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"We were fighting for our place": Resisting gender knowledge regimes through feminist knowledge network formation

Introduction

Business and management studies is historically masculinist, grounded in naive realist ontologies and assumptions of rational economic actors, with an instrumental focus on positive economic objectives (Gherardi, 2009). The discipline of entrepreneurship in particular has centred upon heroic entrepreneurs, nearly always men, white and eventually, rich from their entrepreneurial activity (Verduijn and Essers, 2013), shaping the hegemonic image of the entrepreneur in policy and popular culture (Jones and Spicer, 2009). Feminist scholarship counters this established conceptualisation: first, the study of women entrepreneurs has emphasised the diversity of women engaged in entrepreneurial activity (Knight, 2016). Second, critical feminist work has explored and critiqued the patriarchal gendering of the phenomenon, as well as the discipline of entrepreneurship studies itself (Ahl and Marlow, 2012; Calás *et al.*, 2009). Finally, narrow conceptualisations of gender as a property belonging solely to women are challenged, with calls for entrepreneurship, business and management research to draw on feminist knowledge from other disciplines taking gender as a complex multiplicity, relevant to all actors and influenced by context (Marlow and Martinez Dy, 2017).

Propelling this research tradition forward are feminist scholars whose interest in gender and enterprise has brought them together as a significant movement within the management studies community (Ahl and Marlow, 2012; Hughes et al., 2012). However, there exist multiple perspectives on the value and purpose of feminist knowledge creation in the business and management field. Some believe that studying women's entrepreneurial activity is a feminist end in itself, while others argue that a feminist perspective should illuminate the ways in which gender, as an overarching social system, works to contextually constrain and enable all entrepreneurial actors. Some take for granted the benefits of encouraging women's enterprise activity, while others critique the neoliberal entrepreneurialism aiming to stimulate women's entrepreneurship for economic growth purposes (Jones, 2014). We draw on Azocar and Ferree's concept of gendered expertise, or 'the claims, competences, and networks that connect gender, knowledge and power in a relational field' (2015: 842) to highlight the feminist expertise co-constructed through collaboration and discourse (rather than the specific expertise of individuals who might employ such perspectives). From the spectrum of feminist research described above, gendered expertise on entrepreneurship has emerged, offering an alternative avenue for research and scholarship beyond that of typical economic imperatives (Calás *et al.*, 2009; Verduijn *et al.*, 2014). Yet, despite a twenty-year history and the flourishing of influential works on gender scholarship in entrepreneurship, business and management, perspectives that challenge the masculinist foundations and economic imperatives of entrepreneurship research have made limited inroads into mainstream fora.

There is a general absence of feminist expertise in the keynotes of international business and management studies conferences, while gender-related research and/or research on women tends to be channelled into separate tracks, no matter the area of inquiry (Marlow and Martinez Dy, 2017). Feminist expertise is arguably positioned as 'non-knowledge' that is 'deflected, covered and obscured' in organizational contexts through 'practices of obfuscation and deliberate insulation from unsettling information' (McGoey, 2012a:3). Such positioning means that universities and other knowledge-based organisations can strategically ignore the knowledge claims of feminist scholars (McGoey, 2012b:555). To further explain this

phenomena, we draw together two strands of literature, one on gender and inequality regimes (Acker, 2006; Connell, 2002; 2006) and another on knowledge regimes (Bleiklie and Byrkjeflot, 2002), to form the notion of 'gender knowledge regimes'. We argue that these embedded hierarchies combine to subordinate women, femininity, and knowledge produced by women, while portraying maleness and masculinity as neutral by comparison (Oakley, 2001). This manifests in unfair gendered expertise practices and perceptions, perpetuating the marginality and unequal treatment of gender scholars. Nonetheless, such practices and perceptions do not exist without critique, and there is growing evidence of collective resistance against subordination and marginalisation. One means by which gender scholars resist subordination is through the creation of feminist knowledge networks (see Rai, 2005). This paper empirically investigates one such network, posing the following research questions*: a) What initially motivates actors to form feminist knowledge networks? b) What value does such a network produce for its members? c) What effects on existing gender knowledge regimes can be identified?*

We address these questions through autoethnographically analysing the formation and development of the UK-based Gender and Enterprise Network (GEN), to which the authors belong. We argue that the formation of GEN, and our explicit aims to enhance the professional networks and career progression of our membership, as well as supporting the deepening and mainstreaming of feminist knowledge production and expertise, constitutes a collaborative response to individualistic neoliberal trends within the contemporary academy and beyond. It is a transgressive response, addressing issues that cannot be reduced to the 'purely scientific' by linking with 'diverse practises, institutions and actors' (Nowotny, 2003: 151) to span disciplinary and institutional boundaries. GEN resists the institutionalisation of discriminatory gender knowledge regimes within business schools, which position feminist knowledge production as irrelevant and untrustworthy. We do so by articulating an alternative gender knowledge regime, based on broad feminist principles, which emphasise transdisciplinarity, collectivism and equality. In documenting and analysing our experiences through collaborative autoethnography, we contribute to the growing literature on feminist knowledge production through network formation. We also critique extant gender regimes within the neoliberal academy, offering examples of practices that resist and reframe through the maintenance of a feminist gender narrative (Ely and Meyerson, 2000) with our members, our host organisation and our respective academic institutions.

