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# Trickster Characters: The Tomboy & The Girlboss, or Gender as a Thin-centred Ideology Inherent to Technological Innovation Under Capitalism

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## DECLARATION

This is to certify that the work contained within has been composed by me and is entirely my own work. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Madison Kurchik

October 2022

## ABSTRACT

This doctoral thesis explores the persistence of gendered oppression as inherent to capitalism and technological innovation or progress. To better elucidate these entanglements, I propose a novel theorization of gender as a thin-centred ideology with few tenants but for the supremacy of men and masculinity, or an unequal antagonism between genders. This politically, contextually, and temporally informed conception of gender contributes to a well-established literature analysing gender and gender performativity. In this formulation, gender is a set of beliefs that are malleable, shapeshifting to produce new “rules” in different contexts. This theorization provides a new lens through which seemingly banal concepts and experiences can be understood as neither solely individual nor structural. It also offers opportunity for feminist utopian imaginations. In response to Donna Haraway’s request for “trickster figures that might turn a stacked deck into a potent set of wild cards for refiguring possible worlds” (1991, p. 25) I introduce the Tomboy and the Girlboss. The stories of these two characters are told creatively, drawing from interviews with fifty-two workers in the Irish and UK technology sectors. These narratives are demonstrative of the power of feminist story telling.

## LAY SUMMARY

The belief that technology will solve our societal ails is implicit in much of the mainstream discourse to do with innovation and progress. This technological utopianism is most often apolitical, conceptualizing technology simply as a tool to improve our existence, alleviating us of our material toil. I argue that technology is a paradox. Integral to its paradoxy are notions of difference, like gender and race. These differences are also central to work and capitalism. In this study, I advance an alternative way of thinking about gender to shed light on these complex matrixes of power.

Research in Management and Organization Studies relies of specific ideas of gender, technology, and work. Gender is most often characterized as an identity signifier. Technology is portrayed as an industry or tool. Work is presumed a necessary and worthy human endeavour. I review and take seriously relevant literature in Management and Organization Studies. Then, drawing together interdisciplinary texts on the topics, I theorize gender, technology, and work differently from the set precedent. In this thesis, I begin with gender as a malleable principle of distinction and a technology of the self. Technology is the future, it is information, it is a set of beliefs, it is a surrogate. Finally, embedded within work, is the gendered exploitation and degradation of women. These theorizations them produce the conditions upon which my alternation notion of gender — as thin-centred ideology — is made possible.

In addition, I tell the stories of two characters: the Tomboy and the Girlboss. I incorporate the sentiments of women working in tech whom I interview to creatively narrativize these characters. This feminist storytelling disrupts patriarchal writing patterns and elucidates my theory of gender, exposing paradoxes galore.

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## INTRODUCTION

## Aims & Objectives

The technology sector in the United Kingdom is plagued by stark and persistent gender disparity. Women account for 17% of the workforce and 5% of leadership in the industry (PwC, 2017). This disparity, which is not unique to the UK, has been identified as a problem by Management scholars who have responded to it, and others like it, by developing a “Business Case” literature (Robinson & Dechant, 1997). The underlying logic of the business case is that diversity has bottom-line value, and therefore organizations should be empowered to hire and manage in a more equitable or inclusive manner (Hoobler et al., 2018). This idea was taken up in discussions about racial equality in the United States as early as the 1950s (Wilkins, 2004), but it wasn’t until the 1990s that management consultants started to use it regarding gender and promotion policies (Green et al., 2005). A common claim of contemporary business case studies is that there is a positive correlation between diversity and team creativity or innovation (Cordero, DiTomaso, & Farris, 1996; Gassmann, 2001; Lambert, 2016).

This literature has been criticized for its depoliticization of the absence of minority groups (Perriton, 2009) and over reliance on “rational cost-benefit analysis which tends to assume that inevitably the balance will favour investing in equality initiatives” (Noon, 2007, p. 778). However, these criticisms fall short of interrogating the premises upon which the “problem” of gender representation in the technology sector has been designated a “problem” to begin with. If a lack of women working in technology is the problem, the solution is for more women to take up employment in the sector, and so follows a suite of interventions to improve women’s access to relevant education and incentivize them to apply for jobs in the sector, for example. In essence, the solution is found through work.

It is upon this assumption that I wrote my PhD proposal. My initial interest in the technology sector was part of my own internalization of the centrality of work. The delusion

that an MPhil degree in Women & Gender Studies would render me gainfully employed had hardly the chance to sit in my mind before my cynicism pulled the chair out from under it. If I wanted a job, and a good one at that, I would need to collapse my study of gender theory into something marketable, I thought. So, during my masters, I worked as a Human Resources Consultant at a technology start-up with the intention of turning my “expertise” into a diversity management role. I curated my research interests, accordingly, applying to PhD programs with an empirical project about how recruitment processes were pivotal in excluding women from the technology sector. It was my belief that my work could emancipate me, or at least provide me with the financial freedom my generation so diligently seeks, that I set out to research how women might gain access to the power and capital the technology sector offers.

Work is the preoccupation of Western feminisms. In her seminal text *The Second Sex* Simone de Beauvoir identifies women’s lack of ambition, a result of the way we are raised, as a primary barrier to our achieving rights, equality, and success (1949). The white middle class women of First Wave Feminism equated the realisation of this ambition, through career success and financial independence, with feminist liberation, taking the capitalist context as a given (hooks, 2000). Similarly, contemporary business management treats capitalism as the necessary condition under which organisations function and thrive.

Efficiency and effectiveness are vital measures of contemporary managerial, and thus organisational, performance (Griffin, 2016). Efficiency refers to the prudent utilisation of resources with cost implications in mind. Effectiveness refers to making the correct decisions and executing them successfully. It is the manager’s responsibility to coordinate their organisation’s use of resources in pursuit of these aims through “planning and decision making, organising, leading and controlling” (Griffin, 2016, p. 5). The types of resources an

organisation has at its disposal are human, financial, physical, and information (Griffin, 2016).

First Wave Feminism's attention to our exclusion from formal waged labour in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century does not account for the fact that women have been a human resource, to be managed, towards efficient and effective accumulation of capital since the 15<sup>th</sup> Century (Federici, 2004). Prior to the transition from feudalism to capitalism, women were less differentiated from, and subservient to, men: "women worked in the fields, in addition to raising children, cooking, washing, spinning, and keeping an herb garden; their domestic activities were not devalued and did not involve different social relations from those of men, as they would later, in a money-economy, when housework would cease to be viewed as real work" (Federici, 2004, p. 25). The degradation of women was vital to the realisation of capitalist economies because accumulation of capital required the exploitation of women's labour. Capitalism then, is necessarily devoted to sexism and racism: the exploitation of women, with the colonised, African slaves and their descendants, and immigrants (Federici, 2004).

The relationship between career success and feminism has not only endured but, has been weaponised at times to exclude women from within and, to maintain patriarchal dominance outwith (Federici, 2004; hooks, 2000). Current debates, particularly in *Gender, Work and Organization*, consider the role of work in contemporary feminisms, including moderate feminisms (Budgeon, 2019; Lewis, Adamson, Biese & Kelan, 2016, 2019; Mavin & Grandy, 2019; Marx, 2019; Tzanakou & Pearce, 2019), postfeminisms (Adamson, 2017; Banet-Weiser, Gill & Rottenberg, 2019; Gill, 2007; Gill, Kelan & Scharff, 2017; Lewis, Benschop & Simpson, 2017), and neoliberal feminisms (Colley & White, 2019; Grosser & McCarthy, 2019; Rottenberg, 2017, 2019).

However, this thesis, having transformed me into the kind of person who would produce something like it, is a departure from these debates because its feminism considers capitalism a hinderance in and of itself to gendered emancipation. This perspective renders many of the potential research questions sparked by the “problem” of gender disparity in technology sector mute. Instead, I locate this thesis at the nexus between gender, technology, and work. The aim of this thesis is twofold. First, I endeavour to convince readers of the utility of a conceptualization of gender as a thin-centred ideology. Second, I take up the call and practice of feminist storytelling to introduce and narrativize the Tomboy and the Girlboss. In the pursuit of these aims I excavate the paradoxes of gender, technology, and work, emphasizing how difference functions within and through each of them.

### Structure

This PhD is comprised of six chapters: Chapter 1: Gender & Work, Chapter 2: Gender & Technology, Chapter 3: Approach, Chapter 4: The Tomboy, Chapter 5: The Girlboss, and Chapter 6: Discussion.

Chapter 1: Gender & Work takes the figure of the witch, as characterized by Silvia Federici, as its analytic fulcrum. I begin with a review of literature to do with gender and work in Management and Organization Studies. I describe how gender functions almost exclusively as an identity marker and I tackle the characterization of work as workplace, process, or role. I consider two theories — gendered organizations and doing gender — as commonly taken up by Organization Studies scholars. I point towards the shortcomings of these literatures using the witch to emphasize the co-productive relationship between gender and work. Then, drawing together the work of Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, Angela Davis, bell hooks, and Judith Butler, I theorize gender beyond the limitations of

Management. Lastly, I introduce the concept of thin-centred ideology via Cas Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser to be later built upon towards my theoretical contribution.

Chapter 2: Gender & Technology begins with a more specific review of literature than provided in the previous chapter- it focuses on gender and technology as studied in Organization Studies. In my survey of the literature, I consider research based on definition of technology as a sector and as a tool. Next, I put the work of Herbert Marcuse, Joel Dinerstein, Lewis Mumford, Safiya Noble, and Neda Atanasoski and Kalindi Vora in conversation to aid me in theorizing technology as a paradox, a cultural artefact, a social process, a set of beliefs, information, and surrogate.

In Chapter 3: Approach I outline the manner and position I have taken in this research. It is an approach informed by manifestos — rhetorical provocations — to work between, across, over, and under binaries. It engages an oppositional consciousness to produce “partial, contradictory, permanently unclosed constructions of personal and collective selves” (Haraway, 1985, p. 16). I work with and through Donna Haraway’s, *A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminist in the 1980s* and Legacy Russel’s *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto* to explain the disrupting of binaries, opposition consciousness, technology and work, and how I intend to proceed in the following chapters. Following this, I address some of the expectations for a Methods Chapter in the Social Sciences, theorizing thinking, getting in touch, reading, and writing.

The stories of the Tomboy and the Girlboss are told in Chapter 4: The Tomboy and Chapter 5: The Girlboss respectively. Then, in Chapter 6: Discussion I engage more deeply with both the theoretical and methodological contributions of this thesis, outlining the value of theorizing gender as a thin-centred ideology and making explicit the methodological contributions of the thesis.



## CHAPTER 1: GENDER & WORK

### 1.1 Introduction

The figure of the witch has been a constant companion to my PhD process. In my final semester of teaching at the University of Edinburgh, I was working on a brand-new course called “Creating Edinburgh”. The course design loosely mimics a “choose your own adventure” novel, wherein the students opt for certain topics from a list of offerings at the beginning of the semester. The course is an interdisciplinary approach to the city of Edinburgh itself and engages with themes like, “Decolonizing Edinburgh”, “Digital Edinburgh”, “Literary Edinburgh”, “Deep Time Edinburgh” etc. The main assessment for the course is for students to create their own theme to be added to the cache for future cohorts. One of my groups chose to pursue Witchcraft Edinburgh, and it is to them I owe much of my knowledge about witch hunts in Scotland. Thank you, Eleanor, Aimee, Sadie, and Andrew. It is because of them that I learned that the Mercat Cross located in the market centre of Medieval Edinburgh served as an execution site for accused witches. According to a plaque at The Witches Well, a memorial to those accused of witchcraft in Scotland between 1563-1736, hundreds of witches were publicly executed during this time. The plaque was placed in 1912, and states,

This fountain, erected by John Duncan, R.S.A., is near the site on which many witches were burned at the stake. The wicked head and serene head signify that some used their exceptional knowledge for evil purposes while others were misunderstood and wished their kind nothing but good. The serpent has the dual significance of evil and wisdom.

Witches then, were condemned regardless of which direction they aimed their powers; “the ‘good witch,’ who made sorcery her career, was also punished, often more severely” (Federici, 2004, p.200). This lack of discrimination concerning the morality of witches is perplexing; *if witches were not hunted and killed for their wickedness, what were they persecuted for?*

The situatedness of this knowledge struck me, as I had been working with the text, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body and Primitive Accumulation* for years and had not investigated the history of witch trials in Edinburgh, the city in which I lived and studied in. A year before that, I had written the below Instagram caption. I took the accompanying picture of the Edinburgh College of Arts building while walking in the aimless way only made possible by a period of COVID-19 related restrictions. I had, in fact, connected the text with Edinburgh through imagery without realizing.



 Liked by elysewaughh and 34 others

wmnhud Last Saturday morning I woke up early to write. I had been working a few hours before I recieved a delivery, a thoughtful gift from a friend. I opened the package to find the very same book I had just been reading and that was already open on my desk: "Caliban and the Witch" by Silvia Federic. The book is like a religious text to me and central to my PhD project. Receiving a second copy, entirely unprovoked and with impeccable, all but unbelievable timing, felt like some kind of magic. I'm not sure if I believe in cosmic forces or signs from the universe, but I took this happy coincidence to mean that I am where I am meant to be, doing the thing I am meant to be doing. And this coincidence inspired in me such a sense of peace and right-ness, like two perfect puzzle pieces clicking into place, that I nearly wept. Thank you @brokenwhiterice

So, I had two copies of *Caliban and the Witch*. In the book, feminist historian Silvia Federici characterizes the degradation of “women’s work”, alongside the genocide of hundreds of thousands of witches in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, instrumental to the rise of capitalism (2004). Her argument, broadly speaking, is that the demonization of witches was vital to establishing the conditions of possibility for capitalistic exploitation of women, and others, to flourish. This process made it so that the work that women performed, once ostensibly equally valued under feudal systems, moved to the ranks of the unpaid. For this to happen, women had to be differentiated and separated from the public sphere of paid labour, and witch trials enabled this.

It was most often women of significant competence, such as village midwives or medics, who stood accused of witchcraft. They were charged with any number of unfathomable crimes, including devil worship, the murdering of children en masse, sucking their blood, and making potions with their flesh (2004, p. 169). Their capability and expertise posed a threat to the new social formations necessary to enable the accumulation of capital; women as witches were rendered dangerous and the danger was construed along material terms with material impact. That is, the women were seen as dangers to their communities, especially to children, and so their bodies needed to be dealt with accordingly: exterminated. Jean Bodin’s impassioned 1580 treatise, *On the Demon-Mania of Witches*, provides a perfect example of the swiftness (and violent ferocity) with which witches were to be dealt with:

If it happens that a witch invokes or calls on the Devil, one must without a doubt pronounce sentence of death, for the reasons stated above; but one must condemn such monsters to be burned alive

Witches posed such a danger, that even their bodies, vacant of life or soul, were understood to pose a threat, and so were often burned as a final precaution or a method of murder to begin with.

Central to the successful hunting, torture, and killing of witches was the generation of public psychosis on a grand scale through propaganda; it was one of the first tasks of the printing press to help publicize popular witch trials. Pamphlets chronicling the high-profile trials of the day were circulated widely. This was undoubtedly a widespread, concerted persecution of savvy, skilled women.

These techniques, of demonization and then extermination, were also an instrument of the colonial project in the “New World”. Federici explains, “witch-hunting and charges of devil-worshipping were brought to the Americas to break the resistance of the local population, justifying colonization and the slave trade in the eyes of the world” (p. 198). The dark arts, and the Devil specifically, often depicted as a Black man, were moulded to support racist ideologies. Witches and Black people (as demonic) were characterized as barbaric and wicked. Moreover, they were portrayed as seductive, lustful, and sexually potent; “the oversexualization of women and black men – the witches and the devils – must also be rooted in the position which they occupied in the international division of labor that was emerging on the basis of the colonization of America, the slave trade, and the witch hunt” (p. 200). And so, Blackness and womanness are marks of and marked by bestiality. This is not to say they are analogous as, for instance, women in Europe were set apart from those in colonies in different ways that reinforced the naturalization of varied forms exploitation across time and space.

The figure of the witch is important to the work of this thesis because she sets out, and historically contextualizes, a co-productive relationship between work, gender, and women in

the modern age. It is through the witch, a character always already implicated in the exploitation of women and their work, that I approach this chapter on gender and work. The chapter begins with a review of literature concerning gender and work in Management and Organization Studies, returning to the figure of the witch as an analytic tool. Following this, I theorize gender, going beyond what is offered in Management, with Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, Angela Davis, bell hooks, and Judith Butler. In the subsection about feminism, I briefly touch upon the role of work in those movements. Finally, I return to the witch and introduce the concept of a thin-centred ideology, which is a key aspect of the theoretical contribution of this thesis.

## 1.2 Gender and Work in Management and Organisation Studies

The study of the relationship between gender and work in management studies includes a broad set of concerns and topics. Most of the research located at this intersection, as reviewed below, approaches gender as an identity marker— gender refers to men or, more often, women. Work is understood as an organisational setting, procedure, or role. For instance, research has interrogated aspects of work that impact women in different, or disproportionate ways, like the recruitment process, pay structures, and conventions of leadership, managerialism, and entrepreneurship. The experience of women in male-dominated sectors also interests scholars, much like manifestations of masculinity across various contexts. Biased, discriminatory, and otherwise poor treatment of women in the workplace is well documented, occasionally through the lens of intersectionality. Papers in management and organisation studies journals of the last few years have highlighted the inequitable impact of COVID-19 on working women. Feminist interventions and other organizational responses are also detailed in the literature. Following a brief survey of this literature, I will provide an in-depth account of two of the most prominent theories to do with gender and work: gendered

organisations (Acker, 1990, 1992) and doing gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987, 2009; Butler, 1988, 2002, 2004).

The lineage of the witch, as setting out a particular relationship between women and work, is evident, but not named, in the literature in the sense that women are treated as an external variable organizations and labour markets must contend with. Implicit in the literature is the paradox that women ought to be accepted, encouraged, and ushered into the paid workforce, and that their presence is a problem that requires attention, that either/both women, and organizations need to change towards the needs of each other. It is notable however, that none of the articles query the exclusion of women from work to begin with. The witch provides the historical account for this exclusion and elucidates the persistence of a fear of competent women, that women with power(s) are dangerous. At the peak of the witch-hunts, Federici explains, “no man could feel safe that he did not live with a witch” (2004, pg. 188) setting in motion a gendered paranoia still palpable in the phenomena documented in the literature reviewed in the following sections.

### 1.2.1 Gender as Identity Marker and Work as Workplace, Process or Role

Significant attention is paid to recruitment and hiring phases. Some of these articles advocate for positive action on behalf of organisations (Manfredi, 2017) while others highlighted how gender is perceived in cover letters (He & Kang, 2021). One study found that an applicant’s gender determined “how individuals evaluate the rewards provided by different job, whether they identify with those jobs, and whether they believe that their applications will be successful” (Barbulescu & Bidwell, 2012). Negative recruitment experiences inform women’s willingness to put themselves forward for executive level roles (Brands & Fernandez-Mateo, 2017). In the introduction to a special issue of Organisation Science called Gender and Organization Science: Introduction to a Virtual Special Issue, editors point out that “demand effects are often confused for supply effects” because rather than a lack of

aspiration or ambition on behalf of women, “organizations or jobs look unappealing to women because of past histories of not hiring or promoting women into leadership roles or of making work-life balance appear to be impossible” (Fernandez-Mateo & Kaplan, 2018, p. 1229). Further research supports this claim, showing that “congruence between leadership gender and organisational claims is a key mechanism that drives job seeker’s interests” and that women are most keen to work in organisations that “provide credible signals that they are fair and equitable employers” (Abraham & Burbano, 2020, p. 1).

Management literature studies the gender pay gap comprehensively. This research attempts to better understand the phenomena, noting that European surveys have shown that “employer devaluation of women accounted for the majority of the gender pay gap” (Maume, Heymann & Ruppanner, 2019, p. 1002). In organisations with informal, rather than structured, pay systems, male managers were far less likely to rectify gender pay disparities than female managers were; even then, when left to discretion, most amelioration targeted the lowest level employees (Abraham, 2017). Similarly, liberal managers are more likely to address the gender pay gap than those with a more conservative political ideology (Briscoe & Joshi, 2017). Studies link perceived religiosity amongst women to negatively impact their pay (Sitzmann & Campbell, 2021). Another paper found that the gender pay gap was less stark amongst university presidents at high status institutions (Blevins et al., 2019). Women inventors earn 14% less than their male counterparts despite research showing the commensurate quality and contribution of their work (Hoisl & Mariani, 2016). Scholars interrogate why, in the context of European countries with regulated quotas for women’s representation at the board level, pay gaps persist at the managerial level (Maume, Heymann & Ruppanner, 2019). High profile cases of pay gap disputes are analysed (Simpson et al., 2018).

