (Kurkistuksia miestutkimuksen maailmoihin)



- 3/2012 Age and the Dilemmas of Educability in the Narratives of Women in Their Fifties and Sixties (Ikä ja koulutettavuuden dilemma viisikymppisten ja kuusikymppisten naisten kerronnassa)
- 4/2012 Hooked On Feelings – the Therapeutic Ethos in Education for Young Adults at Risk of Social Exclusion (Tunnekoukussa – Syrjäytymisvaarassa olevien nuorten aikuisten koulutus terapeuttisessa eetoksessa)
- 1/2013 Citizens' Political Participation and Knowledge in Finland (Kansalaisten poliittinen osallistuminen ja tietämys Suomessa)
- 1/2013 Power to the People! or to the Experts? Voters' Views On the Organisation of Decision Making (Valta kansalle! Vai asiantuntijoille? Äänestäjäkunnan näkemykset päätöksenteon järjestämisestä)
- 1/2013 The Values in Young Adults' Volunteering (Arvot nuorten aikuisten vapaaehtoistoiminnassa)
- 2/2013 The Right to Study at an Older Age (Myöhemmän iän opiskelun oikeutus)
- 2/2013 Feminist Pedagogy in Gender Equality Training: From Theory to Practice (Feministisestä teoriasta käytäntöön – feministinen pedagogiikka tasa-arvokoulutuksessa)
- 3/2014 The Story of Chief Shop Steward Aliisa (Pääläluottamusmies Aliisan tarina)
- 3/2014 Attention Must Be Given to the Masculine Occupational Identity in Education and Counselling (Maskuliininen ammatti-identiteetti on huomioitava koulutuksessa ja ohjauksessa)
- 4/2014 The Portrait of an Open-University Student in the 2010s: A review of student backgrounds, motives and benefits experienced (Avoimen korkeakoulun opiskelijamuotokuva 2010-luvulla: Opiskelijoiden taustojen, motiivien ja koettujen hyötyjen tarkastelua)
- 1/2016 Female Researchers in a Gendered University Organisation (Tutkijanaiset sukupuolistuneessa yliopisto-organisaatiossa)
- 3/2016 Searching for Care Civilisation – The Interface of Family Care in Letters to the Editor (Hoivasivistystä etsimässä – omaishoivan rajapinta mielipidekirjoituksissa)

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## An institutional ethnography of a feminist organization: a study of community education in Ireland

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### Abstract

*A small Irish independent women's community education organisation, founded to provide personal development and community education programmes for women who cannot pay for them, has experienced the struggles of surviving in a patriarchal state that no longer supports women's community building but which funds individual capacity building for 'labour market activation' purposes. The organisation consists of three staff funded to work on a part-time basis, facilitators who work on an ad-hoc basis to meet the needs of groups of participants, the women who participate in different groups in the organisation, the staff of a crèche, and voluntary members. The purpose of the research is to support the need for the organisation to reconceptualise the meaning of the work of the organisation using institutional ethnography methodology to question the extent to which the work can be seen as political and feminist, and adhering to its original ideals. The research consisted of four weeks of fieldwork in the organisation with the participants, followed by a focus group of staff and facilitators reflecting on features that participants valued: making new connections, groupwork, the physical environment, the challenge and support, and the pace of the work. The provision of a space and culture that transgresses the norms of dominant cultural understandings of being a working-class woman is now understood to be the radical outcome, with the original expectation of the possibility of empowering participants to become feminist activists receding but remaining an ideal.*

**Keywords:** class and gender; feminist pedagogy; habitus.

### Introduction

This article explores how a women's community education organisation reflects on its aim of enabling working-class women to work for positive social change in Irish society, and the relationship of feminist pedagogical processes to the realities of the process that women undergo in this context. The organisation is placed within the field of Community Development and Community Education in Ireland and feminist pedagogy, and the changes it perceives as an erosion of its mission are explained by the influence of

neoliberal ideas on state support for marginalised women. The study describes how the women who participate identify significant aspects of the organisational practices, culture and environment along with the reflections of facilitators and staff on the construction and maintenance or minding of these aspects, which are seldom discussed but are the tacit knowledge in this community of practice. The reconceptualisation of the organisation's aims reflects a poststructuralist understanding of identity and agency, which is needed to keep the needs and issues of working-class women a priority. It concludes with reflections on the role of feminist pedagogy and feminist places in fostering the agency of women silenced by culture, gender and class.

### **Women's Community Education in Ireland**

The emergence of the women's community education sector in the 1980s is linked with processes of social change in Irish society, the experience of contradictory social positions and lack of adequate responses from the state. Inglis contends that the low status of women was reproduced by the education system, media raised consciousness about women's issues, and the influence of the Catholic Church over Irish women was in decline: the outcome of these circumstances was 'a sense of alienation from the existing system' for women (Inglis, 1994, p. 54). Groups were able to emerge because of two developments: first, the consciousness-raising activities of the women's movement through the formation of self-help groups; secondly, the influence of Paulo Freire in adult education and the role of non-formal educational activities in community development. The result was the struggle for women to 'gain ownership and control of their own education' (ibid).

The influence of Freire on the community development movement in Ireland gave groups concepts such as 'education for liberation' to aim for, and the political nature of awareness-raising (Freire, 1970). For women's groups, the vision of increasing women's participation in public aspects of Irish life (such as local and national politics) became a goal, with community education given a role to educate and support women to take on new public roles. Freire's analysis, however powerful, was criticised for being gender-blind by hooks (1994), but her criticism enabled feminists to take an approach combining a structural, class-based analysis with a gender analysis of culture. Many involved in establishing women's community groups did not identify themselves as feminists however. Working-class women do not relate to the term 'feminism'. hooks (2000) states that working-class women and women of colour were betrayed by a particular type of feminism, differentiating between reformist feminism and radical or revolutionary feminism. Reformist feminism is about fitting in, with middle-class women gaining equality with middle-class men. This involves the right to work alongside men in good well-paid jobs, a right that was previously denied to them. This is availed of by 'escalator' feminists, middle-class women who get the benefits of well-paid jobs but leave the structures that oppress and exploit poor, black and working-class women intact.

hooks's analysis is that reformist feminism 'hijacked' the discourse on feminism, and so any other type of feminism was obscured. It did this by coming along at the same time that white patriarchy was resisting black empowerment. Including white middle-class women was a means of bolstering white patriarchy against change. Reformist feminism enabled white middle-class women get some of the benefits of an exploitative, capitalist patriarchy (ibid). The dominance of reformist feminism has served to 'deradicalise' both feminism and its movement for radical change (ibid, p. 105). The discourse of feminism that is dominant reflects the interests only of middle-class women,

and this in turn deflects attention away from challenging 'white supremacist capitalist patriarchy' (ibid). Radical feminism sees the only paid work that is liberating is that which is open to the middle-classes. Low paid, menial, or casual work is the reality for working-class women. When they work outside the home, they have the double burden of paid and unpaid work if they have no-one else to share their domestic task. Reformist feminism betrayed those women (ibid). However, it could be argued that because media are controlled by the owning classes and operated by the middle-classes who are including middle-class reformist women, that it was also the negative media portrayal of radical forms of feminism that alienated many working-class women from feminism.

hooks' criticism identifies the limitations of what became known as second-wave feminism that was manifest in the United States in the 1960s. Women of colour and poor women were not the beneficiaries of the actions that responded to the struggle for change. The patriarchal nature of institutions was not radically altered by the inclusion of middle-class women. This criticism, and the rootedness of women's experience affected by the experience of class, race and gender, gave rise to an understanding of the more radical nature of the changes that needed to be made, those at the level of language and culture, and their effect on the subjectivity of women. The argument for radical feminism is based on the analysis that patriarchy is the problem that needs to be addressed through means of collective action.

Feminism has to be relevant to poor women. Any critical consciousness must be based there. This is what will make feminism relevant to working-class, black, and poor women. As hooks says: 'feminism is for everybody' (ibid, p. 110). This analysis helps us understand why every woman might not embrace feminism. A consciousness-raising process can proceed without it, but it will be reformist rather than radical. While reformist pedagogy might be liberating for individual women, it does not alter the material conditions of poor women. The radical aim can be understood as 'liberation', but not just for individuals. When the emphasis is on individual change, education is for 'domestication', enabling the individual to fit into society but leave the status quo intact (Freire, 1970).

Irish educators have considered the question of the extent to which adult education achieves liberation or domestication. Slowey (1987) used the concepts to examine the experience of women participating in diverse forms of adult education provision in the 1970s. Connolly (1997) applies the question to the fields of community education and development, especially women's community education. Galligan most recently examined statutory community education courses provided by the Vocational Education Committee in Co. Donegal to explore the extent to which they were focused on social change outcomes. Her study found that only 25% of the provision could be deemed 'radical' (Galligan, undated). Connolly (1997) identifies problems with the ability of community education and development as practised in Ireland to achieve the emancipation of women because, while it is underscored by Freirean philosophy and principles, it has to be mediated through liberal discourse. Connolly argues that working for gender equality requires learning from feminist theory and the processes and practices that have emerged from feminist groupwork, research and women's studies, especially those informed by insights from poststructuralism.

The women's community education groups that were formed in the 1980s were influenced by images of second-wave feminist activism of the 1960s and 1970s in the Republic of Ireland. We have the memorable image of the 'Contraceptive Train' in 1971, when the Irish Women's Liberation Movement organised a visit to Northern Ireland for the purpose of buying contraceptives that were illegal in the Republic (Connolly, 2003, p. 120): very public, very exciting, quite vociferous and receiving media attention.

However, English's study of contemporary women's nonprofit organisations claims that the women in such organisations are '21<sup>st</sup> century agents of change, from within the grassroots' (English, 2011, p. 217). English claims that this is a quiet, 'postheroic' form of activism that is more relevant to people who experience more risks; it is a strategic form of activism, with actions carefully discussed and considered. It is a grassroots form of resistance to power from above: 'Through participation and informal learning, the women in this study become seasoned actors and informal learners' (ibid, p. 218).

Connolly identifies the problem in community education and development work: it has not achieved the emancipation of women because it has not had any impact on power structures in society (Connolly, 1997). Walby (2009), however, would identify Ireland's poor structures of democracy that marginalise women's contribution as the reason for such failure to impact on power structures. A deeper type of democracy is needed to achieve, for example, a change in Ireland's low levels of female representation. Connolly's questions, however, indicate the type of reflexivity in radical forms of adult education that extend reflection to examining its overall social change mission.

Connolly describes community development's aim to bring about social change by fostering the ability of groups to collectively define problems and solutions to them. This is an educational process. Community development can be seen as a social movement that aims to include marginalised groups into mainstream society. When it is regarded or used as a means of modernising communities, community development is domesticating if it creates 'passive, self-regulating citizens who do not criticise institutions of power' (Connolly, 1997, p. 42). There are a range of community development strategies in Ireland evident since the 1960s, some of which emphasise the process as much as the content of development programmes. These, however, fail to recognise power issues in relation to gender, and how they may even be supporting the status quo (ibid).

Connolly's argument is that the existing power relations in society will not be changed by education, if the dominant discourse in that provision is liberal and individual. There is a radical trend that works towards social and political change, 'but it is not overt about how participants will be agents of that change', so that how processes and programmes lead to social and/or political change 'are not clear' (ibid, p. 43). Connolly states: 'Community education responds to the needs of the community. It imparts the knowledge and skills the community needs in order to become agents of change' (ibid). The response through community education is the provision of three types of learning – technical skills acquisition, practical in terms of communication and social interaction, and thirdly, critical reflection. Critical reflection, Connolly states, 'aims to empower people to take control of their lives, by examining how attitudes and values are formed' (ibid, p. 44). This acknowledges the aim to empower people, but there is no certainty that it actually does this. Community education is here stated to be responsive; this entails providing what people say they want. What happens when those aspirations are limited by cultural contexts? To what extent can responses to needs be directed towards social action for change?

'Social change, in this person-centred perspective, is the cumulative effect of individual, personal change rather than a coherent movement' with equality for individuals assumed to result from that type of change (ibid). Connolly states that this is implicitly a modernist and liberal-humanist view of both society and individual, which de-emphasizes the role of the social/structural in the conditioning or socialisation of the individual (ibid). This reflects a dualism, separating the individual from society. Dualisms need to be overcome so that the individual-society link can be examined. A poststructuralist approach tries to do this (ibid, p. 45). Feminism and community development are linked by an aim to 'bring about social change, to endeavour to empower



people [...] to act collectively to change the power relations which created the inequality' (ibid, p. 47-48). The radical ambitions of community education and development require thinking in three main areas: pedagogy, collective action processes, and the types of outcomes sought (ibid, p. 48).

A critical pedagogical approach does not necessarily enable women move from the personal to the political in terms of action for social change, nor might it necessarily enable a group to work together in a way that enables them to act collectively. If it fails to focus on social change, the effect will be the 'self-regulating citizen', one able to fit into society rather than challenging its unequal relations. A gender model, on the other hand, celebrates women's attributes, 'whether these are natural or socially proscribed' (ibid, p. 49). The gender model of analysis, however, is also criticised for a lack of attention or awareness of the role of collective and political consciousness. Feminist pedagogy is the combination of both the gender and liberation models (ibid).

Adding the dimension of difference to feminist pedagogy depends on using a poststructural approach. Poststructuralism recognizes the role of subjectivity: something individual, formed by conditioning and social structures (ibid, p. 50). If it is individual, then each individual has their own truth, has constructed their own knowledge but not in circumstances of their own choosing. If prior knowledge is accepted as a personal construct influenced by culture, class and gender, this opens up possibilities for different types of action, or for modifying or expanding that knowledge.

Feminist pedagogy, in Connolly's terms, enables power structures to be understood so that routes for equality of power can be identified. The methodologies of this pedagogy consist of 'dialogue, discussion and a supportive learning environment, in addition to input on the social institutions and power relations' (ibid). Groupwork is essential in enabling the skills and education for acting collectively to be acquired (ibid, p. 52). How does groupwork relate to collective action? 'Tremendous personal development' can be achieved by individual participants but unless connection is made with other members of a group, 'it will not translate into social change' (ibid). The bridge between the personal and the political, the essential component in enabling an individual work for or effect social change, is connecting with others, as members of a group. Connolly states that it is only the social model of community education that 'connects the personal with the political' (Connolly, 2008, p. 35).

Connolly shows the relationship between inadequate thinking and failure to change the status quo. She claims a role for feminist poststructuralism in enabling work that encompasses difference, including the varied experiences of women by virtue of multiple forms of oppression and marginalisation. Connolly shows the weaknesses in feminist pedagogy, but also points to ways to deal with it. The poststructuralist approach is presented as the solution to 'inadequate thinking', and will be dealt with again further on.

Work at the personal, micro level, or Personal Development as it has become known in the field of adult education, is the essential starting point for work for social change, according to Murphy (1999) who claims that the starting point for action in the world is action on and in the self. A 'personal psychology of inertia' must be addressed, and then addressing a group psychology of inertia can follow (Murphy, 1999, p. 15). This micro-level work makes certain assumptions: a willingness to take risks; that changing understandings and taking actions will change a worldview (ibid, p. 60); that learning is individual and subjective (ibid, p. 78); that a good outcome of education is that the individual can cope with the fact that culture is constantly changing (ibid, p. 81). Change starts with the individual, but needs to be fostered by educational processes and practices. There is an assumption here that the agency of individuals needs an outside actor or

organisation for it to be released, or at the very least, help people overcome the fear of change. Change is recognised first and foremost to be a subjective experience.

For both Connolly and Murphy, critical and feminist pedagogy involves a relationship between the person and the group. The liberation process is a dynamic one and an interactional one. Connolly states that women's liberation needs feminist theory: we can therefore ask: how feminist is women's community education?

Ryan (2001) contends that attending to subjectivity is a political activity. Poststructuralism gives theorists a way of overcoming the dualism between a sociological understanding of practice and a psychological one. The sociological understanding emphasises the group, the social, and structure; psychological understandings can explain the individual experience of identity and self, and its effect on agency. Psychological approaches are criticised for seeing gender as natural, fixed at birth; sociological approaches are criticised for over-emphasising the social processes and structures that impact on identity. The concept of subjectivity contains the possibility of reconciling two different ways of seeing and knowing. A poststructural approach to subjectivity enables us to examine how the individual and the social are connected.

While community development organisations originally developed as a response to issues caused by poverty, the state now sets policy objectives for them rather than groups setting their own, or at the very least, the goals of the community development organisation must align with the state's objectives in order to receive funding under the new Local Community Development Programme (LCDP), which started in January 2010 and replaced the older Community Development Programme (see [www.pobail.ie](http://www.pobail.ie)). Not all established community development projects were able to do this. Many transformed themselves into providers of further education, delivering certified programmes for adults who feel under an obligation to attend programmes or lose their social welfare payments. Ironically, the establishment of a coherent, accessible and flexible further education structure for adults was sought by community education organisations to enable access for working-class adults to education, training and qualifications. Now that it exists, it has given the state a means of directing funding to the delivery of certified programmes, and the outcomes of these programmes are to be individual progression into employment or higher levels of education, known as Labour Market Activation ([www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie)). 'Education has become orientated towards the market' (Grummel, 2014, p. 128), and providers of informal community education have had to adjust. Providers are required to show outcomes in terms of numbers progressing into employment or higher education. Progression is individual and linear, expressed as 'individual achievement, products and performance rather than the communal or participative aspects of learning process' (ibid, p. 130), discouraging 'the sense of collective responsibility, trust and action necessary for civil society' (ibid, p. 134).

These changes illustrate the increasing influence of neoliberal values on state support for the independent community development and community education sector, and suppress public discourse about approaches that may be essential in preparing adults for participating in such individualised and competitive processes. State support for funding community groups to identify problems and take collective action on them, as a core part of the original Community Development Programme, has disappeared. We are not alone. The experience of neoliberal state policies that are turning feminist organizations into service-providers is a global phenomenon, according to English and Irvine (2015). Feminism is 'ghettoized' into the personal sphere, with the loss of its political agency (ibid). That loss threatens the ability of 'thinly-stretched' feminist organisations (ibid) to 'disrupt patriarchy' (Hegarty, 2016, p. 82). As bottom-up community development is replaced by programme funding targeted at labour market

outcomes, it becomes a vital defence to identify what practice is actually achieving. As the discourse of pedagogy shifts to 'how' questions related to Lifelong Learning, research provides an opportunity to link the 'why we educate question' to the 'how' of a specific learning culture before audit culture 'crowds it out' (Finnegan, 2016, p. 47-48).

Connolly and others, as considered above, prescribe a particular pedagogical approach to foster social development and social change. Much of this relies on individual facilitators having the required consciousness, analysis, pedagogical and facilitation skills, and environment to do so. What else is required? How does an organisation organise this, especially an organisation that claims to attend to the needs of the women who participate? What is going on for the women who participate: what do they see as significant?

## The Investigation

The organisation claims to address barriers experienced by marginalised women in participating in different forms of public life: formal education and training, employment, politics, and Irish society generally. The women themselves identify the barriers, which include parenting alone, being dependent on social welfare, having low education levels, lack of confidence in their ability to cope with the demands and the skills involved in formal education, and having childcare and other social care responsibilities. There is also an awareness of the effect of domestic violence on women of all classes. There have been many individual instances of women saying how their participation in the organisation has changed them. These statements were never systematically recorded, so that the staff and facilitators carry a sense that something is being done well, but what exactly is it? What is it that the organisation does that helps the women who participate?

Bourdieu's concept of field and habitus came into play to frame the investigation. Bourdieu states that a culture, or field of practice, acts to provide norms around how to be, which become internalised in individuals as their habitus. Habitus is the set of dispositions shaped in and by a social field of practice, is deep, beneath and beyond the reach of consciousness. Relations of domination and subordination 'inhabit each of us, whether man or woman ... so familiar and self-evident that they pass unnoticed' (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 54). Culture is the field of practice that gives us these meanings, embeds them deep within us and requires us to perform them in different ways: through divisions based on gender, class, race and other forms, which are 'culturally arbitrary' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000), varying from place to place and time to time. These performances serve to reproduce existing social relations. This view is that we are made by culture, and we reproduce culture through performance. This performativity is controlled by power relations. Those relations are rendered so invisible due to the taken-for-granted nature of them within the culture. They form doxa, that which 'goes without saying' (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu (2001) states that habitus cannot be shifted by cognitive means alone: this challenges the possibilities for change in pedagogies relying on rational cognitive approaches. The organisation could be looked at as a culture with distinct practices that happens beyond the rational, or in addition to it, for identifying elements that enabled participants to change their thinking and actions.

To get at the 'doxa' involved using Smith's idea of Institutional Ethnography (2005). Smith states that institutional ethnography allows structure to be seen in agency, showing the impact of cultural and political forces in individual accounts. The researcher, a voluntary member not known to the participants, acted as an ethnographer for a period of four weeks, noting comments of participants, asking questions of individuals during

their breaks or when invited to meet a group, and observing the activities within the organisation. Institutional ethnography requires the researcher to provide a social map, and identify what is indicated by the data. The data provided themes for discussion with a focus group of staff and facilitators. The presentation of the themes below includes quotations from participants and the reflections from the focus group of facilitators and staff. Names of speakers were not recorded. The quotations selected are those that most illustrate the theme.

### **The Social Map of the Organisation**

Some participants are women referred to the organisation by local doctors, other community groups, social workers and state agencies. Others are self-referred, hearing about programmes on the basis of word-of-mouth, or having been encouraged by a friend. Before joining a group, the development worker meets each woman individually, and a relationship is established. Many who attend meetings go on to form a pre-development group, the needs analysis is done, and funding applications are made that reflect what the women need and want. Women with childcare needs can avail of places in the crèche to support their participation.

Groups are involved in collective activities such as celebrating International Women's Day each March and the annual Sixteen Days of Action against Gender Violence. They are also supported to attend local, regional and national conferences. Staff members and voluntary members have been involved in an exchange programme with women's groups in Tanzania. Each group appoints two representatives who attend management meetings.

The organisation is managed by a voluntary management committee made up of different groups of women: some are the founders of the organisation, others represent the current groups, and working groups include staff. A feminist model of participatory democracy has developed which enables the groups to be part of the decision-making through working groups and have a say in the overall direction of the organisation. This is also recognised as building capacity for external representation at local, regional and national level on relevant structures which voluntary members attend (Murphy, 2011). The hope is that participation fostered at micro and meso levels can be transferred to a macro level once working-class women have the space to find and use their voice.

Women's needs are kept central to the work, keeping a feminist analysis to the fore, where power is shared and reflective practice is extended beyond the daily work of the project to all areas including the organisational culture. The organisation's reports convey the nature of the activities and the various roles that participants are supported to take. Such reports do not convey a sense of the relationships they have with staff, voluntary members and each other, hence this reflexive investigation.

### **Features of the Organisation**

Participants described being ill-at-ease or unaccustomed to talking about themselves before starting in the organisation: 'I was asked for my opinion. No-one had ever asked me for an opinion'. 'If I was out in company with someone I felt had a good education, I'd hold myself back and feel stupid.' This indicated that a social and supportive connection with other people had been missing in the lives of those participants. Facilitators spoke about the background of some participants and the effect of talking in

groups or to the development worker: 'One woman frequently says that when she comes here she feels important. She has a place to be, a purpose beyond her everyday roles, and a sense of belonging.' This is not true for all women who participate, only for those whose confidence levels are low. It would not apply to those who are more used to group situations. However, it was stated that 'They may have individual connections but not the collective connections that they get here.'

This 'feeling important' enables needs to be expressed and normalised. The organisation exists to address those needs and provide the supports that they can. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1997, p. 26) claim that without social interaction, 'individuals remain isolated from others', which seems obvious, but they go on to say 'without tools for representing their experiences, people also remain isolated from the self'. This indicates that the oppression of isolation is not just about isolation from others, but causes a lack of self-knowledge due to the absence of a space or opportunity to discover more about the self through relational activities such as the discussion groups. The outcome of such groupwork enables self-discovery, the relationship with the self to change, as well as the relationship with others outside of the immediate family or neighbourhood. The group becomes a bridge to something outside of their own life: 'such interchanges lead to ways of knowing that enable individuals to enter into the social and intellectual life of their community' (ibid, p. 26). The participants conveyed their awareness that the organisation is a different space for them, enabling them to make a type of connection with others that was new.

Participants were enthusiastic about being involved in groups. They state that the welcome they receive, the recognition they get, and being given a turn to speak, is significant. 'Listening to people talking, I realised everyone had problems, some a lot worse than mine'; 'I don't feel intimidated in the small groups'. Facilitators stated that the welcome is fundamental, from the time a woman first comes to the organisation. If a welcome is not there, the woman will not come back, and the welcome has to be maintained. This is work that is invisible:

It's the nothing stuff, but it's huge. It goes against social norms: Society does not recognise for instance, being a mother, and therefore doesn't allow your voice to be heard. The group recognises this and values the work you are doing and that gives you the sense you are worth listening to.

Dialogue with others enables the woman to become aware of herself as a knower. She can then feel less subject to the 'whims of external authority' (Belenky et al, 1997, p. 13). She has the opportunity to listen to the voices of others, and once she is able to listen, she hears the voices of peers and facilitators. She can see them as knowers because they are like her in many ways – age, class, race, or even circumstance. She can start to see herself as a knower because of this.

If she claims that she is not capable of knowing, she is reminded of what she has already provided evidence of: her own thoughts, her own feelings, and her own experience. For a woman who has had a view of herself as 'mindless and voiceless', these conversations break isolation so that the perception of the self can be reconstructed. Her sense of herself as a knower changes. She is 'coming to voice' (ibid).

The groupwork element is perceived as empowering, because of what is discussed but also because of the way it is facilitated: 'nothing stuff' that is everything. The facilitators say that their job is to keep the space safe for these discussions, and mind the relationship of each member to the group. This enables becoming a co-participant, performing differently, and the women enjoy the respect and recognition they receive. Belenky et al (1997) identify how women in stages of knowing use the metaphor of voice.

The women in this research used the metaphor of voice and sight, finding that they were affirmed by being seen and being recognised as a competent person.

The physical environment was also identified: 'The building is like a home from home.' Other participants agreed enthusiastically with this speaker. What does the building convey to them? 'Starting out here, it's not as daunting' was the explanation of one facilitator. It is not only how the space looks, but how it feels. Facilitators mind safety within the group, and safety within the building can also be taken for granted. The space is domestic in some features, and so provides familiarity of scale and setting but in a quasi-public space. Men who are on the premises are working for women, and participants observe this. Women are not there to support men: men are there to support women. This is a new experience for many participants, and provides a picture of what could be possible elsewhere. This is an argument for maintaining women-only programmes, or spaces that prioritise women and where men are there to support them. It counters the cultural practices that are outside the premises. Such spaces give 'women the ability to resist power relations elsewhere' (Etienne & Jackson, 2011, p. 235).

It can take a 'fair bit of encouragement' to challenge a woman to take on a new experience such as representing their group in management meetings. This identifies how facilitators might challenge as well as support participants.