We begin the paper by outlining the persistent marginality of feminist scholarship in business and management schools and present our theoretical framing, drawing on and developing the notion of gender knowledge regimes. We then describe the collaborative autoethnographic method we employ and present evidence from our data analysis. We close by building on scholarship examining the gendering of academic knowledge regimes to discuss our findings and outline our contribution.

The Marginality of Gender Scholarship within Business and Management Studies

While the growing influence of postfeminism suggests we no longer need to consider gendered structural barriers (Gill and Scharff, 2011), the broader knowledge society and economy is still notoriously gendered (Mósesdóttir, 2011). Women are disadvantaged in human and social capital accumulation, network development, and by the normative definitions of knowledge itself, which value certain kinds of knowledge over others (Walby, 2011). These structural disadvantages feed into neoliberal expectations of individualised success, responsibility, and competition (Du Gay, 2004), in which failure is attributed to individual lack of merit or effort.

As knowledge production in UK business schools is 'both heteronormative and phallocentric, while simultaneously presenting a myth of objectivity' (Sang and Glasgow, 2016: 2), feminist gender scholars in such contexts are often marginalised. Scaffolded by the hegemonic Western cultural valorisation of masculinity, this marginalisation of primarily women scholars has been a concern for over thirty years. Such marginalisation is magnified for women black and ethnic minority scholars who also encounter institutionalised racial discrimination and white supremacy (Gabriel and Tate, 2017). Yet, the neoliberal academic environment has entrenched such views within business schools in teaching, research and the wider academy (Jones, 2015; Harding *et al.,* 2013), often leaving gender researchers ignored, silenced, unsupported, or continually on the defensive. Likewise, despite more than a decade of feminist critique of the entrepreneurship, business and management literatures (Ahl, 2006), there is little uptake of this stance in the wider literature (Ahl and Marlow, 2012): it is telling that few feminist and gender journals are recognised as important by business schools (Harding *et al.,* 2013; Sang and Glasgow, 2016). The emergence of gender tracks at predominant academic conferences, and separate conferences on women's entrepreneurship, while useful in enabling dialogue amongst gender scholars, has also led to the siphoning off of gender-related issues and concerns. Such marginalisation can, however, create the conditions and the will to pursue change (Meyerson and Tompkins, 2007).

To understand the marginality of gendered expertise within business and management schools, we must first examine the organisational inequality feminist scholars face. Acker (2006: 443) defines inequality in organisations as:

> 'systematic disparities between participants in power and control over goals, resources, and outcomes; workplace decisions such as how to organize work; opportunities for promotion and interesting work; security in employment and benefits; pay and other monetary rewards; respect; and pleasures in work and work relations.'

While articulating these processes is difficult, Acker sees value in examining specific organisations and interrogating the local organisational practices that reproduce such inequalities. We thus explore the 'micropolitics of resistance' (Thomas and Davis, 2002: 373) within GEN, in its bid to locally renegotiate the position of feminist knowledge, to challenge extant sexist notions of gendered expertise (Azocar and Ferree, 2015) and strategic ignorance (McGoey, 2012a; 2012b).

Knowledge Regimes in the Neoliberal Academy

Knowledge production is embedded within a wider set of social and political institutions that form knowledge regimes, defined as 'the outcome of the struggle to define the true nature of knowledge between actors such as states and politicians, institutional leaders and students, researchers and intellectuals, consultants and business leaders' (Bleiklie and Byrkjeflot, 2002: 520). Howard-Grenville and Carlile (2006: 474) suggest that such regimes represent 'the nested connections between the material realities engaged by work practices, the work practices themselves, and the larger collective conventions that reflect and account for the appropriate use of such practices.' Knowledge regimes therefore encompass the legitimate conventions and hierarchies that work to enable knowledge production, and their impact upon accepted practices in different settings. In this context, feminist knowledge workers within academia are viewed as oppositional. By challenging 'the tenets of established and "critical" disciplines and

practices' (Langmead and Kenway 1998: 32), they challenge accepted knowledge regimes, and the gendered hierarchies that persist within and between the actors who have the power to define knowledge.

Indeed, critics argue that the increasing influence of external actors, such as government, consultants and industry has led to a breakdown of the internal value systems within academia that are intimately linked to modes of knowledge production. Knowledge has become utilitarian; in the business school context, this means directly and quantifiably enhancing efficiency, productivity, competitiveness and economic growth. Feminist values and concerns are subsequently positioned as non-productive or even counter-productive. Mackinnon and Brooks (2001) therefore argue that a new era of international collaboration in feminist work is required to challenge further entrenchment of capitalist and neoliberal knowledge regimes.