Women in management or leadership positions are also a subject of study in the literature. Scholars consider how organisational culture shapes women's leadership practices (Longman et al., 2017), and strategies that women use to “obtain and sustain” positions of executive leadership (Glass & Cook, 2020). The concept of the “Phantom of the Male Norm”—drawing attention to socially constructed “congruence between men and managerial jobs”—is deployed to make sense of women's experiences (Billing, 2011). The impact of women's presence on board is considered against investor confidence (Solal & Snellman, 2017). Female entrepreneurship is similarly examined in management literature, largely focused on the relationship between femininity and entrepreneurial identity (Lewis, 2006). For instance, one such study explores the “aesthetic labour required to achieve such postfeminist glamour” as portrayed by Mattel's Entrepreneur Barbie (Pritchard, Davey & Cooper, 2019). Another investigates how female entrepreneurs mobilise familial resources amidst the financial crisis in Greece (Meliou, 2019).

Several studies explore the experiences of women working in male-dominated industries such as forestry (Johansson et al., 2019), firefighting (Ainsworth, Batty & Burchielli, 2014; Tyler, Carson & Reynolds, 2019), skilled trades (Bridges et al., 2021), the funeral industry (Pruitt, 2017), and the military (Steidl & Brookshire, 2018). This research largely offers evidence for women's position as “second-class workers within the masculine culture” of their workplace (Steidle & Brookshire, 2018, p. 1271). This stratification can be traced back to what Federici argues was the sanctifying of male supremacy during the witch-hunts, as well as the fear instilled in men of women undermining them (2004). In these studies, women were shown to engage in “social-identity-based impression management strategies (e.g., attempting to appear less feminine in cover letters)” in the application process for roles in male-dominated sectors (He & Kang, 2021). Some industries or working contexts

are categorised as “extremely gendered” (Tyler, Carson & Reynolds, 2019), or “hypermasculine” (Ajibade Adisa et al., 2019).

Men’s experiences working in female-dominated environments is paid less attention in the literature. Nevertheless, one such study investigates how, “privilege is perceived and talked about” by men working in female-dominated occupations, showing that, “in contrast to existing literature on the invisibility of privilege to the privileged”, “the privileging of men is indeed known to them” (Schwiter, Nentwich & Keller, 2021, p. 2199). Interestingly, the devaluation (and criminalization) of sex work, a (perhaps the only) women dominated industry of the time, occurred concurrently with the witch hunts; a common saying at the time was “a prostitute when young, a witch when old” (Federici, 2004, pg. 197). And so, “women’s work” was necessarily sullied by its correlation to the “dirty and corrupt” work of sex work, and in turn witchcraft. The embedded denigration of “women’s work” is today evident in sectorial differences whereby feminized work is characterized by lower pay and worse conditions.

On a more theoretical level, research dissects masculinity itself by focusing on the construction of masculinity in male-dominated working environments (Johansson, Andersson & Johansson, 2021), female-dominated workplaces (Adamson, 2014), and beyond (Liu, 2017). Women who worked as volunteer firefighters offered complex reflections on how masculinity is constructed in a male dominated environment where scholars theorised gender as a relational discursive construction with material implications (Ainsworth, Batty & Burchielli, 2014). A study based on interviews with professional Chinese men in Australia points towards the way Western gender structures have cast Asian men as “weak, feminized and asexual”, “subordinate to white hegemonic ideals” (Liu, 2017, p. 194). Notably, a recent article in the *Academy of Management Annals* provides a systemic review of literature to do with inequity in management studies, finding that most research is conducted through the lens

of disadvantages, rather than privilege or advantages (Phillips, Jun & Shakeri, 2022). The authors point out that such an approach renders racism and sexism as one dimensional rather than having to do with the power and privilege afforded by white supremacy and patriarchy (Phillips, Jun & Shakeri, 2022).

Gender bias and discriminatory treatment is detailed extensively by academics themselves through autoethnographic work about experiences of cyberbullying (Mandalaki & Perezts, 2021) and glaringly unfair treatment in comparison to male counterparts (Salmon, 2021). Outside of academia, women recount being ignored by men altogether (Jones & Clifton, 2017). A review of literature concerning women's career choices found three primary justifications for their "opting out" or being "pushed out": career preference, gender bias, and work-family explanations (Kossek, Su & Wu, 2017).

Intersectional analyses focused on revealing "complex patterns of (dis)advantage" (Sang & Calvard, 2019, p. 1506) have been performed on a broad range of subjects: hotel workers in Venice, Italy (Alberti & Iannuzzi, 2019), hotel workers in New Zealand (Mooney, Ryan & Harris, 2017), further education lecturers in hair and beauty (Harness, 2021), migrant workers in the context of academia (Sang & Calvard, 2019), Digital Humanities scholars in Nordic countries (Griffin, 2019), senior higher education leaders in UK business schools (Sliwa et al., 2021). This group of literature characterises intersectionality as fluid, embodied (Alberti & Iannuzzi, 2019) and relational (Sliwa et al., 2021)

A recent empirical study based on qualitative interviews with PhD and postdoctoral researchers took an intersectional approach to examining experiences of sexism and racism (Bourabain, 2020). The study identified four relevant processes: (1) smokescreen of equality describing a "paradoxical climate in which substantial attention is paid to the construction of an inclusive academia, but does not do so effectively" (p. 255), (2) everyday cloning takes

place in a climate where “the existence of inequality is suppressed” while “everyday sexism and gendered racism are sustained” and reproduced (p. 356), (3) patronisation refers to the ways in which women’s expertise is unacknowledged and purposively undermined, (4) paternalism more specifically refers to the treatment of an individual by, most commonly, superiors who assert dominance through dismissiveness or ‘mansplaining’, for example.

COVID-19 and its impact on working life has become the subject of a great deal of research. Some studies focused on the gendered experience of government mandated lockdowns and the transition to new work patterns, such as remote working (Coban, 2020; Gao & Sai, 2020; Ryan et al., 2020), while others performed a gendered analysis of institutional responses (Nash & Churchill, 2020). A set of literature chastises claims that the pandemic was a “great equaliser”, pointing out the ways in which inequalities along social class, gender, ethnicity, race, religion disability, and age lines were worsened (Johnson, 2021; Mandalaki, et al., 2022). Research revealed the ways in which women bore “the brunt of school closures, mass lay-offs and increase in care duties due to lockdowns”, highlighting how “white, masculine bodies and abilities in the workforce are inoculated from the perils of disaster” (Johnson, 2021, p. 639).

Finally, research considers organisational and feminist responses or interventions. Amongst the organisational responses studied, are women only mentoring schemes (Dashper, 2018). Another study finds that, although managers express commitment to improving gender equality and are aware of related policies, they “lacked a deeper understanding of how organisations and human resource practice are gendered, which impeded translating commitment into action” (Colley, Williamson & Foley, 2020, p. 284).

Feminism is thoroughly discussed in Organization Studies literature, largely in the journal *Gender, Work & Organisation*. Scholars use their work to further feminist agendas,

advocating for art and activism (Mandalaki et al, 2022), setting up networks and organising collectively (Gurrieri, 2021), and proposing radical, affective, and affirmative politics of resistance (Pullen, Rhodes & Thanem, 2017). Various types of feminism come under scrutiny, including business feminism (Fodor, Glass & Nagy, 2018), moderate feminism (Lewis et al., 2019; Mavin & Grandy, 2018), neoliberal feminism (Colley & White, 2018), and postfeminism (Lewis, 2014; Lewis, Benschop & Simpson, 2017). Neoliberal feminism and postfeminism are closely related. Neoliberal feminism is “a new variant of feminism, on that revolves centrally around the notion of a happy work-family balance”. Put simply, careerism is promoted as emancipatory, while expectations of “good” motherhood are reinforced (Whiley, Sayer & Jaunchich, 2020). Furthermore,

disavowing the socioeconomic and cultural structures shaping our lives, this feminism spawns a feminist subject who accepts full responsibility for her own wellbeing and self-care, which are predicated on crafting a felicitous work-family balance, which is itself based on a cost-benefit – namely, a market – calculus (Rottenberg, 2018, p. 1075).

Additional theorisation of neoliberal feminism has drawn attention to its promotion of ideals of white femininity, such as clean eating, looking, and living (Wilkes, 2019). Research chronicles the emergence of neoliberal feminism in popular self-help, biography, and memoir style books written by or about women in business, like Sheryl Sandberg’s *Lean In* and Ivanka Trump’s *Women Who Work* (Adamanson, 2017; Rottenberg, 2018). Neoliberal feminist logics have been observed and examined in the rhetoric of conservative political actors (Colley & White, 2018), non-governmental organisations aimed at the economic empowerment of women (Kemp & Berkovitch, 2018), and UK policy around work and retirement (Fegitz, 2022). The impact of neoliberal women’s entrepreneurship policies in Sweden is also the subject of study (Berglund et al., 2018). Some other research tends to how

the neoliberal co-optation of feminism might be resisted (Grosser & McCarthy, 2017; Quah & Ridgway, 2021).

Here, I will briefly diverge to point towards how neoliberal feminism and the witch have come together. Amongst the most famous modern witches are those we meet in the cult classic film *The Wizard of Oz* (1939): The Good Witch of the South, Glinda and the Wicked Witch of the West. We also, very briefly, are introduced to the Wicked Witch of the East before she is crushed beneath Dorothy's falling farmhouse, not all that unlike the violent fates of those original witches hunted in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Wicked Witch of the West provides the archetype for scary witches of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century, those with wart covered complexions wearing black cloaks, casting spells of condemnation. Glinda the Good Witch provides a blueprint for a beautiful blonde aspirational witchy femininity, later exhibited in television shows like *Bewitched* (1964-1972) and *Sabrina the Teenaged Witch* (1996-2003).

The witch now offers a feminist icon of sorts, no doubt with the help of the *Harry Potter* novel (1997- 2007) and film (2001- 2011) franchise. Hermione Granger, best friend of the fictional series' namesake, is a witch best described as bossy, smart, and tenacious. Her quick problem solving is often at the crux of good triumphing over evil. Today, women and girls proudly refer to themselves as “feminist witches”, perhaps referencing a lineage of strong, independent, “outsider” women. T-shirts reading “Yes, I’m a Witch” and “Feminist Witch” are available for purchase. It is at this point that the witch, a woman with magical abilities, and my research converge. The witch is no longer hunted, she is a woman of intelligence and ambition. She is an idol of modern feminine capability. Yet I argue that this figure of the witch serves a purpose not incongruent to the one described by Federici as central to the functioning of capitalism. In our 21<sup>st</sup> Century configuration of neoliberal capitalism, the witch has been made new.

Returning to feminisms, scholars stand hesitant to characterise postfeminism as a type of feminism and instead consider it a “discursive formation” (Gill, Kelan & Scharff, 2016), whereby “the contemporary ‘ordinariness’ of feminist principles is accompanied by a repudiation of feminist action alongside a process of retraditionalization” (Lewis, Benschop & Simpson, 2017, p. 5). This retraditionalization encompasses a resurgence of gender essentialism and the devaluation of the feminine (Ronen, 2018), as well “old-school” and contradictory feminine sexualities (Duffy, Hancock & Tyler, 2016; Just & Muhr, 2019). Attention paid to postfeminism highlights its seductive appeal (Liu, 2019), as well as how it is rationalised (Treanor, Marlow & Swail, 2020), and “manoeuvred through” (Utoft, 2020). Other studies consider how postfeminism informs entrepreneurial and workplace femininities (Lewis, 2014; Swan, 2017), as well as professional masculinities (Rumens, 2016) has been explored.

A small set of literature extends beyond the gender binary and heterosexual matrix, referencing the experience of trans and non-binary people (O’Shea, 2018), or thinking “with trans” (Moulin de Souza & Parker, 2022) to ask, “How may we organize to make lives liveable rather than foreclose them?” (O’Shea, 2018, p. 17).

The bulk of the literature to do with gender and work are ahistorical and apolitical in their identification of the “problem” and potential “solutions”. This necessarily limits their analytic breadth, where curiosity about cause is bound up in the status quo. The majority of the research then does not recognize the relationship between work, gender, and women the figure of the witch establishes. It is striking that Management scholars working on the edges of the discipline, mentioned immediately above, are asking how we might craft liveable lives; the lives of witches were eradicated, setting up a lineage of conditions to do with gender, race, and work that are, as they note, unliveable.

### 1.2.2 Gendered Organisations and Doing Gender

Much of the research in Management and Organisation Studies concerning gender and work do not engage specifically with theories of gender. Instead, they do research *about* gender, most often about women, rather than *with* gender as a concept. In this section I summarise two of the most ubiquitous theoretical framings applied to gender and work research in management literature: gendered organisations and doing gender. It is important to note that nearly all the articles referenced in this section that work to theorise how gender functions in organisations, are published in a single journal: *Gender, Work and Organization*.

Joan Acker's seminal paper, "Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations" exposes the limits of how gender in organizations had been treated up to that point, arguing that organisations ought not to be considered gender neutral (1990). Instead, Acker, a sociologist by training, proposes a "systemic theory of gender and organizations", whereby the gendered segregation of work— as well as inequality in terms of income and status between men and women— is created and maintained in organisational processes (Acker, 1990, p. 140). Acker uses the concept of embodiment to explain this further:

In organizational logic, both jobs and hierarchies are abstract categories that have no occupants, no human bodies, no gender. However, an abstract job can exist, can be transformed into a concrete instance, only if there is a worker. In organizational logic, filling the abstract job is a disembodied worker who exists only for work... The concept of 'a job' is thus implicitly a gendered concept, even though organizational logic presents it as gender neutral. 'A job' already contains the gender-based division of labor and the separation between the public and the private sphere. The concept of 'a job' assumes a particular gendered organization of domestic life and social production (p. 149)

Acker's theory of gendered organisations emerged out of feminist debates revolving around "sameness and difference", whereby some feminists strongly rejected claims of sex-based difference for fear it would affirm women's subordination while others advocated for the recognition of difference as politically useful. Acker does not take this debate up explicitly in her work, but it seems clear her interest was in presenting "a more nuanced understanding of the issue, one that moved beyond an individual-centred approach and instead included it within the context of institutional/structural processes and dynamics" (Nkomo & Rodriguez, 2017). At the time, "structural or macro-level explanations for women's experiences in organizations were rare, implicitly assuming the problem did not lie at the organization level" (Nkomo & Rodriguez, 2017, p. 1733). From an epistemological point of view, gender was mostly treated as a demographic variable (Ely & Padavic, 2007).

A systemic review of Acker's impact across 47 management journals between 2000 and 2017 found gendered organisation, inequality regimes and the ideal worker to be the three most used of her concepts (Nkomo & Rodriguez, 2017, p. 1736); "most works used Acker's idea as a starting point to position their articles within what we could term the Ackerian theoretical standpoint that recognises that gender is embedded in social structures and institutions" (p. 1738). The legacy of Acker's work continues to reverberate in management and organisation studies (Benschop & van den Brink, 2017). Relatively recent work using concepts like the paradox of participation (Pruitt, 2017) or gendered skill/expertise (Johansson et al., 2019) continue to draw on Acker's gendered organisations theory.

Drawing on the work of Candace West and Don Zimmerman (1987, 2009), with additional theorisation by Judith Butler (1988, 2002, 2004), scholars in Organisation Studies use "doing gender" widely. According to West and Zimmerman "gender does not exist a priori but is created through interaction" (Kelan, 2010, p. 179); they define doing gender as

“a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine ‘natures’” (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 125). In this sense, West and Zimmerman and Butler share a view that gender is constructed. However, Butler characterises gender as a discursive effect: “gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes...gender is always a doing” (Butler, 1990, p. 25). Butler is best known for their poststructuralist theorisation of gender as performative and constituted by “regulatory notions within a heterosexual matrix” (Kelan, 2010, p. 180). Some critical work uses Butler to appraise the “crystallization” of gender identities in empirical work, arguing that, “in order to foreground the fluidity and uncertainty of gender categories in our scholarship, it is necessary to understand gender identity as a process of doing and undoing gender that is located very precisely in time and space” (de Souza, Brewis & Rumens, 2016).

The application of “doing gender” to empirical study is broad in Organisation Studies. A review of empirical studies developed (overlapping) categories for this application as “doing structures”, “doing hierarchies”, and “doing identity” (Nentwich & Kelan, 2013). Examples of “doing structures” include how women navigate participating in the processes of a livestock auction (Pilgeram, 2007) and how gender is performed in open plan office settings designed to encourage collaboration (Hirst & Schwabenland, 2018). “Doing hierarchies” has been taken up by researchers interested in examining the paradox of visibility for women in academia (van den Brink & Stobbe, 2009) and how gender is done by women CEO successors (Byrne et al., 2021), as well as women in elite leadership positions (Mavin & Grandy, 2016). From my review of the literature, “doing identity” is the most common application of “doing gender”. Much of women’s experience in male-dominated fields mentioned above is approached through the lens of “doing gender” or “job crafting”, wherein women are understood to be “enacting ‘dynamic displays’ — material, discursive, and fluid

— of their gender identities and meanings as situated responses to a given job demand being made” (Yu & Jyawali, 2020, p. 610). Doing gender is applied to entrepreneurs (Bruni, Gherardi & Poggio, 2004), members of regional development boards (Sheridan, McKenzie & Still, 2010), exotic dancers (Mavin & Gandy, 2011), nursing students (McDonald, 2012), women politicians (Charles, 2013) and care workers (Ravenswood & Harris, 2016).

Much of the empirical work on how gender is done centres on women. Only in recent years has an agenda for studying how men do gender at work been set (Kelan, 2017), with studies investigating how male administrative assistants do gender (Seeley, 2017). The doing of gender by trans and non-binary people in organizational settings is also paid some attention (Thanem & Wallenberg, 2016). Finally, the possibility for gender to be “undone” has also been theorised (Butler, 2004; Kelan, 2010), and applied to various groups of workers and settings (Charles, 2013; Thanem & Wallenberg, 2016).

It is also important to note that the application of doing gender in management and organisation studies has been criticised for its misappropriation, through which “its potential value as a theoretical device for advancing feminist scholarship and gender studies is being overlooked and even occluded” (Wickens & Emmison, 2007, p. 326).

### 1.3 Gender & Feminism

In this section, I will attempt to theorize gender more substantially. Each of the theorists included here are connected in some way and offer a perspective on gender beyond what Management literature can offer. I begin with French feminists Simon de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray, both of whom produced work theorizing gender in the mid-late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Their work is the product of particular political moments, and contemporary debates in French philosophy. Their counterpart, Hélène Cixous, is credited with the conceptual development of *écriture féminine*, translated to women’s/feminine writing, which is indicative of the general

philosophical and literary approach taken by theorists of time— making the work of Beauvoir and Irigaray even more relevant to this project in which I later engage in feminist storytelling. The next thinker I engage with, American academic and activist Angela Davis, studied French and in France for a time, where she focused on Jean-Paul Sartre, whose relationship with Simone de Beauvoir I briefly explore below. From French philosophy, Davis went on to study extensively under and with Frankfurt School philosopher Herbert Marcuse, whose work is vital to my theorization of technology in the next chapter. In fact, Davis wrote the forward for the 2019 book, *Herbert Marcuse, Philosopher of Utopia: A Graphic Biography* (Thorkelson, 2019). Davis’ work on the legacy of slavery, the suffragette movement, and working women elucidate what race does in relation to gender. Reviewers of Davis’ book, *Women, Race & Class*, compared it to bell hooks’ *Ain’t I a Woman?* (Lewis & Parmar, 1983). Davis and hooks met when they were both teaching at San Francisco State. hooks’ work urged that attention be paid to the degradation of Black women and in turn, that action be taken to dismantle white supremacy. Both Davis and hooks were concerned about feminism, its tactics and aims, through the lens of Black womanhood. Judith Butler, the final theorist I introduce into conversation, discussed the work of de Beauvoir and Irigaray, amongst others (Freud, Lacan, Derrida, and Foucault), in their seminal text *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. With Beauvoir, Irigaray, Davis, hooks, and Butler, I understand gender quite distinctly from how it is characterized in Management literature and in turn set out the groundwork for my theorizing of gender as thin-centred ideology.

Yet it is still being talked about. And the volumes of idiocies churned out over this past century do not seem to have clarified the problem. Besides, is there a problem? And what is it? Are there even women? (Simone de Beauvoir, 1949)

Gender is colloquially treated as a category of identity; alongside race, age, class, and other characterisations, gender offers us an easily communicable aspect of “who we are”. An essentialist notion of gender implies a direct correlation between one’s sex, their genitalia and chromosomal makeup, expressed in binary terms of female and male, to one’s gender as either a woman or a man. In this section, I put the work of French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, French psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray, American activist-academic Angela Davis, American author bell hooks, and American gender theorist Judith Butler in conversation to conceptualise gender beyond essentialist or identity marker usage most common in Management literature.