Challenging someone to think well of herself is support. You have to challenge in such a way that you don't set people up for failure. As women we have been conditioned to put ourselves at the bottom of the list, and we challenge each other to go against the conditioning.

It is not just individuals who get challenged by facilitators: 'I challenge cliques. I keep the space safe.' Worldviews are challenged. Fear is examined. Enabling and encouraging a woman to become an active subject in the world requires a shift in habitus at the subjective level. The facilitators' comments illustrate the care and thought that is needed to do this.

Staff face the challenge of finding ways to justify to funders the amount of time an individual woman may need to be involved in a group or programme. As one participant said:

What I like about it, there's no-one pushing you saying you're here for six months and you have to move onto the next group. As I'm going along, I'm discovering my needs. If the (organization) was set up a different way, I'd be after running a mile already.

Facilitators say: Unlearning takes time. It increases a woman's self-confidence to have control over something like pace because many of the women have very little control over anything. It says I matter.

Time, in this sense, is another resource to be used and appropriated as each participant needs, reflecting a 'care-full' model and providing 'nurturing capital' (Lynch, Baker & Lyons, 2009) for as long as is necessary. It takes time to practice a new way of being, to re-write one's biography, and practice a newer way of acting as a subject and expecting to be treated as an equal. Alheit and Dausien, examining learning processes within transitions, refer to this process as 'biographicity', the project of redesigning or repositioning the self within specific contexts, which depends on perceiving these contexts as shapeable (2007, p. 66). Some contexts provide resources that allow it, others constrain it. This context provides time. Time enables praxis: it is not just abstract knowledge that is handed over, it is reflecting on experience, discussing different problems, exploring solutions, and testing things out. It is also performing differently,

and managing how that feels. A primary habitus is kept in abeyance for this period, and a provisional one is being tested out. The length of time for a provisional habitus to take hold and become permanent will vary from person to person.

The effect of a changing sense of the self can relate to increasing a sense of agency: for example, 'When you know what you want, no-one can push you around.' Facilitators state that significant change in feelings and understanding has to happen before collective action is possible. However, personal development 'Is not about fixing yourself. It's about challenging society. It's about taking personal responsibility, but not taking responsibility for decisions that have been made before you were born'. This social model allows emotional, social and cognitive elements to be treated equally, which stands in contrast to the neglect of the emotional sphere in dominant educational discourse and formal learning environments as described in Burke and Jackson (2007).

Facilitators say that the kind of personal development approach they take 'is in the context of a critical analysis of society, not the counselling model, or the healing model, or the therapeutic model'. This reflects the poststructuralist approach to facilitation, encompassing the psychological and the sociological, the personal and the political, the individual and the social.

Ó Tuama uses the concept of identity capital in exploring how lifelong learning opportunities can work for more vulnerable adult groups. The social learning and the relationships that are constructed 'are enhanced through the accumulation of identity capital' (Ó Tuama, 2016, p. 113). Identity capital underpins the acquisition and accumulation of other types of capital. It is linked to people's capacity to avail of transition opportunities. Overcoming the oppression caused by such critical factors as class and gender requires a learning culture that understands and challenges low levels of self-confidence and self-esteem. When that is successfully challenged, links can then be made to wider social networks that enable 'progression' by seeing barriers from a different and more empowered perspective. Ó Tuama reframes this approach as 'reflexive activation' rather than other forms of labour market activation that are being promoted by the state (ibid, p. 110).

Ó Tuama argues that identity capital is the 'essential foundation', and is in turn reliant on 'recognition' (ibid, p. 115). According to Fleming (2016), Honneth's treatment of the concept of recognition has the promise of enabling community educators to reconcile the individual and the social elements. Attending to the affective equality element (Lynch et al, 2009) is one level of recognition that can result in establishing self-confidence, a precondition for 'involvement in a democratic society'; other levels of recognition, such as the type of recognition that is gained through work, may be missing for many working-class women who have a poor record of adherence to the workforce (Fleming, 2016, p. 14).

## Reflection

Some of the women who participate in programmes may have grown up in an environment where their voice was never sought, or if it was used, they were disparaged for it. Some participants present a sense of being a knower as 'Silent' in Belenky et al's (1997) *Women's Ways of Knowing* framework. 'Received Knowledge', the next stage or mode of knowing in this framework, also involves passivity, but the difference is the sense of capability that now exists. The woman sees herself as able to receive knowledge, but does not yet see herself as a knowledge-creator. Many women in community education are at this stage of dependency, relying totally on a tutor or facilitator to direct

the learning, and giving the power of expertise to the tutor. They do not expect to have their own experience acknowledged, never mind have it seen as learning that is as valid as the learning of any other person. When their experience is heard, they value this. It is significant for them.

Belenky et al state that 'Subjective' knowing means a move to a new stage, in which a woman trusts her intuition, or emotional reaction, more than knowledge from an external source. Knowledge must be made personal and concrete before the woman views it as knowledge. It must have meaning. Abstract knowledge is seen as pointless. The woman's own experience and emotion is seen as her best or most reliable guide to future action (ibid). This attention to the emotional aspect of learning and transformation is what informal education seems to have more autonomy for. It is a more 'care-full' model of education argued for by Lynch et al (2009, p. 38), who state that if an individual has not received sufficient nurturing capital, they are unable to work in solidarity with others. Feeley (2009) states that lack of nurturing capital impedes the ability to benefit from formal education and learning opportunities. This indicates the need to provide nurturing capital by attending to affective equality aspects before an individual can be expected to work in solidarity with others.

For these first three stages of knowing in this framework (Silence, Received Knowledge, and Subjective Knowledge) there is no particular willingness or motivation to work with abstract concepts. The dominance of the Piagetian view that the ability to work with abstract concepts is the final stage in cognitive development results in thinking that is done in these three modes being seen as unreliable. The woman who operates in any of these modes is seen as less than intellectually capable, or childlike. The remaining two stages (Procedural Knowledge and Constructed Knowledge) underpin successful formal undergraduate study. Objective criteria can be applied to concepts; there is a different, more evaluative, relationship to knowledge. There is more than one truth. There is an openness to hearing the voices and opinions of others, which can then alter the woman's own frame of reference. The woman's relationship to knowledge has undergone a fundamental shift: knowledge is seen as created through dialogue, with objective and subjective criteria being applied to evaluate it. Building or constructing knowledge is fundamentally a relational or social activity (Belenky et al, 1997, p. 144-150). The social model reflects these shifts in habitus or epistemological stages that can be facilitated. The social and emotional aspects indicate how to get beyond the limits to transforming habitus defined by Bourdieu (2001) earlier, that habitus is not changeable by cognitive means alone.

The strength of Belenky et al's (1997) research is its inclusion of women in what they called 'invisible colleges' in community settings, where learning is nonformal or informal in nature. The particular attraction of these invisible colleges is that they are spaces devised and run by women, for women. They therefore had the potential to show what kind of pedagogy women can devise for themselves, if free to do so (ibid, p. 12). *Women's Ways of Knowing* was criticised for essentialising such stages as inherent in or natural to women. However, this is the criticism of psychological explanations that assume certain characteristics are natural to one gender rather than the other, ignoring the impact of culture on habitus, or the impact of structure on agency. Ryan (1999) states that *Women's Ways of Knowing* was popular as a psychological study because it stood against dominant conceptions of the female as deficient, but we need to be able to develop more sophisticated understandings through poststructuralist analyses.

These stages of knowing may not apply only to women: they may have a more universal applicability to other social groups who have not had the opportunity to develop along the path identified by Perry's (1970) study of undergraduate men that prompted



Belenky et al's investigation. Lovett (1975), for example, writing about adult learners in Liverpool, identified the need for these men and women to make concepts personal and concrete. The earlier stages of knowing may have a stronger relationship to class rather than gender. The comments of participants and facilitators in the study suggest that the intersection of gender with being working-class means that if the Silent stage of knowing is prevalent in Irish society, it could explain why formal educational opportunities are availed of least by those who are seen to need them the most. Reframing this as a cultural issue rather than an individual one could help working-class women and men avoid being penalised for not 'progressing' through formal further education.

Lifelong learning, in the dominant discourse, depends on the supported and able learner, identified by Warren and Webb (2007) as the 'responsible learner'. *Women's Ways of Knowing* shows that several stages of cognitive development are involved in being an adult (man or woman) able to avail of formal learning opportunities. Women who do not have a sense of themselves as knowers are unlikely to put themselves forward as potential students; women who have sense of themselves as able to receive the knowledge of others will be able to access opportunities, but may not be the self-directed mature learner of the dominant discourse. However, given access to informal networks, their sense of themselves as knowers and learners can change and develop. Gaining a sense of ability for formal lifelong learning will not be enough unless the material aspects such as childcare and social care supports are available so that the extra costs of participation in formal education are manageable.

## Conclusion

The vision and practice of Freire's anti-poverty work is now translated into a critical feminist pedagogy for 21<sup>st</sup> century women, with facilitators reflecting a poststructural understanding of the self, the social, and society. Attending to the discursive aspects of practice (Ryan, 2001) is useful in naming what needs to be held onto, to counteract the lack of attention on the collective and social aspects of enabling change. The need to understand the subjective experiences of women who are marginalised by class as well as gender must be given a voice rather than let neoliberal policies make them further marginalised in society. Resistance to the 'Culture of Silence' (Freire, 1970) around class means naming the effects of class and gender.

This women's community education organisation can now see itself as a field of practice enabling habitus changes and a new sense of agency to be acquired and practised. The original expectation of participants becoming radical agents of social change is reframed in light of the understanding of the subjectivities of working-class women, and the care-full model of community education needed to provide nurturing capital and affective equality. However, in Bourdieu's (2001) view of cultural reproduction and cultural transformation, all individuals and groups receive culture and both reflect it and transform it. The more women stop the 'Culture of Silence' (Freire, 1970) around gender and class, the more will oppressive relations diminish.

The process of gathering the data and reflecting on it enabled the organisation to re-value the 'nothing stuff' that underpins good practice that was becoming suppressed in the neoliberal discourse of individual 'progression' and 'outcomes'. The goal of enabling working-class women work for social change is still held, but this is alongside the reality of what is possible, given the depth of conditioning to be 'unlearned' and a new agentic sense of self to be practiced. Habitus change does happen, but this change is provisional. It may be temporary or it may become permanent.

The feminist and radical aspect of the organisation is now understood to be the provision of an 'invisible college' (Belenky et al, 1997, p. 12) where attention is given to women's subjectivity and where oppressive patriarchal relations are kept at bay, giving participants the experience of being recognised and respected, and being involved in a participatory democratic management structure. The criticism of community development's failure to produce groups actively working at local and national level to represent issues and the need for change is accepted. The tension between education for domestication or liberation is also accepted and outcomes are no longer seen as being either one or the other but on a continuum of change for 21<sup>st</sup> century feminists.

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## Developing inclusive later life learning environments: insights from intersectional analysis of ageing and lesbian, gay, transgendered and bisexual identities

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### Abstract

*To date there has been minimal empirical inquiry on what may constitute inclusive learning environments for older (50+ years) lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) adults. This paper draws upon a recent life-histories study with older LGBT adults in Scotland to consider how such environments can be developed. To do so, intersectional analysis is applied to interrogate how participants' lived realities and sense of self are enabled and constrained by the interactions between their diverse ageing, LGBT and other identities in the particular contexts of later life, post work. The paper argues that by adopting this approach to intersectional analysis, critical educational gerontology (CEG) is equipped to more effectively realise inclusive, meaningful and potentially empowering learning environments for older LGBT adults. These will be more attuned to their later life realities, enabling them to reflect on the changing significance of being LGBT as they age, while allowing potential for personal growth and renewed sense of self.*

**Keywords:** age and sexuality; critical educational gerontology; intersectionality; later life learning

### Introduction

... the other word I used was man and I mean that is different from all the others because I have not had to engage with the issue of gender in the way that I have done about, sexuality, disability or age, you know. I mean this is a world for men. And I know that I benefit from that. You know there are things that I can do that women in my situation would find more difficult to do. I have become more aware of that over the years, that, it is, it is, like a privilege, eh being a man Yes, and it's also like ... middle class. Because that is something else that I am as well. And so being a middle class man is definitely, you know eases life a great deal.

(Andrew, b. 1945)



Intersectionality provides a standpoint with which to interrogate the processes of identity construction from which we can gain insight into the inter-defining, conflicting and mutually constitutive nature of multiple identity categories and how they are subjectively experienced (Dean, 2010; Taylor, 2010). In making sense of how his identity has developed to this stage in his life, Andrew draws upon intersectional analyses. His reflections are taken from a recent study with older LGBT adults in Scotland from which this paper will draw further examples. As indicated here and more fully elaborated in his narrative, Andrew's sense of self has developed through his navigation of the combined impact of becoming gay, older and disabled. He recognises that because of how they intersect with his gender and class identities, he occupies a privileged social position.

Andrew's reflections provide an opening example that responds to current critiques of the intersectional study of sexuality that will be further considered and applied in the context of education for older adults. The main concerns relate to the need for empirically substantiated exploration of intersectionality as lived reality, shaped by the complex, nuanced ways in which sexuality, inter- and disconnects with other identity categories, not just as constraining, but also enabling of privilege across time and space (Adams, 2016; Cronin & King, 2010; Taylor, 2010). That Andrew has 'engaged' with these aspects of his identity and their interaction reflects another productive use of intersectionality: it avoids the risk of creating a descriptive list of separate social categories and instead analyses the ways multiple social identities interact in different contexts over time (Few-Demo, Humble, Curran & Lloyd, 2016). I propose that in these ways, intersectional analyses have possibilities for understanding how later life learning environments can be better developed for older (50+ years) LGBT adults through being more responsive to the processes involved in the construction of their multiple identity formations and lived experiences.

In its application of intersectionality to consider the particular relationships between ageing and LGBT identities, this paper is also timely. It seeks to address the absence to date in adult and lifelong learning research in Scotland that has focused on older LGBT adults. This is particularly important in the context of contemporary Scotland. There has been an intensive period of unprecedented socio-legal change that has sought to extend social justice and equalities to LGBT adults in Scotland (Equalities Network, 2015). However, several national surveys in recent years report that older LGBT adults feel vulnerable and express higher levels of anxiety than heterosexual peers: they fear discrimination, increased social isolation, reduced independence and exclusion from older adult community groups, compounded by concerns that health and social care agencies will have limited understanding of issues related to sexual orientation and ageing (Equalities Network, 2015a; Scottish Government, 2016; Stonewall, 2011). However Pugh (2002) and Stonewall (2014) provide alternative understanding of older lesbian and gay men's potentially more positive adjustment to the ageing process and later life. This confounds some of the stereotypes of and assumptions made about older lesbian women and gay men's lives. Rather than being inhibitive, the repression encountered in their youth and painful coming out processes in their early adult lives can lead to a so-called crisis competence or an individual stamina. This raises important questions about the particular role and character of critically orientated education for older LGBT adults: how it can address such concerns and counter discrimination, in balance with harnessing the resilience and richly diverse life experience older LGBT adults may have had. In particular it invites a rethink of critical educational gerontology (CEG) and how its use of intersectionality can be extended to inform more inclusive and potentially empowering later life learning for older LGBT adults.

The paper firstly considers the possibilities of intersectionality as an analytical tool for CEG. This explores how the empowering later life learning environments CEG envisions can be more purposefully attuned to and be inclusive of older LGBT adults through intersectional interrogation of their identity formations and lived experiences. The study's interview design, participant recruitment issues and use of an abductive strategy for data analysis are then considered. I also reflect on how I addressed the ethical implications of my insider researcher positioning as an older gay man and developed relationships that sought to eliminate any potential power imbalance between myself, and the participants. The analysis section then applies intersectional interrogation to explore how the study participants understand, express and navigate multiple identities in the context of later life and the particular constraints and advantages they experience in doing so. The value of this picture is then considered in the extent to which it can effectively guide CEG to develop later life learning environments more inclusive of older LGBT adults' complex and intersecting lived realities. While the paper partly considers the experiences of transgendered and bisexual women, the discussion is largely drawn from the narratives of participants who identified as lesbian (n.13) and gay (n. 16).

### **The possibilities of intersectional analysis**

Intersectionality as theory and political practice draws attention to the multiple nature of individual identities and experience of social inequality as shaped by mutually constitutive categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, age and (dis)ability (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016; Nash, 2008). In this frame we are therefore not defined solely by sexuality or social class or ethnicity, but by how these and other aspects of identity uniquely interact; how they are 'routed through each other or [are] mutually constitutive' (Monro, 2015, p.59). Intersectionality therefore focuses on understanding how a 'minority status' related to being LGBT can be managed when we have identity formations in which other minority and majority statuses interact (Köllen, 2015). In short, discussion of sexuality cannot be narrowed down to it alone; rather, how it inter-relates with other aspects of identities is key to greater understanding of the processes of identity construction (Taylor, 2005).

Current debates on the more productive use of intersectionality demand a shift from overly abstract theorisation to a refocus on how it manifests as concrete lived reality and experiences across time and space (Taylor, 2009, 2010). It is further argued that for sexuality, intersectional interrogation focuses on how it is '...really lived' in relation to class, ethnicity and age, as the "sexual advances, limitations, intersectional negotiations and negotiations [that] feature in everyday lives, beyond the abstract academic page" (Taylor, 2010, p.4). As Weston (2010) further demonstrates in interviews with lesbians, intersectional interrogation reveals how different aspects of identity have greater significance in different contexts, are in conflict and ever-shifting. Ultimately she argues that: "Class, age, gender, and such come together not only in the doing, but in the perceiving. They can be separated in thought but seldom disentangled in practice". (Weston, 2010, p.36)

These views on the possibilities of intersectionality thus represent an important analytical dimension within which to interpret the inter-relating nature of the ageing, LGBT and other identities older adults construct, significant in the context of later life. However in the context of CEG as theory and practice, and in the later life learning environments it promotes, it can be argued that its use of intersectionality in these productive ways is limited. This is compounded by its minimal focus on older LGBT

adults' experience. The following discussion therefore proposes that by extending its application of intersectionality to engage with, and build a picture of how older adults' ageing, LGBT and other identities interact and shape their everyday experience, CEG can be better placed to develop inclusive and responsive later life learning environments.

### **Purposefully extending CEG's use of intersectionality**

The modes, purposes and impact of later life learning are the subject of on-going enquiry from the evolving perspectives of CEG. CEG is concerned with development of educational and learning practices that can lead to the empowerment and emancipation of older adults (Findsen & Formosa, 2011; Formosa, 2011). CEG has been shaped by, and builds on, developments in critical social gerontology for better understanding of the nature of ageing in social contexts and how social justice can be attained for older adults (Bernard & Scharf, 2007; Findsen, 2005; Formosa & Higgs, 2013; Holstein & Minkler, 2007; Phillipson 1998, 2000, 2006; Tulle, 2004; Withnall, 2010). Critical social gerontologists challenge the normative ideals of successful ageing which dominate ageing discourses to uncover the nature of oppression and inequality experienced by older people (Holstein & Minkler, 2007). Drawing on such analysis, CEG challenges the overly optimistic view of retirement and moving into later life, through analyses of the impact of socio-economic disadvantage that can lead older adults to have differential experience, mediated by class, gender and ethnicity (Phillipson, 2006). These are understood through political-economic, feminist and humanistic lenses which claim successful ageing is attainable but dependent on class positioning and material well-being (Holstein & Minkler, 2007).

Intersectional analysis is therefore foundational to CEG, focusing on the interconnectedness of age, class, gender and ethnicity and how they mediate differential experience. This mirrors patterns in wider critical educational research and practice which has made longstanding use of intersectional perspectives (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). This recognises that to understand the complexity of the self, intersectionality prevents elevating one aspect of social division at the expense of others. For example, a single, isolated focus on class oppression over that resulting from heteronormativity and homophobia can omit analysis of their inter-connectedness and the ways they shape everyday life and human experience (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005; Kincheloe, 2008).

However, albeit that it can powerfully expose the nature and impact of ageism in the context of adult learning, CEG can be seen to employ a limited use of intersectionality which leads it to neglect potentially deeper understanding of the nature of older LGBT adults' later life realities as shaped by the intersections of ageing, LGBT and other identities. This has parallels in social gerontology. In terms of understanding their interconnectedness, Cronin (2006) argues that heteronormative thinking and assumptions in social gerontology have contributed to a marginalisation of and limited insight into the experiences and complex identities of older LGBT adults. Warner (1993, p. xxvi) first conceptualised the notion of heteronormativity as an analytical category through which the operation of power in social relations can be understood. Heteronormativity operates the 'regime of the normal', through which heterosexuality is privileged and dominates as the natural, obligatory, inevitable and normal basis of all social relations and in which sexualities are valued and devalued (Adam, 2002). In Sumara and Davis' (1999, p. 202) terms: 'Living within heteronormative culture means learning to "see" straight, to "read" straight, to "think" straight.' do Mar Castro Varela, Dhawan and Engel (2011) analyse heteronormativity as a category of critical social analysis and how it might be resisted.



They expose the difficult, diffuse, ever-changing and slippery nature of heteronormativity that defies singular explanation. As Ruffolo (2009, p. 2) contends, heteronormativity and exposure of the power relations it seeks to preserve have ‘monumentally framed the ways in which we think about how subjects are subjected to the normative discourses of heterosexuality’.

The ways in which CEG could support a heteronormative reading of learning and educational practice therefore demands critical attention. Without a widening of its scope to consider older LGBT adults and the experiential aspects of intersectionality, it risks overlooking the socio-cultural heterogeneity of ageing and the nature of how older age and sexual diversity interact and feature in everyday life. This in turn risks an uncritical acceptance of the dominance of a heteronormative presence and a queer absence in CEG that Cronin (2006) argues is pervasive and reductive of wider ageing diversity studies.

In how it might develop inclusive later life learning environments attuned to the self-knowledge older LGBT adults accumulate over their lives, CEG is also overlooking intersectional interrogation that usefully positions marginalised subjects with complex identities as having an ‘epistemic advantage’ (Nash, 2008, p.3 ). Through this individuals produce valuable insights on, and knowledge of, lived experiences shaped by the interactions of class, race, gender and sexuality (ibid.). Thus in extending its use of intersectionality to consider the lived intersections of ageing, LGBT and other identities, alert to this epistemic advantage, CEG has possibilities for developing more responsive later life learning environments.

The possibilities afforded by intersectional interrogation of identity and lived experience for CEG is also based on current understandings of older adults’ motivations and outcomes for engagement in later life learning, specifically where it has a positive impact for sustaining their self-identities (Withnall, 2010). In relation to identity, Formosa (2014) adds that later life learning is far from being the simple acquisition of ‘commodities such as skills, knowledge or understanding’ but should provide ‘retirees with the opportunity to undergo a continuous process of personal construction and reconstruction’ (2014, p. 12). In coming to understand and openly express their sexual orientation, through and/or against other identity formations, older LGBT adults have faced and navigated particular forms of institutionalised religious, moral and social opprobrium in Scotland and further afield (Cant, 2008; Meek, 2015). Consequently it is proposed that if later life learning environments are to encourage change and growth in older LGBT adults’ self-identities, CEG can benefit from intersectional perspectives on ageing and sexuality, allowing it to challenge past and present “heterosexualising discourses and heteronormative ways of being, believing, desiring, acting, becoming and belonging” (Grace & Hill, 2004, p. 177).

## Methodological issues

For the purposes of exploring the complex relationships between ageing and sexuality across the life course, first person oral narratives were recorded in semi-structured, in-depth interviews and discussion groups. These encouraged the recounting of significant experiences and events that were transcribed into text form. Having such extended biographical and life history narratives provided opportunities for intersectional analysis that could focus on ‘the creativity, complexity, and variability of individuals’ (or groups’) self and reality constructions’ (Chase, 2008, p. 84).

The life histories and biographical focus very consciously aligned with the study’s adoption of a critical educational research paradigm. This meant that:

- Learners' stories were privileged given their capacity to provide substantive narrative material that captures rich, complex and competing versions of reality, lived experience and learning in diverse settings;
- Through an abductive approach to analysis, biographical narratives on experience were brought into critical, productive conversation with existing theory, informed by a fundamental principle of critical theory as a process of on-going critique in which: "the claims of any theory must be confronted with the distinction between the world it examines and portrays, and the world as it actually exists" (Giroux, 2009, p. 27).

Adoption of the abductive strategy raised a series of challenges for me in the process of analysing the data set. I went through a number of iterations in which I struggled to maintain the balance demanded by abductive practice: theory and empirical data should be interpreted in light of each other, with the primacy given to theory is subject to close scrutiny so as to avoid imposition of overly rigid interpretive boundaries on biographical and life histories narratives (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009; Anyon, 2008). In the earlier stages of data analysis the latter was the case. This in effect stifled the data, and closed down opportunities for a more fluid, open-ended and productive analysis that could allow themes to emerge more organically and that could analyse the complex intersectional relationships between ageing and LGBT identities. This impeded attainment of the 'critical holism' of abduction (Anyon, 2008, p. 21). I was trying to map an overly technical, unwieldy framework onto the narratives that imposed a pre-configured shape and structure. I moved from a fragmented analytical approach in which the main research variables were artificially separated out and disconnected, to one in which their interplay could be more fully drawn out. I did so by arranging and breaking down the participants' narratives into a simpler chronological ordering of childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, midlife, post work and later life. In each life stage I then brought together extracts of how participants articulated their identities. I then considered these narratives more closely, focusing on family, schooling, workplace and formal educational contexts in terms of on how they positioned participants and influenced their identity construction over the life course. This allowed for abductive processes of analysis in which the interpretive power of theory could be both demonstrated and challenged by the narratives.

### *Participant recruitment*

I anticipated and sought to address several, limiting methodological dilemmas in participant recruitment. One of these was in relation to the implications for access and research design in trying to reach those older LGBT adults who may represent a 'hidden community' that can be: "social groups...difficult to access for the purpose of social research; where issues regarding access, emotions, power and the politics of representation ... [are] ... particularly posed" (Ashe, Fraser & Piacentini, 2009, p. 3).

The reasons for being a hard-to-reach research constituency are thus complex. I assumed that for older LGBT adults in particular, whose life histories and biographies may have been shaped by oppressive socio-historical circumstances, they would wish their sexual identity to remain invisible for fear of further discrimination. Consequently, as in previous studies, the research relied in part, on self-selection (Heaphy, Yip & Thompson, 2004). However, to balance this and extend the possibilities for reaching a wider, possibly hidden population and to be sensitive to the complexities of why older LGBT adults choose to hide their sexuality, purposive and snowballing sampling was

used. Once I had completed 10 interviews I sought participants' permission to use some of their comments for an advert promoting the project that I then sent to a range of LGBT organisations. This led to recruitment of several more participants. I also visited the majority of organisations in person to meet with co-ordinators, volunteers and group members to discuss the project with them. Snowball sampling within these informal networks proved the most effective means of recruiting other participants to the study, enabling access to accessing and interviews with 21 individuals, and a discussion group with 9 members of Highland Rainbow Folk. It would be difficult to maintain the view that, of the 21 individuals recruited, any one of them was hidden or reluctant to participate as a consequence of the factors above. For those participants finally interviewed, the ways in which they have led or are currently leading hidden lives may confound expectations and challenges assumptions of what a hidden community may be. Vulnerability and fearfulness were explicitly and understandably characteristic of the maintenance of a hidden life at different points in the life course of many participants. However, different levels of agentic action, choice, creative self-preservation and insightful negotiation of complex and multiple forms of homophobia and heteronormativity became evident. Overall a more nuanced and complex picture emerged that captured open and hidden lives as created within, and inhabiting marginal, but not necessarily constraining 'different worlds' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 68).