Feminist Knowledge Production and Network Formation: Challenging Gender Regimes in Academia

Academia is a site 'where issues concerning the global information economy, the notion of knowledge work and the role of women intersect' (Mackinnon and Brooks, 2001: 1) and where the emergence, impact and perpetuation of gender and knowledge regimes is evident. Ely and Meyerson (2000: 599) define *gender* as 'an abstract organizing principle of organizational life, an axis of power that manifests in knowledge systems and concrete organizational policies, practices, and everyday interactions that appear to be gender-neutral'. It is a social stratification structure that has biological, psychological, and social-structural implications for processes of subjectification and personhood (Risman, 2004). Furthermore, *gender regimes* are defined as the overall patterns of gender relations within an organisation, providing the context for events, relationships and practices; they 'create and reproduce gender divisions of labor, cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity, and ways of articulating men's and women's interests' (Connell, 2006: 838). In this way, unequal gender relations in which men tend to hold more power than women, both inside and outside of academia, are widespread and constructed as normative (Toffoletti and Starr, 2016). Knowledge produced by women feminist and gender scholars is often viewed as flawed or partial (Pereira, 2012), a phenomenon further exacerbated by segregation within disciplines, such that those who draw on feminist or gender theory risk 'being labelled a feminist academic' (Metcalfe, 2010: 164).

The field of entrepreneurship research, as an organisational component of business schools more broadly, relies upon gender regimes for its own reproduction. Moreover, because they concern the production of knowledge, we argue that such gender regimes produce *gender knowledge regimes*, a construct we develop in this paper. We build on previous work on gender and knowledge regimes in academia (Mackinnon and Brooks, 2001) to argue that mainstream institutionalisation of gender knowledge regimes subordinates feminist knowledge, through a variety of formal and informal channels and mechanisms. Indeed, established disciplines such as economics and strategic management are known for masculinist approaches that, subjected to feminist calls to attend to gender, have come to operationalise gender as a variable. Newer disciplines, such as sustainability and social enterprise, are surprisingly lacking in awareness of gender-related issues. Where considerations of gender do exist, they are often essentialist or instrumental, with a marked lack of awareness of feminist principles. For example, social enterprise is often uncritically associated with women because of their supposed pro-social orientation (Calás *et al.*, 2009). In general, the positive economic focus on entrepreneurship results in scholarship and policy that is supposedly gender-neutral, but in reality is gender-blind, ignoring the pervasive effects of gendered processes on all entrepreneurial actors (Jones,

2014). Such approaches privilege agency, emphasising women's entrepreneurship as a route freedom from structural and organisational inequalities.

It is within this context that GEN was created in 2010, with an aim to pursue and develop knowledge sharing and development underpinned by feminist values and collective organising. GEN prioritises feminist knowledge creation, emphasising its importance and relevance for the broader field of entrepreneurship. We argue that feminist scholarship may offer insights into uneven power relations and the gendered contexts of university environments within which we are situated. Likewise, as a feminist knowledge network, we consistently offer alternatives to the individualistic, masculinist value systems and modes of knowledge insitutionalised in our academic institutions and host organisation. Within business and industry more broadly, knowledge networks are expected to exploit knowledge for economic advantage (Phelps *et al.,* 2012). GEN takes a different view, positioning our network as a feminist initiative to harness, produce and share knowledge for the social, professional and political advantage of the gender and entrepreneurship academic community, which is mainly comprised of women academics (Jones and Treanor, 2011).

While academic networks are viewed as essential to career development, they are not always accessible to women (Blackmore, 2011), and women's networks can represent a response to inequality. Van den Brink and Benschop (2012) argue that extended social network connections are crucial in attaining the status of excellence in academia, and women are less likely to have such connections. Such lack of access inhibits women's recognition as producers of knowledge that is legitimate, relevant and perceived as world-leading. GEN is an explicitly collaborative feminist project, designed to raise the profile of gender scholarship within the broader entrepreneurship field, and champion the position of women feminist and gender scholars in academia. While those involved in GEN leadership have varying individual and personal aims and ambitions, the activities that they undertake on behalf of GEN are primarily orientated towards collective goals.

Research Context: The Gender and Enterprise Network (GEN)

At the 2010 Diana conference, an American-based biannual women's entrepreneurship conference, a group of UK-based scholars, with friendship ties and similar research interests, developed the idea for a UK network of gender and enterprise scholars. The imagined group would have the explicit purpose of empowering early career gender scholars in entrepreneurship, business and management studies through a strong and supportive professional network and would welcome those taking critical or alternative feminist perspectives on entrepreneurship itself. From this idea GEN, a Special Interest Group (SIG) of the Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship (ISBE) was founded.

GEN promotes the creation of scholarly research and knowledge exchange on the relationships between entrepreneurship and gender, with the aim of enabling the development of gender-aware entrepreneurship research, policy and practice. We also focus on the career development of GEN members and contribute to developing the Gender and Enterprise track at the annual ISBE conference. In the past eight years, GEN has grown into a formally constituted organisation with a steering committee, advisory group, and an engaged and growing membership. With an international reach (LinkedIn group composed of more than 900 international members, e-mail list with 4000 recipients), we have published two special issues and hosted numerous academic, policy and practitioner focused events and seminars.