“One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one”- Simone de Beauvoir

It was only a year after her enfranchisement that, in 1946, Simone de Beauvoir, then a public intellectual, began drafting what was to become *The Second Sex*, a treatise on gender birthed from her own struggle to define herself (Thurman, 2010). The text was written in response to both the station of women in society at the time— women in France occupied a position quite different from what we observe today in central Europe— and of her own experience as a woman. Beauvoir’s long lasting romantic relationship with Jean Paul Sartre, notable existentialist philosopher, was also impactful. Sartre commented that Beauvoir had “a man’s intelligence”, which she originally took to be complimentary (Thurman, 2010). Upon further reflection, she wrote, it implied that “humanity is male, and man defined women, not in herself, but in relation to himself” (Thurman, 2010, p. 11). Some claim Sartre’s “notion of an opposition between a sovereign self – a subject – and an objectified Other, gave Beauvoir the conceptual scaffold for ‘The Second Sex’” (Thurman, 2010, p. 11). However, I hesitate to overstate his influence and, it should be noted, Beauvoir addressed the matter directly in an interview, explaining they had “a reciprocal influence, that is that each of us has criticized the works of the other” (p. 337), and that “Sartre has never been very interested in the question of

women” (Simons, Benjamin & de Beauvoir, 1979, p. 338). It is notable that Angela Davis, whose work I engage with shortly, dedicated much of her academic life to the close and dedicated study of Sartre’s work.

Beauvoir begins her book with a series of questions: “Is there a problem?”, “And what is it?”, “Are there even women?”, “Where are the women?”, “But first, what is a woman?” (p. 23). Beauvoir’s writing is brimming with important angst, and it is tempting to share it verbatim here; it is also beautifully written. Her theorisation begins with a rejection of gender essentialism: “if the female function is not enough to define woman, and if we also reject the explanation of the ‘eternal feminine,’ but if we accept, even temporarily, that there are women on the earth, we then have to ask: what is a woman?”, again we ask (p. 25). She goes on to formulate a definition of woman as “the negative” to man’s positive *and* default. For Beauvoir, women are the lack against which men are made wholly different. She argues that universal personhood is conflated with masculine gender, and so it is only women who are defined in gendered terms; women are the Other (1949). Based on this theorisation, Beauvoir argued that women ought not “be just like men” or strive towards “as much power as men”, because she rejected power and hierarchies altogether (Jardine & de Beauvoir, 1979).

*The Second Sex* then, challenged dominant psychoanalytic theory of her time which was based on “a concept of normalcy that effectively condemned women to dependent, passive lives” (Simons, Benjamin & de Beauvoir, 1979, p. 336). It comes as no surprise that the text caused a kind of “backlash” from Freudian and feminist essentialists alike, to which Beauvoir responded dismissively. However, Beauvoir’s theory is not without its own shortcomings. As other feminist scholars have pointed out, *The Second Sex* does not offer any practical steps towards liberation, is ethnocentric, and is even androcentric. Its perspective is

necessarily limited by Beauvoir's position as a European bourgeois white woman and reliance on her own perspective as universal (Simons, Benjamin & de Beauvoir, 1979).

“Women does not have a sex”- Luce Irigaray

“My interpretation of woman as other differs from that of Simone de Beauvoir. According to her, woman is second with respect to man”, explains Luce Irigaray in a 2007 interview, “My idea of otherness is more radical. The difference now is qualitative, and the negative is not used to compare two subjects: it maintains the duality of the subjects and of their worlds” (Howie, 2007, p. 285). Irigaray's project then, responds to concepts of woman as the Other from a position that is rooted in what she understands as the universal reality of sexual difference. She agrees with Beauvoir's rejection of Freudian definitions of the feminine condition: “anatomy is destiny”; however, she argues that the “reality of two has always existed” but it was “submitted to imperatives of a logic of the one, the two being reduced then to a pair of opposites not independent one from the other” (Irigaray, Pluhacek & Bostic, 2008, p. 344).

Central to Irigaray's theorisation is that women's gender constitutes the “unrepresentable” or, the sex, which is not one, but multiple (1985). Here men are both the subject and the Other, at the exclusion of women altogether. Irigaray rejects the label of feminism, explaining,

I have many times protested against the fact that I could be called a feminist.  
I have repeated that I do not want to belong to any ‘ism’ category, be it  
feminism, post-feminism, post-modernism, etc. Other people designate me as  
feminist, but not myself (Howie, 2007, p. 283)

Here Irigaray resists legibility- an issue that has plagued her work for decades.

Following the publication of *The Sex Which is Not One*, Irigaray was criticised for what

was read as essentialist provocations. For instance, she references a “feminine way” or essence often, but, when questioned about this apparent essentialism responds, “Could it be the lack of essences which allows people to say anything and everything about my thinking?” (Howie, 2007, p. 287). Irigaray’s career is demonstrative of a persistent attention paid to legibility and language, examining the authority and ideological connotations which accompany gendered utterances, texts, and subjects.

“‘Woman’ was the test, but not every woman seemed to qualify”- Angela Davis

While both Beauvoir and Irigaray concerned themselves with women’s ontological position to men, setting out the substance of their otherness, Davis, taking the slavery of the American South as her point of departure, posits that “since women, no less than men, were viewed as profitable labor-units, they might as well have been genderless as far as the slaveholders were concerned” (Davis, 1983, pg. 3). Here, Davis links gender, race, and work from the start, her primary argument being that “racism and sexism frequently converge- and the condition of white women workers is often tied to the oppressive predicament of women of color” (pg. 82).

In her work, Davis not only sets out the position of Black women within a gendered and racialized matrix of oppression, but she also puts forth corresponding concepts of emancipation and liberation. Davis’ characterization of the Black woman subject is distinctly material in comparison to that of Beauvoir and Irigaray. This is not to say Davis forgoes mention of subject-object relations; but she does emphasize the ways in which the lineage of the work of Beauvoir and Irigaray, especially in terms of their violent ignorance and negligence of race, produced a racist feminist movement informed by the preoccupations of white women alone (pg. 62). Beyond this, the centring and serving of white women in American feminisms came at the direct expense

of Black women. Amongst countless examples of this are the fact that “the wages received by white women domestics have always been fixed by the racist criteria used to calculate the wages of Black women servants” (pg. 82) and the suffragette movement’s resistance to adopt trade unionism as they “did not fully embrace the fundamental principles of unity and class solidarity”, often “unwilling to concede that Black Liberation might claim momentary priority over their own interests as white women” (pg. 125). In essence, white feminist activists were perpetuating the very oppression they protested. In her work, bell hooks, who I engage with below, echoes this sentiment, “we perpetuate both consciously and unconsciously the very evils that oppress us” (1982, pg. 120). Davis explains this through the master-servant, or mistress-maid, relationship, whereby the servant’s consciousness is purposefully and consistently annihilated.

“Throughout American history, the racial imperialism of whites has supported the custom of scholars using the term ‘women’ even if they are referring solely to the experience of white women”- bell hooks

hooks, a contemporary of Davis’, is similarly concerned with the co-productive nature of race and gender. In her seminal text, *Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, hooks begins with a concern for the specificity of patriarchal dominance within the civil rights moment. She points out that Black men in the movement “demanded that black women assume a subservient position”, “Black women were told that they should take care of household needs and breed warriors for the revolution” (hooks, 1982, pg. 5). Of particular interest to hooks is the way in which the ontological tying of Black women to strength produced a divergence between white and Black women, whereby Black women were celebrated for their experience of oppression:

When the women's movement was at its peak and white women were rejecting the role of breeder, burden bearer, and sex object, black women were celebrated for their unique devotion to the task of mothering; for their 'innate' ability to bear tremendous burdens; and for their every-increasing availability as a sex object (pg. 6)

hooks also points towards the incapacity for white people to understand race and racism, especially as having an origin, progression, and lineage. It is this inability that perpetuates the universalizing of white women as "women", and the view, which was certainly that of the white public in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that "the black female was a creature unworthy of the title of woman; she was merely chattel, a thing, an animal" (pg. 159). She emphasizes that despite the active, sometimes violent, exclusion of Black women from feminist spaces and events, they have made great contributions to the movement, contributions which are again and again, excluded from the record. Such an erasure reinforces the ontological position of Black women in relation to the subjectivity of woman. To return to the discussions of Beauvoir and Irigaray, the subject-Other configurations that so preoccupied them appear antiquated (though not without their use) given what race does as outlined by Davis and hooks.

"Masculine and feminine roles are not biologically fixed but socially constructed"

- Judith Butler

In the 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble*, originally published in 1990, Judith Butler explains: "as I wrote it, I understood myself to be in an embattled and oppositional relation to certain forms of feminism, even as I understood the text to be part of feminism" (p. vii). The forms of feminism Butler refers to here are those that presumed clear delineations of gender along the lines of masculinity and femininity. Butler has maintained throughout their work that because "any feminist theory that restricts the meaning of gender in the presuppositions of its own practice sets up exclusionary gender norms within feminism, often with

homophobic consequences” and that “feminism ought to be careful not to idealize certain expressions of gender that, in turn, produce new forms of hierarchy and exclusion” (p. viii). And so, Butler’s project is clear, in the writing of *Gender Trouble*, they sought to explore the conditions necessary for an opening of gender, rather than a closing.

For Butler, the theorizations put forth by Beauvoir and Irigaray are emblematic of “the problematic circularity of feminist inquiry into gender” whereby for some, “gender is a secondary characteristic of persons”, and still for others, “the very notion of the person, positioned within language as a ‘subject’, is a masculinist construction and prerogative which effectively excludes the structural and semantic possibility of a feminine gender” (1990, p. 16). Instead, Butler proposes gender as performative.

Drawing on Michel Foucault’s work about disciplinary regimes and the subjection of criminals in “Discipline and Punish”, Butler characterizes gender identity as produced “along culturally intelligible grids of an idealized and compulsory heterosexuality” whereby, “the disciplinary production of gender effects a false stabilization of gender in the interests of the heterosexual construction and regulation of sexuality within the reproductive domain” (p. 184). This framework leads Butler to conclude that the gendered body is performative, that it has “no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality” (p. 185). Central to gender performativity is repetition. Butler describes gender as an act, a kind of inscribed ritual, legitimized through temporal and collections dimensions of practice. Here Butler works to undermine concepts of gender as an expression of an “essence”, arguing that there is no essence; there is a regulatory system within which we, as gendered subjects, produce and reproduce the gender binary with our bodies.

A familiar feminist retort to the question of gender is to say that sex is biological, and gender is cultural, or socially constructed. However, this definition reifies sex as “natural,

anatomical, chromosomal, or hormonal”, while failing to challenge the production of sex as scientific fact (Butler, 1990, p. 10). By doing so, we come to understand that the relationship between gender and sex is not that of distinction, but rather of cohesion; that is, sex was “always already gender” (1990, p. 11). Butler expands upon this when she explains how she positions her work in debates about materiality and constructivism within which she does not seek to reconcile materiality in constructivist terms. Instead, Butler works to “understand why the essentialism/constructivism debate founders on a paradox that is not easily or, indeed, not ever overcome” because “just as no prior materiality is accessible without the means of discourse, so no discourse can ever capture that prior materiality” (1998, p. 278).

Amongst the implications of Butler’s theory, which she expands upon in her next book “Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive limits of ‘sex’”, is the way in which “the abjection of certain kinds of bodies, their inadmissibility to codes of intelligibility, does make itself known in policy and politics” (1998, p. 277). Universalistic claims around womanhood are rooted in a shared epistemological view articulated through ubiquitous structures of oppression. In essence, “the insistence upon the coherence and unity of the category of women has effectively refused the multiplicity of cultural, social, and political intersections in which the concrete array of ‘women’ are constructed” (1990, p. 20).

Implicit in the work of Butler is the recognition of the political usefulness, or perhaps necessity, of gender identity. That is, we must be able to refer to women as such, when we attempt to describe endemic gender-based violence for instance; yet imbedded in this usefulness is a violence of unrecognition, of the ways in which the other systems of power, like race, interact with, or are co-productive to gender. As Butler points out, “if identities were no longer fixed as the premises of a political syllogism, and politics no longer understood as a set of practices derived from the alleged interests that belong to a set of

ready-made subjects, a new configuration of politics would surely emerge from the ruins of the old” (1990, p. 203).

In this thesis, I begin with gender as a “complexity whose totality is permanently deferred, never fully what it is at any given juncture in time”, “an open assemblage that permits of multiple convergences and divergences without obedience to a normative telos of definitional closure” (Butler, 1990, p. 22). However, to describe gender in this manner is not to discount it as a category of significance in our society. Instead, I work with gender as a category embedded within mechanisms of subordination and exploitation, around which power clusters to privilege some while disenfranchising others. I intend to contribute to theorizations that recognize that “it is precisely the combination of rigid gender categories with the malleability and variability of their enactments and meaning that explains the resilience of gender as a principle of human differentiation” (Weeks, 2014, p. 11, in reference to Salzinger, 2003). Thus, this is a project that assumes that the categories of gender have meaning and consequences that produce and maintain social hierarchies, as well as querying the ways in which the process of categorization itself is imbued with dynamics of power (Crenshaw, 1990).

“...a feminism that does not embrace Woman, but is for women”- Donna Haraway

In a straightforward way, feminism came from gender. Without the contemporary gender binary, and the subjugation of women, there would be no need for feminism. The evolution of gender theory can loosely be tracked onto feminist history in the West, often described as first, second, third, and fourth waves. The waves are undoubtedly an account of white women’s feminisms are the fore and so, the wave metaphor has been criticised for its oversimplification, its resultant generational divisiveness based on false dichotomies, and its linear rigidity (Evans & Chamberlain, 2015). Each wave cannot possibly account for the

actual range of feminisms, nor should they be considered as strictly distinct from each other. Nevertheless, keeping these limitations in mind, the waves are still a useful framework through which to understand the hegemonic history of Western white feminism.

At the centre of the first wave were suffragette agitators. The movement was almost exclusively focused on voting rights with an implicit gender-sex symmetry. Aside from some small factions within the first wave “motivated by the desire to subvert the overarching category of ‘woman’”, the movement was essentialist in nature and centred the desires of white women (Delap, 2007, p. 6). The second wave of the 1960s broadened its rights-based activism to include the social and personal. Feminist preoccupations of the time included equal pay and bodily autonomy; this went hand-in-hand with sexual liberation. Colloquially, it is often referred to as the “era of disaffected housewives” (Evans & Chamberlain, 2015, p. 400); again, there were fragments within the wave, namely radical-libertarian feminists, radical cultural feminists, and liberal feminists of the classic and welfare persuasion (Tong, 2018). In the United Kingdom, for example, socialism was much more influential on the women’s movement of this period than in the United States (McRobbie, 2009). Although the third wave is the most disparate, it can be characterised within the wider push for inclusivity of the 1990s. Third wave feminism intentionally attempted, without necessarily succeeding, to decentre white middle class women to foreground the concerns of Black and queer women. The elusive nature of the third wave is by design, as its proponents actively resisted prescriptive practice or self-definition and identification (Evans & Chamberlain, 2015). During the fourth wave, women’s independence and freedom are celebrated, where the focus turns towards women’s thriving and success (McRobbie, 2009). Social media platforms become a new battleground for feminist issue-oriented organising around body positivity and rape culture.

There are, of course, numerous feminisms, including liberal, Marxist, radical, psychoanalytic, socialist, existentialist, and postmodern amongst them. Neoliberal feminism, mentioned in the previous section, is of most relevance to the chapters that follow here; it refers to co-option of feminism by the logics of neoliberal market logics. More specifically, the neoliberal feminist subject strives for the perfect work-life balance through a relentless regime of self-improvement and optimisation (Rottenberg, 2014). It is not my intention to suggest there is, or ought to be a singular and central feminism. My project, in part, is to consider how gender functions within the neoliberal feminist paradigm, keeping the figure of the witch present throughout. Federici points out that the story of the witch hunts are often expunged from accounts of modern capitalism, whereby they become symbolic of a barbaric premodernity, rather than as real rebellions.

#### 1.4 Towards Gender as a Thin-Centred Ideology

The theoretical account of gender developed in the previous section is far and away from the way gender is characterized and used in most Management literature and research. Here I will take one step further and set out the foundation for my theorization of gender as a thin-centred ideology.

Political scientists Cas Mudde and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser propose an intervention in contentious debates concerning the nature of populism. As they note, populism has been dismissed as a “*Kampfbegriff*”, a political battle term used to denounce political opponents, and because it is too vague, thus applicable to many political figures or movements (2017). Amongst the alternative theorisations of populism are the “popular agency”, “Laclauan”, “socioeconomic”, “political strategy”, and “folkloric style of politics” approaches. Importantly, Mudde and Kaltwasser’s aim is not necessarily to challenge, undermine, or replace these other definitions of populism (2017). Instead, they understand their ideational

formulation as compatible with aspects of each of the approaches, including, rather than discarding them in their attempts to elucidate the complexity of populism. Mudde and Kaltwasser are motivated by an observation that a great deal of intellectual attention has been paid to the normative and theoretical arguments concerning populism, and a desire to “construct a framework within which the term populism has a clear meaning and its relationship to democracy can be studied empirically” (2012, p. 1).

Essential to Mudde and Kaltwasser’s conceptualisation of populism is their positioning of it within the broader context of liberal democracy. That is, “theoretically, populism is most fundamentally juxtaposed to liberal democracy” (2017, p. 7). I will detail later how gender is juxtaposed to justice- that is how gender produces difference, and the conditions of possibility for exploitation, violence, and injustice. Mudde, and Kaltwasser propose the following definition of populism:

a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic camps, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite,’ and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonte generale* (general will) of the people (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 6).

Within this definition is a conception of ideology as a set of normative beliefs about the essence of humans, our society, its organization, and function. Ideology is a worldview which informs how each of us believe the world ought to be. Framing gender as an ideology, especially in Management, would be especially useful in querying, and possibly dismantling, its production of difference and the consequent violence it causes. Gender as a thin-centred ideology allows for us to better consider the historical

production of its tenants, for instance what the witch does and means to the legacy of gender and work, or what race does to gender.

In this thesis I suggest that gender can, alongside other theoretical framings as outlined in Chapters 1 and 2, be understood as being about the unequal antagonism between men and women, or masculinity and femininity, in hierarchical terms. Here, understood as an ideology of fluidity, like populism, gender is slippery and yet destructive in its wielding of power.

## CHAPTER 2: GENDER & TECHNOLOGY

### 2.1 Introduction

There is a uniquely charming ride at the Disney World theme park in Orlando, Florida called the Carousel of Progress. My family vacationed in Orlando almost exclusively for the entirety of my childhood and the Carousel provided a kind of sanctuary during an otherwise hectic visit to Magic Kingdom. I was — and continue to be — an anxious rider. That is, I'm terrified of rollercoasters and being jerked around in unexpected directions, and I especially hate “drops” of any kind. Any time I spent in theme parks as a child was marked by nervousness and scepticism. By the time I was ten years old I had taken to asking the ride operators to “promise there aren't any drops” before buckling myself in, even on rides I had been on before. There was no stress involved with the Carousel of Progress. I could rest assured, just from its external appearance, that it was not going to thrust my body about at any high speed. Instead, it was like walking into a dark air-conditioned womb where I would be shown, through the performance of beautiful looking electronic characters, slightly stunted in their robotic movements, a lovely bedtime story with an obvious happy ending. And now, it seems trite to suggest that my perception of the ride has changed (progressed, even) to the point that I fear it. I don't even have to think about it too hard to fill myself with dread.

The Carousel of Progress illustrates the evolution of technology in American homes through a series of vignettes with a robotic family at its centre. The ride begins with the narrator introducing it as the brainchild of Walt Disney himself: “‘You know, Walt loved the idea of progress’, says the voice, outlining the attraction's dual themes, ‘and he loved the American family’” (Cornfeld, 2017, p. 316). The Carousel was made famous upon its debut at New York World's Fair in 1964 and an estimated 100 million people visited the attraction in the first 20 years (Weiner, 1997). As the audience circles the stage, they witness an idyllic

(white middle-class) family household across four different eras: the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 1920s, 1940s, and a more recent present, whatever that may be (the ride has been updated four times). The first version of the ride Act 1, based in the turn of the century, showcases “the family’s new acquisitions – an ice box, water pump, gas lamps, telephone, stove, ‘talking machines,’ and vacuum cleaner” (Weiner, 1997, p. 112). The next act, in the 1920s, highlights the kitchen with a plethora of new appliances including, “a coffee percolator, waffle iron, refrigerator, and toaster” (Weiner, 1997, p. 112). Then, Act 3, set in the 1940s touts the benefits of an electric washing machine and dishwasher. The last scene of this version of the ride takes place in the “General Electric ‘Medallion Home’ of the 1960s” referencing lighting that can be made to match the mood and the various customisations and colours available for appliances in the “Kitchen of Tomorrow” (Weiner, 1997, p. 113).

The Carousel is a useful illustration of the relationship between gender and technology because, as media studies scholar Li Cornfeld explains, it is “dedicated to celebrating tools that bolster women’s participation in the social reproduction of capitalism” (Cornfeld, 2017, p. 316). The Carousel also makes clear the Euro-American context within which my work is situated. The Carousel depicts a nuclear family empowered by technology, but also steeped in the privilege of their middle-class whiteness. Therefore, I will return to the Carousel throughout this chapter as I provide a review of how Organisation Studies has treated gender and technology and then, in the second and third sections, theorise gender and technology in different ways – in ways that excavate some of the underlying assumptions of the first section.