#### *Reflections on being an insider researcher*

The study demanded careful consideration of ethical issues that arose in the discussions with participants, particularly in light of my insider researcher positioning as an older gay male. For Sikes and Potts (2008, p. 5), insider research holds radical promise to 'make things better'. It has capacity to challenge assumptions, in this case about the nature of being LGBT and becoming older. However, this carries ethical risks for the researcher who may become over identified with the particular research issues and participants' experiences of them. This was a difficult balancing act because I am gay. However I took the approach that inevitably the study was shaped by my experiences, interests and commitment to equal rights for LGBT people. I was therefore prepared and sufficiently self-aware that participants' personal stories, particularly of homophobia and discrimination, would have an emotional impact on me and on them. Fontana and Frey (2008) argue that this is inevitable in qualitative fieldwork and my approach to this was to be as honest as possible with participants about my interest in the study and to double check emerging themes to ensure that it emerged from the data rather a preconceived idea or personal opinion.

As much as possible I also wanted to create a welcoming and conducive setting that eliminated any potential power imbalance between myself, and the participants. Over the two-year process of data collection, I reflected on the importance of my subjective positioning as a gay, middle-aged insider researcher and what this meant for the nature of the inter-subjective processes that were played out between myself and LGBT participants in our discussions. I was sensitive to how subjectivities might be produced in the particular context of the research relationship with LGBT participants, as well as in their wider past and present lives. In my attempts to create a setting in which open, friendly and free-flowing conversations could take place poststructuralist perspectives were informative, particularly the focus on the impact of different contexts on how subjectivities can be produced. Subjectivity signifies how adults:

... understand and identify themselves in relation to multiple contexts in which they are positioned and position themselves. The production of subjectivity is always an interactive, inconsistent and unstable process interlaced with and mediated by social, emotional, cultural, textual and discursive practices and relations. (Burke, 2008, p. 202)

Viewed in this way, it was important to create a research context in which participants were enabled to talk openly about their sexual identities and did not feel inhibited. This was particularly significant given the discussions with many of the participants, in which we explored how we had witnessed at first hand, experienced and learned from the destructive effects of homophobic attitudes and violence. For myself, and participants, alienation and marginality were perpetrated to differing extremes in changing educational environments in Scotland and in wider life, at a range of points across the lifespan. At the same time, I shared with participants the impact of learning from engagement in protest and celebration, with varying degrees of participation. These have resulted in an increased sense of individual agency, collective power and progress towards greater understanding of becoming LGBT. Overall, such discussions demanded an ethics of care on my part and the creation of a productive balance in the researcher-participant relationship in which our experiences and knowledge as LGBT adults could be understood as equally valid. I was able to explore sensitively and openly questions raised by previous research: of the complexities of asserting 'gay rights' and the claims we make about the centrality of our sexualities to our identities; of the on-going struggle to problematise and identify experiences of what it is for us to feel equal, authentic, included and open.

## Analysis

### *The changing intersectional nature of ageing, LGBT and other identities, post work and in later life*

I begin with exploration of how participants understood the intersections of their ageing LGBT identities in the contexts of post work and in later life. Participants attached varying levels of significance to being LGBT, mediated by becoming older and the heterogeneous contexts and multiple realities of their later lives. Andrew's comments on ageing are representative of several other participants who articulated an acceptance of growing older, partly based on having faced adversity and challenges regarding their sexual identities.

So I think I accept that I am getting older and I think partly that it is possible to do that because of things I have had to accept in the past, particularly accepting that I am gay, which wasn't easy, sort of in the 70s, accepting that I had a disability in the mid-80s. So when comes to actually getting on a bit in my 50s and 60s and so on, this is just kind of something that really I have to get on with. (Andrew, b. 1945)

As noted earlier, crisis competence or an individual stamina may be developed at the intersections of ageing and LGBT identities (Pugh, 2002). While it may not be defined as crisis competence, it is the case that across the biographies of those participants who are now post work, and in later life, diverse and cumulative experiences directly linked to their development of diverse LGBT identities have led to a resilience and self-belief:

I think I am quite a resilient person now and quite secure in myself. Well you would hope so wouldn't you – [laughter] It's been a long journey. I think on that basis you probably are better prepared, particularly as a woman. I mean I look at other people around me, heterosexual women of around about my age, women in the pottery class and so on, and I

wonder, they don't really have a strategy. You see that they want things or whatever. But they sit and say I don't want to make a fuss and I'll wait and I'll wait. I am not used to be in milieu where that would be the case... So yes I think being gay does make you more aware and more able to respond to [ageism] and have a strategy inside your head so that okay I am not going to be pigeon holed ... I am going to nicely assert myself to get what I came here to get. So yes I think that would be true that I am better at dealing with it [ageing] (Mary, b. 1954)

At the same time Mary does express some concerns about ageing as a lesbian. These parallel those comments expressed by participants when they were in childhood and adolescence about the absence of role models of lesbian and gay people:

I suppose I do see some difficulties in that when you are younger you see yourself as being kind of radical and it's a bit cool and whatever you know. At least it became that in your peer group. And when you are older it doesn't seem to fit so comfortably. And you think oh I don't want to be some kind of stereotyped old lesbian! [Laughter]. I don't think there are many positive role models of older lesbians. I am struggling to think of any there are. And there are lots of stereotypes of the older lesbian. So I guess I maybe have some issues with that...

Kevin (b. 1965) has a confident and hopeful view of later life and from his experiences a trust in LGBT people's inventiveness for creating new role models and ways of being older:

I think that part of what we do is define, we're defining all the time. You know we are the first generation that are living in this liberated time when we can marry, but actually what are our role models for gay marriage? Well there are actually no very many so you to seek them out somewhere or you just invent. And I think a lot of being gay is about inventing, you know and I think that is really exciting and liberating.

Other participants' perspectives on and experiences of getting older and being LGBT reflect a less optimistic view and predict a loss of identity. Some focused on the continued significance of being LGBT and there not being care and educational provisions which are inclusive of and sensitive to their distinctive needs: "I kind of think God,... we [LGBT people] have survived and grown up through so much to get to where we are now, but that whole bit about care and support I am not filled with confidence." (Stewart, b. 1958).

Others reflected a more pragmatic approach and asserted that their sexual orientation will not have continued prominence. Rather questions of identity are much less focused on being LGBT and concerns about getting older are shared with those common across all groups (Stonewall, 2011):

... the older you get the more disempowered you get anyway. Will that be different for LGBT folk? Possibly, possibly not. Fewer folk having children means you are the mercy of public services which isn't a cause for optimism. Do you actually think that the people who run these places actually have a view of older people having a sexual orientation full stop of any description? ... So I don't know. But do you know what I think the biggest thing that is going to determine how it is going to be is how healthy you can stay. Yes it might be something to do with your sexual orientation but probably not, probably not. (Jean, b. 1965)

These compare with findings from research conducted by Stonewall (2011) that surveyed a sample of 1,050 heterosexual and 1,036 lesbian, gay and bisexual people over the age of 55 across Britain. The survey asked about their experiences and expectations of getting older and examined their personal support structures, family connections and living

arrangements. It also asked about how they felt about getting older, the help they expect to need, and what they would like to be available from health and social care services. Results indicated that LGBT people shared many worries about ageing with heterosexual peers. However responses further indicated that they were consistently more anxious about future care needs, independence and mobility, health including mental health and housing. The report thus has implications for questions of understanding identity development and adjustment to the ageing process for older LGBT adults, suggesting continued, enriching identity development and its full and free expression would be dramatically diminished or thwarted. Of particular relevance to identity in later life, half of the Stonewall participants felt their sexual orientation has, or will have, a negative effect on getting older: ‘many have experienced discrimination earlier in their lives – at work, from families or from authority figures – and this leaves them doubtful about the future’ (Stonewall, 2011, p. 2).

*Becoming older and LGBT: a basis for productive ageing?*

Other participants articulated possibilities for productive ageing in becoming older and being LGBT. Educational researchers and gerontologists have promoted the third age (50 years+) as an important life-stage, characterised by retirement that brings freedom from work responsibilities, with new opportunities for learning (Phillipson, 1998). Learning in this frame is largely viewed as contributing to active, productive and successful ageing (Duay & Bryan, 2006). The participants’ biographies build a bigger picture of the particular realities and forms of successful and productive ageing as mediated by LGBT identity and its intersections with becoming older.

Questions of what may constitute productive or successful ageing emerged in discussions with Highland Rainbow Folk (HRF). HRF is an independent group of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender volunteers, working to raise awareness of issues facing older LGBT people in the North of Scotland. They give presentations to health and social care staff, and to older people’s groups. One of the members, Tina, refers to older retired adults with whom she works as volunteers who commonly express concerns that without work they now “cease to contribute”. Edward (b. 1931) a volunteer in HRF, spoke of the difficulties of retirement as related to boredom and a sense of displacement after a life time of working in the hotel trade. However he feels that his involvement in HRF “keeps him going”. Overall HRF has provided Edward a purpose for a number of recent years. He is particularly engaged as one of the main ‘story tellers’ in the awareness-raising sessions the group conduct across the Highlands with health and social care providers on LGBT issues. He explained:

I am proud of being a member, it has been great for opening out to the gay community and for the old aged like myself. ... the Rainbow group it can help people to come out, the people that’s in it, even if they are older and be honest about it...

In his retirement then, Edward, as with many other members of this group, engages in an enthusiastically productive form of ageing in which his gay identity still energises and gives him purpose and which he is keen to talk about through the story-telling model HRF adopts.

June (b.1954) questions her self-identity now in the early stages of retirement from full-time work that has heavily defined who she has been: “... who would I be, what would I be?” Several participants who have reached this stage of the life course ask similar questions concerning post work identities. Much of ‘who’ June had been to this

point in her life had been constructed through working as a nurse over a 40-year period, latterly as a Nurse Practitioner with significant responsibility for patient health and wellbeing. Entering into the post work phase of her life initially raised unsettling questions about getting older and her identity. However she reflects an increasing sense of ease and prospects for engagement in the forms of active and healthy ageing as promoted by proponents of an emancipated and creative third age:

I think retiral will help with that because [a] I am going to get more physically active because I have the time to it now and I'll just start to do the things that I enjoy ... we have got in the seat outside in the garden. 'Grow old with me the best is yet to be'. ... sometimes we sit there and I think I am coming to terms with that [a] I am getting older and [b] I am not defined by my professional life any more. It maybe take a wee while longer to get there but it is coming quite easily I have to say...

However this point has come after struggling with fears about the reality of ageing and becoming "a fat frumpy old woman". However, again there is positivity where she has come to recognise that she is now: "... going to have learn how to describe [herself] again... The retired bit is good as now I am actually thinking I can start learning things that I didn't have time to learn before."

Part of this positivity and changing view on what will replace her professional identity and lead to a productive retirement is influenced by June's changing sense of being lesbian. Her involvement in the Loud and Proud Gay Choir has re-politicised her, 'reawakening the feminist streak' that had become less important as she "nested" building a career and home in the previous 20 years or so.

Mary recounts similar difficulties in relation to what she describes as the "strange business" of retirement. This was from a very "stressful and pressurised" job as a local authority Educational Adviser that dominated her life and from which she needed "recovery time... a shell that was dropping away from me, in terms of the stress and realising how many layers of stress that were on me". While she recognises the fortunate position in which she now finds herself, it has been nonetheless daunting to be "completely free to define my life in a way that I have never had before... [to] have define your life a lot more". She has come to a point when she is thinking about how she can be productive. She describes a long, sometimes fulfilling, sometimes extremely challenging career fighting for greater educational equality in schools. She has also had to learn, step by step, experientially and reflectively how to be a lesbian in interaction with being a mother. Her work and life experiences directly influence her view on how she could now be productive and what possibilities for continued learning exist. Though she had not decided on the specific direction of this, Mary sees her sexuality as playing a guiding role:

... if I could find something that was identified with my sexuality as well as other aspects of what I was interested in doing and contributing to, both things, then that would be great. But I haven't found anything like that so far.... But I am coming back to a point now where I would like to have some involvement. It's definitely around equalities issues for me. I don't really think I don't know where I would go with it to be honest.

Experiences of retirement and views on the intersections between ageing and transgender identities also arose: "It [getting older] is like cheeses. Some are mellow, some are mature, some are extra mature, some are seriously strong and some are rancid! *Laughter*"

Vera's (b.1938) humorous comment on ageing came from a lively group discussion with members of HRF that considered how becoming older impacted on our LGBT identities. Vera has experienced retirement in wholly positive ways. She refers enthusiastically to the improved quality of life she now has: "just having the time to

yourself just to do things, to choose where to go, when to go, without having to get permission”, particularly where, for her, a pension (“it’s brilliant”) and other older age concessions have brought a new freedom with greater material security than she has had in her previous life. She had a particularly unsettled twenty-year period leading to retirement of low paid, temporary work. Vera’s humour also belies the difficult experiences over her life she had encountered in becoming a transgendered woman. She could only make the transition from living as a man when she was 60 years of age. As such, she provides a unique, subversive portrayal of retirement that paradoxically, accords with the optimistic vision of the third age. However its proponents have contributed to a homogenous and hetero-normalising picture of successful later life.

I am transgendered. It happened very much later in life because when I was young there was no public knowledge about it because when I was young all I knew about it was that I hated being a boy and wished I’d been born a girl. I never got the chance to be who I wanted to be. I made my first attempt at transition when I was around 40 but it was that much hassle and trouble then that I lost my bottle, gave up and spent the next 15 years wishing I had been able to go through with it and then finally deciding that if I ever make another attempt I am going to have to try and get accepted... never had the money of trying to go private, so I just turned 60 when I finally got as far as the op. And the op that was 13 years ago and I have never looked back since...

Vera’s later life transition to finally becoming a woman thus destabilises heteronormative notions of what retirement should entail. However, in a similar way to Edward, HRF has provided another source for Vera to engage in particular forms of productive and active ageing because she is a transgendered woman with an important life story to impart. Her contribution to HRF’s activities is commented on as particularly significant by other members of the group: she tells her story through a profoundly “moving and very comical” poem which is a really important part of the presentation they do for health and social care providers on LGBT issues. For Vera, her sense of actively and productively contributing to HRF is strengthened as she has “learned that it’s not just a social group it’s a campaigning group”, through which she can creatively and openly share her lived, transgendered experience, while still challenging misinterpretations and prejudice in constructive ways:

... a lot of people outside the LGBT community just generally are totally unaware about all the sort of restrictions that we were under in times past, before there was a more liberal attitude in society.

From her research on appropriate methodologies for older adult learning Gaskell (1999, p. 273) identifies the need to harness the positive aspects of ageing: ‘the ability to develop a critical reflectivity that can comprehend stability within change,’ from the perspective of ‘a long and unique life’. I would suggest that intersectional analysis of Vera, and the other participants’ biographies provide insight on how they have harnessed critical reflectivity and found stability in unique forms of productive and successful ageing, born out of their development of diverse LGBT identities. The uniqueness of participants’ lives as a consequence of being LGBT may also account for the ways in which they are resilient.

#### *Intersectional analysis: a developmental tool for CEG?*

This use of intersectional interrogation to understand the nature and lived realities of participants’ ageing and LGBT identities begins the construction of ‘a complex map of



sexual identifications ... as they (dis) connect across time and place, reconstituted through, against and in relation to class, disability... to name but a few focal points' (Taylor, 2011, p. 4). I suggest that such a map can effectively underpin the development of more inclusive and responsive sites of CEG and later life learning for older LGBT participants. This was illustrated in the learning opportunities afforded the study's participants in groups like HRF, an LGBT life-histories group and an older gay men's project in Glasgow. In these contexts there is an explicit focus on the intersections of being LGBT and ageing, that positively altered participants' understanding of their own and others, older LGBT identity formations.

From the group discussion with HRF it was immediately evident that it provides a sustaining social network for older LGBT adults in which they have space to explore the complexities, concerns and opportunities related to their ageing and LGBT identities. Such intersectional exploration is encouraged through adoption of a storytelling approach which Helen (b. 1950s) explained as: "monologues... [they are] presented to healthcare professionals and social workers and produce resources to try and raise awareness". Helen is one of the six presenters who tells her story. She feels "we have been lucky enough to have two transgendered people". The story telling approach, though in monologue form, is also dialogical as Helen's and other participants' stories of gay, lesbian and transgender experience are interwoven, and seek to bring legislation and policy into real life contexts:

....we provide snippets of our own stories. Some of them are funny, some of them are quite heart rending so we try to mix it and quite a lot of legislation. They follow in and out of each from light to a bit heavy and legislation to whatever is appropriate.

Helen's story has learning at the centre of it and she very much emphasises that HRF provides her with "hugely rich learning". This is informed by intersectional perspectives, particularly because of their exploration of the "mixture of LGBT" and what brings them together in terms of experience, but also allowing them to share what is unique to others:

The thing that has been amazing for me in the learning is the mixture of LGBT. Because as a bisexual person, I used to think, nobody wants to listen to me about being bisexual because it doesn't exist as far as just everybody is concerned.

Tina explained the underlying ethos and principles that have informed HRF's approach. There is an in-built openness to constantly review and develop the sessions they deliver "we do have questions throughout the sessions and we are learning as we go along". For Tina their work,

... is not about being aggressively out. It's about, and this is why I like the work of HRF, because we don't assume that anybody's homophobic or bi phobic or trans phobic. We just are thinking there is just not enough information out there and people are wanting to understand. So if we do it in that nice soft gentle way that's the way we'll change attitudes. In my opinion we don't change attitudes by banging people over the head. And telling them they are wrong. We change attitudes by trying to help people understand where we are coming from.

Tina further explained that they were always adamant from its inception that HRF was always going to be inclusive and enable as full understanding as possible to the intersectional nature of diverse "LGB and T" and ageing identities. This was underpinned by choice and "really open dialogue" and awareness that some transgendered groups feel they would not gain from LGB input. However HRF has ensured people could get involved and from an intersectional standpoint allow exploration of what "were similar

issues around growing older, discrimination and past experiences of discrimination". For Tina intersectional exploration of the lived realities of ageing and being LGBT opens up dialogue from which they can raise awareness and interact with diverse constituencies of health and social care professionals in meaningful ways.

## Conclusion and future research directions for empowering CEG

This paper shows that by employing productive forms of intersectional interrogation that focus on the lived realities of ageing and LGBT identities, CEG can construct meaningful and inclusive later life learning environments with older LGBT adults. In particular, CEG can learn from older LGBT adults' articulation of their intersecting LGBT and ageing identities that reveals particular sources of social identification that are rich and diverse, and afford possibilities for building their personal and social agency. The promise of such intersectional perspectives as one means with which to develop more responsive CEG can be seen in several community groups in Scotland. They seek to redress discrimination through their utilisation of intersectional perspectives as a centrally organising concept and principle. These organisations also have an educational focus, particularly attentive to understanding the lived realities and intersectional experiences of complex LGBT identity formations and how they interconnect with other aspects of identity related to race and disability (Cowen, Stella, Magahy, Strauss & Morton, 2011; Equalities Network, 2015). They therefore also respond to current theoretical deliberations, and calls for empirical research and on-the-ground developments that open up understanding of the lived realities of intersectional identities and the complex needs these may create for individuals and groups (Taylor, 2010). HRF represent one such group who have been able to do so. It has created strong and meaningful coalitions between lesbians, gay men, transgendered, transitioning and bisexual women. It engenders a self-reflexivity in participants, affording them new insights into what it means for them personally and collectively, to be LGBT, as mediated by becoming older, in more meaningful and inclusive learning environments.

In terms of future research directions, this study points to the potential of a longitudinal, intersectional study that engages with a wider range of providers of education for older LGBT adults in the UK and Europe. This could explore in more in-depth and purposeful ways what may constitute empowering CEG, particularly the pedagogic practices through which older LGBT adults are enabled to counter ever-shifting forms of heteronormativity as well as strengthen their participative voice to contribute to evolving social and legal reform.

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## Marginalised voices in the inclusive recruitment discourse: a dilemma of inclusion/exclusion in the (Swedish) police

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### Abstract

*Recruitment for diversity is part of a range of proactive strategies for overcoming occupational stereotyping in a number of professions, as well as addressing a history of discrimination against women and minority groups. One such campaign launched by the Swedish police involves 'inclusive recruitment'. By analysing the discourse of inclusive recruitment and its subject positions in police student talk, this article shows how borders between people who are assigned different social categories are constructed, challenged and reinforced. Positive intentions in agendas towards diversity are problematised when minorities are ascribed as admitted on quotation, which places them in a subordinate and 'risky position' within an occupation and on less legitimate premises. A dilemma emerges between a call to represent minority groups and the risk of categorising them as 'others'. In particular, voices of resistance from ethnic minority police women show how practices of exclusion could jeopardise efforts to achieve inclusion.*

Keywords: diversity; intersectionality; minority background; police; resistance recruitment

### Introduction

Ways in which people identify themselves and others in terms of occupational choice and roles can lead to, and be influenced by 'occupational stereotyping', where the labour market is divided into gendered occupations or work tasks (e.g. Fejes & Haake, 2013; Haake, 2011). This gender-related 'horizontal segregation' of the labour market, where men and women choose different fields of study and occupation, is a concern in most European countries (EACEA/Eurydice, 2010). As literature on occupational choices stresses, traditions, social structures and the positions people occupy in society mean that the choices available to them are not neutral (for an overview, see Billet, Newton & Ockerby, 2010. cf. Gottfredson & Lapan, 1997). A number of scholars (e.g. Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2017; Fejes & Haake, 2013; Galvaan, 2015; Hsu, Roth, Marshall & Guenette, 2009; Saavedra, Araújo, Taveira & Vieira, 2014) have answered a call to reject social

determinism and focus on situational understandings of how occupational choices are made and accounted for. Furthermore, research with an intersectional approach to the positive political discourse on widened access and participation in higher and adult education shows how this discourse can work in contradictory ways (e.g. Acher, 2007; Reay, 2003). This article is in line with this approach, and contributes knowledge on how the inclusive recruitment discourse operates in terms of reproducing and challenging occupational stereotypes. The purpose is to identify and describe how inclusive recruitment (*Sw: breddad rekrytering*) to the police is constructed, what identities (subject positions) these constructions offer, and how they are sustained or challenged by police students. Although the adult education site in focus is the Swedish Police Academy, the article addresses questions of interest for policy makers, professionals and educators in various educational and work settings.

Affirmative action strategies and diversity in recruitment are part of a range of proactive approaches to overcoming a history of discrimination and exclusion of women and minority groups, as well as occupational stereotyping in a range of types of education and work sites. However, in some settings, such as the police, these strategies tend to be associated with recruitment based on gender or ethnicity alone, without reference to merit (Thornton, 2003). Despite positive intentions behind the inclusive recruitment discourse, it can have negative consequences for the proposed beneficiaries (cf. Bjørkelo, Egge, Bye & Ganapathy, 2015; Silverstri, Tong & Brown, 2013). This article outlines a number of concerns which have emerged from the ideas expressed by police students in discussions of inclusive recruitment to the Swedish police. A number of aspects of the notion of inclusive recruitment are challenged, especially through voices from ethnic minority police women. By analysing the discourse of inclusive recruitment and its subject positions, this article shows how borders are constructed, challenged and reinforced between people who are assigned different but intersecting social categories. These borders have social consequences in terms of who applies to and enters the police force, and who is seen as having entered the force legitimately. It therefore affects how people are likely to feel at home in their work.

### **Recruitment for diversity and the Swedish police**

In line with the political climate addressing diversity in social institutions, inclusive recruitment has played a major role in efforts to improve diversity in the Swedish police. The police authority invested in campaigns at the beginning of the 2000s to recruit more women and ethnic minorities in numbers proportionate to the population. The importance of diversity has been highlighted in policies in terms of equal treatment and efforts to counteract discrimination (National Police Board, 2008; 2010a). The investments aim to improve legitimacy and trust in the police, develop the police force and provide a good service for citizens. Diversity is described as a resource for a just and efficient police force, and is approached by seeking different backgrounds, experiences and competences. Moreover, diversity is considered important to the police in terms of creating an attractive work place, and the long-term aim is a police force whose composition reflects diversity in society.

In 2015, 42 percent of the police were women and eight percent were co-workers with a foreign background.<sup>1 2</sup> The current population with a foreign background in Sweden is 22.2 percent (Statistics Sweden, 2015). However, those admitted to the police programme are described as second-generation immigrants, and few are described as from marginalised or segregated suburbs. Three semesters in 2009 and 2010 were

considered historic, as 50 percent of the entrants (out of 36-38 percent of the applicants) were women (National Police Academy [NPA], 2010).<sup>3</sup> The police first suggested that this was a ‘coincidence’, but later attributed it to affirmative action (Schoultz, 2015, June 16).<sup>4</sup> This development was criticised in the media, which argued that it involved a quota system and discrimination against men.<sup>5</sup> 130 male applicants reported the police for discrimination and four cases resulted in arbitration and were granted compensation. Since then, the numbers of female recruits have dropped, and the figure is again down to pre-2009 levels at 30-35 percent. Over the years, the police have changed the definition of ‘foreign background’ in their statistics, and since 2013 statistics on employees and students with a foreign background have no longer been officially published. The latest policies no longer uses the word diversity and focuses only on the words ‘equal treatment’ (National Police Board, 2013, 2017). These latest policies have also left out statements regarding recruitment.<sup>6</sup>

### **Research on social categories in the police**

There has been an increase in empirical research since Holdaway’s (1997) call for research on the police to include micro-levels of analysis involving subjective experiences and practices within institutional police contexts. However, explorations of diversity in the composition of the constabulary have focused on pre-determined social categories, rather than on how categories are reproduced and constituted. Recent research on the latter indicates both improvements and obstacles for minority police officers in terms of ethnicity (e.g. Hansen Löfstrand & Uhnöo, 2014; Holdaway & O’Neill, 2004, 2007), gender (e.g. Fejes & Haake, 2013; Haake, 2017; Silverstri, Tong & Brown, 2013), sexual orientation (e.g. Colvin, 2009; Frewin & Tuffin, 1998; Rennstam & Sullivan, 2016) and intersecting categories (Boogaard & Roggeband, 2010; Jones & Williams, 2015; Lander, 2013; Loftus, 2009; McElhinny, 2001; Morasch & Haarr, 2012). Recent research on diversity discourses within the Swedish police has shown how diversity is contradictory and results in practical and ideological dilemmas regarding both the police work and the composition of the constabulary (Wieslander, 2014). Despite positive trends towards inclusion within the police, barriers to diversity in recruitment, retention and promotion are reported to be multifaceted, and are an under-researched area (Björkelo et al., 2015; Shepherd, 2014). Barriers include perceived negative attitudes towards the police among friends and family (low status and high risk), a student environment with experiences of marginalisation and exclusion (Lander, 2013; Wieslander, 2014), negative attitudes from colleagues in the work environment (Colvin, 2009; Peterson & Uhnöo, 2012; Rennstam & Sullivan, 2016) and perceived obstacles to minorities attaining positions of leadership in the police (Haake, 2017; Silverstri, Tong & Brown, 2013; Van Ewijk, 2012). Some argue that a positive, multicultural action strategy for minority officers could de-legitimise them in terms of their career, alienating them within the service (Björkelo et al., 2015; Shepherd, 2014).