The group is led by a committee of twelve members (a transdisciplinary mix of doctoral students, early career scholars and more experienced academics) who are each responsible for different aspects of the organisation but contribute regularly across activities. We are supported by an advisory group that includes many eminent and internationally recognised scholars who offer advice, resource and mentorship for our activities. In this context, our host organisation (ISBE) is positioned as repository of knowledge, and GEN is a feminist knowledge production space within a broader knowledge economy. Indeed, it *is* a knowledge economy, as members pay to be part of ISBE, to access emerging knowledge on small business and entrepreneurship by attending its events and annual conference.

Methodology and Method

In line with Siplon (2014: 488), we 'place ourselves inside the struggles we are seeking to examine' and argue that, as well as being political, 'the personal is also theoretical' (Karaian and Mitchell, 2009: 63). In this paper, we adopt a constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology, focused on the meanings individuals ascribe to lived experiences. We take as methodological inspiration Gherardi's assertion that knowledge 'resides in social relations' (2009, p133) to inform our autoethnographic approach. Autoethnography combines both evocative and analytic ethnography in its use of first person vignettes, while maintaining a commitment to an analytical research agenda (Learmonth and Humphreys 2011). Chang *et al.* (2012) explain that autoethnography enables researchers to present social realities that underpin personal experiences. Autoethnography in organisation studies (Doloriert and Sambrook 2012; Learmonth and Humphreys 2011) is used to explore previously private or mundane practices that nonetheless have significant effects on everyday life. The autoethnographic method adopted in this paper follows collaborative autoethnographic principles, but is partial in nature (Chang *et al.* 2012), as all participants engaged in data production and were invited to co-author this paper, but due to other commitments, not all contributed towards the analysis and writing.

Our autoethnographies focus on the founding of GEN, and the ethos and philosophy behind it. We reflect on its development and on events and activities undertaken to support our membership and our engagement with broader communities of interest. Through autoethnography we engage with wider discourses, which create truth-effects and power-effects (Foucault, 1984), when actions become imposed, by a certain power/knowledge nexus and by institutional norms. We are also intentionally self-critical and reflexive, a feminist approach that, while sympathetic, is still analytical of the self as researcher (England 1994). We follow Golombisky (2006) and Gill (2011) in recognising that gender is co-performed and we, as gender researchers, have significant responsibility for gender performances during the research process. This is particularly necessary, as the 'gendered nature of research and researcher identity is often under-acknowledged' (Pullen, 2006: 278). We are therefore, mindful that women researching women may produce accounts that foreground certain perspectives and experiences. These may differ from those that emerge when men research women or women research men.

Our primary dataset was produced through semi-structured individual reflections from GEN founders, individuals in power who made decisions about supporting it, members of the network who contribute to and benefit from our activities, and current and past members of the organising committee. Data collection was undertaken during 2016-18, resulting in twenty reflective accounts. Whilst generally of an unstructured nature, the reflections were guided by four broad themes; how and why GEN was founded and the individual's role in this process; motivations for being part of the network, accounts of early years, and current situation;

achievements in terms of knowledge creation, and other impacts. As this is a collaborative autoethnographic project, it is possible that the social desirability of positive data, to retain group harmony, may have resulted in generally positive accounts that could gloss over internal conflicts within the organisation. However, the continued active participation of all founding and joining committee members (barring those who have left the UK) and the objective progress of the organisation in terms of membership, activities, and impact, offers some assurance that any conflicts thus far are more mundane than fundamental. Thus, while the group's successes are foregrounded in this paper, we believe there is value in documenting and analysing these nonetheless. Owing to the sensitive nature of conversations, the names of the participants are anonymised.

We undertook a process of rigorous data analysis, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method. All authors analysed the data individually with constant input from each other. In stage one, we read the data several times to understand the settings in which respondents worked and their motivations for joining GEN. These reflections formed the backbone of our evidence and were supplemented with data from other stakeholders, supporters and members, obtained through email correspondence and informal conversations. In stage two, we identified core themes through a grounded coding process (Glaser and Strauss, 2017). Simple questions around why, how and who made decisions, what was visible and invisible in terms of gender and knowledge regimes and knowable about feminist knowledge, and how individuals felt and expressed themselves aided the iterative process of emergence of key themes. Here we were interested in exploring the knowledge regimes within which GEN members work, in their own institutions and within our host institution, ISBE. In stage three, we sought to code and extract vignettes that illustrated our first-order codes. Following this clarification process, we interpreted our first-order codes and grouped them into second-order categories. Stage four of this analysis produced clear theoretical contributions, outlined in our discussion.

Findings

The following section examines the reflective accounts of participants and actors involved in GEN and presents key findings of our study. While participants may have come from various backgrounds, disciplines and academic institutions, and have had differing conceptions of and commitment to feminist change, they consistently questioned and critically reflected on their arrival at a similar destination: as a leader, member or supporter of GEN.