## 2.2 Gender and Technology in Organisation Studies

There is an irony to the fact that the primary user of technology in the Carousel of Progress is the wife/mother figure. Despite the apparent attention paid to the domestic sphere as a site for

technologically enabled optimization, women are contemporarily understood as separate from, even incapable of, using technology, never mind building it. This is evident in Organization Studies literature to do with gender and technology, which largely focused on women's experience working in the technology section, based on the problematization of a lack of gender parity in the industry. Gendered analysis operates at either a comparative level (between men and women), or a descriptive level – focussing on women as subjects of study – that is, gender is an identity marker. Therefore, researchers seek to identify and understand barriers to entry, discriminatory practices, hostile working conditions, etc. There is also interest in potential solutions to this problem, including a variety of what is now referred to as “diversity management” strategies.

### 2.2.1 Technology as a Sector: Problems

To begin with, a subset of this research considers what is colloquially referred to as problems with the “pipeline”. That is, issues that impact, hinder, or restrict women's pursuit of careers in technology prior to entering the job market, namely education. These articles frame gender disparity in the industry as directly linked to how technical subjects are taught. For instance, a 1992 article identified education as a fundamental cause of “the persistence of gender segregation in the technical profession” (p. 557). Another study interested in university students' transition to the job market found that women were disadvantaged by the “extra help” they were given by their instructors, ostensibly a function of gendered expectations of capability (Powell, Dainty & Bagihole, 2011). Tracking and comparing the trajectory of engineering, or other technical graduates, is also a common endeavour (Ranson, 2003). One such study presented first-year engineering students with sixty elements from the Bem Sex-Role Inventory to gauge perceptions of the industry and consider them against the choices women go on to make in their careers (Kelley & Bryan, 2018).

Following on from this, choice is another preoccupation of scholars in the field. As the education required for work in the technology sector was made more accessible to women, attention shifted to women's decision making, with underlying hypotheses ranging from essentialist notions of skill, to gendered preference (Devine, 1994; Henwood, 1996; Powell, Dainty & Bagihole, 2012). In attempting to uncover the reasons for gender segregation in the sector, much of the literature characterises the problem as with women themselves, their choices, their way of working and being.

A separate set of literature focuses more on the role of organisations in excluding women. The technology sector is characterised as a fundamentally masculine space and field (Crump, Logan & McIlroy, 2007; Lohan & Faulkner, 2004). Poor treatment of women working in technology is documented across various contexts (Gupta, 2003; Peterson, 2007). For instance, a study based in India found that, broadly, "women suffer from a lack of critical mass in the institutes, lower positions in the organizational hierarchy, exclusion from important administrative posts and a general isolation in the work environment" (Gupta, 2003, p. 613). Cultural references and insider knowledge entrenched in the masculine environment of software development was characterised as another impediment to women's professional success (Lin & den Besten, 2017). A study situated in Sweden provided evidence for the impact of gendered stereotypes on employee value in the eyes of managers at information technology firms (Peterson, 2007). And research conducted in the context of the German software industry linked gendered concepts of expertise to organisational segregation (Ben, 2007). More specifically, data showed that "personnel managers expect women to possess special social skills and therefore prefer to employ women for tasks that are considered to be socially oriented in the organization" (Ben, 2007, p. 326). Others more explicitly challenged "the stereotypical view of women as technophobic and men as

technophilic” by excavating the relationship between human-machine interactions and the gender division of labour (Packer, 1996, p. 125).

These provocations about gendered skill sets in relation to technology are touched upon by the Carousel of Progress too; in the 1994 version, the depiction of the 1940s characterises the mother as “ill at ease when managing mechanized devices”, naturalising “feminine dependence” by “spotlighting her ineptitude as tasks not squarely coded as female” (Cornfeld, 2017, p. 328). She calls upon her husband to assist her in installing and navigating technology, though his assistance is never actualized for the audience; instead, she is left as a damsel in distress.

There is also considerable literature about women tech founders or entrepreneurs. For instance, a study on networking practices among technology entrepreneurs emphasised the “interrelated individual, organizational, and societal factors contributing to gender inequality” (Ozkazanc-Pan & Muntean, 2017, p. 379). Gender is treated as an influencing factor on the experience and exclusion of female entrepreneurs in high tech incubator contexts (Marlow & McAdam, 2011) and women led start-ups were found to be as financially viable and successful as male led enterprises; however, in terms of raising initial funding, men garner far more (Demartini, 2018).

The work-life balance of women working in technology receives substantial attention in the literature (Holth, Bergman & MacKenzie, 2017). A study conducted in the context of Swedish dual emancipation policies, notes, “gendered assumptions regarding women’s responsibility for family, or compensating for the availability demands of their male partner’s career, were echoed in the roles occupied by women in the workplace: the less technical, generalist and coordinating roles” (Holth, Bergman & MacKenzie, 2017, p. 244). An article entitled, “‘Men Don’t Have Families’: Equality and Motherhood in Technical Employment”

explores how assumptions about varying degrees of familial commitment impingement on work “condition the general treatment of women technical professionals” and “reinforce as unproblematic the prevailing domestic division of labour” (Jones & Causer, 1995, p. 51). Similarly, a study based on interviews with human resource managers in the technology environment found that care responsibilities were discursively separate from work-life balance, reinforcing concepts of the worker as “a man with a female partner who assumes primary responsibility for the reproductive realm” (Hari, 2017, p. 100).

Some of the literature dealt with parenthood — more specifically motherhood — identifying it, or the perception of it in professional settings, as a barrier to women in technology. The planning and timing of motherhood was shown to be critical in the lives of the founders of technology start-ups (Kuschel, 2019). Mumpreneurship then is understood as taken on by “women who created a start-up while young and childless, postponing maternity until the business is ‘stable’” or “mothers who created a technology venture as a strategy to gain higher levels of flexibility and autonomy” (p. 1).

Relatedly, the resilience of women working in the technology sector is also of concern for Organisation Studies researchers. Resilience, understood as an evolving practice involving a suite of coping strategies, is characterised as necessary for success (Tokbaeva & Actenhagen, 2020); researchers suggest practical recommendations for firms, like resilience training with “more explicit gender awareness” because “gender-blind or purely stress-management” training “might not be effective for female employees” (Tokbaeva & Actenhagen, 2020, p. 35). Another study, similarly, focused on resilience, set out three discrete coping strategies: “conforming to play by the rules, negotiating to play around the rules and defying to establish own rules” and emphasised the strength and persistence of the women (Khilji & Pumroy, 2017, p. 1032).

### 2.2.2 Technology as a Sector: Responses

Women's responses to and survival of hostility in the technology sector are the subject of many research articles. The industry and work context are understood to have an impact on women's sense of their own gender identity with behavioural implications on their gender performance (Kenny & Donnelly, 2020). An interesting approach to theorising this negotiation, using Bourdieu's concept of "the game", was applied to women working in STEM in research institutions in the United Kingdom (Fagan & Teasdale, 2021). The findings of this study suggest a plethora of strategies to "playing the game", including "performing as ideal workers, building networks and performing leadership" (Fagan & Teasdale, 2021, p. 789). This study reminds me of a conversation I had with one of the women I interviewed:

The things that helped me in the past are not helping me now. So, I am going to have to figure out a new game plan. The rules of the game have changed. I didn't know there always was a game... I was winning at the game, without knowing the rules. I was winning at it because of a certain combination of characteristics that I had, and also not having children... Now I can see the rules of the game a little better (Gillean)

Other studies focused more specifically on one or two tactics for "game play". For instance, women working in the Swiss Information Technology sector were found to pursue "calculated relationships with organizational gatekeepers", as part of a "more or less conscious game" (Clerc & Kels, p. 197). One study found that women's technical abilities were frequently treated with scepticism, which in turn influenced the women's behaviours in trying to establish their expertise (Kenny & Donnelly, 2020). Another explained how women working as video game developers in Sweden responded to the masculine domination of the field by carving out space as experts about "female gamers' preferences", rather than as "the

possessors of general skills attractive to the video game companies” (Styhre et al., 2018, p. 244). A study found that “Israeli hi-tech women enact and construct a ‘new femininity’ that simultaneously challenges both the discourse of the ‘ideal hi-tech worker’ and that of traditional Israeli femininity” (Frenkel, 2008, p. 352). In the context of Israel where husbands are sometimes not expected to engage in paid work as to make time for religious study, women working in the tech sector were found to struggle in managing professional and social expectations; they found gendered boundaries to be negotiable and solidarity amongst women easier to foster in segregated organisations compared to assimilative ones where rules are strictly set by management and rabbis (Raz & Tzruya, 2016).

A series of strategies and typologies have materialised from this collection of literature. For instance, a comparative study based on the experiences of women in France, The Netherlands, and Italy suggested a set of strategies for women to adopt including assimilation, cul-de-sac, breaking the mould, and lying low (Herman, Lewis & Humbert, 2013). Researchers defined assimilation as conformity “organizational replication (accepting the *status quo*)” whereby the women “strived as far as possible to remain a ‘conceptual man’ or ‘one of the boys’” (p. 472). Women who, after becoming pregnant, accepted that their career would no longer progress further, and the lower status and pay that accompanied that, were said to be evoking a cul-de-sac strategy. Researchers characterised women who resisted conformity and instead were not apologetic about their familial commitments nor their career ambitions as breaking the mould. Finally, those strategically lying low were concerned about their position and progression in anticipation of a “period of slowing down, putting their careers on the back burner, to be retrieved later” (p. 475).

Another study sought to trace how such barriers caused women working in Science, Engineering, and Technology to have non-linear, less predictable career paths (Herman, 2015). Researchers sorted women’s narratives into three categories: Rebooting, Rerouting,

and Retreating. Rebooting referred to “a sense of continuity with a lifelong career identity, even if this included a history of short-term contracts, intermittent jobs, period of unemployment and family care” (p. 330), while the Rerouting narratives were to do with career change that required upskilling, retraining, or additional credentials. Finally, women’s narratives around opting out of their work roles altogether, often to engage in full-time care work, but also because of redundancy, illness, or retirement, were categorised as “retreating”, described as a kind of “giving up” (p. 333).

### 2.2.3 Technology as a Sector: Solutions

The purpose of many studies, especially in the first two decades of the 2000s, was to “aid efforts to retain women within IT” or something similar (Kenny & Donnelly, 2020, p. 326).

A study based on interviews with women working in information and communication technology in New Zealand focused on participants’ perceptions of their work environment and fairness in terms of salary with an aim to “contribute to attracting and retaining them in an industry where a shortage of skills is envisaged in the near future” (Crump, Logan & McIlroy, 2007, p. 349). Along the same lines, the future aspirations and dreams of women workers were examined “given concerns about the future of the ICT sector in terms of skills shortages and gender imbalances” (Moore et al., 2008, p. 524).

Managing diversity is presented as a potential, though limited, response to women’s lack of representation in the industry (Sharp et al., 2012). For instance, when considering the lack of female representation in the information technology industry, an article published in *Work, Employment and Society* in 2009, explains that amongst their participants, “‘hybrid’ roles combining technical and traditionally female skills were seen as the way forward”; such work was seen “as a new way for women to work in a male dominated environment without compromising their gendered identity” (Guerrier et al., 2009, p. 494). A 1995 study

considered whether union presence made a difference on the salary and promotion of women in technology firms in Israel (Bamberger, Admati-Dvir & Harel, 1995).

This literature around rectifying the gender disparity in technology are built upon the assumption that (1) more women working in technology is desirable, and (2) more women working in technology is achievable through organization or industry level intervention. Considerable effort has been put into justifying and quantifying the value of women at work, commonly referred to as the business case (Dickens, 1994; Bilimoria, 2000; Stephenson, 2004). However, this literature has received considerable criticism for their implication that women and other marginalized groups ought to have clear “value adds” (Fine & Sojo, 2019). Researchers have accordingly urged that the question of gender at work go “beyond the business case”, citing additional utilitarian or justice-based rationales (Dickens, 1999; Seierstad, 2016).

#### 2.2.4 Technology as a Tool

Another set of literature characterises technology, not as a sector, but as a tool, gadget, or platform. Within this literature, however, gender remains an identity trait for comparison or for setting out a group of subjects in empirical work. For example, technological changes impacting white-collar workers are analysed along gendered dimensions (Hughes, 1996).

Decades later, technology is treated as a resource in negotiating time and space in work settings with attention paid to its different effects on women and men (Araujo, 2008).

Technology, such as high-quality cameras and mobile phones, is considered vital to the proliferation of mumpreneurship (feminised entrepreneurial activity performed by mothers for other mothers about motherhood) (Mayes, Williams & McDonald, 2018, p. 1468).

Another paper crafts an appraisal of technology’s impact on care work in the healthcare field (Lindsay, 2008; Halford et al., 2015).

Returning to the Carousel of Progress, the approach of scholars detailed directly above, querying how technology impacts people and their productivity, is precisely the purpose of the Carousel. The Carousel targets even more specific aims though, as it “idealizes the housewife as an industrious laborer whose productivity, like a factory worker’s, is bolstered by the introduction of industrial technology” (Cornfeld, 2017, p. 329). It is notable that while literature in Organisation Studies does not consider the relationship between gender and technology in the context of domestic labour, the Carousel makes this link clear: technology aids in work either way, it makes things easier, and tasks can be done quicker.

However, there is other research that is more critical of the accessibility or equality offered by technology. One such study “challenges the notion that the internet is a neutral platform for entrepreneurship” (Martinez Dy, Marlow & Martin, 2017, p. 277). In a similar study, the emancipatory potential of digitally enabled entrepreneurship is examined through an intersectional feminist lens, concluding that “the use of digital platforms for entrepreneurial activity does not in itself ameliorate the negative effects of low or marginal social positionality” (Martinez Dy, Martin & Marlow, 2018, p. 602). Innovation, a process often used interchangeably with technology, is characterised as inherently gendered (Pecis, 2016, p. 2118).

Online platforms are heralded for connecting women along occupational lines, “promoting inclusion, co-producing equalising resources, and fostering exclusive enclaves” (Vasst, 2020, p. 1673). Studies mark social media platforms as a place where professional reputations are made and maintained with the purpose of establishing competence and expertise (Vasst, 2020). Gendered representation, imagery, and performance on these online platforms is also an area of research. Imagery of entrepreneurship has been analysed for its gendering implications where feminised aesthetics, like long, luscious hair and the touching of hair were contrasted against masculine images of a strong chest and stance, with folded

arms (Pritchard, Williams & Miller, 2021). The social media presence of women entrepreneurs as idyllic feminine “wonder women” is situated within a broader analysis about “romanticised ideals of women’s economic empowerment in digital spaces” and the “perpetuation of systemic and structural oppression” (Heizmann & Liu, 2022, p. 411). Coincidentally, the images of the ideal entrepreneurial woman, marked by high femininity and whiteness, map well onto the wife/mum character in the Carousel of Progress.

### 2.2.5 Gender Beyond Identity Marker

Empirical work concerning the tech industry, primarily in *Culture and Organization*, and *Gender, Work, and Organization*, engages with gender theory; most often this engagement involves Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity and the doing of gender. However, as shown in the previous chapter, gender theory, although often referenced, rarely serves as a truly analytic or generative framework. For instance, a 2013 article juxtaposes “public policy claims” to do with the image of the tech sector as masculine with “recruitment literature which seeks to disrupt or shift away from traditional stereotypes of the digital industries worker” (Proctor-Thomson, 2013, p. 85). The author uses Butler’s performativity to argue that “there are unintended consequences in attempts to repopulate the sector with a more diverse group of workers because gender is suffused through understandings of digital industry work” (p. 100). Another study highlights “how the gendering of emotional and social skills shifts with different discursive contexts” (Kelan, 2008, p. 50). An additional paper, again using Butler, claims that “in ‘doing’ engineering, women often ‘undo’ their gender”, which seems an extraordinarily binary claim to make in the context of Butler’s work (Powell, Bagilhole & Dainty, 2008, p. 411).

Beyond this, there is literature that characterises the relationship between technology and gender as fluid, dependent upon “changes in socio-cultural and economic context” (Gupta, 2015, p. 661). One such study emphasises the role of national culture in the

technology-gender relation, arguing that “while in the West the computer culture is typically masculine” in India, this is not necessarily the case (Gupta, 2015, p. 668). However, this article does not clearly define or theorise about technology and gender; instead, there is an underlying assumption that technology refers to the IT industry and computer related work, while gender refers to men and masculinity, and women and femininity. The article that comes closest to a serious ontological interrogation of technology and gender is critical of what it identifies as “a theory of the body circulating within software development whose norms are unattainable by women” because “female bodies are envisaged as ‘flesh’, and male bodies as a futuristic merger of body and machine” (Tassabehji et al., 2021, p. 1297).

In closing, it seems clear that Organisation Studies as a discipline would find the narrative of the Carousel of Progress as familiar, comforting, or even aspirational. Whether technology is conceptualised as a sector or a tool, notions of progress underlie much of the research surrounding gender and technology. The explicit wish in so much of the literature — to have more women working in technology — goes entirely unquestioned; that is, women’s employment in the sector is understood as undeniably progressive, desirable, and even achievable. Although there is some dissent, when technology is defined as a tool, most research heralds it as an accelerator for productivity and connectivity in the workplace or in entrepreneurial contexts. In the following sections, I theorise technology and gender anew returning, when relevant, to the Carousel of Progress.

### 2.3 Technology

In this section, I put the work of a philosopher (Herbert Marcuse), an American Studies scholar (Joel Dinerstein), a historian (Lewis Mumford), an Internet Studies researcher (Safiya Noble), and Critical Race and Ethnic Studies scholars (Neda Atanasoski and Kalindi Vora) in conversation to theorise technology. Drawing on these debates, I suggest a conceptualization

of technology beyond the two presented in Organisation Studies, as either a sector or a tool. The work of these scholars offers an ontological position of technology that is already linked, if not intertwined, with gender and race. That is- technology, recast as a cultural phenomenon and a process, via Mumford and Marcuse respectively, reveals an entirely different relationship between technology and gender than is possible given its treatment in Organisation Studies. Furthermore, the questions and problems at the nexus of gender and technology in Organization Studies (the pipeline problem, the business case motivation etc.) are rendering obsolete in the context of the theorization to follow. Instead, the below theorization provokes a new set of concerns, pointing towards the conditions of possibility at the nexus of gender, technology, and work.

Lewis Mumford's 1934 book, *Technics and Civilization* responds directly to historical accounts of the industrial revolution which centred around the birth of the machine beginning in the eighteenth century. Mumford's work points towards a much richer and more complex relationship between humans and technologies, spanning centuries and starting well before the industrial revolution. His work broadens the boundaries, temporal, spatial and otherwise, within which technological development and innovation is understood. His work is not simply pointing towards a longer lineage of technics, but also the implications of such a history for the ontological and epistemological questions we continue to have about the nature of technology and, its role in our future. Rather than limit our characterisation of technology to its utility, Mumford encourages us to situate technology within our human culture, a culture concerned with truth, goodness, and beauty. In other words, we ought to examine technologies' aesthetic and ethical dimensions. The primary thesis of the book is that the relationship between humans and our world of technics is dynamic (Mumford, 2010, p. xi). This view is best expressed in his own words, "man internalizes his external world and externalizes his internal world" is a marked departure from concepts of human mastery of

natural resource to make tools for themselves (Mumford, 2010, p. xii). It is certainly distinct from the characterization of technology in Organisation Studies as a tool solely to be used by and for human progression.

Mumford's formulation of an interactive relationship between technology and culture stands in stark contrast to what is presented in the *Carousel of Progress*. The characters and their domestic roles are unmarred by the technological change purported to be on the horizon; the "industrial incursions into domestic life pose no threat to the sanctity of the family even as their technology evolves, the human protagonists of the *Carousel* barely change (or even age) over the course of the play" (Cornfeld, 2017, p. 321). This was likely a deliberate choice to alleviate anxieties about how technology could disrupt domestic hierarchies and labour divisions. For instance, in a scene set at the turn of the twentieth century, the wife is shown "stationed behind an ironing board. 'With my new washday marvel' she coos, 'it takes only five hours to do the wash. Imagine!' When the husband begins to tell the audience how new technologies have afforded his wife leisure time, she interjects: less time doing laundry, she explains, gives her time for 'canning and polishing the stove'" (Cornfeld, 2017, p. 321). Notable political events are also poignantly excluded from most iterations; "the civil rights movement and world wars alike go unmentioned" (Cornfeld, 2017, p. 323).

Neda Atanasoski and Kalindi Vora, whose work I explain in greater detail later, express a similar frustration with the way our current moment is referred to as a "fourth industrial revolution" or "second machine age", implying revolutionary change "entirely different from those that led to the first industrial revolution and earlier moments of automation" (2019, p. 17). Instead, they argue that modern fantasies of liberation from onerous labours simply extend the "history of autonomous subject whose freedom is in actuality possible only because of the surrogate effect of servants, slaves, wives, and, later, industrial services workers who perform this racialized and gendered labor" (p. 19). The

fantasy is, of course, that “machines take on the sort of work that degrades humans” so that “humans can be freer than ever to pursue their maximum potential” (pg. 16). In essence, technology as surrogate obscures gendered and racialized designations of (in)valuable, and (in)decent, work.