### **Research setting and data**

The results are based on a strand of data from a broader empirical study on diversity discourses within police trainee settings (Wieslander, 2014). The Swedish police programme covers five semesters of professional education, and during the period of this study (2010) it consisted of four semesters of theory (with a shorter period of field

practice), and a fifth probationary semester where trainees are based in a police station. The empirical data is based on ethnographically inspired field studies at the Swedish National Police Academy in 2010, where two (out of 16) randomly selected classes (a total of 45 students) were observed during a six-week course in their fourth semester. Classes, group assignments and talk during breaks were audio-recorded and combined with field notes. Discussions about recruitment and different social categories was transcribed verbatim and the text was used for analysis. In addition, a major part of the data analysed consists of a total of eight focus group interviews. Five of these interviews were conducted with 27 of the 45 police students at the end of the Academy programme (semester four), and three focus group interviews were conducted with 11 of the former 45 students at the end of their six-month probationary period of training at a police department (semester five). The interviews contained questions about diversity, inclusive recruitment and multiculturalism in relation to the constabulary and policing. Focus groups were used to highlight diverse and shared constructions on complex topics (Wibeck, Abrandt Dahlgren & Öberg, 2007). The interviews were transcribed verbatim including laughter and pauses, and lasted from 56 to 100 minutes, with an average length of 84 minutes.

### Discourse theory and analysis of subject positions

As identity addresses questions of justice and equality, it works in highly politicized environments. Policies addressing discrimination and social justice through identity often do this through very distinct social categories, such as gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, ethnic identity and so on. However, to categorise an individual can also have reverse outcomes than being just and inclusive (cf. Archer, 2007). According to Day (1988), ethnification (being positioned as the ethnic other) runs the risk of leading to exclusion in the social fellowship and in group activity. Holdaway and O'Neill (2004:857) describe similar consequences resulting from the ethnification of police officers, and also highlight an aspect of how these officers conceptualise themselves: To be stereotyped and, thereby, categorised as a member of an ethnic minority is precisely to be set apart from the ethnic majority. De facto, it isolates an officer from the mainstream workforce, setting a framework for relationships with colleagues and a perception of oneself within a constabulary.

In response to these simplifications of categories and their potential exclusionary outcomes, this article aligns with an intersectional approach that challenges reductive ways of framing difference (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Intersectionality takes into account individuals' multiple belongings and how identities, or social positions, *intersect* with each other and within social structures, and it can thus reveal power relations (both oppressed and privileged) in a nuanced way. In contrast to research based on social categories *as a point of departure* for occupational choice and skills, this study applies a discourse approach in order to analyse how aspects of inclusive recruitment and intersecting social categories are *constructed* and *negotiated* in conversations between police students. The empirical data are analysed with reference to critical discursive psychology (cf. Edley, 2001; Wetherell & Potter, 1992) and positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 2001), seeing discourse as a social practice and analysing the subject positioning emerging from these discursive practices. This meso-analytical approach considers both the local accomplishment of the discourse, as well as the broader social implications. It not only examines how identities are produced in specific contexts and for particular occasions, but also the performative, or productive capacities of discourse, namely 'how



it comes to structure both subjective experience and our sense of who we are' (Edley, 2001, p. 191). This means that both the content and discursive resources used to legitimise certain claims are considered significant for understanding how the inclusive recruitment discourse and its subject positions are constructed – and what it accomplishes in a specific context. Discourses make some positions more attractive than others, and make it preferable to avoid certain positions. Hence, this post-structural perspective acknowledges people as active subjects who are given and reproduce power through the use of discursive formations, but who also have the opportunity to resist. Resistance can take the form of using alternative discourses and discursive resources to negotiate or avoid a social positioning (Day, 1998; Edley, 2001; Wieslander, 2014). This means that an individual's belonging to a social category in a "factual sense" is less relevant. Rather, the analysis focuses on *how positioning is done* in conversations, and includes both reflexive positioning (how one positions oneself) and interactive positioning (how one positions others) (Davies & Harré, 2001). The three main questions that have guided the analysis are: 1) How is inclusive recruitment to the police constructed? 2) What subject positions are offered and assumed? 3) How are these subject positions sustained or challenged? The results and their social consequences are discussed through critical perspectives on multiculturalism (Ahmed, 2012; Archer, 2007; May, 2009).

## Findings

The findings are presented in two sections. The first section, 'Inclusive recruitment as the others', focuses both on how inclusive recruitment is constructed and what subject positions it offers and assumes. The second section, 'Negotiating a position as the successful female immigrant recruit', focuses on how the subject of 'the successful female immigrant recruit' is challenged in discussions by police students. This subject position is also resisted, primarily by female students with minority backgrounds. In both these sections the social consequences of the results are discussed.

### *Inclusive recruitment as the others*

In police policies (National Police Board, 2008) as well as among students, inclusive recruitment is distinguished through the social categorisations "women", "ethnic minorities" and "homosexuals". These categories are contrasted with a perceived norm, and thus are expected to contribute to improved diversity within the police force. However, some people and groups are seen as *more* different than others, which places difference in a hierarchical structure. This is illustrated by the following excerpt from a group interview, where Mirko answers David's question about the percentage required for police education to become multicultural:

[Excerpt 1]

Mirko: If you have a Swedish mum and a Finnish dad you are included in the group of immigrants the police are after. /.../ So you don't know how accurate these numbers are.  
(Focus group four, semester four)

Different subgroups or nationalities covered by the label 'immigrant' are seen as more or less qualified to represent diversity in the constabulary. The definition of immigrant background is contested by Mirko. As in the large empirical corpus, immigrant police

students are defined in terms of foreign names and visible appearance, and this does not include Swedish or Finnish students who look like or act like the norm. This also appears in Tara's (female student with a Kurdish background) account that police education is 'not really multicultural' and that 'the National Police Board should recruit real immigrants' since 'the immigrants at the Academy are native-like' (Focus group one, semester four). These constructions result in hierarchical categories within the label 'immigrant', which are made invisible in most other cases where groups are constructed as homogenous.

The term 'ethnic matchmaking' has been introduced as a resource that the public can identify with and that can help them trust the police (Hansen Löfstrand & Uhnö, 2014). It involves police officers with minority backgrounds being considered suitable to work in areas with large numbers of minorities. These officers become linked to restricted areas of policing such as suburbs and stigmatised neighbourhoods, or to certain issues such as honour and hate crimes, or as language interpreters. Being seen as resources, however, restricts and limits their legitimacy within the police. Consider the following statement, which suggest that female, veiled minorities are restricted to policing segregated areas (suburbs):

[Excerpt 2]

Isabelle: there are large areas with only immigrants, where it can actually be good to have [veiled immigrant police officers] (Focus group three, semester four)

The next excerpt shows how different subject positions are played out among each other in one of the group interviews when the students talk about inclusive recruitment to the police:

[Excerpt 3]

Jonas: In this group Tara has another background, and in this group you represent an immigrant student or whatever /.../

Tara: Here I represent women too, apart from ... guys.

Jonas: You have a lot to deal with today [smiles].

Tara: \*Yes, it's tough, really tough\* [laughs] ... I think you'll be approached in a different way if not all cops look the same, if they're not just male, or female, er, special appearance (Focus group one, semester four)

Inclusive recruitment is constructed through practices of differentiation with binary constructions of 'us' and 'them'. In the large empirical corpus, Swedish, white, heterosexual, secular men are normalised. At the same time, this reduces 'the other' to a deviant from the norm, with the consequence that *other attributes* are linked to their identity and their entry into the police force is based on other qualifications.

### *Inclusive recruitment as quantity*

When diversity is recognised by the students as an important political goal within the police it centres on aspects of legitimation, representability and trust. Inclusive recruitment is viewed as part of this, and seen as a strategy for developing a police force which mirrors the diversity in society. However, inclusive recruitment becomes linked to

quantitative measures through a ‘body-count routine’ (Jonsson, 2009). This body-count routine literally involves counting the number of individuals (bodies), where the individuals are representatives of an ascribed category. The following excerpt shows the body-count routine in use in a focus group interview:

[Excerpt 4]

Nick: But the papers say 15 percent, right? But where are these 15 percent? /.../ I thought I read that somewhere, that there is 15 percent with an immigrant background at the Academy.

Nora: That’s hard to see.

Nick: Yes, I have a really hard time seeing that.

/.../

Jesper: Yes, it’s absolutely fine but I also think it’s a danger saying 15 percent should be like that and 25 should be like that. [Isabelle: Yes, exactly, yes, I think so too] ( ) then the quality drops. (Focus group three, semester four)

The body-count in use here is immigrant background, which is quantified to 15 percent. The number, taken from policy documents, is questioned by the participants, and the discussion ends, as it often does, in a rhetorical question: ‘According to the percentage they should be here, but where are they?’ This can be described as a vacuum which makes people invisible, where for example ethnic, sexual and religious identity is spoken about in its absence. Labelling them as ‘hard to see’ suggests that they carry visible attributes which distinguish them from others. Jesper problematises the body-count routine by suggesting that it reduces the quality of the police force. His reply can be seen as demonstrating resistance to legitimising inclusive recruitment strategies through quantitative measurements, and a preference for qualitative aspects. The account modifies the question what diversity means when inclusive recruitment is expected to involve *other* qualifications in police recruits.

#### *Inclusive recruitment as quota*

Discourses which represent some occupations as more suitable for men or women have consequences not only for occupational choices and work tasks (cf. Fejes & Haake, 2013), but also for who is seen as fit for the work. According to research, physical strength and speed are prerequisites for the police, and together with different admission requirements in terms of physical tests for women and men, these issues have introduced a silent cultural preconception of who is legitimately considered for admission (e.g. Lander, 2013). This being the case, the discourse on police work as a macho, physically demanding and action-based occupation can be considered an obstacle for diversity within the force (Lander, 2013; Loftus, 2008, 2009). As outlined below, my data tend to support this argument. In the following excerpt a student criticises the possibility that people, with what he sees as better policing skills, are at risk of being rejected in the recruitment process in favour of people admitted in order to fulfil political aims.

[Excerpt 5]

Jesper: A lot is gained. Everyone can identify themselves if it mirrors society. But then it never will, I think ... considering their recruitment system is catastrophic. /.../ You can't quota people, or discriminate against people, and then it's supposed to mirror society. If you admit people who are not up to the standards and then think they will meet the standards in practice ... Or sift people out using these standards. /.../ They told me [at the recruitment interview] 'If you end up in the same situation as a girl or a migrant, you might not be selected, even though you're as suitable as they are'.

/.../

Nora: But I think it's one thing to say 'you're an immigrant and you're a Swedish guy', if you're just as good. They want more immigrants, and I can accept them admitting immigrants if they're just as good=

Jesper: Would you like to be rejected or discriminated against in that way? (Focus group three, semester four)

According to the accounts in this excerpt, inclusive recruitment is a practice where 'people who can't meet the standards' are selected. Affirmative action is redefined as discrimination and quotas when people from under-represented groups are admitted with the same qualifications. Jesper suggests that there is discrimination against the Swedish male position, but not that it would be the other way around for minority groups if he is selected. Women and migrants are assigned other qualifications, a practice of differentiation which is also constructed in a hierarchical order. Hence, the position as a Swedish male is normalised and given high social standing and to be of superior quality. When they are described as the object of discrimination, those constituted as the norm are given priority in the police force when 'others' gain access to the occupation. This practice of equating the normative position with higher quality, which disregards concepts of structural inequality, has been identified as contributing to a colour-blind approach, and it is argued that this is often found in the way white people consider affirmative action (McElhinny, 2001, drawing on Frankenberg, 1993). This has been reported elsewhere as a condition of 'white victimhood' and a 'white backlash' to the politics of multiculturalism, and is seen as an attempt to preserve a hegemonic police culture and a privileged position (Loftus, 2009, p. 81). By bringing in quality and merit on the basis of physical tests (best suited for the job), and using the rhetoric of 'we are all blue' in the police (rather than acknowledging social differences), people avoid speaking in terms of race or ethnicity and claim that this is non-racist, fair and objective because they are building on occupational identity. However, colour-blind rhetoric conceals inequalities, as it directs the focus away from social hierarchies and avoids the politics of power. As Archer (2007: 647) explicitly points out, diversity strategies for widened participation have to be viewed in relation to structural inequalities in the society; "[t]he policy focus upon reified student bodies as a key marker of 'diversity' and 'equality' within higher education masks the way in which these bodies are located and situated within unequal social structures."

*Negotiating a position as the successful female immigrant recruitment*

As further developed in the following section, recruitment campaigns have been based on a premise that minorities represent a larger community (ethnic matchmaking), with

special experiences and knowledge common to a whole group. Minority officers are presented as resources who embody knowledge of areas of interest for the police. When Tara becomes positioned as an immigrant police student, she resists and negotiates the position, implying that it is a stigmatised one. Even Jonas, who positions Tara several times during the interview as an immigrant with specific resources for policing, acknowledges this dilemma:

[Excerpt 6]

Jonas: If we were to leave this room to work with traffic today, I would want to work with Martin 'cause we would make a damn good team. If we were off to another case, we might end up in Rinkeby [suburb of the capital city of Sweden], then Tara has resources no one else has. Everybody contributes something and no one contributes everything, which makes us ... as we talked about before, we bring beneficial things. And I think it's nice with that great variety. 'Cause I know what I'm good at but also what I do poorly ...

[A few seconds' silence]

... but it's also depressing if I consider, if you take it one step further, if Tara is taken as an example, it's depressing always to be put in a box for this reason. I mean ... Tara and I - say that we had identical qualifications but she had an immigrant background, it's depressing if you're always put in the immigrant box. That must suck [Lukas: exactly].

[Overlapping talk. Robin: Like on the first day. Tara: Yes, exactly].

Lukas: Yes, like Tara, she arrives somewhere, and this will be a good connection with ... it takes ( ) ... then nothing will ever happen, then it will always=

Tara: I can be just as I am, even if I would have been adopted and have always been ... [Overlapping talk. Lukas and Martin: No, precisely] the whole time ...

Lukas: That's what I meant. I was born Swedish and will never learn to ... it will never change ... so there's a problem. (Focus group one, semester four)

Tara is described as a police officer with certain skills and assignments in Rinkeby. She is made the deviant in the group, with resources no one else has. Rinkeby is marked as a place which differs from other suburbs, a possible reference to it as a segregated suburb with many cultures and languages and with requirements for certain qualifications in police officers. Since Tara is placed in an 'immigrant box', certain immigrant skills are assigned to her identity. Thereafter, Jonas articulates a new perspective, questioning regularly-used categorisations and stereotypes.

When Tara is addressed as an immigrant, her identity as a Swedish person is diminished. As an immigrant, only with some effort can she be positioned as Swedish at the same time, just as her positioning as a woman (in excerpt 3) distinguishes her from the men around her. The ascribed position is difficult to extricate herself from, and she becomes a symbol of diversity (woman and immigrant) in the room and a double representative of deviants in the police.

Besides Tara being ethnified and facing the risk of exclusionary practices, Lukas' reply sheds light on another problem arising from the reproduction of stereotypes in the police; diversity in the constabulary only becomes a requirement because of the diverse population in certain areas of society. Ethnic minority officers are recruited to meet and encounter an ethnic minority population in society and, hence, become legitimised as a means of solving other problems. In this sense, diversity in the police is reduced to a

project for minorities, rather than being seen as a development in society as a whole, benefitting and creating equality and justice for all. Through Lukas' account, it becomes clear that a more inclusive rhetoric on diversity – as relating to the whole population and relevant regardless of who the police encounter – is marginalised in the context. Through the dominant construction on the need for diversity where diversity is perceived to exist (suburbs), 'the immigrant others' are constructed as people with specific needs. Minority police officers become translators or mediators, and may be restricted to assignments where these skills are considered to be needed. There are no corresponding arguments involving a need for a diverse police force in areas with greater socio-economic resources. This perspective is highlighted by the participants. The view of diversity in society 'will never change', as Lukas suggests, and ethnic Swedish officers 'will never learn'.

### *Symbolic positioning as an organisational policy strategy*

Ethnic matchmaking can be described as a symbolic positioning with the purpose of increasing confidence in the police and policing. Police organisations emphasise that diversity in the police force will make the police an attractive occupation and help to reduce suspicion towards it (Ben-Porat, 2008; National Police Board, 2010a). Recruitment of minorities is also considered to reduce the problem of under-policing in areas where people feel culturally and linguistically alienated from the police (Ben-Porat, 2008). Diversity within the police is important on a symbolic level, but this does not necessarily mean that minority populations feel the need to be assigned police officers with the same ethnic background. Minority officers also express a lack of interest in working with this type of strategy (cf. Ben-Porat, 2008).

The next excerpt indicates resistance to this symbolic positioning in the training context. Tara recalls her first day at the Police Academy, when she was asked to pose for a photograph as a new student, to show the diversity of the students. Tara resents this role model, as she was only asked because of her skin colour and not her experience:

[Excerpt 7]

Tara: My face goes red and I think, 'Wait a minute, what the hell is happening?' I said, 'No'. End of story! 'I'm really sorry, but if I'd done anything to deserve being on the website, I wouldn't mind'. In five, six weeks, when we've done some exercises or whatever, but just to show that we now have a person of colour and a [laughs] wog<sup>7</sup> on the webpage, that we've been admitted and the quotas have been filled, and that we want to show them off. I said, 'I'm sorry, but I won't do it'. I'm so disappointed that the school has a need to show off these two immigrant girls who've been admitted to the programme. (Focus group one, semester four)

Tara directs her resistance towards difference as an exterior, visual concept, related to physical appearance. Her resistance can also be seen as a lack of interest in working in a context of ethnic matchmaking. The group continues to discuss Tara's earlier positioning, and Lukas suggests that symbolic positioning is a management strategy:

[Excerpt 8]

Lukas: I don't know about the webpage but ... I can imagine that the aim is to attract more ... applicants with immigrant backgrounds, but you might not want to be the model (*Sw: skyltdocka*) for that.

Tara: No, but attract more. Why attract more by showing people who are already ... it's like attracting fat people and show off the worst [laugh] - yes, but you know. It didn't feel right. It definitely didn't feel right. [Lukas: No].

Jonas: It might fulfil a purpose because people might think they don't stand a chance [Lukas and Tara: Yes], but I can still see a risk of ending up in a box.

Tara: Precisely, that's the reason I wanted to be a guide at the police museum and talk to youngsters there who might be thinking about it. That's a completely different thing. (Focus group one, semester four)

This strategy represents Tara as a model, or token, for the public face of the Police Academy (cf. Loftus, 2009). Tokenism is a strategy that organisations use for developing diversity through identification, a strategy Tara resists, partly because of the feeling it produces. Instead, she proposes an alternative strategy, not based on showing off her skin colour in a police uniform, but on talking to people who show interest in the occupation and visit the police museum.

The same discussion took place during a seminar on prejudice in the other class, where Maria, a police officer student, recalled being positioned in a similar way to Tara on her first day at the Academy. Maria describes how she was asked to represent immigrant women in a magazine about the police programme:

[Excerpt 9]

Maria: On the first day I was asked to represent immigrant women in the programme magazine. She approached me and said, 'Yes, because we need immigrants and you also look good in pictures', and I just said, 'What?' It was the same as we talked about earlier. I was admitted on merit. I've never, ever played an immigrant card. I was born in Sweden. I feel Swedish. Just as Swedish as anyone else who has been living in Sweden their whole life. So I think it was almost an insult for that reason. It was a bit odd, so I didn't volunteer, and still she phoned me several times and left a message, and wanted it to look good, bla bla bla. Then I thought, 'Look good for whom?' (Field work, day 17. Transcribed audio recorded class room seminar on prejudice and hate crimes)

In a similar way to Tara, Maria resists being categorised and defined as an immigrant. Thereafter Chris, a fellow student, suggests (like Lukas in the group interview) that this is a ploy by the Academy's Board of Directors to attract people from other social strata by announcing in the media and to the public that diversity is addressed at the Academy. He gives an example from his field practice as an officer, where he 'talked to some kids at some party, and then we started to talk and they were curious about this police thing. But they were from Alby, Fitja, Rinkeby and the like [suburbs of the capital], and I said, 'But you can apply', and they said, 'No, it's only people like you: big, strong Swedes with short hair, shaved – shit, not me' (Field work, day 17. Recorded quote from class room seminar). In terms of symbolic positioning, Chris' story illustrates a situation where 1) people with minority ethnic backgrounds are made deviant in terms of the police force as a whole, and 2) the police are trying to change. Maria formulates her reply like Tara, who said, 'If that's the case the board can choose real immigrants for the programme', with the experiences they want them to have, and who can convey a better message in their marketing.

Tara and Maria's resistance to being treated as models can be compared to what Cashmore (2002) termed window dressing within the police in the early 2000s, where cultural diversity is portrayed as a way of addressing discrimination and institutional

racism, but is ineffective as a strategy for diversity. Cashmore's study is based on interviews with ethnic minorities in the British police force whose attitudes differ considerably from the policy. Like these subjects, the police students' interpretation of diversity is in opposition to the organisation's operational strategies for inclusive recruitment, and the policy becomes challenged from within. Like Cashmore, I construe the participants' critique of the diversity policy as a superficial image of changes within the police. Maria's account 'look good for whom' indicates how the organisation's image can benefit from these policy strategies, while the individuals targeted pay the price for it.

### *Resisting a 'risky position'*

When being addressed and positioned as subjects, people respond to these positions in different ways (Davies & Harré, 2001). The construction, meaning and consequences of categories shift according to context, circumstances, and the people involved in the social interaction. The participants depend on each other's interpretations, so positioning becomes a socially regulated practice.

The analysis of Tara and Maria's resistance shows how resistance to reductionist descriptions of their identity can be understood in relation to a specific context; recruiting for diversity is a 'risky positioning' in the police because of possible consequences of exclusion and de-legitimation. A factor contributing to their resistance was their positioning as 'the other' because of their physical appearance. They considered themselves to be defined as immigrants based on a template of what immigrants and a successful recruit in the police look like. Ahmed (2012) also claims that when diversity is rendered as something to *add* to the organisation, like skin colour, it confirms the white dominance already in place. When the variously coloured representatives of diversity are shown in police images, the organisation is portrayed as marked by diversity. However, as Ahmed argues, people 'can get stuck *in* institutions by being stuck *to* a category' (2012, p. 4. *Italics in original*).

Stigma restricts people's ability to act. The label 'immigrant' involves a diacritical practice which differentiates between Tara, Maria and other students at the school, for example, and suggests they contribute different skills or resources. It is not until Tara and Maria resist the positioning that they can adjust the design of the template and the way in which they belong to it. Their resistance challenges the model of ethnic and gendered matchmaking when Tara gives an alternative example of how to approach people who are interested in the police (guiding at the police museum). In conversations on inclusive recruitment, questions of quotas in the police programme arose in both class and in interview discussions. In line with these local factors, Tara and Maria's resistance is directed against the risk of being positioned as a quota (cf. Boogaard & Roggeband, 2010; Egge et al., 2008; McElhinny, 2001). Maria makes this explicit in the classroom discussion, saying she did not play 'the immigrant card', and emphasises instead how she passed on her own merit. Her resistance highlights the fact that she does not share immigrants' experiences, and instead suggests that she was admitted on other, more legitimate and accepted premises which her peers will not question.

There are different ways of re-negotiating or nuancing conventional expectations about members of a category (Day, 1998). These negotiations create an opportunity to redefine oneself and others. One way is to oppose an ascribed position to a category, and adjust and reduce the meaning of it. Another strategy is to nuance the attribute of the category which can increase and broaden a category to include a larger group. Instead of



broadening the concept inclusive recruitment to involve more categories and include more people, the participants reduce the categories of diversity so they themselves do not fit into them, because if they fit they risk being stigmatised. The students avoid reproducing their own affiliation as deviant, and position themselves as part of the majority, for example describing themselves as ‘native-like’, ‘not real immigrants’, ‘born in Sweden’, and ‘feeling like a Swede’. Their negotiating focuses more on their own positioning than the category as such, though their negotiation adjusts the meaning of the category at the same time; immigrants have *other* specific qualifications to contribute. Tara’s own language skills and Kurdish background are not made relevant here, but are in other circumstances common features in distinguishing cultural resources within the police force. In their definition of ‘real immigrants’, they oppose belonging to this category and the ability to refer to immigrant experiences, while the concept of the immigrant becomes ‘the other’; a subject with no Swedish language skills, with deviant attitudes and experiences, and outside the constabulary. The constructions also constitute identity as an either / or concept, rather than addressing people as both Swedish and Kurdish, for example. The negotiations are examples of how the category ‘immigrant’ is defined more narrowly and displaced to an even more marginalised position in relation to the police community.

In this analysis, power is placed inside discourses. Power relations are reproduced and challenged when some positions are normalised and placed in a hierarchy in relation to other positions. The positioning of Tara and Maria as deviant is one example of this, and their resistance to the discursive formation of their positions and identities is another example of power in use. However, their resistance can be understood in the light of historical forms of dominance in society, where discourses which legitimise white, Eurocentric maleness have regulated the power and control over defining and ruling in society, and have also regulated the ways in which resistance has been possible and by whom (e.g. van Dijk, 1992). This power can be found at an institutional level, where ways of addressing positions are constrained, and this in turn influences the individual level. Not everyone has the same opportunities to exercise resistance in every kind of situation. Tara and Maria’s resistance could potentially be related to the contextual framing where classmates have known each other for almost two years. In other police contexts and groups their opportunity to resist might be more circumscribed.

## Conclusions

Recruitment for diversity has been addressed in many educational and occupational contexts to enhance equality and inclusion, and to overcome occupational stereotyping. As well as in society at large, this is seen as important on a symbolic level and as a strategy against discriminatory tendencies. This article contributes to knowledge in this field by showing empirically how different activities to gain equality and inclusion can work in contradictory ways. More specifically, it shows how minority officers (women are still in minority within the police) become positioned in the inclusive recruitment discourse as quotas, as a quantified number, and with their qualities questioned. Moreover, this article argues that this discourse actually reproduces the social order by affirming social categories which are assumed to be inherent in the representatives of diversity. On the other hand, the students also contest these positions, giving minorities a voice. A dilemma emerges between a call to ensure that minority groups are represented in a segregated occupation and the risk of defining these groups as ‘others’, thus placing them in a marginalised position. Hence, diversity in the police addresses and nuances some of the

consequences of the paradox involved in recognising people's social backgrounds on the one hand, and disregarding them on the other.