Motivation for Mobilisation: An Active Response to Marginality

The pervading marginalisation of organisational and academic members as gender scholars was identified as the initial driving force for the creation of the GEN community. Respondents appreciate the space that GEN creates to share knowledge, understanding and to challenge the gender knowledge regimes within which they work. Dr. H sums it up, saying, *'being a gender focused entrepreneurship scholar can be a lonely experience in a business school'*. Similarly, Dr. N says, *'you do not notice any gendered effects on you until you start talking about your research interest in women'*. Indeed, many members feel their research focus is not taken seriously. Dr. S feels that *'being a gender scholar can be disheartening; that feeling that you're seen as a humourless irritation, doing 'fluffy' research, with no immediate business application or economic impact. At times my research is seen as an irrelevant self-indulgence'*.

Such marginalisation is arguably a result of studying a topic (gender) – which has been described, along with race and class, as a 'zombie' category that has lost its relevance (Knapp, 2005). Within an increasingly postfeminist/post-race cultural landscape, our interest in gender studies and other 'zombie' topics can position us as outmoded (Hark, 2016). Our marginalisation also reflects wider marginalisation of feminist academics (Van den Brink, 2015), a continuing concern given the high numbers of women in academia, but the small numbers at senior professorial levels (Morley, 2013). This persistent marginality applies to both experienced academics and doctoral students studying gender (Danowitz, 2016).

GEN's formation was therefore, a response to gendered knowledge regimes in academia, as well as in entrepreneurship research. We came together to actively acknowledge our collective and individual positioning, to promote the value and importance of gender research generally, and gender and entrepreneurship research in particular. Prof. J puts it succinctly: *'We were fighting for our place and every now and then I'm reminded that we're still fighting for our place'.* Just as feminist gender and entrepreneurship scholars seek to challenge and redress the gender-blindness and gender-silence of entrepreneurship, so too GEN seeks to challenge this in the broader academy and other institutional settings. Indeed, a robust and critical engagement with feminist theories of gender brings much value to the field of entrepreneurship: through developing new voices and perspectives, highlighting entrepreneurship as a diverse phenomenon, and critiquing the masculinist, neoliberal conceptions of entrepreneurship in public and academic discourse.

Valuing our Values: Finding a Home, Building a Community and Nurturing our Collective Interests

It was recognised that, as a potentially marginalised group, we needed to be embedded within an established organisation; one with the potential to offer resources such as marketing, membership management and access to broader national and international networks. Dr L explains, *'Professor S who was supportive of the idea and, in her role as Trustee of ISBE, she suggested we form an ISBE Special Interest Group.'* We did not necessarily need the endorsement of ISBE. However, founding members were concerned that setting up a discrete, independent network was unsustainable, requiring much ongoing administrative, organisational and individual effort. As many of the members regularly attended the Gender track at the ISBE annual conference, we saw ISBE as an appropriate home for GEN.

Some current members of the organising committee first encountered GEN at the ISBE conference. As Dr N reflects, *'I remember this feeling of relief, being in the room with likeminded individuals, passionate about making a difference. It was like coming home'.* For founding members, it was about having a voice and being heard by a group that was increasing in power and visibility. Prof. J explains: *'I really felt that all of our voices were given the space to develop'.* While we needed role models, we were also becoming them: as one member recalls: *'These were influential female role models who managed the group processes in a confident, completely non-apologetic way'.* However, at that point ISBE did not have any formalised SIGs. As we had no experience of establishing a SIG, this proved to be a valuable learning experience for all involved. It also meant that we were able to act as a model for the SIGS that followed us.[1]

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[1] There are currently ten ISBE SIGs. For more details visit http://isbe.org.uk/special-interest-group/

The founding committee members reflected on the importance of being part of a like-minded community, and the many stages of experience therein, from working with practitioners and policy makers to doctoral students, early career scholars and professors. This meant a conscious effort to be accessible, approachable, developmental and encouraging. As Dr. H explains: *'We needed [...] a community of early career and mid-career scholars focusing on gender and entrepreneurship research [...] providing the space to foster collaboration. These aims continue to attract [...] scholars and colleagues in less developed economies.'* The ECRs felt included, as Dr S recalls*: 'I still remember my trepidation as a PhD student and the warm welcome that I received...'* Founding members' reflections are filled with narratives around coming together, and the importance of support that one gives and receives. Dr L explains her becoming an active member, *'I [...] liked the idea of a group of women supporting each other and helping to advance each other's careers – an 'old girls' network ...'*

This idea of a network emerged from our engagement with the Diana Conference[2] and observing how they had established themselves as the leading group of North American scholars on women and entrepreneurship. Dr N explained that *'at the [...] event run by Diana members, senior women academics shared their experiences of how their network enabled professional career support for other gender researchers.'* From the reflections of our participants, it was evident that this knowledge is rarely shared in our respective institutions. This convivial approach is particularly supportive when based on research-orientated peer mentoring groups that offer '…friendship; feelings of connection to and membership of a group; and support for professional development' (Rees and Shaw, 2014: 5).