For philosopher Herbert Marcuse, technology is many things: a “social process” (1941, p. 138), a “mode of production, as the totality of instruments, devices and contrivances which characterize the machine age” (p. 138), and a “mode of organizing and perpetuating (or changing) social relationships, a manifestation of prevalent thought and behaviour patterns, an instrument for control and domination” (p. 139). Marcuse’s *Social Implications of Modern Technology* was first published in 1941 in response to what critical theorists were calling the fetishisation of technical efficiency. Marcuse concedes, “the system of life created by modern industry is one of the highest expediency, convenience, and efficiency” (p. 145), but his project is to investigate the “new rationality” (p. 139), and power dynamics it produces.

Marcuse contextualises the human relationship with and to technology by describing how machine use instructs humans on the usefulness of “obedience to the directions” to “obtain desired results” (p. 144). As such, human behaviour takes on a mechanistic quality, it becomes increasingly governed by the rationality of technological processes. More specifically, humans, like machines, are subject to, “the laws of mass production” including “expediency in terms of profitable efficiency” and “monopolistic standardization” (p. 144).

Another aspect of modern technology Marcuse hones in on is individuality and conformity. He argues that although technology is often characterised as liberatory, associated with individual freedoms, and it embeds conformity. Furthermore, the mechanics of conformity are so pervasive as to “govern performance” beyond workplaces and in the

realm of leisure (p. 145); a broadening of the scope of focus on people as employees includes increased “concern for his personal aptitudes and habits” as part of a “total mobilization of the private sphere for mass production and mass culture” (p. 151). A brief aside – the Carousel of Progress showcases technologies of the private sphere, advancing a modernist aesthetic that embraces consumer choice as a kind of individual freedom; in the 1964 version of the Carousel, the last scene includes the wife’s enthusiastic comment, “we were able to pick our appliance colours from so many beautiful combinations” (Cornfeld, 2017, p. 321). Returning to Marcuse- he gestures towards neoliberal logics of self-improvement explaining, “the machine process imposes upon men the patterns of mechanical behaviour, and the standards of competitive efficiency are the more enforced from outside the less independent the individual competitor becomes” (p. 145). Decades later in 2018, Safiya Noble adds to Marcuse’s observation: “new, neoliberal conceptions of individual freedom (especially in the realm of technology use) are oversupported in direct opposition to protections realized through large-scale organizing to ensure collective rights” (p. 165)

The concept of the ideal, Marcuse argues, “has become so concrete and so universal that it grips the life of every human being, and the whole of mankind is drawn into the struggle for its realization” (p. 159). This “struggle” is on display in the Carousel of Progress, where “to the extent that the Carousel’s plot has dramatic tension, that tension draws from anticipation of industrial products not yet on the market” (p. 319). The wife proclaims, “progress takes a lot of people wanting it, and willing to work for it” (Cornfeld, 2017, p. 320). Joel Dinerstein, remarked in his 2006 paper that, because of contemporary belief systems that have accompanied technology, “the future replaced heaven as the zone of perfectibility” (Dinerstein, 2006, p. 573).

In the realm of work more specifically, Marcuse points out that such technological rationality serves systems of control, notably using the example of scientific management as

amongst the “most profitable means for streamlined autonomy” (p. 146) and observing that “even the highly differentiated professional requirements of modern industry promote standardization” (p. 151). Of course, there are political consequences stemming from these phenomena. Marcuse notes that “efficiency is one of the main reasons the fascist regimes hold over its regimented population” (p. 155). But Marcuse does not claim that all is lost when it comes to technics; instead, he points out that “the philosophy of the simple life, the struggle against big cities and the culture frequently serves to men distrust of the potential instruments that could liberate them” (p. 160). Marcuse is careful not to suggest a utopia marked by perpetual happiness. He notes that “the machine individualizes men by following the physiological lines of individuality: it allocates the work to the finger, hand, arm, foot, classifying and occupying men according to the dexterity of these organs” (p. 160). Nevertheless, he sees opportunity here: “mechanization and standardization may one day help to shift the centre of gravity from the necessities of material production to the arena of free human realization”, “a new form of human development” (p. 160). Mumford comes to a similar conclusion; in a later version of his book, published about thirty years after the original, he writes proudly about his own work in the introduction, stating “I drew attention to the regressive possibilities of many of our most hopefully technical advances” (p. xviii). Although his orientation shifts in other publications as the twentieth century progresses, Mumford maintains an optimism about the possibility of a world made more just by humans and technics together.

The aim of Safiya Umoja Noble’s 2018 book *Algorithms of Oppression* is not, at least explicitly, to theorise technology. Noble’s attention to algorithms, particularly those behind search engines, like Google, makes “visible the ways that capital, race, and gender are factors in creating unequal conditions... bringing light to various forms of technological redlining” (p. 1). She works to establish new concepts, like technological redlining and algorithmic

oppression and in so doing makes a convincing argument about the nature of technology. Through a series of case studies, “unveiling the many ways that African American people have been contained and constrained in classification systems” (p. 5), she demonstrates how “racism and sexism are part of the architecture and language of technology” (p. 9). That is, “technology impacts social relations and creates unintended consequences” (p. 10).

Noble’s implicit theory is that technology is information, or at least, it is access to information. Noble argues that specific attention and remediation ought to be aimed at algorithms and search engines because, “information organizations, from libraries to school and universities to governmental agencies, are increasingly reliant on or being displaced by a variety of web-based ‘tools’ as if there are no political, social, or economic consequences of doing so” (p. 9). She notes later that, “unlike the vetting of journalists and librarians, who are entrusted to fact check and curate information for the public according to professional codes of ethics, the legitimacy of websites’ ranking, and credibility is simply taken for granted” (p. 155). She argues that “access to high-quality information, from journalism to research, is essential to a healthy and viable democracy” (p. 153).

Noble notes that “neoliberal impulses in the United States to support market-driven information portals such as Google Search have consequences for finding high quality information on the internet” (p. 179). The Carousel of Progress was also a marketing pursuit; “originally created in partnership with General Electric, the Carousel ran in conjunction with a World’s Fair expo hall that showcased GE products ahead of their commercial debut” (Cornfeld, 2017, p. 317). The collaborative spectacle “marks an early iteration of what would not be called a brand-scape, a landscape that stages a corporate brand’s world and worldview, encouraging consumers to adopt both as their own” (Cornfeld, 2017, p. 317).

This is problematic for many reasons, primary amongst them the fact that “Google Search is an advertising company, not a reliable information company” (p. 5) and that “despite a climate wherein everything is driven by market interests is considered the most expedient and innovative way of generating solutions, we see the current failings”. Noble illustrates “the power of algorithms in the age of neoliberalism and the ways those digital decisions reinforce oppressive social relationships and enact new modes of racial profiling” (p. 1). She problematises the privatisation of technology, and thus information, pointing out that “private ownership on the web is a matter of who can pay and who lines up quickly enough to purchase identity markers establish a type of official record” (p. 172).

Like Mumford, Noble insists on linking technology to culture; she characterises the design of software, hardware, etc. as “practices that are culturally and gender situated and often determined by economic imperatives, power, and values” (p. 179). An interesting observation she makes in regards to this is that “at the very historical moment when structural barriers to employment were being addressed legislatively in the 1960s, the rise of our reliance on modern technologies emerged, positing that computers could make better decisions than humans... when women and people of color are finally given opportunity to participate in limited spheres of decision making in society, computers are simultaneously celebrated as more optimal choice for making social decision” (p. 169).

Noble also considers several racist and sexist glitches, pointing out that rather than being treated as a symptom of a systemic issue to do with the “organizing logics of the web”, instead they are treated like “these occasional one-off moments when something goes terribly wrong with near perfect systems” (p. 6). Noble provides endless examples of technological redlining and algorithmic oppression, including how real estate websites like Zillow.com maintain the homogeneity of white suburban communities by offering search metrics related to school ratings.

Here I will highlight just one example Noble details, that of the concept of the “digital divide”. The term, as coined by the Clinton-Gore administration, along with the National Telecommunications Infrastructure Administration hinges on three aspects of “disempowerment that have led to technological deficits between Whites and Blacks” (p. 160). They are, “access to computers and software, development of skills and training in computer technologies, and Internet connectivity” (p. 160). Importantly, this characterisation of a digital inequality overlooks “the framework of power relations that precipitate such unequal access to social, economic, and educational resources” (p. 160). This is best summarised in Nobles disturbingly accurate characterisation: “focusing on the skills and capabilities of people of colour and women, rather than questioning the historical and cultural development of science and technology and representations prioritized through digital technologies” (p. 160), “has not altered the landscape of power relations” (p. 161). Empowerment through the closing of skill gaps is seemingly innocuous enough, but Noble argues it is neoliberal concepts of social mobility that underpin this, and that leave “the diasporic labor conditions facing Black women who are engaged in the raw mineral extraction process to facilitate the manufacture of computer and mobile phone hardware” outside the purview of concern. She laments, “the onus of change is placed on the backs of Black people, and Black women in the United States in particular, to play a more meaningful role in the production of new images and ideas about Black people by learning to code, as if that alone could shift the tide of Silicon Valley’s vast exclusionary practices in its products and hiring” (p. 165).

A similar sentiment is shared by Atanasoski and Vora who explain that “in the desire for enchanted technologies that intuit human needs and serve human desires, labor becomes something that is intentionally obfuscated so as to create the effect of machine autonomy (as in the example of the ‘magic’ robot intelligence and the necessarily hidden human work

behind it)” – it “actively obscures technoliberalism’s complicity in perpetuating the differential conditions of exploitation under racial capitalism” (2019, p. 6).

In her concluding remarks, Noble implores us again to consider “the way that algorithms are value-laden” (p. 171), and that “we have automated human decision making and then disavowed our responsibility for it” (p. 181). When looking towards the future, Noble makes some notably ambiguous and incremental suggestions: a “decoupling of advertising and commercial interests from the ability to access high-quality information on the internet” (p. 179), or “greater transparency and public pressure to slow down the automation of our worst impulses” (p. 181). She proposes Black Feminist Technology Studies as an alternative epistemological framework for “exploring power as mediated by intersection identities” in media studies (p. 172). She reminds us that search engines like Google are powerful resources that catalogue information and can promote cooperation and yet they are also exploitative of their users. Importantly, she argues, that “an app will not save us” (p. 165).

In his 2006 piece, “Technology and its Discontents: On the Verge of the Posthuman”, Joel Dinerstein criticises technological determinism and utopianism. The thrust of his argument is that “new technologies help maintain two crucial Euro-American myths: (1) the myth of progress and (2) the myth of white, Western superiority” (p. 572). Throughout the article, Dinerstein proposes several definitions of technology: technology as “synonymous with faith in the future” (p. 569), technology as “an autonomous aspect of cultural production” (p. 571), technology as “the American theology” (p. 581)

Dinerstein’s project is built upon the following understanding. The legacy of colonialism is that technology is understood as equivalent to civilisation itself. That is, the civilised are empowered by gadgets the uncivilised do not yet have, and only when they

obtain these technologies could they begin the civilising process. This is embedded in the mis-telling of innumerable colonial stories, whereby the colonisers are cast as generously sharing their, obviously superior, gadgets like guns and medicines (with deliberate omission of the fact that they used the guns to murder inhabitants, and the medicines were needed to combat new diseases spread by Europeans). And so, “the markers of the difference were machines, technological products and the effects of technological networks” (p. 578)

Interestingly, historical events, like the Great Depression, urban riots, rights-based movements, and war are consistently excluded from all four versions of the Carousel of Progress. In the most recent version, made in 1995, the family is introducing a voice activated oven system and includes revisions to previous versions that mentioned the mother spending “her free time on the ‘Clean Waters Committee’” for example, towards a starkly apolitical picture (Weiner, 1997, p. 114). Disney’s interpretation of history, along a linear positive trajectory is consistent with technological utopianisms.

He begins from a definition of technology as “synonymous with faith in the future” (p. 569). Posthumanists and other tech utopian thinkers consider technology a sovereign force within our broader cultural milieu paving the way to “a utopian future that will not require social or political change” (p. 571). This faith is precisely what prompts the devising of Progressland, General Electric’s World’s Fair pavilion where the Carousel of Progress made its 1964 debut; “Progressland, via the Carousel of Progress, presented audiences with particular (gendered) identities that revolve (literally) around enthusiasm for industrial development” (Cornfeld, 2017, p. 318). The ride demonstrates the “future’s anticipation in the 1960s, to its negotiation in the 1970s, through to the 1990s nostalgia for futures which failed to emerge” (Cornfeld, 2017, p. 318). The experience of the ride also suggested a kind of natural and smooth path to a tech-enabled future; the “theatre seats’ electronic rotation... provided audience with the sensation of moving into a novel future” (Cornfeld, 2017, p. 319).

According to feminist media scholar Li Cornfeld, the Carousel has “two chief ideological tasks: to cultivate enthusiasm for American industrial futurity and to mark mechanization of the home as integral to American domesticity”, or “challenging assumptions that industrialization belonged outside the domestic sphere” (2017, p. 320). It “celebrated the pleasantness and productivity of domestic labour under capitalism, and gestures toward a future where each of these measures increase, exponentially” (Cornfeld, 2017, p. 321). In 1965, the Carousel was relocated to Disney’s California park where it took up residency in the futuristic Tomorrowland district (Cornfeld, 2017). In its new location, the Carousel no longer prefaced General Electric’s product showroom, but instead was followed on by an exhibition about Disney’s future, including a model of ‘Progress City’ and plans for Disney’s ‘Florida Project’, the park planned for Orlando, which eventually housed the Carousel itself in 1975 (Cornfeld, 2017).

### 2.3.1 Race & Technology

In this section I endeavour to elaborate more specifically upon what race does in the study of technology. The hegemonic belief about technology as “the condition of possibility for freeing human creativity” obscures the ways in which “economic, social, and human obsolescence has been figured through a racial-imperial episteme” (Atanasoski & Vora, 2019, p. 66). Essentially, contemporary techno-revolutionary imaginaries emerge from ahistorical concepts of emancipation and how dominant tech-utopian ideals are informed by capitalist expansionism enabled by the capture of racialized and gendered labour.

In their book *Surrogate Humanity: Race, Robots, and the Politics of Technological Futures*, Neda Atanasoski and Kalindi Vora craft the concept of technology as surrogate. Noting the ways in which our history, especially post-Enlightenment modernity, is littered with human surrogates: “the enslaved standing in for the master, the vanishing of native

bodies necessary for colonial expansion, as well as invisibilized labor including indenture, immigration, and outsourcing” (2019, p. 6). That is, “since the first industrial revolution, automation has signaled the threat of the replaceability of specific types of human functions and human workers that are racialized and gendered” (p. 2). The “tasks deemed automatable, including manual labour, blue collar factory work, and reproductive and care work, were gathered as unskilled and non creative-work that could be done by the poor, the uneducated, the colonized and women” (p. 2).

They define the surrogate as “a racialized and gendered form defining the limits of human consciousness and autonomy” (p. 9). Therefore, the pair sets out to “assess the racial and gendered architecture of post-Enlightenment modernity as engineered into the form and function of given technologies” (p. 6) and the “tension between humanization and dehumanization at the heart of Western European and US imperial projects” (p. 16).

Atanasoski and Vora’s aim then is to expose how,

technological enchantment seeks to overcome a sense of disappointment in the limitations of the human as biological being... In this future imagine, human consciousness shifts vis-à-vis the technical enchantment of object, animate and artificially intelligent, rather than as a result of political transformations (p. 19)

Marcuse touches upon something like humanizing technology when he observes, “the average man hardly cares for any living being with the intensity and persistence he shows for his automobile. The machine that is adored is no longer dead matter but becomes something like a human being” (1941, p. 144). But Atanasoski and Vora argue it is “precisely because such technologies can never be human, they allow for an exploration of the aspirations of humanity” (2019, p.5). For a short time during my PhD, I worked as a Research Assistant on

a project led by a group of computer scientists at a nearby university. I analyzed recordings of “abusive exchanges” between home AI interfaces and users. It was my job to determine if an exchange was offensive or discriminatory and if so, in what way: sexist, racist, ableist, homophobic, etc. All this to say, the interactions human users are having with their, often female voiced, AI system, reveal the extent of human vulgarity and hate. Atanasoski and Vora argue that it is also our human aspiration to be masters over our technology, to be free to treat our robot helpers in ways we might otherwise have treated humans of difference. They point out that “engineering projects that create the robots, program the AI, and enhance the digital infrastructure associated with a revolutionary era are in fact predetermined by techniques of differential exploitation and dispossession within capitalism” (p. 4).

The surrogacy dynamic is evident in the Carousel of Progress. The final scene in the original incarnation of the ride showed “a 1960s fantasy of ‘push-button’ living, where mechanization replaces housekeeping and increases leisure time” (Cornfeld, 2017, p. 319). As with the previous scenes, the husband is reclining centre stage explaining the technology while his wife uses them to perform domestic tasks behind him. The fantasy is, of course, that “machines take on the sort of work that degrades humans” so that “humans can be freer than ever to pursue their maximum potential” (2019, p. 16). However, Atanasoski and Vora insist that “racial and imperial governing logics of liberalism continue to be at the core of technoliberal modes of figuring human freedom” (p. 14) noting that “the history of slavery is always acknowledged, but only insofar as it can be rendered irrelevant to the present day... as a story of redemption and progress toward an inclusion as rights-bearing subjects of an ever-proliferating list of others” (p. 12). The modes through which race is used for economic ends are consistently and deliberately “disavowed even as they are innovated” upon (p. 11).

In terms of the future, Atanasoski and Vora argue that even those technological projects which explicitly espouse revolutionary effects and impact are often contributing to this innovation on the exploitation of difference. They point out that,

Technoliberalism's version of universal humanity heralds a postrace and postgender world enabled by technology, even as that technology holds the place of a racial order of things in which humanity can be affirmed only through degraded categories created for use, exploitation, dispossession, and capitalist accumulation (p. 13).

Moreover, "within present-day fantasies of techno-futurity there is a reification of imperial and racial divisions within capitalism. This is the case even though such divisions are claimed to be overcome through technology" (p. 13).

#### 2.4 The Cyborg

Atanasoski and Vora note that the "human-machine divide in US technological modernity" is connected to "the racial production of the fully human in US political modernity" (p. 7). They also point towards Frantz Fanon's definition of decolonization; "quite simply the replace of certain 'species' of men by another 'species of men'" (Fanon, Sartre, & Farrington, 1963, p. 35), which requires "the reimagining of the human-thing relation as a precondition for freedom" (Atanoasoski & Vora, 2019, p. 15). It is this binary that techno futurists seemingly ignore, inherently limiting their imaginaries. Dinerstein echoes these observations:

So long as cyborgs are imagined as superhuman male bodies – as the perfect, desired, mechanical other, as motorcycle-driving, shades-wearing, gun-toting, Western heroes of the future, as male technological society's man-made technological saints – then the posthuman dream of evolving into cyborgs

both perpetuates the mythic triumphalism of progress and constitutes a refusal to acknowledge the limits of an individual human body and an individual life (p. 589).

## CHAPTER 3: APPROACH

### 3.1 Theory as Method: Cyborgs and Glitches

In 1989 Ronald Reagan, no longer in his official capacity as President, visited the United Kingdom where he gave a series of speeches espousing his total belief in technology's ability to crush communism and promote democracy (Rule, 1989). At one such event, Reagan triumphantly proclaimed to an audience of 1,000 people that "the Goliath of totalitarianism will be brought down by the David of the microchip" (1989).

In this biblical reference David, the youngest of twelve sons, bravely defends his God during a war between his people, and the Philistines. While Goliath, a physically oppressive Philistine mocks the Israelites, David brings him down with a single slingshot and then beheads him. The story is often read as an instruction on the power of faith, as David was defending his God. In casting totalitarianism as Goliath and the microchip, or the tech industry, as David, in his approximation, Reagan implied that first these two are implicit opposites; Like the Israelites and the Philistines, authoritarianism and tech are sworn enemies. The allegory also suggests that tech is the morally superior force against authoritarianism, that tech has the backing of God, or at least is "good". This tech heroism is pervasive in discourse concerning various existential threats to humanity today, including climate change and the destruction of the earth's environment (see Elon Musk's recent foray into inter-planetary colonisation and Mark Zuckerberg's utopic escapism into the Metaverse).

Donna Haraway characterises her seminal text, *A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s* published in 1985, as a product of the early Reagan era (Markussen et al., 2000). She has also spoken and written at length about her Catholic upbringing and would no doubt understand and likely refute Reagan's fable. She frames her blasphemous work as "in the utopian tradition of imagining a world without

gender, which is perhaps a world without genesis, but maybe also a world without end” (p. 8) and goes on, “the cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden” (Haraway, 1985, p. 9).