Parallel processes of inclusion and exclusion are made visible in talk about the composition of the constabulary. Diversity strategies are met with resistance through a discourse on the police work in which it is described as macho and action-based, which contributes to limiting diversity and inclusion within the police (cf. Lander, 2013; Loftus, 2008, 2009). Minority officers are considered to have been recruited in pursuit of politically correct goals and on the basis of their social group and affiliation, rather than on individual merits, and are therefore not seen as equally competent. Meanwhile, officers ascribed to the norm (ethnic Swedish, heterosexual, white men) are considered to have been recruited for individual – and more legitimate – reasons. Hence, constructions of police minorities as resources for the police and the public are contested through constructions of minorities as quotas and as not the most suitable for police work. Minority officers are requested due to their social categorisation and labelled in terms of diversity, which means they also risk being excluded by it.

Categories are politically and socially constructed. They are used for distinguishing groups, and contain different degrees of stigma in different contexts (May, 2009). Police officers attributed minority backgrounds are viewed as resources vis-à-vis different groups in society, which mobilises boundaries between people on the basis of tokenism and ethnic matchmaking in the inclusive recruitment discourse. These constructions risk locking people into certain work tasks and reducing their occupational choices. The inclusive recruitment discourse is also hierarchical, as some social groups are portrayed as being more representative of it than others. I label the categories related to inclusive recruitment as 'risky positions', due to the potential risk of them leading to exclusion and de-legitimation within the police. Nobody wishes to be ascribed a position as a minority police officer student because of the stigma associated with it. Hence, the inclusive recruitment discourse conceals normative positioning and privileges ascribed to people within hegemonic police cultural norms (ethnic Swedish, heterosexual men), while minorities continue to be reproduced as 'outsiders within' (cf. Loftus, 2008; 2009; McElhinny, 2001; Peterson & Uhnnoo, 2012). Although diversity strategies aim to promote equality in the police the inclusive recruitment discourse also reproduces the status-quo and conceals both differences between people and the socially constructed inequality between different groups (Archer, 2007).

In order to improve equity and equality in occupational choice, and produce a diverse police constabulary in the longer term, comments on, and criticism of quotas and marginalising practices need to be taken into consideration. Both the recent prominent increase in women in the Swedish police programme, as well as the subsequent decrease of women after the public criticism, has reinforced a notion of quotas and arbitrary selection in recruiting police officers. While the aim of more inclusive recruitment is to empower certain groups, the analysis shows that this may reinforce structures which promote inequality and provoke feelings of otherness and discrimination (cf. Boogaard & Roggeband, 2010; Shepherd, 2014). These may limit the legitimacy of selected individuals, and raise questions about people recruited through standard procedures. In the long run, this influences whether people feel at home at work.

In sum, the results show that the inclusive recruitment discourse can be understood as a complex and contradictory practice. It can be liberating and give a group autonomy, but it can also limit individuals (cf. Wetherell & Potter, 1992) in terms of occupational choices and access. A critical perspective needs to be addressed when differentiating practices of social categorisation are at play - practices which risk locking individuals in

fixed stereotypes. Otherwise, diversity strategies may jeopardise efforts to improve social equality.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> SCB defines foreign background as born abroad or with both parents born abroad.

<sup>2</sup> Women = 31 percent police officers and 67 percent civilian staff. Foreign background = 6 percent police officers and 11.2 percent civilian staff, according to unpublished documents received by e-mail from the police's HR department.

<sup>3</sup> Applicants with foreign background varied between 17-27 percent during 2009-2010, but after 2010 the numbers dropped to 9-12 percent (see appendix 1 in Wieslander, 2014). Admission to the police programme is based on formal admission requirements as well as different tests and on interviews.

<sup>4</sup> In a report from October 2010, the National Police Board states that at least 40 percent of each gender should be admitted to the Police Academy (National Police Board, 2010b).

<sup>5</sup> In Sweden, quotas, meaning the recruitment of under-represented people with unequal merits, are prohibited by law. Affirmative action, or positive discrimination, meaning recruitment of under-represented people with equal merits in relation to other candidates, is not prohibited.

<sup>6</sup> During 2017 the Swedish Police removed all former officially published policy documents concerning diversity and equal treatment from their website.

<sup>7</sup> Slang for immigrant person with dark skin (Sw: *svartskalle*).

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## Change orientated learning and the Greek disability movement - a mutually beneficial encounter between knowledge and action

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### Abstract

*This paper is a qualitative survey based on the exploration of disabled peoples' existing experience of participating in non-formal forms of education, which take place in the context of the Greek disability movement. Its aim is to record the way in which this kind of education can be a catalyst in the empowerment of disabled people. Data was obtained through semi-structured interviews held with both learners with disabilities and educators and from direct observation of the educational process. The main findings of this study explore the ways in which educators can contribute to the empowerment of disabled people. It is found that the empowerment of learners cannot simply be regarded as an aspect of education but rather as an integral part embedded in the content, in the educational methods and in the role of the educator. Finally, the paper highlights the necessity for disability organisations to cooperate with the fields of disability studies and adult education, in order for them to jointly conceive and try out new more transformative pedagogical methods.*

**Keywords:** adult education; change orientated learning; disability studies; empowerment; greek disability movement

### Introduction

In this paper, the disability movement is perceived as a “support system”, which was developed in order to achieve the transition from the medical approach model of disability to the social approach model. Two assumptions are responsible for the choice of the disability movement and for engaging with the issue of disability: a) the disability movement has a clear critical social action orientation b) both educational theory and practice have generally followed an avoidance strategy in the management of disability matters.



As regards the former, the disability movement participates in the reflective intake and reconstruction of the definition of disability, and this is of vital importance, as definitions semantically surround all spheres of human activity and give them a symbolic meaning. The disability movement puts up resistance to definitions of normality and ‘this resistance implies confronting disablism not just in the ideologies of the able-bodied but in the institutionalised practices stemming from these ideologies’ (Oliver, 1990, p. 77).

As for the latter, the educational theory and practice approach, disabled people as a special target-group with specific inherent deficits, needs and dispositions, hence they focus on special programmes for dealing with “them” (Covington, 2004; Polson & White, 2000; DuBois, 1998). This means that the matter is limited to specialised organisations or researchers and therefore raises no issues with wider implications on educational research.

The two aforementioned assumptions call for an interdisciplinary meeting of two fields: *adult education* and *disability studies*. Many critical adult education and disability studies have recognised the potential of interdisciplinarity between the two fields as far as disability is concerned (Beckett, 2015; Clark, 2006; Erevellless, 2000). Clark (2006, p. 310) argues that ‘disability studies and adult education share an intersecting interest in issues of learning, asymmetrical power relationships, hegemony, race, gender, class, education, social and self-agency, identity construction, contestation and representation, sexual orientation, adult development, and social change’.

In conclusion, knowledge that is capable of allowing the disability movement to put an end to oppression cannot be generated within the prevailing culture. It can only be produced by consciously putting up resistance to this culture and by searching history and social relations for the reasons and forms of oppression.

This paper attempts to highlight the potential and the ways in which the Greek Disability Movement - GDM (namely the National Confederation of People with Disability of Greece<sup>1</sup>), expects to contribute, through education to the development of socially active agents, involved in the development and re-development of the disability situation. Education in the disability movement can be defined both as informal learning (through everyday experience, events, work groups, consultation procedures) and as non-formal learning (through grassroots organisations’ related training) of people belonging to the disability movement. It can also be defined as learning which takes place in society at large, as a result of the existence and action of this movement (Gouin, 2009).

The empirical research was conducted in the framework of the educational programme of the GDM<sup>2</sup> titled: ‘*Education of elected members and or staff members of the disability movement in the policy planning of disability matters*’. The educational programme lasted 200 hours and was incorporated in the framework of the Operational Programme ‘Education and Lifelong Learning’ of the programming period 2007-2013 and was funded by Greece and the European Union (European Social Fund).

## Theoretical framework

### *Change orientated learning and disability*

Beckett (2015) based on Kumashiro’s typology (2000, 2002), considers three options to the question ‘What form might disability-focused anti-oppressive pedagogy take?’: 1) ‘Education about the Other’, 2) ‘Education that is Critical of Privileging and Othering’ (Freire, Critical Pedagogy) and 3) ‘Education that Transforms Students and Society’ (Mezirow 2000). A critical composition of the second and third approach will be attempted in this text.



The purpose of education is for people to ‘achieve a deepening awareness both of the sociocultural reality that shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality’ (Freire, 1970, p. 27). Freire’s idea of ‘conscientization’ was also used by Mezirow. However, while Freire refers to the ‘conscientization’ of social, cultural and political circumstances that define their lives, Mezirow (2000) refers to the ‘conscientization’ of a person’s frame reference (meaning perspectives, meaning schemes).

Freire (1970) emphasizes oppression stemming from class and economic background, and makes no mention of the category of disability. This approach leaves room for the expansion of the debate and allows for the inclusion of analysis of other forms of power and knowledge, through which people constitute themselves as subjects.

Mezirow (2000) on the other hand, with his transformative learning theory, focuses mainly on aspects of personal change, with personal experience almost completely cut off from its social context. Mezirow limits his analysis in mentioning the significance of social conditions, since he steps no further, to describing or explaining the means and terms of their influence on the individual. This indicates the need to extend Mezirow’s transformative learning theory and to explore the power of the social dimension of transformational learning as well as the interaction of learning with its wider social context.

One could indicatively mention bibliography references that make use of the transformative learning approach in relation to disability, such as Baumgartner (2002), Courtenay, Merriam, Reeves and Baumgartner (2000), Courtenay, Merriam and Reeves (1998), Rager (2003). In these references, representation of disability within the adult educational context is seen from a transformative or a self-directed learning paradigm and reflects disability as a biomedical event, presenting the adult learner with a disorienting dilemma and subsequently triggering a new experience of learning, a redefining of the meaning of life and identity, and/or an action for self-determination on a personal basis (Clark, 2006, p. 312).

These findings call for an alternative reading of the works of the two theorists; that is of Freire and Mezirow. It is along this line of thought that we shall attempt to formulate a social discourse on transformative learning, which stresses the importance of social movements, notably of the disability movement, in relation to transformative learning experiences, personal transformation and empowerment.

The Greek Disability Movement as an example of coordination of meanings and transformative learning

With the appearance and rise of ‘new’ (or not so new) social movements (such as the feminist movement, the environmental movement, the LGBT movement, the disability movement etc.) bibliography on critical adult education has expanded to include the action of individual movements (Crowther & Shaw, 1997; Foley, 2001; Holst, 2007). It is generally accepted by the radical social and educational theory, that social movements can be distinguished from other forms of collective behaviour in that they create “cognitive praxis”; that is, social movements have a dynamic role to play in challenging dominant understandings and generating new ones; they provide the framework from which new knowledge can emerge and they give impetus to social action (Crowther & Shaw, 1997; English & Mayo, 2012; Freire & Shor, 1987).

‘New’ social movements have a potentially transformative role, which facilitates new participatory democratic forms. Transformation is often perceived as a solitary and rather unexpected event, however catalyst events, frequently accelerating transformation, derive from a support system (Courtenay, Merriam, & Reeves, 1998). Therefore, transformation has both a personal - evolutionary and a socio - historical context.

The GDM finds itself in a particular social context, that is to say the environment of transition from the medical approach model to the social approach model of disability. The medical approach model of disability regards the aspect of disability as an individualised situation, which is caused by illness, injury or other health conditions and is defined as a physical, mental, sensory or psychological divergence from ‘normal’. The social approach model regards disability not as a feature of the individual but as a ‘social construction’ or ‘social product’. By introducing the social factor into the meaning of disability, one automatically also introduces the human rights dimension.

Disabled people have experienced the medical approach model in their everyday life (disability certification, family, education, work, etc.), and as a result they find the two models (the medical approach and the social approach) at conflict even within themselves. The re-framing of the meaning of disability, in the light of active participation in forming the socio-political field, constitutes an integral part of a transformational process that combines both thought and action (praxis). On this basis, the disability movement can be seen as an example of coordination of meanings and transformative learning. While the identity of persons with disabilities in the traditional and dated contextual framework is marked by the dualism “normal - deviant”, the disability movement is concerned in terms of reflective reconstruction of meanings and codes, as well as of semantic reframing of the definition of the term ‘disability’.

Frame analysis of interpretative frames<sup>3</sup> [‘the notion of the schema of interpretation, or frame’, which ‘has proved very influential among scholars interested in symbolic aspects of collective action’ (della Porta & Diani, 1999, p. 74)], allows us to capture the process of the attribution of meaning which lies behind the explosion of any conflict among disabled people. According to Snow and Benford (1988), there are three stages to this process, defined as the ‘diagnostic’, ‘prognostic’, and ‘motivational’ dimension of framing.

In the case of the disability movement, these stages correspond to the *recognition of disability as a social problem*, to the *recognition of possible strategies which could resolve it*, and finally to the *recognition of disabled people’s motivations for action*. The following table illustrates an attempt to juxtapose the stages of attribution of a meaning behind the struggle of the disabled with the stages of transformative learning.

*Table 1:* Comparison of the stages of the Transformative Learning theory and of the Interpretative Frame theory

STAGES OF TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING		STAGES OF FRAMING	
1	A disorienting dilemma	1	<b>Diagnostic</b>  (recognition of disability as a social problem)
2	Self - examination (along with a feeling of fear, anger, guilt or shame)		
3	A critical assessment of assumptions.		
4	Recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared		
5	Exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions.	2	<b>Prognostic</b>

6	Planning a course of action.		(recognition of possible strategies to resolve the issue)
7	Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plan.	3	<b>Motivational</b> (recognition of motivation for action of people with disabilities)
8	Provisional trying of new roles.		
9	Building competence and self - confidence in new roles and relationships		
10	A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspectives.		

The creation of a sense of self is closely linked to a frame reference, which 'is the structure of assumptions and expectations through which we filter sense impressions' (Mezirow, 2000, p. 16). Frame references represent cultural examples as well as personal opinions emanating from the process of recognition by 'important others' (family, school, society). In the case of people with disability, exemplary assumptions (Brookfield, 1995) which group people into fundamental categories, in this case the 'normal – disabled' segregation, constitutes the hierarchical divide by which, both the disabled and the non-disabled, learn to perceive reality and so construct it in a way that causes problems to the democratic coexistence of subjects and social groups.

Later on as adults, having the possibility of free choice, we are concerned over the assumptions of frame references, both ours' and others', and proceed to evaluate them and decide on their adequacy or the need to change them (Mezirow, 2000). Of course, in the case of the disabled, the issue of adulthood becomes more complex, as the question arises, whether or not, and to what extent is the right of disabled people to self-determination<sup>4</sup> recognised (Houghton, 2003).

In light of these problems, the status of a movement member may work as a catalyst; both the support frame and the forms of recognition created within the disability movement, stimulate disabled peoples' critical thinking, so that they become aware of the social restrictions on their personal development, their autonomy and their self-determination, imposed by traditional assumptions, and therefore proceed to review/reform them.

Consequently, the stigma of disability and the anguish caused by non- recognition and social exclusion, emerge as an important research topic, because they are in fact psychological and emotional processes, which organise inter alia everyday political action. It is through these processes which are, ultimately, culturally constituted and mainly carried out through educational interactive processes, such as participating in the social movement, by which new political subjectivities may well occur.

Participation in the disability movement, as a form of informal learning, provides space and time for disabled people to talk to each other, to work together (regardless of the category of disability), to exchange experience, thus promoting a genuinely democratic form of learning. Personal experience is utilised, analysed and/or transformed and acquires a collective nature that is transformed into knowledge on disability, which starts from below.

This emerging field of knowledge and action is characterised by a transformative perspective, an ability to transform the way by which personal experience gives meaning within the movement, where the goal of change does not restrict itself to the relation of a person with him-or herself but is about their claim of recognition as right holders, which starts from above or from the outside.

In this context, the process of transformative learning becomes both personal and social; on the one hand the subject is visible – although it has little to do with the subject as it is usually presented by postmodernists, but more so as a subject that is ‘collective, rather than individual, and unifying and coherent, rather than multiple and decentralized’ (McLaren & Lankshear 1994, p. 3) – on the other hand objective conditions of oppression and lack of respect are in effect.

Participation in the movement provides triggers for reflection, which allow disabled people to re-negotiate the frames by which they perceive not just themselves but the world in general. It is in essence, a transformative process that marks the development of socially active agents, who can become involved in the (re-)shaping of the disability situation (not only at a level of self and self-determination), but also at a level of taking action in order to change the social, economic and political reality they experience.

## Methodology

The *qualitative approach* was chosen for the conduct of primary research, given that it is the type and intensity of experiences that matters and not the generalisation of results. Both a) *semi-structured interviews* held with learners and educators and b) *direct observation* of the educational activity were used for data collection. The two methods (*triangulation*) were used in order to ‘explain more fully the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint’ (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000, p. 254)

Learners with disabilities and educators of Greek Disability Movement educational programme titled: ‘Education of elected members and or staff members of the disability movement in the policy planning of disability matters’, constitute the survey ‘population’. Learners were elected members or just plain members of GDM; educators were social scientists with teaching experience in formal education and/or adult education. There were ten interviews held in total; five with disabled learners and five with educators. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. Direct observation was applied in five classes. The author of this article did not take part in the educational activity during direct observation; however the participants were aware of her position as researcher (*observer as participant*) (Robson, 1993). Coding and analysis of data content were applied for *data interpretation*. In the present paper, by which the results of the survey are made public, the use of pseudonyms ensures participants’ anonymity.

The aim of the research was to investigate a) the empowerment potential of people with disabilities through education in the disability movement and b) the educational factors which reinforce empowerment of people with disabilities. In order to attain the aims mentioned above it must first be attempted to answer the following research questions:

- Were the disabled learners empowered as a result of their educational experience from the disability movement educational programme?

- If so
  - in what way?
  - how did the educators contribute to empowerment?
- In cases in which the educators contributed to empowerment:
  - to what extent did the prevailing approach of general adult education influence the type of empowerment (as defined below) developed through the educational process?
  - to what extent did the prevailing approach of general adult education influence the ways in which this was achieved?

### Empowerment as a result of educational experience

The content of the meaning of “empowerment” varies widely and for many theorists empowerment is still a concept which requires closer scrutiny (Archibald & Wilson, 2011; Freire & Shor, 1987; Foley, 2001; Inglis, 1997). According to Jarvis (1999, p. 205), the use of the term “empowerment” differs according to the approach of adult education.

1. Radical adult educators use the term in relation to providing a social class, e.g. the working classes, with the awareness and knowledge to act in and upon the social structures so that people can restructure society in a more egalitarian manner.
2. More conservative and progressive adult educators use the term to refer to equipping and raising the confidence of individuals so that they can be more successful in the world.

This paper adopts the first version of the meaning of “empowerment”- the radical one. By combining elements of the critical adult education approach (Freire, 1994; Freire & Shor, 1987), of Transformative Learning (Mezirow, 2000) and of Interpretative Frames (see Table 1), it appears that empowerment, in the case of the disability movement, consists of three levels: the *first level* which is the production of topics from disability as a feature which the disabled people themselves regard as being of major importance in their lives and therefore qualify as important in the formation of disability identity which they support and in the form of collective action appropriate for this purpose. The *second level* is the connection of the subject of disability with broader socio-economic and political matters, perceiving it as a subject with social, economic and political dimensions. Finally, the *third level* is investing knowledge into action and discovering new modes of action for the disability movement.

Primary research (as illustrated by the following quotes) showed that the classroom environment is a place of vital importance for the empowerment of people with disabilities, thereby strengthening the argument that the social dimension of educational programmes of people with disabilities is important. The building of social capital bonds (Putnam, 1995, as cited in Merrifield, 1997) is a positive step towards highlighting disability issues within political dialogue. Learners are then in position to break their social isolation, to form allies and encourage collective identity which could potentially evolve into actual community.

when we're together we achieve more, because the State won't listen just to the deaf, or just to the blind, but it will listen to people with disabilities (in general). This makes sense, we all need to united, Kostas- learner

In groups where learners belonged to different disability categories, it was easier for the educators to work towards bridging social capital, by using the analytical category of disability as a common denominator. The learners of these groups developed empathy for the needs of other disability categories and overcame latent intra-disability conflicts, unlike groups in which the majority of learners belonged to the same disability category, and in which the creation of social capital was restricted to each individual disability category.

I know which category [of disability] I belong to. [I need] to learn about the rest [...] As we have different disabilities each one of us spoke about his own problems and we all shared our problems, Kostas – learner

The experience of learning about the other parts of disability is very interesting, Vivian - learner

In terms of knowledge, learners acquired a deeper awareness of the social dimension of disability through the exploration of the socio-political curriculum of the educational programme, and this constitutes a step towards the development of social acting subjects.

Lets say, when there's the medical model [of approach of disability] and for its own reasons it focuses on disability as an illness, isn't this a financial question? [...] If there was another government it would be different] [...]. If you have a different attitude you change, you see things from a different point of view. Vivian – learner

I think that most of us approached [the matter of disability] from the medical model [point of view], Thodoris – learner

In terms of ability, learners acquired a voice, meaning that they were both more willing to speak but also had something to say, in a fashion which others could hear and comprehend.

I know whom I must address to support an issue I have or something I want to do. You don't know the way from the start. The local action plans on disability [one of the curriculum sub-units of the educational programme] are a way to learn how to handle a matter and to learn whom you must address, talk with... Aris – learner

To sum up, the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed by disabled and non disabled students, in order to act effectively, can be divided into three levels: they need to be informed, to have a voice, and to work together (Merrifield, 1997, p. 6).

### **Practices / Methods that reinforce empowerment of people with disabilities**

Given that in the context of this educational programme, educators work for the benefit of empowerment of disabled people, it was investigated to what extent the teaching practices followed were consistent with this political choice (Freire & Shor, 1987), that is the use of dialogical deliberative processes and democratic teaching styles, aiming at reinforcing the self-reliance of disabled learners through the critical awareness of the problems they face. The results in relation with this question can be divided into three categories: *empowerment through the curriculum, through teaching techniques and through the educator's role.*

*Empowerment through the curriculum*

The curriculum on the whole involved matters aimed at learners with disabilities claiming their rights and their equal treatment in all areas of life (education, work, healthcare, accessibility, etc.) in a uniform and systematic manner. So, since the inclusion of socio-political topics was predetermined, and not the educator's choice, it comes as no surprise from primary research that educators do not account for the inclusion of these issues in their lessons.

However, the way in which the educators made use of the topics varied. To begin with, the various motives of the educators can be reflected in the way they make use of the curriculum. So, educators with a socio-political interest in their work also had a broader understanding of the curriculum and were mainly concerned with the critical exploration of ideas. In this case, the curriculum was treated in a manner which involved the direct relation of disability (as a social construction) with economy and the analysis of the wider phenomenon of oppression, focusing on oppression due to disability, therefore essentially attempting an expanded application of the Marxist analysis.

Socio - political participation is a sine qua non for assertion and also a component of union action. Theoretical training and a thorough knowledge of the causes of the problems are prerequisites for justified claims and effective participation. Otherwise union action (action in inverted commas) is limited to recycling superficial and ineffective claims and practices.  
Angelos – educator

The majority of educators however, addressed the curriculum in a rather restrictive manner, focusing mainly on the presentation of the function of public administration and these were limited to union practice without going further into the critical investigation of the root causes of social exclusion of people with disabilities and the system's operating mechanisms.

People with disabilities must acquire the methodology (they need), in order to learn how to find a law which concerns them, and how they can claim their rights, Agatha - educator

The subject matter that additionally emerged in the classroom covers issues related to the lives of learners with disabilities. Educators interviewed give prominence to the use of the learners' experience as an important element of the educational process:

I realised that as an educational team there was a strong experiential element and therefore, anything said, cannot only be presented as theory. Theory alone is not enough [...] Participation became much more intense when there was lived experience on the syllabus subjects, Elisa - educator

It was found that the educators' motives were also reflected in the way in which they made use of personal experience. So, for educators with a socio-political interest in their work, the personal experience of disability became the starting point for generalisation, discussion and political action (Choules, 2007, p. 169-171). In other cases, the disabled students' experience was approached solely at a personal level as an individual psychological, therapeutic process and, even though it might bring people closer together, it has limited possibilities for building solidarity amongst a group. Also, this option generates a pedagogical comfort zone that makes the oppressed feel good about their victimisation (Lovett, 1988).

The educators attempted to invest the knowledge acquired into practice and suggested improved modes of action for the disability movement. By living such an experience

learners, as well as educators, ‘begin to perceive more than before that education has something to do with politics’ (Freire & Shor, 1987, p. 45-46).

For example, being a grass-roots organisation they seemed interested in working with University students of their city in creating a map with accessible routes in the city. What brought this on was the reference to good practices in Europe. Giannis - educator.

It gives me knowledge as to what to do. Kostas - learner

In conclusion and despite the exceptions, the influence of the social model of disability approach is evident in the subject matter of the educational programme, especially as regards assertive speech, formulating arguments and developing a sense of being a social acting subject.

### *Empowerment through teaching techniques*

Educators who perceive learners’ empowerment as part of their role, recognise the value of using participatory techniques, as a means of building social capital bonds in learners. However, they seem to mention the use of participatory techniques to a larger extent in their interviews than was actually observed in practice.

This evidence is supported by the difficulty that certain educators said they faced with group work, attributing it to the specificity of the group of learners, the diversity of learners as regards the type of disability and the attitude of the learners themselves, thus justifying their practice.

One way to encourage collaborative learning would be to work in small groups. Unfortunately I could not work that way, mainly due to the heterogeneity of the wider group of learners. Markella – educator

Although the learning patterns of people with disabilities and their expectations for the learning process are associated with educational experiences that may be limited or come from special educational backgrounds, however, the learners interviewed were positive to participatory educational techniques and it seems they had no difficulty in dealing with them and responding to them.

Maybe it would be best to do some other things in practice only and leave the theoretical part aside a bit. Thodoris – learner

I like to talk of my own experience. When others tell their own experience, I tell mine too. Because they speak in their own words, not scientifically [...]. When I participate, I feel that I’ve understood better and I want them to tell me more, to explain to me. Maria – learner

Primary research showed that educators use lectures to a great extent. However, in cases in which a lecture is accompanied by dialogue (Choules, 2007, p. 171) or in which parallel pedagogical approaches are used, one achieves the formulation of problems which put dominant knowledge of disability into question.

Participation was mostly spontaneous, with dialogue between learners, questions posed, opinions and suggestions, Angelos - educator

Of course we talked, it was not clearly a lesson, it wasn’t a class, it was chat. Eventually the conversation became lighter, we were no longer teacher and student, look at the blackboard, learn, write, that wouldn’t do. Thodoris - learner



*Empowerment through the educator's role*

Educators who view the empowerment of learners with disability as part of their role, recognise the value of shifting their focus from the subject matter to the learner.