In GEN we share tacit knowledge of the neoliberal academy and gendered business school, highlighting the gender regimes within which we work, and ways of resisting them. We therefore support our members to understand the rules of the game but draw on an array of values from various feminist traditions, in order to collectively pinpoint, subvert, challenge and renegotiate those same rules. Within the organising committee, amongst the traditions we draw upon are post-structuralist (interpretivist and constructivist), intersectional, Bordieusian, radical, queer and critical realist feminism; however, our organisational interactions are not primarily focused on feminist debates. Rather, we take as our common ground our shared mission to cultivate and elevate feminist and gender scholarship within the field of entrepreneurship studies. From this, we suggest and debate goals and objectives, developing consensus around initiatives and activities that we then collectively support. Furthermore, our organising committee, and our membership, is genuinely diverse, from various national and demographic backgrounds; because of this, we draw on insight from a variety of social positions and are intentional about being as inclusive and egalitarian as possible. This means increasing awareness of, and actively displacing, the normative Anglo/Eurocentric whiteness and middle-classness of feminist scholarship through, for example, attending to phenomena in the Global South (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013), and considering the impact of intersections such as class, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, and age on gender as it relates to entrepreneurship. We are open to learning from, and creating knowledge with, each other: as such, we encourage the 'externalization' of tacit, situated knowledge through close, frequent interaction' (Howard-Grenville and Carlile 2006: 475) between members, our host organisation, and practitioners, business support organisations and policy-makers.

We use two specific event formats aimed at building and supporting our scholarly community. First, the *"thinkspace"* format, with academic speakers from different disciplines (e.g.

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[2] For more information on the history of the Diana Project visit: http://www.babson.edu/Academics/centers/blank-center/global-research/diana/Pages/home.aspx

sociology, politics, geography, philosophy and education) coming together to consider different aspects of gender theory. Second, our *"confreat"* format (conference-retreat) focuses on supporting PhD students and ECRs to develop submissions to conferences and journals. It involves peer mentoring and review and brings together gender scholars at all career stages. Thereby we encourage delegates to build networks and become embedded within the broader entrepreneurship research community. As such, we see the committee and its founding to be a manifestation of tempered radicalism, as we are committed not only to our academic institutions and ISBE but also 'to a cause, community, or ideology that is fundamentally different from, and possibly at odds with the dominant culture' (Meyerson and Scully, 1995: 585).

However, these differing values have caused some tensions within ISBE. For example, when GEN was negotiating its position as a newly formed SIG, there was a clash of values between ISBE's President, who prioritised SIG profit-making from activities. The three GEN members, also on the Board of Trustees of ISBE, felt that financial support for SIGs should come from ISBE not from members. The GEN committee even considered leaving ISBE altogether and creating a separate organisation. These tensions continued until a new President came into position, who was sympathetic and recognised the value of SIGs. Regular annual funding of SIGs was subsequently negotiated and agreed. In bringing outsider perspectives to ISBE we are mindful that it can be difficult for insiders and outsiders to create 'mutual understanding and alliances' (Tyyska, 1998:403). However, since that early clash, we now find a willingness to engage and collaborate.

Our members have also experienced tensions within their home institutions. For some, being associated with GEN is not seen as a positive marker of external engagement. Likewise, internal pressures, misunderstanding and/or ignorance of feminist and gender research can influence the institutional support members receive to attend events, contribute their time to GEN and share knowledge and practice within their home institutions. There can be tensions amongst GEN members in balancing traditional research perspectives with activist and transgressive ones. We also recognise another tension here: while we aim to challenge the position of gendered knowledge, and the association of non-knowledge with women and with feminist and gender research, GEN members are primarily women. However, GEN actively seeks to raise the visibility and legitimacy of our members, challenging claims of feminist expertise as ignorable non-knowledge. Furthermore, our insider position as a SIG helps us to access collective resources, enabling us to respond to the challenges our members may experience as outsiders in their home institutions.

Challenging Gender Knowledge Regimes: A Critical, Activist, Feminist Intervention

We see the creation of the GEN as a consciously feminist action, both as individuals and as a collective. This resonates with de Vries and van den Brink's 'bifocal approach', which focuses on transformative organisational change and offers 'an alternative means of countering gender inequalities in organisations. While pre-existing transformative interventions focus on more immediately apparent structural change, the focus begins with the development of individuals' (2016: 429). Although individualistic approaches dominate, our starting point and strength was, and still is, in the collective, with a transdisciplinary focus on institutional actors and organisations (Nowotny, 2004).

We may be seen to serve as the feminist conscience of our host organisation, challenging gender discrimination where we see it, whether in the programming of the conference, or in the attitudes and assumptions of other members and conference delegates. In doing so, we actively unsettle underlying 'masculine, white, elitist, hetero-normative assumptions' (de Vries and van den Brink, 2016: 430). However, a more critical perspective might be that our host organisation has simply co-opted our network (Swan and Fox, 2010), as a form of ghettoization (Mariniello, 1998), faux-feminism (McRobbie, 2004) or, perhaps more positively, for its symbolic value. ISBE's embracing of GEN might also be seen as a form of containment that renders invisible broader feminist challenges to gender and knowledge regimes, evident in conference themes and keynote speeches. While such critiques may have credence now or in the future, we actively resist co-optation through collective agential decision-making and action. We actively seek to improve conditions for women scholars, creating platforms for feminist expertise and striving to take our work beyond the bounds of GEN in our engagement with ISBE and other organisations. For example, a recent annual ISBE conference was particularly unsettling due to a preponderance of white, men-only panels and plenaries. Given the numbers of knowledgeable and respected ISBE members who are women and people of colour, we challenged the ISBE conference organisers to draw upon a more diverse range of experts. As Dr A recalls, *'the top prizes at the 2016 ISBE conference were won by women of colour, including myself. ... I couldn't help but point out the lack of diversity and representation in the keynote events, and the fact that this did not reflect the ISBE membership'*. We aimed to encourage the conference organisers to emphasise and make visible the broad range of experiences, expertise and knowledge that exists in the ISBE entrepreneurship research, policy and practice communities and networks.