In this chapter I work closely with “The Cyborg Manifesto”, and another manifesto, Legacy Russel’s *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*, both of which resist and dismantle moral assessments of technology, like the one made by Reagan. It is not incidental that both texts are manifestos, rhetorical practices of provocation of militant optimism. Instead of appealing to reason or interest, “the manifesto takes aim at the affects and the imagination” (Weeks, 2011, p. 214). They move an audience, call us to organize, and demand things of us. The versions of the texts I use, Haraway’s 1985 article and Russel’s 2020 book, were each the result of many previous drafts, published and spoken renditions. Haraway gave a series of lectures in the early 1980s alluding to the Cyborg. Russel’s manifesto, in shorter essay form, was first published in 2012 after which she delivered a series of lectures on the topic beginning in 2017. Both texts also play with what Haraway refers to as “heteroglossia” – a variety of different voices, a concept that I problematise throughout this chapter. Nevertheless, the ideas supporting the Cyborg clearly did not emerge from the depths of the academic canon; instead Haraway describes them as emerging from conversations she had with graduate students, treating them with great reverence, not patronage. This is not inconsequential, because it is rooted in the *practice* of teaching, and yet, she explains “abstraction and illusion rule in knowledge, domination rules in practice” (Haraway, 1985, p. 17). We can and ought to hold, “incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true” (ibid). Similarly, Russel has collected, shares, and references, in both text and image, the work of a diverse set of artists and artistic practitioners which, taken together, form a kind of harmonious and fractious heteroglossia. This practice of percolation through various forms of engagement and partial integrations is also evidenced in this chapter, about which I have spoken to many students, colleagues, and friends.

Haraway and Russel's texts, written 45 years apart, have similar preoccupations – that of identity, solidarity, technology, and imagined futures; they collide and pull at each other in fruitful ways for the exploration of feminist myth making and ontological debate. In this chapter, I interweave the Cyborg and the Glitch to set the stage for how I will treat technology and gender. I do this also to emphasise the utility of feminist myths, and of narratives, for what I believe is the broader feminist project. Form is of the Cyborg and Glitch project, as Haraway's explicit intention is to use irony and blasphemy to preserve contradiction, rather than resolve it, and Russel advocates for the freedom of illegibility.

As mentioned, both texts are self-indicating manifestos, where the authors call their audience to action. Manifestos are texts written by people who have something to say to, and ask of, a particular audience. In Haraway's case, at the time of writing, she is a white early career stage academic, who is seemingly calling out to those who share a kinship with her—other feminists. She wants to interrupt feminist debates that she characterises as divisive, presenting a new way forward. Nevertheless, as will be detailed further on in this chapter, her attempts at including the work of Black feminists and the stories of working women from low-income countries to these ends were met with much criticism. Russell, a Black queer writer and curator, recruits Glitch Feminists from the plethora of creatively named chatrooms for trans teens; she calls out to those sticky-fingered internet punks for whom hitting their home computer system and resetting their dial-up connection sometimes worked. She coaxes anyone who has made an avatar (in their likeness or a likeness they wished for), who has become their avatar, or who is their avatar to join in the glitching (Russell, 2020, p. 13).

### 3.1.1 Disrupting Binaries

In her manifesto, Haraway works to expose the ways in which the dualisms between animal and human, organism, and machine, and physical and not physical are folding in onto themselves. In pursuit of this exposure, she creates the myth of the cyborg to offer a new

perspective on the relationship between animals, humans, and technology. However, she does not make a moral calculation about these collapsing dualisms. Alternatively, she characterises it as a cultural dominant – a condition of human life that ought to be recognised for understanding the self and acting towards freedom; “there is much room for radical political people to contest for the meanings of the breached boundary” (1985, p. 10). Russell takes up this mantle in her assertion that “glitch feminism urges us to consider the *in-between* as a core component of survival” (2020, p. 11). More specifically, in her chapter on refusal, Russell explains how bodies are reduced to one dimension, often violently, through taxonomical norms, but that refusal ought not necessarily to be defensive nor a retreat; instead, refusal can be an expansive occupation, an existence that causes the bursting of seams, revealing bare flesh, fur, and hardware. In *Glitch Feminism*, Russell is working with the binary of offline vs. online life. She argues that life in digital spaces ought not be considered as separate from our AFK (away from keyboard) lives, but rather as part of them.

The cyborg is a mythical creature, made up of stitched together scraps of philosophy, popular culture, and science fiction. According to Haraway we are all cyborgs, and in recognition of this is a new terrain of contestation. She is of course wary of the intrusion of technology in some ways, but she also works to sketch out an array of opportunities made available, both emancipatory and pleasurable. In her manifesto, Russell is triumphant about these possibilities for pleasure. She uses the language of technology to describe the power of Glitch as error, encryption, virus, and remix. The Glitch is not the linear progression or realisation of a cyborgian utopia, but instead, offers a partial, pointy-edged, porous, and pornographic continuity to the terrain of contestation.

Haraway reminds us that cyborgs (all of us), are “the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism” and importantly, that “illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins” (1985, p. 10). The cyborg, therefore, is always already

implicated in systems of domination and colonisation and is a figure of rebellion and resistance. In this sense, the cyborg is “a kind of disassembled and reassembled, post-modern collective and personal self. This is the self feminists must code” (1985, p. 23). And decades later, it is the uncoded subject that Russell feels so strongly that we ought to strive towards through refusal – refusal to be categorised and measured, for our consumption to be weaponised against us as we are flattened into demographics of consumers. For her, “hacking the ‘code’ of gender, making binaries blurry, becomes our core objective, a revolutionary catalyst” (2020, p. 25). Haraway concurs, “the biggest threat to such power is interruption of communication” (1985, p. 23), and Russell characterises the body (physical and in-real-life, avatar online, and otherwise) as a site for constant and deliberate miscommunication – she calls this error; “Decolonizing the binary body requires us to remain in perpetual motion; accidental bodies that, in their error, refuse definition and, as such, defy language. Forcing the failure of words, we become impossible. Impossible, we cannot be named” (Russell, 2020, p. 75).

It's worth noting here that Haraway received considerable criticism for her characterisation of us all as cyborgs. In an interview five years after initial publication, she said that she would have been “much more careful about describing who counts as ‘we,’ in the statement ‘we are all cyborgs’” (Penley, Ross & Haraway, 1990). Amongst the responses to the manifesto were frustrations expressed at the lack of rigor in working with whiteness.

Haraway treats postmodernism as a descriptor for the architecture and conditions that structure contemporary life. Her work is instructional in content and form as she works abundantly across disciplines to present a pluralist call to action involving the holding together of “witches, engineers, elders, perverts, Christians, mothers, and Leninists long enough to disarm the state” (1985, p. 13). She describes the cyborg as “our ontology; it gives us our politics” (Haraway, 1985, p. 8). Here Haraway is writing past previous analyses in

which the organic body is seen as the site of resistance against or over technology. And Russell locates the body as technology.

Haraway writes that we are no longer dominated by Foucault's systems of domination – medicalisation and normalisation. Instead, she argues that modern domination is that of “networking, communications redesign, stress management” (1985, p. 11), or “Foucault's biopolitics is a flaccid premonition of cyborg politics, a very open field” (p. 8). The difference between these types of domination, in at least my reading of Haraway, is that medicalisation and normalisation are of a unifying nature; that is, these systems work to coagulate and group together, for example a whole series of systems are taken to be indicative of a single diagnosis, like hysteria. In contrast, the new technological domination is based on differentiation and individuation whereby the self is “untied at last from all dependency, a man in space” (1985, p. 9).

### 3.1.2 Opposition Consciousness

Amongst Haraway's primary preoccupations, is that of the right to signify, which she places at the centre of political struggle, especially in the context of theories of feminist collective action. She is interested in how individuals come to identify their own positionality and the conditions of domination that shape their status, as well as how this recognition can then lead to cooperation and collaboration to oppose those conditions. She draws on the work of Bernice Reagon, who described a coalition as implicitly in flux, fluid, porous, malleable, whereby action is not based on an essential shared experience of women, but on contextual dominations and responses whereby some are called upon to give and others to leave (Reagon, 1980, 1982). The thrust of Haraway's critique is aimed at the work of Catharine MacKinnon, whose work she describes as intentionally erasing difference to advance strictly essentialist conceptions of women. Similarly, Chela Sandoval's work criticised the way in which feminist practice was categorised in what she describes as unnecessarily divisive ways

based on naturalising and essentialising logics (Sandoval, 1982, 1984A, 1984B). With Sandoval, Haraway points towards the potential for collectivity that “does not replicate the imperializing, totalizing revolutionary subjects of previous Marxisms and feminisms which had not faced the consequences of the disorderly polyphony emerging from decolonization” (1985, p. 15).

In her attempts to outline a mode of political organising based on kinship, Haraway draws from the work of Black feminists like Bernice Reagon and bell hooks, as well as prominent cultural theorist Nancy Hartstock to promote a feminist positionality that harnesses what is shared, rather than what divides: affinity rather than identity, and here affinity refers to relation of choice and political kinship rather than of blood. In this she is highly critical of the feminist identity politics that were, and continue to play out, emphasising the way in which Black women and criticisms of coloniality were ignored or erased. She highlights the harm that is done in centring gender as the expense of race, class, and colonialism, and argues that “taxonomies of feminism produce epistemologies to police deviation from official women’s experience” (1985, p. 15). Haraway characterises the period in which she writes as opportune for unification in the face of race, sex, and class dominations, emphasising that “we do not need a totality in order to work well” (1985, p. 31).

However, Haraway’s work has been criticised for the ways in which she glosses over whiteness and flattens the historical specificities of women of colour. Malini Johar Schueller asks pointedly, “What colour is the cyborg?” (Schueller, 2005, 2007). Similarly, Joan W Scott claimed Haraway’s work was rife with the shortcomings of traditional socialism in that there is an underlying economic and technological determinism, and that it romanticises women of colour (Scott, 2018). There is also a glaring lack of engagement with disability. In her musing about our hybridisation, Haraway remarks in passing, “perhaps paraplegics and other severely handicapped people can (and sometimes do) have the more intense experiences

of complex hybridization with other communication devices”, but never returns to it (1985, p. 36). Scholars, most notably Alison Kafer, go on to build a crip politics substantially and skilfully with the use of the cyborg (2013).

Haraway writes, “What kind of politics could embrace partial, contradictory, permanently unclosed constructions of personal and collective selves and still be faithful, effective – and, ironically, socialist feminist?” (1985, p. 16). Here Haraway walks a fine line as she advocates for the political myth of the cyborg with a new, possibly dangerous (literally), origin story, or no origin story at all, which results in erasure or loss of something that ought to be held onto.

Haraway comments on “the non-innocence of the category ‘woman’” but, in my view, she does not take this far enough, as woman is more than simply not innocent – she is violent. I agree with her general approximation that a share of victimhood subjectivity ought not be the grounds for unity against systems of oppression. In Haraway’s cyborgian future, “people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints” (1985, p. 13).

### 3.1.3 Technology and Work

In troubling the binary between human and machine Haraway does away with both tech-utopianism and tech-scepticism. She writes, “The machine is not an *it* to be animated, worshipped and dominated. The machine is us, our processes, an aspect of our embodiment. We can be responsible for machines; *they* do not dominate or threaten us” (1985, p. 38). Haraway is writing her manifesto in 1985, at what might be considered mid-dawn of the technology boom in Silicon Valley, and she does make a series of critical observations about technology. For instance, she notes, “The culture of video games is heavily oriented to individual competition and extraterrestrial (sic) warfare. High-tech, gendered imaginations

are produced here, imaginations that can contemplate destruction of the planet and a sci-fi escape from its consequences” (1985, p. 28). Haraway also rightly identified Silicon Valley as a place with a particular story of progress, where start-up companies labour to birth technological innovations that go on to shape and change the world. Nevertheless, for Haraway, technology is a terrain which can be co-opted by feminist cyborgs. Haraway notes, “It is not clear who makes and who is made in the relation between human and machine” (1985, p. 35). Among the tools available to us, she advocates for “weaving” as opposed to networking, which she characterises as a shared practice of feminists and multinational corporations.

For Haraway, “advanced capitalism” is a deficient descriptor. “The actual situation of women is their integration/exploitation into a world system of production/reproduction and communication called the informatics of domination” (1985, p. 22). She writes, “modern production seems like a dream of cyborg colonization of work, a dream that makes the nightmare of Taylorism seem idyllic” (1985, p. 8) and that the “nimble little fingers of ‘oriental’ woman, the old fascination of little Anglo-Saxon Victorian girls with doll houses, women’s enforced attention to the small take on quite new dimensions in this world” (p. 12). Haraway makes an important critique of feminist Marxism, as with the efforts to include social reproductive work within conceptions of labour, women’s literal child-bearing labour became, in her view, unnecessarily implicated; “the unity of women here rests on an epistemology based on the ontological structure of ‘labor’” (1985, p. 17)

Haraway, with Richard Gordon’s “homework economy”, describes the way in which work is “being redefined as both literally female and feminized, whether performed by men or women”, because “to be feminised means to be made extremely vulnerable; able to be disassembled, reassembled, exploited as a reserve labor (sic) force” (1985, p. 26). Because of this, gendered relations at work are deserving of renewed and sustained attention. Emergent

technologies do not cause these new configurations, but they do provide the conditions for their possibility. Haraway claims that the character of women's jobs is becoming capital intensive, and that the demands of women to sustain life for themselves as well as for men, children, the sick and the elderly have only intensified.

Russel writes that a politics of Glitch “requires us to realize that the relationship between the *idea of the body* and *gender as a construct* is a damaging one that we need to exit” (Russel, 2020, p. 63). She advocates for the bursting of binaries, and in the same way I would like to propose a new ironic mode of understanding the gender binary. Debates concerning populism in Political Science inform this formulation, towards gender as a thin-centred ideology.

#### 3.1.4 Proceeding

In a 2000 interview, Haraway joked, “I think that as an oppositional figure the cyborg has a rather short half-life (laughter)” (Markussen, Olesen & Lykke, 2000). The cult status of the work has in some ways undermined the cyborg figure's political potential. However, in a 2017 essay for Viewpoint Magazine, Sophie Lewis recalled her first reading of Donna Haraway's Cyborg Manifesto as a teenager, describing it as a “witchy” piece of writing that “felt like coming home” (Lewis, 2017). Lewis' 2017 PhD manuscript on gestational surrogacy at the University of Manchester, entitled Cyborg Labour, is a testament to the enduring relevance of the cyborg, at least taken in parts. Lewis asks, “What if the cyborgs made a comeback? They knew who their enemies were” (Lewis, 2017). Haraway writes that the cyborg “does not expect” to be saved “through its completion in a finished whole”, and for me this unfinished-ness holds opportunity (1985, p. 9).

The cyborg has no genesis story but of course they were created as Haraway intended, in her choice of texts brought together. Russell's Glitch Feminism is a cobbled together

mosaic of the already created art and prose of others. The characters I intend to introduce in the later chapters of this manuscript are generated in yet another way, through conversation with women steeped in the world of technology, women who have accepted the cyborgian ontology to a certain extent, though perhaps not in the specific ways in which Haraway imagined.

In a later piece, “The Actors Are Cyborg, Nature is Coyote, and the Geography is Elsewhere: Post-script to ‘Cyborgs at Large’”, Haraway “called for new metaphors – such as trickster figures to ‘refigure[e] possible worlds’ by thinking outside of techno-science; this hasn’t happened even within the humanities” (Dinerstein, 2006, p. 589). I introduce the Tomboy in Chapter 4 and the Girlboss in Chapter 5 as a taking up of this mantle. These archetypal characters are neither aspirational nor villainous. I share Simone de Beauvoir’s “horro of positive heros” and am moved by her provocation for a story as “problematique” (Simons, Benjamin, & de Beauvoir, 1979, p. 332).

### 3.2 Theorising Method

The dilemma for the feminist scholar, always, is to find ways of working within some disciplinary tradition while aiming at an intellectual revolution that will transform the tradition (DeVault, 1990, p. 96)

I have told many an undergraduate student that writing their methodology chapter is straightforward, even easy. I tell them, “You know what you did and now you just have to describe it”. Of course, it is not that easy. The more I read and learn the less clear it is how to “do” research. Here, an important reminder, “Feminist researchers deal with dilemmas that have no absolute solutions” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 4).

In the above section I have addressed what I perceive to be the pertinent concerns of method. However, my project was not always oriented in this way. In this section I will

briefly consider the (d)evolution of my project and address the expectations of empirical work within a Social Sciences matrix. I have structured this section around a series of literal verb phrases: thinking, getting in touch, reading, and writing. Despite what this list suggests, the actions themselves are not what is prioritized, nor are they meant to imply a sequential process. Instead, I work closely with Eve Sedgwick's work to foreground theoretical interrogations and explanations, choosing to put logistical and descriptive information in the appendices of this chapter.

### 3.2.1 Thinking

In this section I put the Social Sciences and Humanities in textual conversation. My learning lineage is a patchwork of frayed edges, multi-coloured stitching, and loosely hanging swatches – a technicoloured dream coat. It does not just include my undergraduate major in Sexual Diversity Studies with minors in Indigenous Studies and English Literature, my masters in Women and Gender Studies, and then doctoral studies in Business Management; it is also made up of Sunday mornings spent in church wearing matching hat and dress ensembles with frilly socks, the Irish music my mum played in the kitchen as she cleaned or cooked potatoes, my favourite, the way I learned to cartwheel, ride a bike, and do my makeup. In responding to Donna Haraway's question: "To what are you accountable if you try to take what you have inherited seriously?" I find myself compelled to consider the entanglements of my learning lineage to work *with*, rather than *against* their differences (Haraway, 2013, p. 145).

### *Disciplinary Curiosities: Matters of Fact and Matters of Concern*

Social Science requires first a research question. Implicit in the asking of a question is that its answer is knowable. In the Humanities, there is a desire, or at least there is space for, "moving from the rather fixated question, 'is a particular piece of knowledge true, and how can we know?' to the further question, 'what does knowledge do – the pursuit of it, that

having and exposing of it, the receiving – again of knowledge of what one already knows? How, in short, is knowledge performative, and how best does one move among its causes and effects?” (Sedgwick, 1997, p. 4). Eve Sedgwick names this distinction in terms of preoccupation; the social sciences’ facts and the humanities’ concerns.

### *Responding to Disciplinary Curiosities*

Studies in the Social Sciences follow a systematic approach to answering questions through methods sections with headings like: research aims and objectives, philosophical commitments, research design, access to participants, data collection, and data analysis.

These headings describe a linear process through which information is collected, analysed, and presented as knowledge. The knowledge is found in and through the “data”, extracted by the objective researcher, a pure specimen to be examined as proof that supports or rejects a hypothesis.

Within the humanities sits, it is unclear exactly whether centrally or in the peripheral elsewhere (perhaps location is unimportant), the methodological practice of critique. In her text *Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You’re so Paranoid, You Probably Think this Introduction is About You*, Eve Sedgwick characterises critique as an approach to humanities’ concerns that aims to expose (1997). She skilfully traces the sceptical and paranoid practices of critique (1997). I will return to this line of thinking in the below section on reading.

### *The (D)evolution of My Project’s Purpose*

This research was conducted by me, a student of women and gender studies, as a PhD researcher in a business school. It is the result of tensions between the disciplinary traditions of management research and the transformative spirit of feminism. Initial drafts of this chapter adhered to the expectations of the Social Sciences, with sections detailing research questions and data collection, as is evidenced in the appendices. At the same time, I included

feminist critique of some of those conventions. Here I will excavate these tensions, first by reviewing the (d)evolution of my research questions:

In my original research proposal, prepared in the spring of 2017, I wrote the following:

*The focus of this research is women's experience of the recruitment process at technology start-up firms. I am interested in their impressions of the firm based on inexplicit factors. Through a process of oscillation between inductive and deductive research methods, I intend to investigate the aspects of the recruitment process that are often not considered by firms – like the words used in job descriptions and the visual experience of the interview.*

However, as is common, my research aims morphed over time. Especially once I started to think about data collection. I found it difficult to access folks working in start-up environments and I was instinctively resistant to following a strict and structured interview schedule. As I realised how little I knew about women's experiences in the technology sector, I decided upon a preliminary exploratory aim: to familiarise myself with the concerns of women working in technology.

As I gathered data the objectives of my research responded to what I was hearing. My original interest in recruitment remained present, while other new areas of concern developed. The following were my three research questions at my first-year annual review in May 2018:

- 1. How is the recruitment process an emotional and unconscious encounter?*
- 2. In what ways does recruitment produce and use spectacle? Why?*
- 3. What do emotion and spectacle mean in the context of women's experiences of recruitment in the technology startup industry?*

In the subsequent years, even greater change occurred. I conducted the bulk of my data collection and my enrolment in a module called Advanced Theories in Science and Technology Studies had a great impact on my approach to my research topic. At my annual review in May 2019, I had markedly changed the focus of my research:

1. *What role does technology itself play in the exclusion of women from the sector?*
2. *What is the hiring experience like for women jobseekers in technology?*
3. *How do women do gender in the technology sector?*

By January 2020, having completed data collection and broadened the scope of my reading, I settled on the following research questions:

1. *What is the role of work according to contemporary feminist discourses, particularly neoliberal feminism? How do these logics manifest in practice for women working in the technology sector?*
2. *What are the possibilities for the realisation of feminist aims through work, considering the specific conditions of the technology sector?*

Considering this (d)evolution, my thesis is broadly structured around two stimulants: the internalisation of neoliberal feminism in the technology sector, and what the archetypes of the tomboy and the boss girl reveal about the positioning of work as a site of emancipation and liberation.