The curriculum should be the learners' actuating means and not an end in itself in the learning process. We must place the centre of gravity in the learner and not in the curriculum, which we often have to readjust depending on the target group. Agatha- learner

I need to take into account the specific features, the educational needs and the diversity of learners as regards the category and degree of disability, and their educational level. The different educational levels require a degree of simplification, explanation of meanings, analysis of the 'obvious' and enrichment through examples, etc. Angelos - educator

In cases in which a student-centred approach was applied, adults with a disability had the opportunity to share the educational histories they bring, possibly from special education environments, coloured by gender and economic status, the category and severity of disability as well as by the sociocultural meanings attached to their visible or invisible disabilities (Ross-Gordon, 2002, p. 54). However, educators seemed to mention the student-centred approach to a larger extent in their interviews than was actually observed in practice.

The majority of educators treat learners as social agents, asking them to express their opinion, they pose questions openly and dialogue takes place. When the relationship between educators and learners was such that it allowed learners to contribute to decision-making in curriculum related matters, then learners gained the confidence to express their ideas and take initiatives.

Furthermore, primary research showed that in the case of people with disabilities, educators within their liberating role, also have to deal with some communication and participation particularities. These particularities of learners with disabilities, should there be no provision that they are properly dealt with, are likely to become reasons for discrimination against certain learners with disabilities.

The unequal participation of the deaf when there are several people talking together, is a typical example. In this case, sign language interpretation is not possible nor can the deaf person intervene in the discussion. Such discrimination, although not covered under the category of racism, however, constitutes a serious obstacle to the equal participation of persons of certain disability categories in the educational process. Where the student-centred approach was applied, it was found that the opportunity was given to the disabled adults themselves to identify the reasonable adjustments they consider suitable for them, highlighting their potential for learning (ibid).

Research also revealed that after their teaching experience with this educational group, educators feel that the way in which they perceive their role has changed and refer to the dimension of encouraging learners and facilitating the process of learning through empathy.

I began to also understand in practice the educator's role as that of a person who encourages and makes the interactive process easier. Markela - educator

It made me reconsider and understand the meaning of empathy better as the function of the specific target group also triggered many psychological techniques. Eliza - educator

I find that my role is more of a coordinative one. I find that I'm increasingly trying to integrate activities into the flow of the educational process that actively involve the learners in the learning process. Giannis -educator

In conclusion, given the positive impact that learning experience has on empowering learners with disabilities, the educator's concern about the educational options (techniques, subject-matter etc.), proves important. Empowerment cannot simply be regarded as an aspect of the lesson, but as an integral part of the curriculum, of the educational techniques and of the educator's role.

### **Effects of the prevailing approach of general adult education**

Most of the educators, who worked in this particular educational programme, come from the field of formal education, - so their work was not exclusively with adults – however they feature elements of the basic principles of adult education in their practice, and mainly in their speech. These elements mainly result from the general adult education approach, when it comes to the teaching-pedagogical and animating function of the educator (active learning methods, adaptation of teaching modules in order to meet learners' needs, observation of the learners' personal development). In contrast, there seems to be a limited influence of the critical approach regarding the socio-political function of the educator (emancipation of learners through the learning process, encouragement of critical thought).

As regards the widespread influence of the general education approach, it can be attributed to the fact that during recent years in Greece education providers have increased and to educators working to the end of scientifically establishing and upgrading adult education activities (Kokkos, 2008). The widespread influence of the general adult education approach also seems to have affected the type of empowerment developed during the educational process. Specifically, empowerment, for which educators with a general education approach aspire, despite their claim that it is aimed at the social level, is actually focused on the personal level, just as it is in the case of educators with a person-centered approach.

On the other hand, the limited influence of the critical approach, despite the fact that it is consistent with the objectives of the disability movement which, as provider, promotes a more emancipatory approach, may be attributed to the fact that adult education in Greece has not developed as a social movement (ibid). The majority of educators did not make the most of their freedom of action given to them in the framework of a social movement, compared to that of formal education, regarding the implementation of critical education methods, probably because their official professional training does not include taking part in opposition politics (Freire & Shor, 1987, p. 77). There needs to be a sense of solidarity among educators regarding the goals of the movement they serve, in order for them to take radical social action (Mezirow, 2000).

Especially in the case of disability, the limited influence of the critical approach is reinforced by the fact that education of people with disabilities is regarded mainly as a process of skill acquisition aiming at their social integration, focusing on specialised programmes and reasonable accommodation in the educational process. The fact that Disability Studies theory has recently been associated with the education sector also works along the same lines (Disability Studies in Education officially developed as field of study in the U.S.A in 1999, as an extension of Disability Studies; in Greece they have yet to be associated with Education).

In conclusion, adult education in this educational programme, which was inspired by a political discourse on disability, did not reach the ideal level of empowerment as determined by the critical education approach. However, one should not ignore the other findings regarding many individual positive aspects of the programme.

This leads us to the conclusion that, apart from attributing primary importance to achieving a complete radical educational intervention, one must acknowledge the value of individual radical elements of an educational process. Besides, 'social transformation is made by lots of small and great and big and humble tasks!' (Freire & Shor, 1987, p. 46).

## Conclusion

In the context of the theoretical debate on changes to the limits regarding the extent and variety of adult education, disability as an analytical category may become the starting point for creating new directions of adult education, both in theory and practice. The meeting of adult education, disability studies and the disability movement can be seen as a strong link in the process of recognising the relationship between education, research and activism (Slee, 2010), which is needed by those serving the vision of social justice. The knowledge resulting from the relationship between adult education, disability studies and the disability movement can help theories on adult education and help adult educators to develop their thinking on disability related issues and to understand the value of united adult education, thereby promoting social change in this field. We expect this text to provide the context for an intersectional discussion on the development of new, more transformative approaches, both on a personal basis and at level of changing social structure.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The National Confederation of People with Disability of Greece was founded in 1989. It is an umbrella organisation representing all categories of disabled people (mobility, sensory, mental, chronic diseases, etc.) and their parents or legal guardians of disabled people who cannot represent themselves (e.g. the mentally disabled)

<sup>2</sup> The National Confederation of Disabled People of Greece has been designated provider of lifelong learning according to the Greek law 3369/2005, in order to implement programmes in the framework of the Operational Programme 'Education and Lifelong Learning' and is co-funded by the European Union (European Social Fund)

<sup>3</sup> A frame thus 'is a general, standardized, predefined structure (in the sense than it already belongs to the receiver's knowledge of the world) which allows recognition of the world, and guides perception... allowing him/her to build defined expectations about what is to happen, that is to make sense of his/her reality' (Donati 1992: 141-2)

<sup>4</sup> Wehmeyer (1998) distinguishes the two dimensions of the meaning of self-determination: the personal dimension (which has to do with a person's control over his life) and the political dimension (a person's right to self-management).

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## Citizenship as individual responsibility through personal investment – an ethnographic study in a study circle

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### Abstract

*The aim of this article is to shed light on how the democratic ideal of institutionalised Nordic popular education is realised through an ethnographic field study in an English as a foreign language study circle. The study focuses on how participants express their citizenship when taking part in the study circle. Citizenship is viewed as a dynamic concept comprising the aspects of 'being' and 'acting' and constructed in and through social interaction. The study circle is arranged as a classroom practice: The study circle leader organises the activities, while the participants engage in exercises and attempt to learn correct usage. Through their participation, the participants take individual responsibility for what they see as their lack of sufficient knowledge of English. The participants describe their participation as a personal and voluntary investment in themselves. In light of the study, the individual stance is discussed as limiting possibilities for responsibility and thus expressions of citizenship.*

**Keywords:** citizenship; ethnography; liberal adult education; popular education; study circle

### Introduction

*'Pick up a language you have almost forgotten, discover an entirely new one, or renew your knowledge. By studying a language, you gain more from your vacation or business meeting'.* With these words, the brochure of one of the nation-wide study associations in Sweden greets potential participants in a language study circle. In the same brochure, after the initial greeting, the reader is informed about the Common European Framework for the assessment of language skills and knowledge (see Council of Europe, 2016). The potential participant should assess their level of knowledge in accordance with the

framework to pick the right course. If the reader is uncertain about his or her personal language level, there is a free language test on the study association's web page.

Study circles are part of Swedish popular education, which consists of state-subsidised educational practices with high levels of participation with regard to the entire population. Popular education strives to make knowledge accessible to people through practices that allow participants to influence the organisation of the studies by, for example, taking participants' previous experience into account. These forms of practices are further thought to be linked to the democratic ideals of study circles; that is, to provide possibilities for different groups to accumulate and disseminate knowledge in a democratic manner, and to articulate their interests and needs (Harding, 2011; Laginder, Nordvall, & Crowther, 2013). The low-threshold practices of study circles, whereby a small group gathers on a regular basis to study a topic of their own interest, are especially thought to support democracy in everyday life (Larsson, 2001). In general, study circle practices are thought to be connected to democracy and to developing and learning as a citizen regardless of subject.

The idea of Nordic popular education as a fundamentally collective endeavour has been questioned in recent years. Korsgaard (2008) has described contemporary popular education as interwoven with individualisation and 'personal enlightenment (or education)' (*personlig oplysning*, Korsgaard, 1997). Sundgren (2012) has proposed that the function of modern Swedish popular education can be understood as 'making the circumstances a bit more meaningful', not as providing an arena for political struggles or deliberations. Niemelä (2011) has suggested a similar development of increasing emphasis on individualisation and personal development in Finnish popular education since the 1960s. Nevertheless, Nordic popular education is still considered a potential supporter of citizenship and a functioning democracy (Andersson & Laginder, 2013).

The view on the role of adult education in general, as furthering both individual and collective change in democratic societies, has in recent decades been described as shifting from emancipatory to empowering (Wildemeersch & Salling Olesen, 2012). In other words, participants in adult education are expected to be individually responsible, focusing on individual employability as an important aim for adult education (Bagnall, 2010; Zeuner, 2013). Individual citizens are thought to need recurrent learning, which is part of the responsibilities they should attend to (Sandberg, Fejes, Dahlstedt, & Olson, 2016). Further, this assumption of individual responsibility is framed in relation to ideas about freedom of choice. Citizens, as members in associations or participants in educational practices, seem to be treated as customers and consumers. As such, they are not supposed to participate in decision-making about common activities, but rather to accept or discard the services offered (Åberg, 2013; Bauman, 1999; Wildemeersch & Salling Olesen, 2012).

Previous research has also portrayed an ambivalent picture of the realisation of democratic ideals in study circles (Andersson & Laginder, 2013; Larsson, 2001; Lundberg, 2009). In combination with a lack of previous studies focusing on study circle practices as such (Nordzell, 2011), there is a need for further research on study circle practices from a democratic and citizenship perspective. A small but growing body of research on citizenship education and popular education is addressing questions like this, focusing on the discourses (e.g., Fejes, Olson, Rahm, Dahlstedt, & Sandberg, 2016) or enactments (e.g., Rahm & Fejes, 2015) of citizenship among students. These perspectives are positioned as an alternative to highlighting, for example, employability questions, skills needed, or more philosophical perspectives in relation to citizenship education.

In relation to the abovementioned discussions, we are interested in understanding how the democratic ideals informing study circle activities might be realised in the practices



of a study circle. The aim of this article is to shed light on how the participants express their citizenship in and through their participation in a study circle. The study was conducted as an ethnographic field study in an English as a foreign language study circle. In the following sections, previous research and, thereafter, the theoretical concepts of the article, are discussed. Next, methodological considerations are discussed and the field study is presented. The analysis highlighting citizenship as ‘being’ and ‘acting’ follows. The article ends with a concluding discussion that focuses on the dilemmas in this study circle in relation to the democratic potentials of study circle practices.

### Previous research on participation in study circles

The investigated context in this article is an example of a kind of popular education organised by study associations in Sweden (in Swedish, *studieförbund*). These study circle activities are institutionalised, that is, there is an organisation providing structures and financing to support the realisation of the activities through state subsidies (Larsson & Nordvall, 2010). Participation in study circles constitutes an opportunity for participants to free themselves from domestic and professional obligations and to influence and change their living conditions together with others (Laginder et al., 2013). The ideal study circle is considered to be a small democracy in which the participants can build on their previous knowledge and influence the circle’s content and working methods (Åberg, 2008; Larsson & Nordvall, 2010). Thus, equality between the study circle leader and the participants is pivotal. An important organisational principle is consequently detachment from what is understood to be the rigid, teacher-led lecturing methods of a traditional school (Larsson & Nordvall, 2010). At the same time, the study circle might never be totally free from such traditional influences, as it is most often a fixed group meeting at a certain time, during a certain period, to study a certain subject (Salo & Rönnerman, 2014). It could even be argued that a partial support from an organisational structure is important for democratic learning (Harding, 2011).

The democratic ideal does not always seem to be fully realised in the practices of study circles (Larsson, 2001). An equal conversation, with all participants both listening and being heard, constitutes an ideal that is challenging to fully obtain (Lundberg, 2009). Participants in study circles also often assume that they need to take on a passive role and follow the instructions of the circle leader. The function of the study circle leader generally seems to be at the centre of a conflict between what is understood as the ideal study circle and what is perceived as possible under the practical circumstances (Andersson & Laginder, 2013). On the one hand, the participants are expected to be active and influence both the content and working methods of the circle; on the other hand, the atmosphere of the circle is expected to be comfortable and welcoming, possibly prohibiting the participants from trying to exert too much influence. For the activities to run smoothly in this context, the circle leader might feel it is his or her responsibility to be in charge. Additionally, sticking to the topic of the circle eliminates the risk of touching upon private and potentially uncomfortable issues.

Rather than directly supporting the realisation of democratic ideals, participation in study circles can be understood as providing opportunities for personal development and meaningful spare-time activities (Andersson, Laginder, Larsson, & Sundgren, 1996; Sundgren, 2012). It has been argued that this reflects a historic shift whereby study circles have developed from building upon collective concerns to focusing on individual interests and needs (Andersson & Laginder, 2013). However, the social and collective reasons for participating are still considered to be important (Andersson et al., 1996; Laginder &

Stenøien, 2011). For example, the participants' collective actions taken to create a study circle have been described as happening through acts of mutual fondness, resulting in a co-production of a circle narrative (Nordzell, 2011). Nordzell shows that the participants co-create the study circle by communicating intensively, interrupting and interposing, asking questions, commenting on others' remarks, and laughing together.

Recent research indicates, however, that the neo-liberal notion of individual freedom stressing personal responsibility is also affecting the view of students as citizens in Swedish popular education (Fejes et al., 2016). Nevertheless, individualisation does not necessarily mean a decrease in the potential for changing the living conditions of the participants. Instead, interest-driven learning can be understood as creating a needed distance from everyday life, allowing for a space for commitment and coherence not necessarily found in contemporary society (Laginder & Stenøien, 2011).

### **Citizenship as acting and being**

To make sense of the study circle activities as participants' expressions of citizenship, the concept of citizenship is here understood to be broad and dynamic, comprising participatory and existential conceptions beyond that of formal status as the relationship between individuals and society (Bagnall, 2010). The assumption is that for the individual to be a citizen, he or she must always be part of different communities and social contexts that need to be maintained and continuously (re)negotiated (Biesta, 2014; Wildemeersch, 2014). Citizenship concerns both the individual and the individual's relationships to others. Citizenship as an individual's societal status is not excluded in this perspective; however, that aspect is not of primary concern in this study. Instead, citizenship is viewed as consisting of dynamic aspects relating to how the citizen is willing and capable of relating to and making use of the role of citizenship. Furthermore, citizenship is tied to the citizen's perception of the role of citizenship and its possibilities, as well as how the citizen sees himself or herself in relation to different living contexts (Bagnall, 2010).

In this study, citizenship is understood to consist of aspects of 'acting' and 'being', in line with, for instance, Biesta, De Bie and Wildemeersch (2014, p. xiii), who define education as the support of 'democratic ways of being and doing'; and Brooks and Holford (2009, p. 96), who understand citizenship learning as comprising 'dimensions of identity and action'. In the perspective employed in this article, educational processes are vital in preserving and re-establishing the dynamics of citizenship (Biesta, 2011, 2014). The aspect of being a citizen includes a sense of belonging in different contexts. In other words, being a citizen entails sharing identities with others and being able to organise oneself in different communities. The aspect of acting as a citizen includes striving towards autonomous thinking and a preparedness to act either to counteract perceived injustices or maintain the status quo. At the same time, being and acting as a citizen involves relations to individual human beings and their shared living contexts, including a willingness to compromise and respectfully disagree (Biesta, 2014; Wildemeersch, 2014); in other words, to seek knowledge collaboratively. Being and acting as a citizen is a process that is paradoxically individual yet only possible in relation to others.

### **Ethnography of the study circle**

The aim of this study is to understand the participant perspective of the everyday life of a study circle practice. That is, from an ethnographic tradition, the aim is to study the social actions of the participants first hand through participant observation in a specific

context (Hammersley, 2006). The realisation of this aim relies on long-term presence and engagement in a particular field, where rich data are generated through systematic processes (Walford, 2009). The interpretive emphasis is on the lived culture in this field from the eyes of the participants, focusing on the broad question: What is going on here (Geertz, 1973)? This broad question is then narrowed by the research interest. In this case, the focus is more specifically on the expressions of citizenship in and through the study circle. That is, the kinds of expressions discoverable from the participant perspective.

Alongside an interest in the participant perspective, an ethnographic stance includes the goal of developing an 'analytic understanding of perspectives, activities and actions' (Hammersley, 2006, p. 4). This understanding is likely to differ from those of the participants in the study, meaning that the participants in the English study circle would probably describe their participation differently than the description portrayed in this article. Even though the ethnographic analysis draws on actual social expressions in the circle, the employed theoretical framework allows the understanding to reach beyond what is seen from a strict participant perspective. This tension between the ambition to understand the informants' or participants' perspectives on the one hand, and the more distanced analysis of them and their behaviour on the other, can even be argued to constitute 'the essence of ethnography' (2006).

The contribution of an ethnographic analysis lies in its ability to make use of a micro-perspective to bring relevant order to what might seem either confusing or all too familiar. Ethnography focuses on the 'mundane' and the 'routine' (Walford, 2009), and in this particular study this comprises the routines that constitute and make sense of expressions of citizenship in the study circle. Ethnographic description is 'thick' and interpretive and concerns social discourses and attempts to preserve what is being said and done in communicable terms. The objective is to be precise and avoid ambiguity when communicating the findings about the everyday lives studied (2009). These descriptions by the ethnographer consist of imagined constructions, and they are always of a second or third order since only a native can make first-order interpretations. The culture at hand can be accessed empirically by taking in and inspecting relevant events – not through an abstract arrangement of entities into patterns (Geertz, 1973; Gordon, Holland, & Lahelma, 2001; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

It is important, in ethnographic studies, to reflect on the appropriate context for understanding the examined social actions (Hammersley, 2006; Walford, 2009). In this case, the context of the study was narrowed down to the study circle in question with some reference to the institutional logics of the association organising the study circle. This is not an unusual stance within current ethnography, since participants in one context can lead very different lives in the rest of their day-to-day engagements (Hammersley, 2006). Capturing all these different participant circumstances would be challenging and likely result in an amount and breadth of data that would make an analysis virtually impossible. This form of choice of context leads to some delimitations of this study. The study of a specifically defined social site does not yield understanding of what the persons involved are doing and saying in other parts of their lives; moreover, general conclusions cannot be drawn about actions within the study circle as products solely of the situations within the circle.

Another kind of understanding could have been attained if the study context had been more broadly defined to include other aspects of participants' lives. Nevertheless, how this broader context should be determined and how knowledge about it should be gained are difficult questions that do not necessarily have any satisfactory answers (Hammersley, 2006). Considering a broader context was not perceived as necessary in this case to obtain an understanding of what it means to be a participant in a study circle from a citizenship

perspective. According to the literature, it is reasonable to assume that the circle can constitute a democratic setting (Larsson, 2001). Thus, we draw on a theoretically informed stance (Walford, 2009) to argue that the context of the study circle, in itself, is enough to obtain ethnographic knowledge about what it is to express citizenship in and through the study circle. In the following, this stance is elaborated on by discussing the principles and practices of the field study in more detail, including some analytical considerations.

### Choosing the site and entering the field

Entering the field of ethnographic fieldwork is, in Geertz's (1973, p. 13) words, all about 'finding our feet'. This process represents a balancing act that should neither end up with the researcher becoming one of 'the natives' nor seeking to mimic them. The aim, in all its simplicity and complexity, is to converse with the persons in the field. In this case, one of the two authors (Annika Pastuhov) was the ethnographer conducting the fieldwork. The study circle examined in this article was chosen with the help of the director of a study association (*studieförbund*). A meeting was arranged to discuss the research interests and possible study circles to take part in. The initial interest was guided by openness on the part of the ethnographer who, at the same time, stressed an interest in finding a circle with a leader who would willingly accept the researcher. The first suggestion was to participate in an English study circle, which ultimately became the case study. As the ethnographer began attending this circle, the aim of the research was briefly presented and participants were given the opportunity to ask further questions. The participants were told that participation was voluntary and that they would remain anonymous in the study reporting. The participants accepted this, with none expressing reluctance to participate in the study on these terms.

The site in ethnographic fieldwork needs to be chosen for particular purposes in order for the study to provide a basis for further systematic analysis (Walford, 2009). The reasons for choosing a language study circle are twofold. Firstly, languages constitute an extensive part of organised study circles in Sweden – including humanistic subjects, the majority of which (16% of all arranged study circles in 2015) consist of language circles (The Swedish National Council of Adult Education, 2016). Nevertheless, few previous studies about participation in study circles have focused on language circles (a recent exception is Nordzell, 2011). Secondly, a language circle is potentially interesting from a citizenship point of view. There is a prevailing assumption that languages are typically taught in a teacher-led way (Larsson & Nordvall, 2010; Nordzell, 2011). At the same time, learning languages constitutes an important pathway for broadened opportunities for communication, especially by learning a *lingua franca* such as English.

The English study circle group consisted of 12 participants, six men and six women, of which two were retired and the rest were between the ages of 30 and 60 and employed. Beginning in early September, the group gathered once a week, for 12 weeks to learn elementary English under the guidance of a study circle leader. One of the participants had not studied English in compulsory education, while the rest of the group had some basic knowledge of the language from previous formal education. We gathered in a large building in the city centre that holds different educational activities. Besides the office spaces of the study association, the facility also houses a lower and upper secondary school.

The ethnographer attended nine of the gatherings during the autumn of 2014, solving exercises and taking part in the activities. Participating in the study circle as a whole is

considered an important principle for obtaining ethnographic understanding (Hammersley, 2006). Even though the intent was to be one of the participants, this was not possible since it immediately became apparent that the ethnographer's knowledge of English was to some extent more comprehensive than that of the other participants. This was evident, for instance, in different types of conversation exercises, which led to the ethnographer helping the other participants from time to time, but only if asked to do so. Otherwise, the ethnographer tried to keep a low profile by, for example, not immediately giving suggestions for answers. But if someone asked for help, it felt quite natural and reasonable to assist. To pretend otherwise would probably have been considered dishonest and could even have been regarded as morally questionable.

The main sources of data are field notes (35 pages) written in part during, but mostly directly after (cf. Walford, 2009), each of the study circle sessions, and audio recordings of eight of the sessions (11 hours in total). Secondary data include copied task sheets from the lessons, brochures from the study association, some e-mail conversations with the director and the study circle leader, and a one-hour interview with the study circle leader. Initially, there was also an attempt to complement the participatory observations with some focus group interviews. Unfortunately, interest in participating was meagre, and therefore no participant interviews were conducted. The analysis of the data was informed by the field notes as an initial, naïve way of understanding the meanings and consequences of the social interactions taking place in the study circle (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 3). The field notes were then subject to further reflection and scrutiny in relation to the audio recordings and expressions of the informants over the course of the fieldwork (Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Lofland, & Lofland, 2001, p. 5). The analysis proceeded with attempts to find surprising or conflicting patterns that would inform everyday life in the study circle, and also by relying on previous research on the subject (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 163).

### **Taking our seats and doing our exercises**

The classroom as a social practice was chosen as a starting point for understanding the meanings and consequences of the social interactions in the study circle. This choice was informed by initial experiences during the fieldwork. The classroom practices include the dynamics of fitting into the crowd, submitting to evaluation by both the teacher and peers, and accepting the teacher as an authority leading the activities (Jackson, 1990; Sahlström, 1999). This represents an intriguing contrast to the ideals of the study circle described earlier.

Almost immediately during the first session, a pattern of 'doing school' is noticeable. We, the participants, find our seats among three rows facing the study circle leader's desk. We are here voluntarily, which means that we, in a way, actively consent to the role of the compliant and dutiful student. This role seems familiar to all of us: There is no hesitation as to what it means to do the exercises and participate in the learning activities. Typically, we work with different work sheets and do our grammatical or vocabulary exercises individually or in small groups. If we go through the answers after we have finished, everyone provides one answer each, followed by the study circle leader's response and evaluation. Wrong answers, of course, receive follow-up questions or explanations in order to work out the correct answer.

This setup could probably be described as expected when attending an activity providing lessons in a foreign language. At the same time, patterns for participation are to some extent even more restricted than, for example, in an elementary school. No

students with ‘motivational issues’ or otherwise ‘bad’ behaviour are found here. All participants are focused on and engaged in the activities. If someone arrives unprepared, this is not voiced. It seems like everyone always brings all their notes, copies from previous lessons, and pens as needed. Of the participants, the ethnographer seemed to be the only one constantly forgetting both previous paper copies and pens, causing feelings of guilt when compared to the seemingly well-prepared course-mates. The overall dutiful work ethic in the group is understandable since the participants are attending the study circle explicitly because they feel they lack knowledge in English. To achieve a better grasp of and improve our skills in English, we do as the circle leader tells us.

Most of us take notes frequently, and we are eager to determine the correct answers. The desire to know precise answers sometimes proves challenging, especially when there are no direct translations between English and Swedish. For example, at the beginning of our fourth session, when Tina wants to know the difference between using ‘good’ and ‘well’, she refers to the study circle leader previously answering the question ‘How do you feel?’ by replying ‘I feel well’. Tina mentions the common phrase ‘I feel good’ as a reason for why she is asking. The circle leader explains, quite extensively, that ‘things’ need ‘adjectives’ and ‘verbs’ need ‘adverbs’ to clarify the difference in use. The follow-up questions posed by other participants show that understanding this grammatical presentation is challenging. There still seems to be some confusion in the group. In an attempt to clarify, Marc asks, ‘Could you say, “She speaks English very well?”’ The circle leader confirms this is correct, and goes on to conclude that, ‘You wouldn’t say, “She speaks English good”’. Finally, we arrive at the specific distinction between Tina’s two example expressions, ‘I feel well’ and ‘I feel good’. The circle leader tells us, ‘Nowadays, a lot of people say “I’m good”, but it’s not correct’. Tina concludes by asking whether this means that both can be used. Even though the circle leader confirms this, she also points out that she does not like it. Tina responds with laughter, repeating the answer but stressing the fact that it is the circle leader’s opinion: ‘*You* don’t like it’. Seemingly wanting to move on in her teaching, the circle leader asks in a neutral, but polite, tone whether Tina’s question has been answered. After a somewhat hesitant answer from Tina – ‘I think so’ ending with a slight laugh – the theme of the leader-led conversation changes.