We have continued our dialogue with policy-makers and practitioners with our recent 'Family Leave for the Self-Employed: Co-Creating Policy' round table, and with an International Diversity Day event in collaboration with the Federation for Small Business (FSB). We seek bring our engagement with and understanding of feminism, gender theory and the gendering of organisations, into the practices of our host organisation, and others, through organising, developing and increasing the visibility and impact of our SIG, internally and externally. Leading the intervention through a rejection of being othered, we aim to be both 'change agents and changed agents' (Parsons and Priola, 2013). Prof. J illustrates this, saying she is *'really unashamedly vocal about that now and I think [as an organisation] we've reached a tipping point'*. In line with Eschle and Maiguashca (2014) we see such interventions as offering an optimistic view of the future of feminist knowledge in a postfeminist world. As such, we seek to 'transform organisations into more democratic and equitable places for those who are judged 'different' (Sinclair, 2000: 245), highlighting and resisting the gendering processes under patriarchal capitalism and neoliberalism (Calás *et al*., 2009).

GEN's success is also reflected in the successes and recognition of our members, with attendees at our writing development workshops winning best paper awards in various ISBE tracks, including those outside the gender track; raising awareness of feminist perspectives in the family business, finance, entrepreneurship education, and digital entrepreneurship research communities. Members have been awarded prizes for best early career research and best overall ISBE conference papers, raising the visibility of feminist perspectives within the broader small business and entrepreneurship communities. GEN has also been instrumental in developing informal and formal mentoring relationships between members, a direct result of members' commitment to the next generation of feminist gender scholars. The special issues we have proposed and edited have opened new areas of debate, and offered different perspectives on gender, in mainstream entrepreneurship journals. Being ISBE's first ever SIG has allowed us

to drive institutional understandings of how SIGs support their members and the broader research community. Our committee members have been instrumental in developing ISBE's internal processes, as members of the Board of Trustees. As such, we see GEN as offering an adaptable model for feminist knowledge networks. We are approached for advice and support in creating similar networks and SIGs outside our host organization. We are regularly invited to collaborate on events with other membership organisations such as the British Academy of Management and the European Council for Small Business. To extend our reach outside the academic community, we are currently developing links with third sector organisations to offer, employability and skill building workshops for vulnerable and underserved women. Although initially formed as a UK network, GEN is also taking steps to broaden its reach internationally through partnering with European and other international feminist and gender networks to support events and knowledge sharing. The global academic context means that growing numbers of members and attendees reside outside the UK. Despite GEN's successes, we are mindful that internal constraints within our network mean we cannot respond to all requests for collaboration or projects. This is primarily due to members' voluntary participation in GEN and the difficulty of balancing this with our paid, institutional roles.

Discussion: Resisting and Reframing Extant Gender Knowledge Regimes

Synthesising the notions of gender regimes identified by Connell (2002; 2006), and the knowledge regimes and resultant organisational practices produced by the struggles of powerful actors to define knowledge (Bleiklie and Byrkjeflot, 2002), we argue that extant academic gender regimes combine with wider knowledge regimes (of academia, policy and practice) to create *gender knowledge regimes* within academia. We critically observe that the academic gender knowledge regime is so constraining that no matter GEN's tempered radical orientation (Meyerson and Scully, 1995), we are still complicit with the gender division of labour within our discipline, for GEN is mainly comprised of women studying what is seen as a women's subject. However, we argue that this complicity is inescapable, a result of the way gender knowledge regimes in business schools, driven by neoliberal concerns of individualism and economic growth, position us in the symbolically inferior realm of the feminine (Jones, 2015). Acker (2000: 625) acknowledges that utilising conceptions of gender as systemic is 'difficult and rare' and that gender-equity projects in organisations can create dilemmas. Ely and Meyerson (2000: 590) argue such dilemmas can make it difficult to maintain a gender narrative and to 'expose and revise…organizational phenomena'. Yet, while the gender knowledge regime in academia has resulted in our marginalisation, it has also brought us together to collectively and actively resist and reframe our positioning, disrupting the dynamic through community-based actions and critique. Through our experience, we see that marginalisation *can* lead to mobilisation for change. Such change crystallises around a resistance to extant institutionalised gender regimes and gender knowledge, emphasising both the value of feminist knowledge for the discipline, for ISBE and the academy, and the values of our membership. As such, we echo Connell's observation (2006: 838) that '(g)ender is a dynamic system, not a fixed dichotomy' offering clear potential for change, with many gender issues based on relationships that have little to do with personal characteristics, but are instead representative of a broader gender regime, and the symbolic relations at play.