In her seminal text *The Second Sex* Simone de Beauvoir identifies women's lack of ambition, a result of the way we are raised, as a primary barrier to our achieving rights, equality, and success (1949). The white middle class women of first wave feminism in the West equated the realisation of this ambition, through career success and financial independence, with feminist liberation, taking the capitalist context as a given (hooks, 2000). The relationship between career success and feminism has not only endured but has been

weaponised at times to exclude women from within and to maintain patriarchal dominance without (Federici, 2004; hooks, 2000).

Current debates, particularly in *Gender, Work, and Organization*, consider the role of work in contemporary feminisms, including Moderate Feminisms (Budgeon, 2019; Lewis, Adamson, Biese & Kelan, 2016, 2019; Mavin & Grandy, 2019; Marx, 2019; Tzanakou & Pearce, 2019), postfeminisms (Adamson, 2017; Gill, Kelan & Scharff, 2017; Lewis, Benschop & Simpson, 2017) and neoliberal feminisms (Colley & White, 2019; Grosser & McCarthy, 2019; Rottenberg, 2019). For the purposes of this thesis, I focus on the rise of the neoliberal feminist subject characterised by self-responsibility, entrepreneurialism, choice, confidence, and ambition, and obsessive self-improvement and optimisation (Gill & Orgad, 2015; Rottenberg, 2014). Much of the existing research is based on analysis of discourses and representations of neoliberal feminism in popular culture, for example feminist manifestos such as *Lean In*, *Women Who Work*, and *The Confidence Code* (Gill & Orgad, 2017, 2015; Rottenberg, 2019, 2014), speeches of politicians (Colley & White, 2019), public documents of girls' empowerment organisations (Banet-Weiser, 2015), or publications of global development institutions, such as the World Bank (Prügl, 2017).

The emergence of the technology industry was cause for excitement and optimism amongst feminists who viewed it as an opportunity for women to access flexibility and independence. This thesis illustrates the experiences of women working in the male-dominated sector and exposes the inherent limitations of work as a location of emancipation or equality. The abasement of women has proven a vital prerequisite for the preservation of capitalism (Federici, 2004). And, although capitalism is not a necessary condition for the degradation of women, there is an illusory symbiotic relationship at work. This system can “sustain itself only by dividing, on a continuously renewed basis, those it intends to rule” (Federici, 2004, p. 8). I identify neoliberal feminism as a recent divisive mechanism. I

endeavour to demonstrate how the logics of neoliberal feminism reinforce the now taken for granted assumption that capitalist accumulation is inherently liberatory (Federici, 2004).

Under neoliberalism stark inequality is the justifiable result of entrepreneurial meritocracy (Antonio, 2013; Gilbert, 2012; Houghton, 2019; Littler, 2013; Sayer, 2015). Then, tech-utopic visions, often imbued with these meritocratic sentiments, are also ignorant to their unjust-ness and fundamentally built upon them. Neoliberal feminism mimics this effect, not only by contributing to the widening of the gap between women but, more importantly, by offering a rationalisation for the existence of a gap.

### 3.2.2 Getting in Touch

In order to illustrate his theory of interpellation, Louis Althusser presents the instance in which a police officer calls out, “hey, you there!” and an individual turns around, as subject production (2006). I came to sit across from and speak to the people whose words I use for this project by way of the phrase “women in tech”. In Althusserian terms, I “hailed” my participants, to which they responded, “it’s me, I am a woman in tech”. Althusser shifted the idea that individual subjects were independent and self-produced towards an understanding of identity as iteratively produced by social forces and influences (2006).

Drawing on this theorisation, Judith Butler emphasised the social construction of gender by applying an interpellative framework to the moment a newborn infant is declared a boy or girl (1990). In their more recent book, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Butler engages with questions of relational subjectivity and moral philosophy by putting the work of Levinas, Foucault, and Adorno in conversation. Consistent amongst these theorisations of subjectivity is an acknowledgement of the impossibility of the knowable subject (Butler, 2009).

The individuals who came forward to give an account of themselves as “women in tech” are produced, and made legible, as such by these normative identifiers of gender and occupation. For more demographic details see Appendix A. Similarly, I am produced as the researcher through my having recruited the people I spoke to. In this way, we (both myself as “researcher”, and my interviewees as “women in tech”) are conditioned by norms that “establish the viability” of our own subjectivity (Butler, 2009, p. 9). The meaning and productive power of this phrase, “women in tech” is central to my project. It is notable, and perhaps predictable, that there is no counterpart to the binary, no “men in tech”. For more details about “access”, see Appendix B.

### 3.2.3 Reading Transcripts

Reading transcripts was made possible first through talking (for more details about interviews see Appendix C), and then by transcribing (for more details see Appendix D). The original “reading” of the transcripts was informed by a thematic analysis framework. For more details about this see Appendix E.

However, as my project (d)evolved, I chose to change the way I approached my transcripts. To return to Eve Sedgwick’s conceptualisation of paranoia in criticism, I note the headings with which she structures her piece: “Paranoia is anticipatory. Paranoia is reflexive and mimetic. Paranoia is a strong theory. Paranoia is a theory of negative affects. Paranoia places its faith in exposure” (Sedgwick, 1997, p. 8). Sedgwick writes against what she understands as an anger that pervades critical work. Instead, she advocates for “a much more speculative, superstitious, and methodologically adventurous state where recognition, pleasures, and discoveries seep in only from the most stretched and ragged edges of one’s competence” (p. 2).

Feminists have long been criticized for their epistemic cynicism and paranoia (Anderson, 2006). However, as Sedgwick points out, paranoia can be generative, if not gentle in the context of criticism. Paranoia is present throughout the thesis, its evidenced in the anecdotes about my experience as a PhD student producing feminist work with the expectation of disapproval and rejection. Paranoia as a sensibility informing Chapters 1 and 2 allowed for the literature reviewed to be treated with seriousness which was organically revealing. In my reading of the transcripts, paranoia informed a desire to work with the texts in a different way than common qualitative analysis for instance. Instead, I approached the transcripts looking for what they exposed.

Haraway, and later Barad, advocate for diffraction as an alternative to critique (Latour, 2004) and/or going critical (Turing, 1950). Diffractive reading entails close respectful responsive and response-able attention to the details of a text, it is important to do justice to a text. Haraway argues that critique is too formulaic, too predictable – isn't sufficient and often times is not politically useful. Critique is about separateness and exteriority, critiquing from the outside, whereas the differentiating of diffraction is not about Othering, separating, but on the contrary, about making connections and commitments. It is about patterns of difference that make a difference and making entanglements visible; Diffraction allows you to study both the nature of the apparatus and the object. The generosity of diffraction is similarly taken up by Helene Cixous and Bolous Walker, both of whom are interested in the joy, pleasure, and necessity of reading (Bolous Walker, 2017). Cixous, for example, explains, "I am a reader before I write. Writing is for me born in reading" (in Bolous Walker, 2017, p. 156). Reading then, is meditative to some degree, it involves attentive slow engagement with text.

The application of diffraction to the transcripts meant that they were not treated as empirical material as such. Instead, I drew connections from the texts that, taken in totality,

produced the characters of the Tomboy and Girlboss. In essence, the characters made through the lens of paranoia and process of diffraction are potential sites for feminist knowledge production. Such an approach, similar to that which has been taken up by feminist and decolonial scholars in Organization Studies (e.g. Limki, 2018; Cook-Lundgren, 2022), offers great opportunities for novel feminist methodological approaches.

### 3.2.4 Writing

#### *Writing as Play*

We need new category work. We need to live the consequences of non-stop curiosity inside mortal, situated, relentlessly relational worlding (Haraway, p. 143)

Within management and organisation studies (MOS), supposedly ‘scientific’ norms govern what is regarded as worthy of being studied and how those areas can be written about. Such ‘scientific’ writing excises much of what it is to be human – the poetics of our humanity if you like – and thus our knowledge, understanding and learning are inhibited (Gilmore et al., 2019, p. 4)

I began my PhD with few certainties about the direction it might take. One thing I felt strongly about was the writing. In our first year of study at Edinburgh Business School we are required to take a module entitled, Introduction to PhD in Management. As part of this course work, I presented a poster (Appendix F). The bottom section provides a brief outline of the kind of writing I wanted to do. About a year later I was in line behind the PhD Program Director at the cafe in the Business School. He had been enthusiastic about my poster and the potential of cyborg writing. He asked me if I was, “still into it”? Without thinking I responded, “I’m collapsing under institutional pressures”. In the process of becoming a PhD candidate, in doing a traditional literature review of the “top” management journals, I had lost

sight of my original intention. Nevertheless, the chapters that follow contain the stories of the Tomboy and the Boss Girl. I wrote them with playfulness and something that felt like courage. It brought me great pleasure.

The writing differently movement within Management acknowledges that “it is not just about what we write but also about how we write” (Mandalaki, 2021, p. 846). Amongst the most popular approaches to writing differently are auto-ethnographic projects. Women, trans, and non-binary scholars have engaged in deeply vulnerable auto-ethnographic or autobiographical projects, seeking to expose the nuances of the cultural sexism they experience and link them to greater feminist concerns (Custer, 2014; Savigny, 2017; O'Shea, 2020). This method of writing allows for the ordinariness of lived experience to be explicated and explored (Stanley, 1992), and for closer attention to be paid to the embodiment of myths and norms (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992).

Storytelling, the method through which the characters in the following chapters take shape, offers something distinct from auto-ethnography. Feminist critique, as outlined above as the purposeful connecting of individual experience to systemic, socio-historical phenomena, provides the methodological environment for the potentiality of storytelling to be played with (DeVault, 1996). Storytelling can, for instance, be an instructive sanctuary, providing something akin to the oral tradition of mothers warning their daughters to avoid danger, or the function of gossip amongst sex workers (Roche, Neaigus, & Miller, 2005).

## CHAPTER 4: THE TOMBOY

### 4.1 The Story of the Tomboy

The tomboy gets dirty. She doesn't wear dresses, and when she does, she kicks up a fuss. She likes to play with the boys. She's athletic and "rough and tumble". She's louder than other girls. She plays with barbies, but also Thomas the Tank Engine. Onlookers laugh to themselves when they see her right in there, wrestling for the basketball, scoring a goal, whatever it may be. She's liked, broadly speaking. Her parents tell their friends she will "grow out of it", say soon enough she'll be chasing boys, giggling about her crushes.

The Tomboy's parents "never gender stereotyped" her (Kiera). She "grew up in a household where [her] parents never said, 'you can't do this because you're a girl' or 'because you're a girl you have to act ladylike'" (Harriet). She simply "wasn't raised like that" (Harriet), her parents gave her "so much freedom" (Rhonda). She "grew up with older brothers" (Marnie). Her family never treated her differently, so she never thought of herself as a girl (Marnie). They never held her bags, and her dad had her "mowing the lawn", just like her brothers would (Marnie). When she and her sister were kids, they "were both tomboys" of course, "but also wore dresses" (Kiera).

The Tomboy played with all the "standard Lego type stuff, construction toys" (Mary-Kate). She "loved, loved, loved Lego" and she "built and built and built with that" (Catarina). She mostly did that with her "brother and his friends" and she "thought it was "the most creative ever" (Catarina). They were "big Lego kids, big Kinnex kids"; they "really liked building" (Kiera). She also had dolls she adored (Catarina) and she "would set up barbies inside" the things she built and "play 'house' with them" (Keira). She had a dirt bike (Tina). She played "every sport!" (Marnie). She played "basketball, baseball, gymnastics, volleyball, golf, cheerleading, you name it" (Marnie). When she "played with boys, [she] would be

them” (Isobel). She liked “playing outside” (Kiera). The house she lived in “backed onto a woodland”, so she and her siblings “did lots of playing out back in the woods building forts, chasing around each other” (Mary-Kate). They were “tree climbing, aggressive children” (Kiera). She was always “just trying to keep up with [her] older brothers” (Marnie).

When she was in school, she was “fighting a lot”, “picking physical fights” (Rhonda). But because she was a girl and “was looking very innocent” with her “braid and pink clothes” she wasn’t stigmatized as a boy might be for the same behaviour (Rhonda). She always “tended to get along better with the boys than with the girls” (Tina). Although she “didn’t pay a lot of attention in school” (Tina), the Tomboy was a “big nerd” (Kiera). She went through a phase where she “carried a briefcase to school” and “wore business suits” (Kiera). She wanted to be like her dad, but “it’s pretty hard to find child sized pant suits” (Kiera).

The Tomboy was an avid reader. She really, really liked to read. She liked “adventure books and like, criminal books, like detective stories” (Kiera), and “everything that was on women doing sword fighting” and “sci-fi”, “anything that dealt with the future, what inventions we might have” (Catarina). Growing up, the Tomboy also watched “Star Trek” and “Star Wars” (Rhonda). The Tomboy’s dad “was a huge video game aficionado”, and he only played games with her that “had a female lead” (Rhonda). So, it was like “Laura Croft Tomb Raider, you know?” and she was her “role model for a long time” (Rhonda). The Tomboy likes Laura Croft because she’s “a rebel”, “but at the same time she is very smart and intelligent” (Rhonda).

When she was young, the Tomboy got interested in technology through those video games. Her family had “a lot of video games”, like an “Atari800, which is ancient by current standards” (Rhonda). The Tomboy’s dad “really liked computers”, even though “he wasn’t necessarily very good” with them (Kiera). And her dad always encouraged her to “learn a bit

about programming” (Rhonda). It was the Tomboy’s dad who first introduced computers into the home; “it was like Texas Instruments or something, T199” (Rhonda). He would give her “the instruction manual and he would be like, ‘if you can set it up, then it’s yours” (Kiera). She would “connect to bulletin board systems” using the internet, and that piqued her interest (Rhonda). By the time she was eight or nine, she was able to take computers “apart and put them back together and build” her own (Kiera). When she was eleven years old, she “had a palm pilot” and her dad continued to give her his old tech stuff (Kiera).

The Tomboy’s mother “is very handy” and took “a lot of construction classes” so was “very mechanically inclined” (Kiera). Nobody “ever explained to [her] that computers and math were boys’ things, ever” (Kiera). She never got the message that she was “supposed to be dainty or anything like that” (Keira). The Tomboy was “called bossy as a kid” just “like Sheryl Sandberg” (Marnie). She was “sort of the boss of the family, the decision maker” (Marnie).

When the Tomboy got her first job as a consultant, she “didn’t think being a woman was a factor at all” (Gillean). She “perceived no barriers” (Gillean). Now, when she looks back, she sees it differently; it wasn’t right for “consultant nights out being extremely male” centric, “going to dance bars and stuff like that”, which she “could not attend” (Gillean). Since then, in certain companies, she’s “had to drink with the leadership team to fit in” (Marnie). The drinking helped, she “got more attention and face time with senior people” (Marnie). She knows that “some of [her] success is because [she] could go and have a drink” (Kiera). She “was happy to go and have a drink”, especially because she has “a very non jealous and extremely supportive partner”, and she know that’s something that “could block other women, but “didn’t block” her (Kiera).

At a work “conference in Brighton”, around a dinner table of “like eight or ten people”, this guy was “telling this story about how when women walk through doors, they deliberately let the door hit them, so that they can blame men” (Kiera). It was “a really weird story”, and she thought “this makes no fucking sense”, but he just kept “going on and on and on about how women set themselves up for thing so they can blame men” (Kiera). In “today’s terms”, the Tomboy would call the guy “like a men’s rights activist”, and “no one said anything” (Kiera).

The Tomboy went on to spend “a lot of time with men” in her sporting life as an adult (Gillean). She has “non-stereotypical femme hobbies” (Mary-Kate). She’s “a black belt” (Gillean). She likes to brew beer, and when she tells clients they’re “a bit surprised by it” (Mary-Kate). Around “five or six years ago” she “started going with the short hair”, and she wonders “if that was subconscious move to keep [her]self in a sort of faux-tomboy mode, to not come across so much visually” feminine (Tina). It also helps that the Tomboy is “physically bigger” than a lot of men, so “they don’t mess with [her] as much” (Isobel). Now she “wears the makeup and everything” but is “still kind of a little bit tomboy-ish” (Tina). She doesn’t know if she “did it on purpose” but she never changed her hair until recently, when she “felt kind of relaxed to the point” of “growing it out again” (Tina).

Each time she was interviewing for a new role, the Tomboy “didn’t want people to know that [she] was married” (Marnie). She’d “hide the fact that [she] was married” because she “felt like being married is kind of considered like a negative” (Marnie). She’s aware there’s a stigma, that her boss might think ““oh you’re not going to stick around, you’re going to have babies”” (Marnie).

She never defined herself by her gender and she “finds it more difficult sometimes to relate to women than to men” (Marnie). She’s felt like there “wasn’t support from [her]

female colleagues”- “they could almost sometimes be worse” (Tina). She especially felt hurt when her female colleagues “didn’t say anything if they saw something was clearly” wrong, like “if they say you were being interrupted or talked over, or it was your idea and somebody else is taking credit” (Tina). She always notices when “they talk about peoples’ contributions on projects and stuff like that, they’re leaving off women on the team” (Kiera).

At the first startup she worked at she was “walking to the kitchen or back from the loo and the new sales guy yelled ‘shaking that ass’ are her” (Mary-Kate). She’d “hear remarks sometimes”, like ““oh you wouldn’t know what this is””, and she’d be like, ““how can you assume that?”” (Catarina). She feels sometimes as though she’s just not “taken seriously” (Kiera). Nevertheless, she’s “very comfortable around men, very comfortable in male dominated spaces” (Gillean). She “used to like, being with developers, especially with [her] last company, they would just be inappropriate and crude” (Marnie). The Tomboy knows what needs to be done, she “conditions them” on how to treat her (Marnie).

Once, at work, her new manager told her she’s looks “much better now” in real life than in her company headshot and that she “should have the photo changed” (Mary-Kate). She thought that was weird. Another time, she’d been on a team that had “finished some big important project” and the client gifted the guys “a bottle of champagne each”, while she just “got flowers” (Mary-Kate).

The Tomboy is “a good listener” and “can show empathy” (Tina). She “can be strong without showing anger or frustration” (Tina). Of course, “there will be times and places where that’s necessary, if it gets to that” (Tina). She considers herself lucky because she’s “pretty mouthy and aggressive” (Mary-Kate). She’s doesn’t conform to “appropriate female behaviours” (Mary-Kate). She seems “to have escaped a lot of the policing for that” and she’s not sure why, but she’s “very grateful” (Mary-Kate). She “can be firm and positive at the

same time and that helps- it gets a better reception” (Tina). She must make herself “speak up during meetings” because she’s “naturally quiet” (Tina). She must “make a little extra to be heard” (Tina).

She “never wanted to, like in the workplace, be defined” by her gender or sexuality (Marnie). The Tomboy identifies as “queer”, but “gender conforming”- she passes (Mary-Kate). She’s “very comfortable with men” and sees herself as “one of the guys”, but also, she sometimes feels “left out of the boys club in tech” (Marnie). Sometimes the Tomboy finds it hard to “play both fields”, but she uses it to her advantage, she can “relate in different ways to people” (Marnie). She has a “certain set of characteristics” that “could be considered male” that enabled her “to get around certain things” (Kiera). The Tomboy gets frustrated with the “double standard” (Tina). It’s “more acceptable when a man” behaves as a “strong individual” (Tina). Sometimes she must “be firm and make [her] voice heard”, but “when a female would do it, it just comes across as ‘oh what’s your problem? Is something wrong?’ or she’s being bitchy” (Tina).

Now that the Tomboy is “in a certain position”, “those same characteristics” that were helping her get ahead are “now blocking [her]” (Gillean). She gets “told [she’s] too aggressive” and because she’s “more visible” she’s “more threatening to the status quo” (Gillean). It “wasn’t a problem” for the Tomboy before “because there was lots of success to go around”, now it “makes people uncomfortable” (Gillean). She must “figure out a new game plan” because “the rules of the game have changed” (Gillean). She realizes now that she “was winning at a game without know the rules” because she had a “certain combination of characteristics” and “did not have children” until later, she was “able to say yes to every opportunity that came [her] way” (Gillean). She can see now “at a senior level, those characteristics are ruffling feathers” (Gillean).

When younger women ask her for advice about getting into tech, the Tomboy tells them: “don’t let your gender be an intimidating factor” (Kiera). She tells them she, “mostly ignored it unless it’s like something that is confronting [her] like glaringly” (Kiera). She “doesn’t view [her]self as a woman in tech necessarily, [she] views herself as a software engineer” (Kiera)

#### 4.2 Tomboys & Gender Liminality

Broadly defined, a Tomboy is a girl who acts like a boy (Hall, 2008), in the sense that they embrace stereotypically masculine (Safir, Rosenmann & Kloner, 2003). Nevertheless, there is considerable debate around how “Tomboy” is defined because it is culturally, geographically, historically, politically, and socially bound (Abate, 2008; Carr, 1998; Jones, 1999). Tomboyism involves varying degrees of transgression into and in pursuit of the masculine, in terms of traditional interests, sociality, activities, physicality or appearance, and attributes (McGuffey & Rich, 1999; Safir, Rosenmann & Kloner, 2003). Moreover, these tensions have the potential to continue throughout adolescence and adulthood, contingent on varying social pressures and expectations, as well as lifelong trajectories of changing identity coordinates, such as age, sexuality, and politics, amongst others (Abate, 2011; Carr, 2007; Cousins, 1997; Skerski, 2011).