The participants quite often pose questions like this. Almost as often, they face problems of this kind, where the sort of answer they are looking for is not given straight away and sometimes not at all. Another type of feature worth noting is that this conversation takes place entirely in English, engaging four of the participants and the study circle leader, while the rest of the group listens attentively and shows no signs of having difficulty understanding.

### **Facing difficulties and the hesitation to leave our seats**

The participants seem, in other words, to already be quite competent in both understanding and producing the foreign language they are studying. But this is not how they see it. On the contrary, the way the participants label and focus their own activities and contributions seems to emphasise their deficits. If opinions on the exercises are uttered, the tasks at hand are almost always thought to be ‘hard’ and ‘difficult’. The person’s own ability to understand is often questioned. The expressions range all the way from a simple ‘I don’t understand’ to a discouraged ‘I’m a total moron’. Perhaps as a result of the exercises being labelled as demanding, answering the study circle leader’s questions is often followed by a display of insecurity. Occasionally, the leader asks us to

read out loud what we have written in our homework or some other exercise. Quite often, this request is met with some hesitation and an insecure pitch, sometimes accompanied by self-conscious gestures, such as shoulder shrugs.

This suggests the participants are not confident about their skills and are unwilling to put themselves forward, which is even more apparent when it comes to physically stepping up in front of the rest of the group. Instances of this kind take place only a couple of times during the entire season. One example occurs at the very end of the fourth lesson, which is focused primarily on adjectives and their comparative and superlative forms. The last exercise of the evening is quite challenging. We have been sitting in small groups, trying to formulate different sentences according to a certain pattern. The first sentence takes quite a while to figure out, but finally, after negotiations in Swedish and repeated reminders by the study circle leader to use English, all five members of our group are able to jot down 'Monaco is smaller than Andorra, and Vatican City is the smallest'. After finishing five sentences of this kind, we are told to come up with a similar exercise of our own for the other two groups to solve. Quite quickly, our group begins to enjoy composing a sentence that is as difficult as possible. Some suggestions are put forward in English, but most of the discussion, especially the livelier statements, are in Swedish. When we realise someone needs to write our clues on the whiteboard, an eager, whispering negotiation, now only in Swedish, takes place, as no group member wants to volunteer: 'You go and write!'; 'Yuck, no, you go!'; 'I don't know how to spell it!' After a couple of requests from the circle leader in combination with a mildly insistent look, one group member walks up and writes the words without any protest.

This short scene is a fairly typical example of what goes on in the study circle and what participation is all about. The participants engage in difficult exercises that are nonetheless solved by the end of the session. Usually, the tasks are done independently or in pairs. When put together in groups, they cooperate, focusing on the task at hand. However, the participants prefer to play their roles as students completing exercises given to them rather than providing input on the content, not even in the form of writing on the whiteboard.

### **Contemplating the personal investment and saying our goodbyes**

On the last study circle gathering, Christmas was one month away. As a gesture of appreciation to the participants for accepting the researcher, the ethnographer, about to leave the field, brought in gingerbread and chocolate, showing up a little earlier than usual to be able to greet everyone and offer them the sweets. There was some surprise on the faces of the other participants as they almost dutifully – some hesitantly, others more happily – helped themselves to the offerings. A feeling that the rest of the study-mates do not find this gesture to be in line with the rapport we have established during the last three months lingers. Nevertheless, it is not met by condemnation, but rather by courteous acceptance combined with a slight hint of indifference.

The study circle leader agreed to spare 15 minutes at the end of this last lesson for a short discussion with the group about their views on their studies and participation in the study circle, as well as the ethnographer's participation. When the circle leader initiates this last part of the night's session, one of the participants asks whether it is now okay to talk in Swedish. The circle leader confirms this and we change language. Firstly, the leader wants to know what we thought of the course. There is not much initial eagerness to contribute to this discussion. The study circle is, for example, described as 'good' and

having varying exercises. All responses are quite concise, and in only two minutes, this part of the discussion is over.

Accepting this, the study circle leader goes on to ask, ‘Why have you come to this course? What motivates you?’ When no one jumps in to answer this question right away, she goes on, ‘Why do you sacrifice a Tuesday night? And pay a lot of money for it?’ This incites some laughter in the group. One of the participants, Eric, states without hesitation or constraint that the participation is ‘an investment for oneself and the job’. The other participants seem to think that this pretty much sums it up and the rest of the answers are quite similar. Many return to the word ‘investment’ when talking about the meaning of participation. Most of the replies are quite short and refer either to the job or to, for example, travelling, where communication skills in English are useful. Nina reminds us that this kind of voluntary participation is more fun and inspiring compared to going to school.

Speaking of the difference between studying voluntarily as an adult and going to compulsory school in childhood, the study circle leader initiates a discussion about ‘a thing [the ethnographer] and I have been talking about... This format, the teaching, when I [the study circle leader] stand here, I write there, and you sit by your desks, quite as you did in school’. Here, the circle leader does not even have to pose a question before Nina reacts. ‘It feels safe this way!’ she claims, causing the rest to laugh. When asked what she means by that, she does not really elaborate. She just thinks, ‘It feels good when we do it like this, I don’t want to stand in the front’. The circle leader asks the whole group if this is what they expect, and gets some affirmative answers. Either you are a pupil or you are a leader or teacher, and since you as a participant are expected to be the pupil, you feel comfortable when this is realised in a well-known manner. Eric, again, concludes that the reluctance towards what is positioned against the role of the pupil, namely ‘standing and speaking there in the front’, is not alluring since it ‘is about stepping into the unknown, or unsafe, and then one sits here and feels more safe with that – of course – choosing the less unsafe option’. Several others seem to agree with this.

Then, the last 15 minutes were up. In the end, after a hesitant start, the discussion had engaged all those present. The circle leader hoped to see some of us again next year and wished us a Merry Christmas. This functioned as a final sign to all of us. Quite quickly, like all the other nights before, everyone emptied their seats, jackets disappearing from coat hangers, and we all hurried down the stairs and into the dark night. There and then, without anyone noticing or being concerned, our study circle group had ceased to exist.

### **Being and acting as the unknowing for becoming knowledgeable**

When asked, the participants in the English study circle claim to be making an investment in themselves. In other words, the study circle consists of individuals who view themselves as responsible consumers. Furthermore, they repeatedly position themselves as pupils in relation to the English language, since acting like this feels familiar and safe. The composition of the group appears as random as a school class, even though voluntariness rather than obligation informs the explicit motives for participating in the study circle. It is clear that the group, just like any class in school, is formed only to be dissolved again in the near future. The group functions as a means of reaching the participants’ goals of gaining more knowledge. The participants attend with the intention that their investment in the study circle will help them leave behind the position of an unknowing pupil.



The orientation towards their knowledge of English is characterised by an aspiration for perfection. A considerable amount of attention is paid to identifying what is correct language use and what is not, which means identifying the limits of their knowledge. Their relationship to learning English is characterised by uttered expressions of deficits, focusing in particular on everything they do not yet know. The participants seem to think that studies leading to the mastery of the language should consist of solving difficult exercises. The participants themselves seem to choose this setup because of the security as well as efficiency it brings to the organisation of their studies.

When considering the aspect of 'being' as a citizen in and through the group, the participants orient themselves explicitly as individual consumers. The reason for attending this study circle as consumers is their current, expressed understanding of lack of knowledge of the English language. This is the identity they seem to be sharing, an identity that includes socialising only insofar as it is needed for completing their studies. According to the participants themselves, the 'acting' as a citizen in and through the circle is, in other words, a personal investment. They take responsibility for their deficiencies in English and strive to become more knowledgeable to meet the demands of both working life and leisure time. They attempt to achieve this by committing and adapting to the classroom practices. This adaptation is not combined with attempts to influence the study activities, but rather to accept the arrangements for what they are. Since all of the participants fulfilled the requirements, it might be suitable to conclude that they were content and found the investment worthwhile.

The expressions of citizenship in and through the study circle concern issues of fitting into the group and, at the same time, not having any need to establish social bonds. The participants seem to view themselves as individuals, completing their challenging exercises and then leaving for the night, not longing for any coffee breaks or other get-togethers with the rest of the group. Even though they commit individually to the tasks at hand, they do not want to be noticed as individuals, but rather as invisible parts of the study group.

## Discussion

Citizenship as expressed in and through the participation in the English study circle concerns individual responsibility for personal betterment. At the same time, it also involves maintaining a mode of social interaction that is familiar to the participants, here portrayed as typical classroom practices (cf. Jackson, 1990; Sahlström, 1999). The citizenship here is furthermore a citizenship of choice, where the task of the citizen is to choose among ready alternatives, not collectively formulating alternatives to choose from (Bauman, 1999; Biesta, 2014). The study circle can thus be described as consisting of investing individuals who find themselves brought together to do exercises in order to reduce their perceived and expressed lack of knowledge in English. The focus on correctness sometimes seems to overshadow the fact that the participants are able to communicate about most issues in English. Rather, these investing individuals take responsibility for their own education (Sandberg et al., 2016) and act to improve their skills in English. To achieve this goal, the participants accept and adapt to the circumstances in the study circle.

The introductory text for the language circles provided by one of the Swedish study associations, cited in the beginning of this article, encourages the reader to choose a language course to 'gain more' from both business and leisure time. The potential study circle participant's current knowledge of languages can be assessed via the Common

European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2016). The view on knowledge reflected through this starting point is quite different from the one usually associated with study circles; that is, democratic knowledge production within the study group that draws on participants' previous knowledge and shared influence (Laginder et al., 2013; Larsson, 2001).

Instead, in the case of the English study circle, potential participants are assumed to be able to acquire knowledge after they first acknowledge their deficiencies and then choose to take measures against them, as part of a group yet still as individuals. The participants consider their participation voluntary; they have chosen this circle and its subject. However, after starting to attend the study circle, they no longer choose anything, nor do they make any particular attempts to influence their studies. The role of the participant is that of a customer who either finds the service good enough to accept or chooses not to consume it at all. To try and change the practices is out of the question, since the provided circle setup feels convenient and familiar, as stated by some of the participants. The importance of coming together as a group highlighted by study circle participants in previous research (Andersson & Laginder, 2013; Laginder & Stenøien, 2011; Nordzell, 2011) is absent in the English study circle. In contrast, the circle is regarded as necessary for tackling the lack of knowledge in English rather than as a motive for participating. In this sense, the study circle can be considered an example of popular education in an era of 'personal enlightenment' (Korsgaard, 2008; Niemelä, 2011), where participation in study circles provides an opportunity for personal meaning making (Sundgren, 2012), here expressed as taking personal responsibility as an obedient student.

The choice of ethnography for the empirical study allowed us to understand and scrutinise the study circle practices from the inside. This stance made it possible to make sense of individualistic traits according to the terms of the study circle practice. During the fieldwork, attempts were made to interact with the other participants. The results of these attempts were meagre. For example, it was not possible to conduct a focus group interview even after a couple of months in the field and frequent attempts to connect with the other participants. Paradoxically, we view this as an important result: It reveals something essential about the conditions for being and acting as a citizen in and through the study circle. The fact that the participants barely actualise other social contexts when attending the study circle further strengthens this argument. This also justifies our limitation of the study context primarily to the study circle, since it resonates with the participants' understanding of their activities (cf. Hammersley, 2006).

Expressions of citizenship as personal responsibility in and through the study circle raise questions about what this responsibility implies. What kind of actions are (im)possible for the participants in the study circle? What kind of freedom – a core ideal in popular education – do they have to act in this particular practice? Here, they choose to act and be in ways that are considered 'safe', without any ambition to influence the status quo. Voluntary participation and personal responsibility in the English study circle do not render a position where citizenship can be expressed as autonomously influencing the situation. Individual freedom could potentially also be gained through collective engagement, where the individual attains more personal freedom when allying with a collective of likeminded others. This is an idea Nordic popular education has traditionally drawn from. Setting aside the personal and individual in favour of collective perspectives could, perhaps paradoxically, open up possibilities for influence of each responsible individual in the English study circle in a more profound way.

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# The narrative of 'equality of chances' as an approach to interpreting PIAAC results on perceived political efficacy, social trust and volunteering and the quest for political literacy

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## Abstract

*The article focuses on the theoretically and empirically addressed question of whether workforce literacy strategies in research and policies may tend to exclude relevant fields of literacy, which have emancipatory chances for participants, but which regularly fail to include low qualified or literate adults (Hufer, 2013), namely the area of basic civic education or political literacy. First, a theoretical discussion makes use of recent publications. The relevance of basic civic education will be discussed using contemporary theories, which point at a crisis of democracy and explain this by the spread of income and capital (Piketty, 2014) and its legitimation (Rosanvallon, 2013). Further detail is provided by using Rosanvallon's criticism of the term 'equality of chances'. The everyday unfairness, covered by the narrative of equal chances, leads to peoples' disengagement from reciprocal relations and disintegration of solidarity within a society. This theoretical approach will then be supplemented by empirical data. The empirical research question is: Do adults with low literacy skills agree less often on feelings of political efficacy and social trust than adults with high literacy skills? Do they engage less often in volunteering than adults with high literacy skills? This is based on the PIAAC 2012 dataset which relates literacy on the one hand with variables of political efficacy, social trust and volunteering on the other hand. Results will be compared with volunteer and youth surveys. Furthermore, the connection of a "Nouvelle Droite" (contemporary right-wing populism) and peoples' low feelings of political efficacy will be reflected in order to refute the stereotype that marginalized groups automatically become voters of right-wing populists.*

**Keywords:** basic citizenship education; citizenship education; literacy; political literacy; PIAAC

## Introduction

National strategies for literacy<sup>1</sup> have often been launched as an answer to large-scale assessments, like the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) or the German Level-One Survey (LEO). The strategies focus on employment and employability, workplace and family literacy.

Literacy is a value on its own, without needing legitimization via employability. Indeed, the Austrian scientist Ribolits points out that literacy is relevant for humanistic reasons and also potentially enables people to act in a non-alienated, emancipated way (Ribolits, 2009). The economic argument, however, is not the only one driving national strategies for literacy. As the French economist Thomas Piketty (2014) and the French philosopher Pierre Rosanvallon (2013) discuss (see below), societies are losing their cohesion. Financial and social inequalities and the narrative of equal chances may lead to the instability of democracies. By not addressing countries as economies but as democracies, the attention shifts remarkably.

Therefore this article discusses what empirical data tell us about political and social participation among low and highly skilled adults. Thus it fuels the discussion whether national strategies for literacy should have a broader approach, including both employability and citizenship as their aim, instead of prioritizing employment.

As the current databases do not offer variables on literacy and *political participation*, this analysis will draw on variables about literacy and *political efficacy*<sup>2</sup> from the current PIAAC survey (Rammstedt, 2013). Feelings of *political efficacy* are not the same as real *political participation*, but they correlate (see below). Further indicators will be *social trust* and *volunteering*.

Descriptions of adults with low skills, detailed in four chapters (work and family, reading skills, literacy practices and participation in adult education) have recently been published by the OECD (Grotlüschen, Mallows, Reder & Sabatini, 2016). This article complements these recently published chapters by focusing on the three variables *political efficacy*, *social trust* and *volunteering* and by comparing low-literate adults with high-literate adults across the countries participating in PIAAC. The statistical method followed the above mentioned publications' scheme. The literacy scale has been divided into *low* literacy competence, defined here as 'below 225 points on the PIAAC scale', which equals PIAAC level one and below - and *high* literacy competence, defined as 'above 375 points on the PIAAC scale', which equals PIAAC level four and above. The first round data have been used (all countries' datasets, data collection from 2012) with the statistical software 'Stata' and the 'PIAAC repeat module' co-developed by Francois Keslair from OECD. This module allows for fully taking into consideration all ten plausible values for the literacy variable as well as the sample weights.

Crosstabulations have been calculated between literacy levels and the three variables *political efficacy*, *social trust* and *volunteering*. Low literate and high literate subgroups then are compared and compiled into a graph showing results on international level. The significance is expressed by standard errors. While the graphs show all results, the interpretation of results in this article only refers to statistically significant differences. Because of the large sample even small differences of a few percent points are significant in PIAAC. Controlling for sociodemographics and performance variables like education and employment would definitely reduce the correlation and show how strong the influence of literacy is onto *political efficacy*, *social trust* or *volunteering*—if the influences of education and others are kept aside (which would be a causal relation that would require strong theoretical background—and which obviously is too linear to meet the reality).

But this is not the research question here—the question is to describe the *low-literate population* in contrast to *high-literate adults* with literacy being a result of formal education as well as literacy practices and many other factors.

The reason to crosstabulate *literacy* instead of *formal education* (as it is reported in regular surveys on volunteering and youth, see below) is that the current political attention focuses low-literate adults and not low formally educated adults. Thus it makes sense to use the literacy variable even if it has a high correlation with education.

It was decided to fully report all countries' results in the graphs but focus on three special countries in the interpretation. The reason is twofold. On the one hand, an interpretation needs sound knowledge about the political system and its recent development which would take much longer discussion and explanation than is provided here. On the other hand, the three countries in focus experienced shifts to the right wing in their political landscape shortly after the PIAAC data collection and the shifts were discussed in mass media with high concern. Meanwhile, many other countries face the same problem (or always had before). But this was not yet clear when this article was computed and the shifts now take with more and more distance to the year of data collection (2012). Thus, three countries are selected here: *Germany* newly saw right wing populism in the streets as well as a new political party at the same time when the borders were open for refugees in September 2015. France had strong Front National results in regional elections in December 2015. Poland voted for a nationalist government in October 2015. All this took place in or close before this article was compiled. Thus, the interpretation of results keeps a special look onto these three countries.

### Workforce literacy programs versus basic civic education: the German case

Via the Level-One Survey, published in 2011, it became clear that more than seven million German adults (14,5% of the adult population aged 18-64) read and write on a level that equates the international UNESCO definition of functional illiteracy (Grotlüschen & Riekmann, 2012). Follow-up programs funded by the federal ministry of education, the federal laender and the European commission prioritize literacy programs addressing the workforce and their needs in the workplace.

The international PIAAC survey confirmed the results: According to PIAAC, 17,5% of German adults aged 16- 64 belong to reading literacy competence level I and below, the international average being 15,5% (OECD, 2013; Rammstedt, 2013). The description of this level does not equal the LEO descriptions, so this subpopulation should not be called *functionally illiterate*— for this article we will consider this subpopulation as *adults with low literacy skills*. Still, there are substantial concerns about this group, and these concerns drive the development of national strategies and educational programs to improve adult literacy.

This article focuses on the relevance of basic civic education for adults with low literacy skills, whether they are excluded from political participation and how the theoretical explanations for differences in political and social participation of population subgroups have developed. Therefore the research question is:

- Do adults with low literacy skills agree less often on feelings of *political efficacy* and *social trust* than adults with high literacy skills?
- Do they engage less often in *volunteering* than adults with high literacy skills?

If so, it may be discussed whether low-literate adults' higher agreements to feelings of political efficacy and engagement were desirable (actually political efficacy can be performed by joining extremist groups as well which is not desirable from the standpoint of democratic states). It is also relevant to take into consideration whether national literacy strategies then also should focus on the theoretical and practical improvement of basic civic education.<sup>3</sup>

To answer these questions, the following sections will analyse recent theoretical approaches which give the three variables a broader sense and meaning. The approaches do not follow the rational-choice approach, partly underlying the PIAAC theoretical framework (OECD, 2011), but substantially exceed the idea of a 'homo economicus'. We prefer a recent French philosophers' discussion of a 'homo reciprocans' (see below, Rosanvallon, 2013).

### **Economic inequalities (Piketty) and their ideological legitimization via the narrative of equal chances (Rosanvallon)**

Current assumptions about the situation of economies and societies—especially in the U.S.A. and France—are strongly influenced the most recent publications in political sciences and economics. Highly relevant discussions have followed the publication of *Capital in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* by French economist Thomas Piketty (Kaufmann, & Stützl, 2015; Piketty, 2014). Piketty analysed tax data over two centuries and concluded: Firstly, capital grows faster than income—his famous formula ' $r > g$ ' (revenue exceeds growth) receives some criticism, especially because of the database. Although interesting, this first conclusion is not so relevant for this article, so I do not discuss it further.

Secondly, Piketty concludes that the economic gaps in France and the US have increased since the 1980s, after having decreased for roughly 200 years because of revolutions, democratic developments, war and socio-political change. Piketty's second conclusion can be confirmed at least for Germany from regular reports on poverty and wealth [*Armuts- und Reichtumsberichte*]<sup>4</sup>.

Piketty suggests global tax policies as well as higher taxation of the richest sections of societies (Kaufmann, & Stützl, 2015). His core focus is the 'equality of distribution', pointing at financial and economical inequalities.

While Piketty has been much discussed in the US since 2014, he was known much earlier in France for his analyses. The trade-unionist and scientist at the Collège de France, Pierre Rosanvallon, uses Piketty's results as a starting point for his theoretical approach in *Society of Equals* (Rosanvallon, 2013).

Rosanvallon uses the economical '(in)equality of distribution' and asks about the legitimization of this kind of (in)equality in modern societies. He asks about the assumptions about communities and relations which allow inequality to be understood as fair. A core narrative in modern societies seems to be the idea of 'equality of chances'. This narrative assumes that economic distribution is fair, as long as all members of a society have the same chance to climb the socioeconomic ladder by relying on their own performance and thus qualify for the income they receive.

According to Rosanvallon, the model has three consequences (2013):

Firstly, the idea of equality of chances delegitimizes instruments that rearrange economic possessions such as taxes, social insurances and social benefits. Thus, unsuccessful individuals are interpreted as responsible for their lack of success and income (blaming the



victim), while at the same time non-meritocratic, structural effects and exclusions from labour markets or respected societal positions become invisible. (pp. 303- 304)

Secondly, the idea of equality of chances has no upper limit for an annual income that can legitimately be received because of high performance. This may even lead to accepting spectacular forms of income, as long as it is taken for granted that the income relates to individual performance (ibid). Even CEO incomes that sometimes exceed more than two hundred times the income of an average employee (cf. Mishel & Davis, 2015) seem to be legitimate in this narrative.

The third aspect is the lower limit of what people need to be able to live in a society. Charity and humanity become the legitimization of defining the minimum social benefit, but not solidarity among members of a states' population (ibid, p. 304). This also means that social benefits can always be lowered or cut – and those who receive them feel ashamed about their status. Andrea Liesner, a Hamburg-based educational researcher, quotes Stéphane Hessel (Indignez-vous!) and states that average indignation in Germany is not focused on the *cutting* of social benefits, but the fact that some social benefits still remain, stating benefits would lead to passivity and lack of discipline amongst those who receive them (Liesner, 2012, p. 59).

Equality of chances is an idea and a narrative, but the real distributions follow many other aspects, like family background and social heritage.<sup>5</sup> The consequences of this non-fulfilment of the narrative lead to *dismissed reciprocity* (2013, p. 325), which I will understand here as *disengagement from solidarity*. Reciprocity is part of a larger theory of equality in Rosanvallon's approach. The three parts of a theory of equality consist of singularity, reciprocity and communality which he suggests for a better legitimization of the distribution of income. But as this paper does not use the complete sociological theory of Rosanvallon, the other aspects are not discussed here.

The reason for this disengagement is – according to Rosanvallon – the assumption that balanced participation on the one hand and the common refusal of free-riding are no longer the moral bases of the majority in contemporary societies. In exaggerated terms, upper, middle and lower classes would each have their own reasons to disengage by thinking the others do not show solidarity anymore:

- Celebrities and the super rich face the temptation to quit their country and pay tax in other (cheaper) areas of the world, if they do not feel they belong to their country anymore.
- Recipients of benefits experience disrespect and disdain (Verhöhnung, Butterwegge, 2015) of their status, instead of receiving solidarity from others towards their social group and ask themselves whether they would do better to adapt to the stereotypes that are told about them and in fact avoid controls and become deviant.
- Middle classes wonder whether they are the only ones sticking to the rules between those who might be avoiding taxation and those they assume to receive more benefits than they should. In case middle classes then fight back, their aims are to attack political and economic elites and as well as refugees or migrants.

The political consequences of low solidarity and reciprocity may well fuel the rise of populism as Rosanvallon states:

In sociological terms, the crisis of reciprocity is reflected in the malaise of the middle and working classes. Members of these groups who are employed see themselves as doubly penalized: their situations are not bad enough to receive the benefits of the welfare state,

yet they are not wealthy enough to enjoy the fiscal and other advantages available to the rich. Politically, their resentment has fueled the rise of the extreme right in Europe. Extreme right-wing parties have capitalized on frustrations due to the diffuse feeling that reciprocity has broken down, directing their fire at both the privileged elite and immigrants said to be taking advantage of the taxpayers' generosity (Rosanvallon, 2013, p. 275).

This line-up of three social classes struggling with each other for solidarity and distribution of chances and economic goods (as provided by Rosanvallon) is not yet complete. According to Jacques Rancière's „Disagreement“ (Rancière, 2002), there are always groups that do not even have the opportunity to negotiate, as they are not recognized as members of society. Rancière points at the fact that politics does not happen among those who sit at the table, but only when poor (2002, p. 26), illegitimate groups start claiming their rights. He states that it is especially the poor who benefit from politics (whether precarious workers, benefit recipients, teenage parents, workers in monotonous jobs or retired people who cannot live from their pension alone).

Rancière concludes that this is why poverty has been denied by dominant, prevailing groups for centuries (2002, p. 27). Politics start to happen when the part that has no part (*Anteil der Anteillosen*) finds their names and language, claims their part<sup>6</sup> and step by step gets recognized as a legitimate part of society and solidarity.

Silke Schreiber-Barsch used this approach with regard to participation in adult education (Schreiber-Barsch, 2009), while Nora Sternfeld used it for overall educational and transformative procedures (Sternfeld, 2009). Earlier works by Rancière focus on citizenship (1992, 2007) have been used by Vandenaabeele, Reyskens & Wildemeersch to challenge mainstream concepts of active citizenship and lifelong learning (2011, p. 193).

A subgroup of adults that in recent times left their invisible position in industrialized societies is the so-called group of functionally illiterates<sup>7</sup> or – in less stigmatising terms – adults with low literacy skills.

### **Sociopolitical disengagement: PIAAC variables**

Adults on PIAAC competence level I and below (adults with low literacy skills or low-literate adults) are the focus of national literacy strategies. To describe them and their sociopolitical engagement or disengagement, it is better to use literacy variables than formal education or socio-economic status for two reasons: First, formal education does not necessarily guarantee sufficient literacy competences throughout the adult lifespan. Second, adults without formal education can easily have a good literacy proficiency, especially in reading.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, we use literacy (as defined in the narrow way according to international large-scale assessments like PIAAC) in order to look closer at the subpopulation which is addressed by the „Literacy Decade“ (2015-2025) in Germany.

We assume that the tendency to disengage from a solidaritarian society may be higher for low-literate adults than for high-literate adults. This is specified as:

- (1) low feelings of “political efficacy”
- (2) low expression of “social trust” and therefore
- (3) less voluntary work than high-literate groups.