Such symbolic relations are symptomatic of wider shifts in conceptualisations of productive and valuable knowledge in an increasingly neoliberal and economically functionalist society. Whose knowledge counts is contested, particularly where that knowledge counters neoliberal

and capitalist settlements, privileging economic growth at the expense of sustainability, parity and respect for workers as thinking, feeling and empathic beings (Pedwell, 2012). This is also evident in the marginalisation of other forms of collective organising, such as the decline of trade union membership in academia and more broadly.

GEN's response is 'transgressive', addressing issues that cannot be reduced to the 'purely scientific' by linking with 'diverse practises, institutions and actors' (Nowotny, 2003: 151) to span disciplinary and institutional boundaries. GEN resists the institutionalisation of gender knowledge regimes within business schools, which position feminist knowledge production as marginal. We do so by articulating an alternative, emergent gender knowledge regime, based on broad feminist principles, which emphasises transdisciplinarity, collectivism and equality.

Furthermore, we argue that GEN, in its collective organisation, its focus on knowledge creation, application, and sharing across disciplinary and theoretical boundaries, and its embracing of heterogeneous theoretical and political perspectives, emphasizes what Nowotny calls a mode 2 approach to knowledge production. Such an approach emphasises dialogue among a number of actors and their perspectives, heterogeneity, reflexivity and social accountability, trandisciplinarity and value integration (Nowotny, 2004: 10-12).

In taking a mode 2 approach, GEN creates a forum to resist extant gender knowledge regimes within business schools and entrepreneurship studies that valorise and reward scientific-technical, discipline specific, positivist and reductionist knowledge above all. In these regimes, conceptualisations of gender that emphasise and uncritically accept essentialist biological foundations, and conflate these with biological sex, are seen as credible, robust and 'truthful'. Through GEN's visible success in resisting such misunderstandings, we challenge arguments that feminist gender scholars produce irrelevant 'non-knowledge'. A mode 2 approach also allows us to pursue knowledge production outside the traditional disciplinary and hierarchical structures of masculinised and scientific-technical knowledge. However, we recognise that following a mode 2 approach may bring us and our members into conflict with our host organisation (ISBE) and our respective home institutions. We have mitigated such conflicts in our emphasis on developing the quality, authenticity and theoretical robustness of the feminist knowledge developed within the network. We suggest that creation of GEN has enabled a repositioning of feminist knowledge and feminist scholars in this context. GEN acts as a knowledge alliance *outside* the gender knowledge regimes of our individual institutional contexts and opens space to collectively challenge the gender knowledge regimes at the intersection of business, policy and academia. The focus on gender theory and the articulation and discussion of gendered practice in these contexts informs our members' understanding of their research *and* their position within the academy and the broader field. As such GEN cultivates and mobilises collective understandings of the gender knowledge regimes within which we work, so that our members can subvert and reframe them.

Conclusion

Hegemonic gender knowledge regimes within business and management studies are discriminatory, actively silencing and ignoring feminist concerns. GEN is working to produce an alternative gender knowledge regime that values, and advocates for, new conceptualisations of gender from a diversity of perspectives, driven neither by purely economic rationales nor biological essentialism. Although such interventions, accounts and analysis are 'difficult and rare' (Acker, 2000:625), in documenting the creation and development of GEN, we offer practical insights for other feminist scholars whilst contributing to theoretical considerations

of the value and values of feminist knowledge particularly in, what may initially be viewed as, hostile contexts.

We have shown that extant gender knowledge regimes *can* be resisted, and another alternative emergent gender knowledge regime developed, through collective organising and maintaining a feminist gender narrative in our relationships with our members, our host organisation and other external groups. As the first SIG of our host organisation, we have set an agenda that has been adopted as a model for community development. There is scope for others to take these ideas and experiences into developing their own 'outsider' feminist networks in contexts where they seek change through collective, feminist action and knowledge creation.

This is an ongoing transformative project, which aims to challenge the existing gender knowledge regime of our academic field, our academic institutions and other allied actors and organisations. Through adopting an activist feminist stance that takes issues of women and gender beyond the bounds of women's forums, we aim to remake ourselves, our members and the scholarly community more broadly, and combat both conceptual and professional marginality.

As our title suggests, we see this as a collective 'fight' to expand and elevate feminist and gender knowledge within academic, practitioner and policy communities. As such, our collective goals transcend and embrace different theoretical, disciplinary and political investments. We recognise that there may be future debates and tensions over GEN's aims and vision that, in a rapidly changing academic environment, we cannot yet predict. However, in establishing an ethos of mutuality and collectivism we will continue to challenge the discriminatory gender knowledge regimes and gendered hierarchies that persist within and between the actors who have the power to define knowledge. Given the growing prominence and influence of business schools in the UK and global higher education context, we believe this to be an important and timely aim.

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