All three aspects (political and social engagement or disengagement and consequently high or low readiness for volunteering) operationalize the theories discussed above. But

we do not focus on lower, middle or upper classes: This article focuses on literacy, not class (even if both correlate).

The variables used in PIAAC need some specification. PIAAC is an economic survey based on human-capital and rational-choice theories. The latter seem to be the theoretical base to the variables political efficacy and social trust, even if the theoretical framework only mentions very few aspects of the theoretical discussion underlying the variables.<sup>9</sup> Literacy and Education is said to predict economic outcomes as well as wider benefits on all sections of life:

There is good empirical evidence that education not only affects labour market outcomes but is also a strong predictor of outcomes in other life domains. The [background questionnaire, AG] includes indicators of family formation (...), health (...), voluntary work (...), political efficacy (...) and social trust (OECD, 2011, p. 46).

The assumptions about political efficacy and social trust rely on the idea of rational choices (*homo oeconomicus*), which mean humans vote or act socially as long as they think this makes sense because either it has an effect (political efficacy) or social acts will be reciprocated by others (social trust). Rational choice theories have often been criticized, mostly because they cannot explain altruism, friendship, morals, co-operation or solidarity in larger, functionally differentiated societies. Contemporary criticism comes from Pierre Rosanvallon, who prefers the idea of a *homo reciprocans* (2013, p. 319-320), who belongs to others and does not only individually or cognitively make rational decisions. In line with Rosanvallon, I prefer to interpret the PIAAC variables and results from the theoretical standpoint of reciprocal relations which make a society relevant for its members.

Rosanvallon also clarifies his position by stating that a lack of social cohesion allows the Nouvelle Droite (contemporary right-wing populism) to expand and use the feelings of disengagement for introducing their egoistic ideology.

The variables therefore have a connection with each other and can be read as indicators giving information about the democratic stability of societies and the dangers of right wing populists making use of social instability.

I will now check the variables with the PIAAC dataset and compare international and intra-national results. Data have been computed because of a Thematic Report "Adults with Low Skills", which was initiated by the OECD and has recently been published as OECD Education Working Paper 131 (deleted for anonymity). All countries have been included and all computations have been carried out with weighted datasets and plausible values, using the PIAAC repeat module for the Stata software (designed by Francois Keslair, OECD). The English version of the questions reads as follows:

- Volunteering: "In the last 12 months, how often, if at all, did you do voluntary work, including unpaid work for a charity, political party, trade union or other non-profit organization?"<sup>10</sup>
- Political Efficacy: "People like me don't have any say about what the government does."<sup>11</sup>
- Social Trust: "There are only a few people you can trust completely."<sup>12</sup>

The analysis has been carried out by country and by literacy level. The results of the OECD partners Cyprus and Russia are shown in the graphs but will not be interpreted. Interpretation focuses on the OECD countries.

## Findings by country and literacy level

The analysis tries to describe the subpopulations of low-literate adults compared to high-literate adults and specified by country. This does *not* mean literacy is the cause for political efficacy, social trust or volunteering. The question is how people with low literacy skills act and feel in their societies and how this differs from high-literate adults. Further discussion may take place and clarify whether the gaps should be seen as a reason for offering possibilities for political and social participation for them, including adult education.

## Findings and discussion: adults performing at literacy level I and below assume they have little political efficacy

*Political Efficacy* has to be understood as one's own feeling of having the capacity to understand politics enough to participate, and as the feeling of responsiveness of governments. The question has been operationalized negatively, asking about a lack of influence on governments. Critics state this might be a narrow definition of politics, as it is reduced to governments, political institutions and elections, while many other expressions of political activities – like demonstrations, petitions, ecological awareness, struggles against class, gender and race inequalities are left out of this definition.

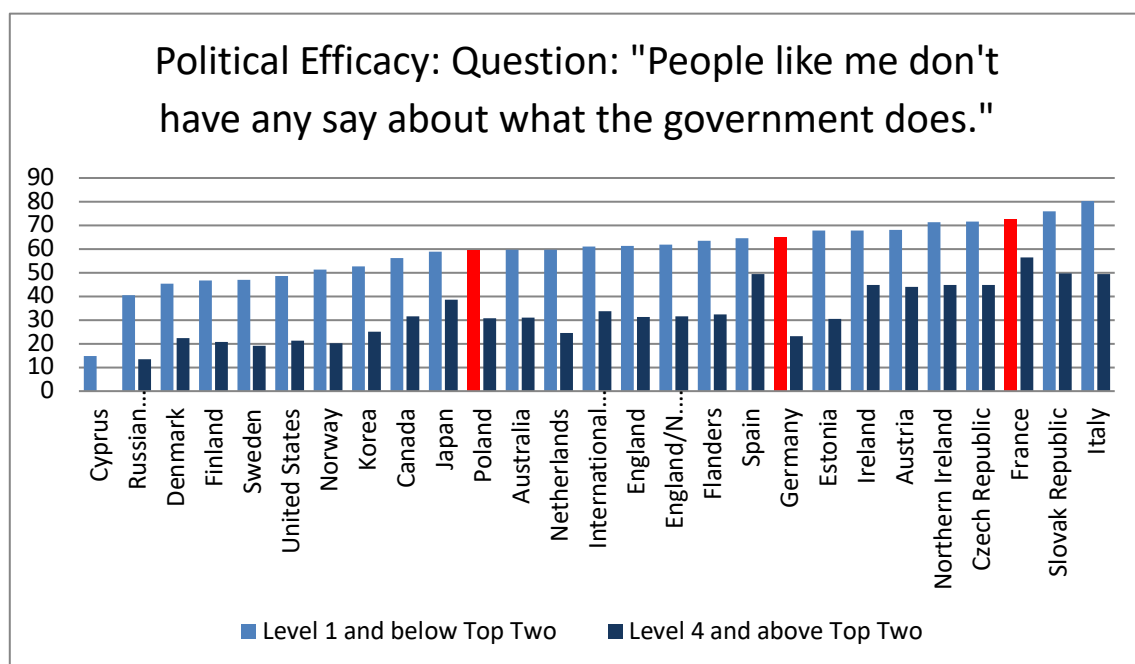


Figure 1: Political Efficacy (Top Two Negative Answers) by Literacy Levels and Country (Quelle: PIAAC, 2012 data).

Roughly two thirds of the German population at or below literacy Level I (65%) assume not to be able to influence their government. The gap between low and high-literate adults (23%) is rather large (more than 40 percentage points) and larger than the gaps of all other countries.

A closer look at Poland and France, two large but historically very different neighboring countries, shows interesting differences. While Germany has a large gap in 2012 (when the data was gathered), the northeastern neighbor Poland finds better feelings of political efficacy in the low subpopulation (59%) and worse for high-literate adults (31%). Poland changed their economic system to capitalism and their government to a democracy in an ongoing process in the 1980s. Four years later a nationalist government took over, but the data represent the situation in 2012.

Geographically on the southwestern side, France faces nearly three quarters of low-literates agreeing to the statement of feeling politically ineffective (73%). More striking, however, is the group of roughly 56% of the high-literate adults feeling disengaged from their government, this figure being the highest of all participating countries in 2012. Neither French conservative nor French socialist governmental actions seem to convince the contemporary French population of their political efficacy: Politics obviously disconnects with voters.

The international results are robust and confirm the Mathew Effect, which is known for *formal education*, holding true for *literacy competence* as well. All countries' low-literate populations report lower political efficacies than the high-literate adults. These data do not mean low-literate adults are to be blamed for. The explanation by German political scientist Christoph Butterwegge seems more convincing: precarious groups and lower classes vote less often than others. So politicians, who depend on voters, organize their activities towards middle classes (Butterwegge, 2015). Therefore, the most precarious groups actually do not receive any response from their politicians, and thus the statement of being politically ineffective is simply true. This does not mean low-literate adults were politically uninterested; they still may protest or enjoy satirical shows. And they also may feel understood by nationalist and populist agitators – which is an expression of political thoughts and wills as well, even if it has nothing in common with democracy, solidarity or social cohesion.

### **Findings and discussion: adults performing at literacy level I and below express low social trust**

Social trust is – for this analysis – an indicator representing the social cohesion of societies, as Rosanvallón claims. The question of whether to trust not only one's government but also other members of society is – as explained above – most important for legitimizing monetary distributions within these societies. In case middle classes suspect upper classes of avoiding taxation and lower classes of illegally receiving more benefits than they have a legal right to, the middle classes feel exploited by others who do not stick to the rules. This would increase the tendency of social disengagement and a loss of solidarity.

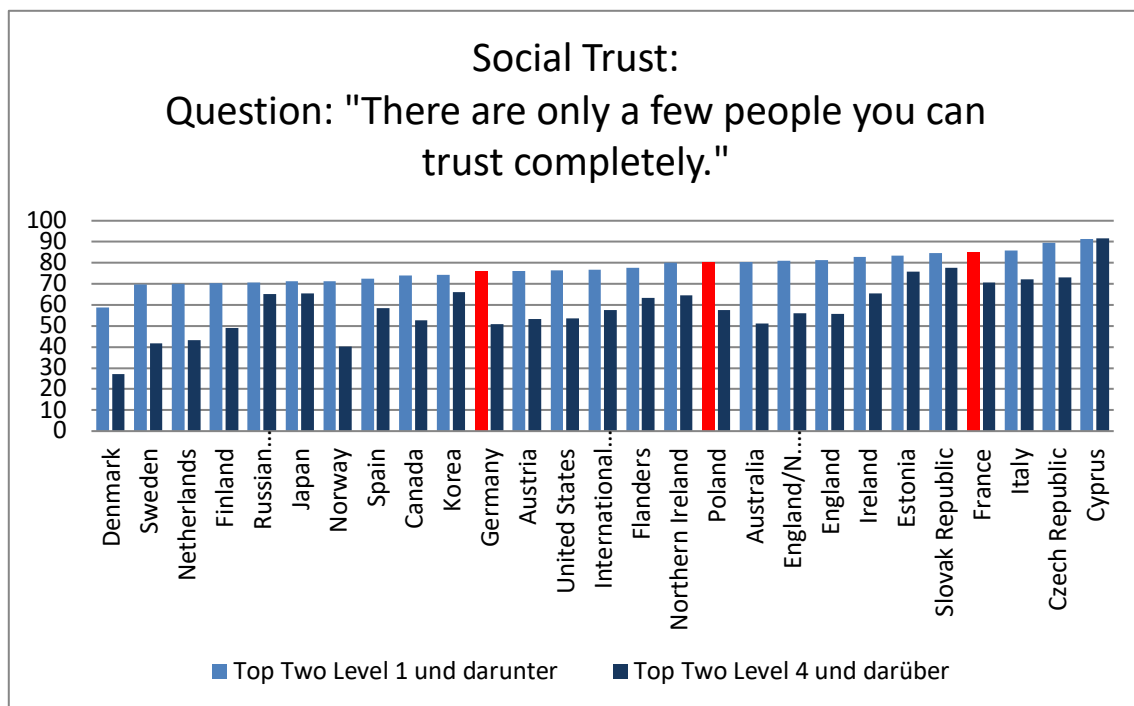


Figure 2: Social Trust (Top Two Negative Answers) by Literacy Level and Country (Source: PIAAC 2012 data).

Compared to other countries, Germany can build upon a rather good structure of social trust. Real solidarity seems to be most widespread in the Nordic countries, with the lowest values for mistrust for both high and low-literate adults.

The international comparison shows again that Germany has quite a large gap between high and low-literate subpopulations and their feelings of social trust (25 percentage points). However, in contrast to the other Nordic countries, Norway has the largest gap, with 30 percentage points. This surprising position in the *international* comparison could perhaps be explained by the recent extreme right terrorist act (Utoya, 2011), but this does not explain the large gap *within* Norwegian society.

Some 80 percent of low-literate Polish adults express social mistrust. This is higher than in Germany (76%) but lower than in France (85%).<sup>13</sup> Rosanvallon, who explained his theories on a lack of social cohesion based on French and American history, can thus be confirmed for the case of France. The U.S.A. in the year 2012 does not show similarly severe difficulties regarding social trust (76% low-literate adults vs. 53% high-literate adults), but still a considerable number of low-literate adults seem to disconnect with their society. This may have become much worse in the past four years since the data were collected.

Intra-national gaps are in all cases much larger than the international differences.

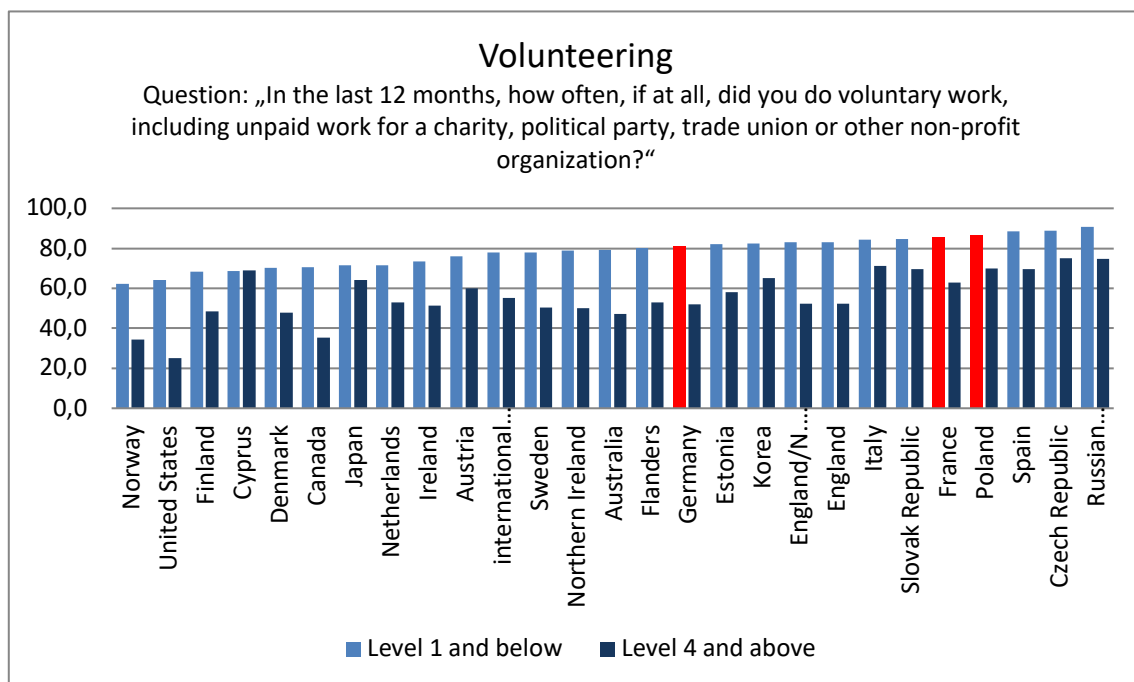
### Findings and discussion: adults performing at literacy level I and below participate less in volunteering

Low feelings of social trust and political efficacy will be mirrored in lesser engagement for the society and community. It can be assumed that low-literate adults participate less often in non-governmental, non-profit organizations.

It is important to keep in mind that inclusion and exclusion play a role here. Lower formal education or a migration background correlate with low integration in social organizations in Germany (Albert, Hurrelmann, & Quenzel, 2015). Literacy is not necessarily the most relevant factor. We also cannot conclude that low-literate adults are responsible for less volunteering, as they are sometimes smoothly excluded from non-profit organizations by dominant, well-educated groups.

Furthermore, the welfare regime of the economies and societies respectively is a relevant factor. The question as to whether social security is guaranteed by social law and transfer, or whether it has to be provided by the citizens themselves, does have an impact on the readiness to participate in voluntary work and engage for others in need.

In fact, the two extremes, the traditionally neo-liberal, Anglo-American states, with their charity approach on the one hand, and the sociodemocratic Nordic countries, with guaranteed social welfare on the other can be found side by side in the higher ranks of the table. Roughly two thirds of low-literate adults state that they never volunteer (Norway: 62%, USA: 64%), or looked at the other way around, roughly one third do participate in voluntary work. At the other end of the scale, we find France (86%) and Poland (87%), indicating that only some 13 or 14% of their low-literate populations get in touch with voluntary activities.



*Figure 3: Volunteering (Answer: Never) by Literacy Level and Country (Source: PIAAC 2012 data). Differences between Germany and Poland/France are significant. Differences between Poland and France are not significant.*

Of Germany's low-literate adults, some 81% state that they never volunteered, compared to high-literate adults, where about half of the group (52%) never entered non-profit organizations. The mechanisms of self-exclusion and external exclusion are not only relevant with regard to employment but also in non-profit organizations, as well as in global and local community activities. The findings are robust across countries.

Adults performing at level IV and above are most often found volunteering in the US, Norway, Canada, Australia, Denmark and Finland. We assume that Anglo-American

societies with a more neoliberal tradition, who give responsibility for social aid to charity and volunteering structures, mix in the ranking with more egalitarian sociodemocratic welfare regimes, which offer public services (and therefore need less volunteering) but also face less social exclusion in their non-profit organizations. The findings for the level I and below subpopulations and the level IV and above subpopulations are quite similar to each other.

### Further discussion with regard to contemporary right-wing populism

Calls for more civic education always become louder when populist, xenophobic and similar groups and parties are founded or elected. Civic education – especially for adults - cannot solve these problems alone, but it is still a relevant factor for prevention and for throwing light onto simplifying populist mechanisms and worldviews. Faced with the increasingly louder voice of nationalism in the political arena, this would seem to be quite necessary these days.

However, by way of an explanation for nationalism and right-wing world views, often a special pattern is reproduced, claiming that economic losers, high unemployment, lack of perspectives for youth, low education and feelings of exclusion would lead to xenophobia (Heitmeyer, 2002). These explanations are tempting, but they ignore the fact that populists who act willingly to spread their right-wing ideology and try to recruit members for their movement or parties from such socioeconomic losers are needed. Thus, Heitmeyer's unpolitical interpretation of neofascist activities in Germany has been fundamentally criticized (Dierbach, 2010).

Sociological indicators, like an increasing divide between incomes, as well as the delegitimization of social transfers, which are shown above, can only be interpreted as the soil where neofascist or populist, xenophobic or nationalist seeds can grow. But it always needs people who willingly want to spread their right-wing ideology. Indeed, socially losing groups may equally feel attracted to left-wing approaches like Syriza or Podemos, who may listen to their needs and bring them to the political arena. That is the reason why political or civic education can be successful.

Furthermore, the Leipzig Surveys on the *economic middle classes* and the *political centre* (so-called „Mitte-Studien“, Decker et al., 2016) point at the fact that right-wing populism becomes dangerous *when* and *because* it is accepted by the middle and center of societies.

But nevertheless, the decrease of social cohesion always shows up a paradox regarding the lower classes and their participation in elections. Butterwegge (2015) argues: People who belong to lower classes or receive social benefit are underrepresented in elections, that is, many of them do not vote. Politicians then learn that lower classes seldom vote, so acting towards their needs would not result in winning elections – as a consequence, politicians care more for the middle classes and their claims and disregard the lower classes. If this assumption is true, lower classes, receivers of benefits as well as the low-literate among them were quite right in assuming they do not have any say in what the government does.

### Conclusions: relevance of political literacy and basic civic education?

Conclusions here rely on two aspects of the article. The *theoretical* discussion informs about the mechanisms of material spread of income (Piketty) and its legitimization



(Rosanvallon) in current societies – and their impact on different classes within the social distribution. The *empirical* results about adults and their feeling of *political efficacy* and *social trust* as well as their participation opportunities in *voluntary activities* show large gaps between low-literate and high literate adults in all countries.

The question as to whether all social classes can influence their societies' politics and whether governments and societies can rely on a certain degree of social cohesion and solidarity, seems highly relevant in times of refugees and migrants coming to Europe or at least trying to do so. Disengagement and decreasing solidarity, as Rosanvallon states, develop because of the feeling of having too little influence on the government. The narrative of equal chances delegitimizes taxation and social benefit and leads to conflicts regarding the spread of income and capital. Each social class can have the feeling that the other social classes take too much out of the commons and give back too little:

- At the top end of the social hierarchy, spectacular cases of tax avoidance, extreme CEO incomes and corruption are reported.
- Those who receive social benefit are shamed (by governments!) as unemployed *lazybones*<sup>14</sup> or migrants only *simulating their will to integrate*<sup>15</sup> into German society.
- Parts of the middle classes try to keep together what they understand as theirs, protecting it against others by voting for populist parties and fighting against elites and migrants.

The core question is whether these activities are carried out by a few people (and just made visible via mass media) within a solidarity society, or whether these few are already the majority. The parts of a society who agree to fund social benefits through their taxes are rather relevant for welfare regimes. The findings about political efficacy, social trust and volunteering thus can be read as indicators, pointing at the quality of social cohesion and solidarity in western societies.

For the question of literacy and its correlation with political efficacy, social trust and volunteering, the findings confirm the thesis that all three indicators show lower results for subpopulations with low literacy skills. This is confirmed by qualitative research recently carried out in Germany with low-literate adults (cf. Pape, 2011). This situation is dissatisfying for democratic societies with a tax-paid social welfare system. But it is also dissatisfying because the results can be interpreted as rather fewer possibilities for political participation for low-literate adults. Feelings of political efficacy correlate with taking political action (both in conventional ways, like voting, as well as in unorthodox ways, like the blockading of crossroads or public areas), as the political scientist Angelika Vetter shows (1998, p. 34 et seqq.). Relatively small parameter values for political efficacy – which can be shown for low-literate adults in all participating OECD countries – indicate restricted possibilities for political participation.

This brings us back to the question asked at the beginning of this paper: if less participation in employment and work life, a higher risk of exclusion from the labor market, and low incomes in menial jobs are a reason to start programs on workforce literacy, shouldn't the findings of this analysis lead to a discussion on political literacy? Shouldn't the terms (political literacy, civic education, basic civic education) be discussed and didactical approaches be offered?

Apart from this sociological reason for political literacy provision, several scholars claim for an emancipatory approach anyway (cf. Ribolits, 2009, p. 175 et seqq.) – without needing any statistical base for this, the starting point is normative, not empirically driven. The idea is that basic education cannot only help people *adapt* to social realities, but also

has to make an effort to teach people to understand and *change* the situation. Mere adaptation would lead to defensive learning, as German learning theorist Klaus Holzkamp states (1993), which appears in combination with unreflected *learning reluctancies* (Lernwiderstände, Faulstich, & Bayer, 2006). On the other hand, expansive learning (Holzkamp, 1993) aims at an expansion of one's own sovereignty, both in material as well as in immaterial terms (deleted for anonymity).

This would lead to adults who learn to clarify their interests, claim them and expand the areas where they can decide according to their values, interests and needs. This may be decisions about work and leisure time, for and against starting a family, long-term job security, knowledge of trade unions, tariffs and rights as workers, better income and affordable housing – all these aspects being more or less material improvements of one's life. But expansive learning may also lead to better participation and embeddedness in political structures, in non-profit organizations, in better quality of friendships and personal relations as well as better understanding of contemporary aspects of life by reading weblogs or newspapers – just to name some examples for immaterial outcomes of expansive learning, especially with regard to political literacy.

Thus it is from both perspectives (sociological and emancipatory) quite relevant to offer political literacy and workforce literacy side by side, instead of giving one of them full attention and neglecting the other. But it will be necessary to develop didactical settings for civic education that really attract low-literate adults by allowing them to clarify their interests and needs and to articulate them – and this may include the deconstruction of the narrative of equal chances – and find legitimizations for solidarity which understand and scrutinize the dominant neo-liberal ideology.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> In this case we understand literacy as literacy competence in terms of the Programme of the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), because we want to use PIAAC data for the analysis. Our reflection of the controversy on literacy relies especially on the New Literacy Studies (Grotlüschen, Heinemann & Nienkemper, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> See below for the theoretical concept of political efficacy and for the PIAAC theoretical framework.

<sup>3</sup> A rather well known construct can be seen in the international approach of basic, critical political education which relies on Oskar Negt's notion of societal competences Zeuner (2013). This approach led to an international project under the leadership of Christine Zeuner (Dvorak, Zeuner, & Franke, 2005). So far, the relationship between Basic Education (Grund-Bildung) and Basic Competence (Grund-Kompetenz) seems rather unclear.

<sup>4</sup> Retrieved from: [www.armuts-und-reichtumsbericht.de](http://www.armuts-und-reichtumsbericht.de)

<sup>5</sup> Early studies show that the core selection mechanism in the German educational system, the transition to different school types after grade 4, is much more influenced by parents' socioeconomic status than by the performance of the student (Lehmann, Peek, & Gänsfuß, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> When middle classes start claiming that refugee homes should not be built in their neighbourhood, the lack of a *voice* that would be *heard* by powerful groups becomes clear. Refugees' possibilities to make a claim are not verbal – they consist of self-vulnerating actions like starting fires in their own camps, going on hunger strikes, risking dangerous flight routes and vulnerating practices like stitching up ones' own lips.

<sup>7</sup> Labeling groups of people always contains the dialectics of homogenizing and essentializing the group according to a single characteristic and thus reducing them to the label. On the other hand, the claim for compensation cannot be made without precise distinctions between those who have a right to receive compensation and those who do not. This dilemma cannot be overcome by more euphemistic (politically correct) words. It must be taken into consideration each time a group is characterized. A common approach is to distinguish between the *person* and the *issue* (low-literate adults) instead of making the issue a label (low-literates).

<sup>8</sup> Roughly 80% of those considered to perform on a level called functional illiteracy hold a school qualification. The definition of functional illiteracy corresponds with UNESCO-Definitions: "A person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective

functioning of his group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his own and the community's development" (sources and discussion: deleted for anonymity).

<sup>9</sup> The framework then points at the work by Tom Schuller and Richard Desjardin's who, under the idea of rational choice approaches, stand for the approach of *Wider Benefits of Learning*.

<sup>10</sup> I\_Q 05f About yourself - Cultural engagement - Voluntary work for non-profit organizations. Answers: Never, Less than once a month, Less than once a week but at least once a month, At least once a week but not every day, Every day.

<sup>11</sup> IQ06a About yourself – Political efficacy – No influence on the government, Answers: Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree.

<sup>12</sup> IQ 07a About yourself – Social trust – Trust only few people, Answers: Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree. The Variable "IQ 07b About yourself – Social trust – Other people take advantage of me" has not been used here, because it is part of a construct made of two variables (IQ07a, IQ07b), which tests social trust. As the others are not constructs but merely single variables (IQ05, IQ06) it felt fairer to use one variable each and not two for social trust, one for political efficacy and one for volunteering.

<sup>13</sup> All differences are statistically significant.

<sup>14</sup> Former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (social democrats) claimed in 2001, job agencies should show more strictness against those unemployed who are unwilling to work. The tabloid press (BILD) quotes him stating "There is no right to laziness in our society".

<sup>15</sup> Vice Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel (social democrats) stated at a press conference in April 2016 concerning the new immigration law (SZ 15.4.2016) Germany would not want "Integration simulators" ("Integrationssimulanten"), he meant refugees who would only pretend they would want to integrate.

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