As Paechter and Clark (2007a) note, “the phenomenon of the tomboy has been much discussed but little studied” (p. 342). Tomboy identities have been most seriously considered in the fields of education, gender and sexuality studies, psychology, and literary and cultural studies (e.g. Abate, 2008, 2011; Burn, O’Neil & Nederend, 1996; Carr, 1998; Hall, 2008; Hilgenkamp & Livingston, 2002; Paechter & Clark, 2007b). This research has treated Tomboyism as a nuanced gender position (Carr, 1998; Skerski, 2011), linking it to androgyny, lesbianism, and participation in athletics for example (Paechter & Clark, 2007a).

Relevant gender literature characterises the accepted liminality of childhood Tomboyism as less accessible to adult women (Halberstam, 1998).

The above story presents a nuanced account of Tomboyism. The Tomboy identity is liminal, existing between the masculine and feminine realms of childhood. However, this liminality is less readily accessible to the Tomboy in their adult professional lives, despite its obvious usefulness in navigating the double bind. In some instances, she is rewarded for her Tomboy-like behaviour, and yet in others she is reminded of the impossibility of the double-bind. The story of the Tomboy illustrates the temporal interplay between past, present, and future Tomboy identities. It expands the Tomboy beyond its static embeddedness within childhood to consider its accessibility and usefulness for adults in their professional working environments.

The technology sector has a strong archetypal ideal worker with a history: a geeky, computer game playing, blue jean, white T-shirt, glasses wearing, ivy league drop-out turned entrepreneur-innovator; this is fuelled by the stories of major players in the field like Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, and Mark Zuckerberg. Some women in tech, like Sheryl Sandberg, have contributed to the establishment of an analogous archetype, that of *Lean In* women: women who assert themselves, speak up, and essentially embrace masculine styles of leadership—see *Girlboss* in the next chapter. However, the Tomboy identity offers coherence, legibility, and legitimacy to their presence, as well as a kind of “origin story” for women in tech. Perhaps this is work necessary to survival as an always already unideal worker by virtue of their gender. The Tomboy allows women to claim validity in their male-dominated workplace. They already know how to “get along” with boys and men and are happy to be considered “one of the boys”. This narrative also supports a claim to exceptionalism. The Tomboy is a minority in her field, and turns inwards to give an account of herself, implicitly justifying why she has been admitted entrance, while other women haven’t. The Tomboy

claims to have always been comfortable in male-dominated space, and so she is better suited, and through her balancing of masculinity and femininity, more palatable than other women to work in technology.

## CHAPTER 5: THE GIRLBOSS

### 5.1 The Story of the Girlboss

The Girlboss has her shit together. She makes to-do lists, and she checks things off them diligently. She prints her five-year plan on pink paper and hangs it in her home office. The boss girl works out. She runs in the park in the morning and on the treadmill in the evening. Maybe she owns a Peloton. She does meal prep on Sundays; she tracks her calories. She gets her clothes dry cleaned. She's going to get a promotion soon and she takes on extra work.

The Girlboss has heard lots of stories. She knows other women who “learnt how to code for themselves”, but “they won't make a career out of it” because they just “don't have the confidence to find a job” (Rhonda). She sees it all the time, “like when women feel like they have 99% of the qualifications to apply to a job and then you have a guy who has like half of it and he's like ‘oh I'll give it a go’ and he gets it most of the time” (Lauren). Even though “formal education doesn't matter” all that much in tech, it does make her “feel more confident”, and “given how unconfident” she's been “made to feel”, she sees it as a “true asset” (Megan). In her mind, “sometimes it's more about the confidence building than it is actually the knowledge or skills required” (Megan).

Early on in her career the Girlboss was “coming from a place of ‘Oh God, I gotta prove myself’” (Marnie). She thought to herself, “why was I picked for this role? I don't understand. I have no experience in this thing” (Megan). She was “definitely that person that was like ‘oh my god, I can't believe I landed this job, like how did that happen?’” (Alicia). As her career progressed, she felt like her confidence improved (Marnie). She “knows who [she] is” now and she's “able to come from a place of strength and confidence” (Marnie). She still struggles with “imposter syndrome”, but “it's not visible on the outside” (Alice). She feels like both women and men have imposter syndrome, but “women have it more”

(Kayleigh). Even in her “current role”, in moments of weakness, she’s “sure the boss is going to turn around one day and say ‘no, we’ve made a mistake’” (Kayleigh).

When she “started speaking at conferences as a consultant”, she had the “attitude of ‘why me?’” (Megan). She thought to herself, “I’m not an expert, there is no way I should get up on this stage and talk to people” (Megan). Her advice to newcomers: “try and ignore the chip on your shoulder” that tells you “you’re inexperienced”, “young”, “female”, and “small” (Freya). She tells young women all the time, “don’t feel intimidated if you don’t know the landscape”, “as long as you work hard and are enthusiastic, you can pretty much accomplish anything” (Harriet).

The Girlboss’ heroes are Sheryl Sandberg and Elizabeth Holmes. Sandberg rose through the ranks at Google, then meta (formerly Facebook). Her book, *Lean In* is inspiring. Not only was it a bestseller, but it also really helped the Girlboss to embrace her “bossy side”. And of course, Elizabeth Holmes was a stylish superstar entrepreneur. She only did what every other entrepreneur trying to get their company funding does in Silicon Valley.

Recently, “they set up *Lean In* groups” at her company (Mary-Kate). The Girlboss loves these groups. She’s “been involved in women’s events for four years” and speaks “a lot on the subject” (Gillean). She coaches her colleagues: “Even when it’s uncomfortable, put yourself out there!” (Tina). She tells them, “I have to make myself speak up during meetings because I’m naturally quiet”, you “have to make a little extra effort to be heard as well” (Tina). At the same time, she tells them, “You have to keep it real” (Gillean). Authenticity is key. The Girlboss “understands the power of networking” (Julia). She tells her mentees: “network like crazy both within your work and, if you can join meetups because it gives you contacts in other companies”, “go out with the right attitude, be hard working” (Kayleigh).

Working in tech is a “life calling”, it’s “a lifestyle choice” (Catarina). It’s up to her to “put that time in to learn” (Kayleigh). So, the Girlboss takes advantage of every opportunity to develop (Kayleigh). Everything she does “in [her] free time” is to “brush up on the other skills” she has (Catarina). The Girlboss reads “a ton of books”, she is “constantly educating [her]self” (Marnie). She’s “reading self-help books”, “listening to podcasts on leadership: ‘How to Win Friends and Influence People’” (Marnie). She’s read “every book”, “all the newest and latest and greatest” (Marnie). She’s “agnostic” but, “sort of meditative with Buddhist ideals” (Marnie). She’s “spiritual” and she “takes from all religions” (Marnie). She considers herself a “jack of all trades because of [her] experience” (Kayleigh). She’s “not pigeonholed [her]self into one industry or one area” (Kayleigh). She’s just taken the next step and got herself “an executive coach” (Megan).

You’re probably not as well suited to the technology sector if, unlike the Girlboss, you “love stability and always doing the same thing over and over in routine” (Alicia). The industry is “fast paced” (Alicia). In tech, “you’ll always have something new to learn- that could be changing jobs, changing departments, changing roles within your company” (Kayleigh). And this suits the Girlboss because she “loves doing things that scare [her]” (Marnie). If she’s scared, she “has to question why and if it’s irrational”, she “has to do it” (Marnie). When the Girlboss “looks at [her] friends” and “they’re just a bit scared to get out of their comfort zone or look into their weaknesses” she pities them (Marnie). She’s been successful because she’s not afraid. She tells her friends “not to be afraid”, “learn as much as you can upfront, but don’t just learn what you need to know because down the road you might need it” (Caitlin).

Unfortunately, the Girlboss was “still raised as a girl” so, she “wasn’t raised to be very assertive” (Alice). It “can be hard to come into a room and assert yourself in a room full of guys” and be “the one actually leading” the meeting (Kate). But, the Girlboss had a “great

role model”, her mother, who is always “pushing” her saying, ““ask for more money!”” (Marnie). Her mom “built [her] up”, “coached” her, and that gave her almost “too much confidence” (Marnie).

The Girlboss knows that “for women to get here, it’s hard, it’s really hard” (Marnie). Women “have to be double”, “double as good, double as smart” (Marnie). She knows there are double standards too. When she is called bossy, she retorts “would men be called bossy?” or do they just “have leadership skills?” (Marnie). The Girlboss has been “willing to look at the tasks that nobody else wants to do” (Kate). She’s “very driven” (Marnie) so “it doesn’t matter how many hours [she] works” she’ll “get it finished”, whatever it is (Julia). Throughout her career she has consistently “prepared hard than anyone else” and that’s what’s given her “that step forward” (Megan). She’s watched everyone “run after the big prize or the shiny new project”, but she’s taken a steadfast approach to “showing how important [she] is” (Kate). She keeps the “baseline held together” and her “value is always” apparent (Kate).

When the Girlboss meets other women she “connects with”, she’s “impressed”, because “it’s hard to find as many women like [her], that are quite as driven and candid and ambitious, and earnestly ambitious” (Marnie). She’s met “quite a few” in her current role, but in previous companies she’d “had a hard time fitting in and finding like-minded people” (Marnie). She “connects more with men usually”, and there just “aren’t as many women” in a similar role (Marnie).

The Girlboss has “fought and scraped and hustled and manipulated” to get where she is and she’s proud of it (Marnie). Her trajectory, being “brought up from the lowest job to ending up as a director”, “jumping six levels” meant she had to “hustle” (Marnie). Sometimes it irritates her to see “some people get handed jobs, career, and success”, when she’s

“scrapped for all of it” (Marnie). It’s “because [she] worked really hard and set very high standards” for herself that she’s gotten to where she’s at (Megan). She knows hard work is “the secret sauce” because she doesn’t “believe that [she] is inherently good at anything”, she’s just “applied [her]self relentlessly” (Megan). She’s earned everything she has, she’s “here on merit” (Ella). It’s about her own “perseverance”, “motivation and determination” (Harriet).

She has seen her approach rewarded. Right now, she “has influence” (Gillean). It’s gratifying to her when “senior sponsors and people actually believe in” and “bet on” her (Alicia). Her success is evidence that “if you work hard and you work smart, doors open” (Jodie). She’s in a position now financially where she doesn’t “need this job”, because she “could get a new job anywhere” (Marnie). She’s totally fine on her own, she “could get fired and [she’d] be good for five years” (Marnie). She “takes care of [her]self”. It’s “very Sheryl Sandberg” of her (Marnie).

The Girlboss is ambitious. She’s always asking herself, “What’s the next thing? How can I make more money? How can I become more successful?” (Charlotte). Long term, the Girlboss sees herself in “strategic leadership” positions (Marnie). If she continues to push her career, she “could see [her]self as a COO or CEO”, definitely “an executive” (Marnie). All “the women who write all these books, write them from positions of power” and she hopes to join their ranks (Gillean). And the Girlboss is determined to accrue influence. She understands it’s “politics”, that “politicians do this all the time”, “make a trade off”, “trade off this one thing” to make change in the long run (Gillean).

When something happens, anything, like a male colleague is rude, the Girlboss weighs things up. It’s often smarter to “let things slide” (Gillean). For example, once, the Girlboss was at an event and the host “got [her] title wrong”- he “used the title of the person

who reports to [her]” (Gillean). A man probably would have said something, “but [she] didn’t want to lose the audience on what was a very important topic on diversity” (Gillean). If she had corrected him, the audience might think “who the hell does she think she is?” (Gillean). Anyway, the Girlboss knows she can’t effect change until she makes it to the top. In any case, there is a considerable “amount of support out there for women” and she “just doesn’t see the need for so much to be done” (Kayleigh). She did it on her own, and so can everyone else.

## 5.2 Work

This section aims to put the work of a gender studies scholar (Kathi Weeks), a historian (Silvia Federici), a philosopher (Michael Cholbi), and lecturer in law (John Danaher) in conversation to theorize work. The discussion here broadens the definition of work implicit in the research reviewed in Chapter 1 beyond the literal to situate work politically, socially, ethically, and existentially to better make sense of the context from which the Girlboss emerged.

Kathi Weeks explores the privileging of work as a practice above other aspects of life. Her 2011 book *The Problem with Work* begins with the premise that “the work site is where we often experience the most immediate, unambiguous, and tangible relations of power that most of us will encounter on a daily basis” (Weeks, 2011, p. 2). Given this, Weeks initially identifies two general reasons we work, either because we must or because we want to work. Whether or not to work is the choice of few. This view is echoed by Michael Cholbi, whose work I engage later in this chapter. Cholbi considers what compels us to work and whether we have an ethical duty to work.

Weeks is responding to what she observes as a glaring inattention to work in political theory. She identifies two reasons for this neglect: (1) the privatization of work, and (2) the decline of work-based activism, particularly in the United States. These phenomena have

contributed to what Weeks call “the depoliticization of work”. In her book, Weeks seeks to situate work within broader systems of power and political matrixes. For example, she writes, “waged work remains today the centerpiece of late capitalist economic systems; it is of course, the way most people acquire access to the necessities of food, clothing, and shelter” (pg. 6). She also explains how work produces social and political subjects; it is a “key site of becoming classed”, people are “gendered in and through work” (p. 9). Similarly, Silvia Federici, whose work I close this section with, writes:

Capitalism, as a social-economic system, is necessarily committed to racism and sexism. For capitalism must justify and mystify the contradictions built into its social relations- the promise of freedom vs. the reality of widespread coercion, and the promise of prosperity vs, the reality of widespread penury- by denigrating the “nature” of those it exploits; women, colonial subjects, the descendants of African slaves, the immigrants displaced by globalization (Federici, 2014, p. 17)

Weeks constructs a “feminist political theory of work that could pose work itself- its structures and its ethics, its practices and relations- not only as a machine for the generation of inequalities, but as a political problem of freedom” (Weeks, 2011, p. 23). She begins with a characterization of the work ethic as a both a trap and weapon (p. 38) because it serves the “ideological function of rationalizing exploitation and legitimatizing inequality” (p. 53), and yet there is much opportunity for the ethic to be subverted, contested, and rejected. The significance and centrality of work in our lives “is one of the most stubbornly naturalized and apparently self-evident elements of modern and late, or postmodern, capitalist societies” (p. 43).

In terms of understanding work as a gendered construction, Weeks writes “women too have served as the excluded others of its various historical articulations” (p. 63). Weeks’

argument is bound by her specific treatment of American work ethic, and so she understands this exclusion as “enabled by the historical processes through which work in the United States became equated with waged work, waged work was linked to masculinity, and unwaged domestic work was reconceived as nonproductive women’s work” (p. 63). However, Fedrici provides us a much more substantial and expansive account of the process of coproduction through which gender and work came to provide a foundation for our contemporary capitalist formulation.

Weeks also addresses attention paid to work by feminists. One feminist response to the gendering of wage labour was to “adopt the traditional work ethic’s singular focus on the value of waged labor and claim that women should have equal access to the virtues that employment opportunities could bestow”, while another was to insist on “the status of domestic work as real work- that is, on its standing as a comparably worthy form of socially necessary and dignified labor” (p. 66). However, Weeks is a proponent of the refusal to work, through which she staunchly rejects the glorification of work, arguing that “the struggle to improve the quality of work must be accompanied by efforts to reduce its quantity” (p. 109). Both Weeks and Michael Danaher, whose paper I consider later in this section, see value in speculating about potential, utopian post-work futures. In their work, utopian thinking is treated as an intellectual possibility, not an empirical reality. Danaher’s futures are enabled by technological unemployment, but Weeks’ are more politically rebellious or revolutionary in nature. She advances a vision of a utopian future where we each “get a life”, where “life is an alternative to work” (pg. 232). She expands on this:

the political project of getting a life is both deconstructive and reconstructive, deploying at once negation and affirmation, simultaneously critical and utopian, generating estrangement from the present and provoking a different future (p. 233)

According to philosopher Michael Cholbi, “work (for dialectical purposes) is whatever individuals are required to do so as to discharge the ostensible duty to work” and that “to insist that individuals have a duty to work is to insist that individuals have a duty to engage in economically useful activity (p.1122). In his 2018 paper, *The Duty of Work*, Cholbi makes a case against the legitimacy of a duty to work, claiming that the necessary reciprocal conditions for an expectation of a duty to work are absent.

Cholbi begins with a recognition of what he describes as our “moral zeal for work” and the ways in which workplace logics have come to colonize nearly all aspects of human living (2018, p. 1120). Central to his analysis is the idea of “work-centered societies” where he claims dogmatic reverence for work is unchallenged. This fixation on work informs education systems which, “increasingly emphasize the acquisition of skills so that students will later become ‘employable’” because most of us “*must* work in order to achieve many of our goals or realize our interests” (Cholbi, 2018, p. 1120). Cholbi’s project then, is to interrogate this imperative- “whether there is an interpersonal or social duty to work, a duty which, if we do not fulfil it, we fail to provide what we owe to others” (p. 1120). Cholbi makes an important caveat to his argument, namely that he is operating on the generic, rather than specific level. As such, he does not deny that some may fulfil the moral duty of responsibility towards dependents by providing for them materially because of work.

After reviewing various arguments in support of the duty to work, Cholbi concludes that most people in advanced industrialized societies ought not to consider any duty of work for themselves. Cholbi’s analysis begins with the fair play principle. The familiar formation of people taking part in economic activity through production and consumption, and then pool resources to produce public goods or services, is referred to as a cooperative scheme. And those who endow a fair contribution to the scheme earn a portion of its benefits. Those who do not make a fair contribution are not deserving of its advantages. Cholbi observes that the

presumption of the duty of work as moral, “reflects larger cultural trends that marginalize or demonize non-workers” (p. 1120). However, people who do not work are not harming anyone. The fair play principle then is based on basic concepts of reciprocity. However, some philosophers have pointed out that reciprocity ought not to require work, while others have speculated about how sharing of resources without working might disrupt it.

Nevertheless, Cholbi takes the fair play principle to be accurate, embedding the duty to work based on reciprocity within it. Cholbi explains that “just as only those who make a fair contribution are entitled to a cooperative scheme’s benefits, so too must all who make a fair contribution to a cooperative scheme enjoy its benefits” (2018, p. 1124). Therefore, the duty is conditional: “economies, labor markets, and workplaces must satisfy these ideal conditions in order for there to be a widespread duty to work”, and Cholbi argues that these conditions are rarely met in relevant contemporary societies (p. 1124). Most workers do not produce a contribution at all to the cooperative scheme, and most do not benefit. Cholbi acknowledges that a duty ought not to be considered against its occurrence but makes the case that the duty to work is not valid because not only is it rarely realized in cooperative schemes, but it is also beyond the control of workers themselves (p. 1130).

Cholbi concludes that, “whatever reasons there may be for working- and these reasons are considerable- that working is morally required is not among the reasons most people have for working” (p. 1121). This is because the fair play argument does not reflect the real conditions of work. Vitaly, Cholbi explains that his arguments

do not show that work, either actually or ideally, lacks value of significance for individuals. They show only that we should be more suspicious than we characteristically are in assigning value to work because it fulfils an interpersonal duty, we owe to the societies of which we are members (Cholbi, 2018, p. 1121)

In his 2017 paper, *Will Life Be Worth Living in a World Without Work? Technological Unemployment and the Meaning of Life*, Michael Danaher takes a speculative, yet optimistic approach to the meaning of work in the future. Danaher's definition of work is "the performance of some act or skill (cognitive, emotional, physical etc.) in return for economic reward, or in the ultimate hope of receiving some such reward" (Danaher, 2017, p. 43). Although his definition is quite broad and could include a variety of jobs as such, it does not include domestic or care work that is routinely performed by women without economic recognition. Based on this distinction, slavery is also excluded from his definition of work.

The other concept of importance to Danaher's work is technological unemployment, which he defines as "the replacement of human workers... by technological alternatives (machines, computer program, robots and so forth)" (p. 43). Danaher notes that technological unemployment is a well-established feature of the economy with so-far relatively short-term impacts to employment. The introduction of machines to supplement or replace workers has yet to have caused any monumental or lasting economic crisis. Instead, displaced workers and new generations of workers find alternative forms of work. Rather than assess the plausibility of long-term economic restructuring caused by technological unemployment, Danaher assumes it will happen in order to consider its social and ethical dimensions.

In his speculations about the impact of technological unemployment, Danaher furthers an explanation of work and the meaning it holds for humans. In responding to a characterization of work as virtuous, conferring a sense of "well-being and individual flourishing that would be absent if one did not work for living", Danaher draws on two strands of antiwork literature. The first characterizes work as bad. Scholars like Bob Black have argued that,

Work is the source of nearly all the misery in the world. Almost any evil you'd care to name comes from working or from living in a world designed for work. In order to stop suffering, we have to stop working (Black, 1986)

Weeks' position on work would also fit within this category of antiwork, bad work literature. As outlined above, Weeks argues from a Marxist-feminist perspective that work is of both of bad quality and quantity. But there are various other characterizations of the badness of work: work makes people unhappy; work can be degrading or humiliating; some work makes people mentally or physically unwell; workplaces can be hostile environments. Other arguments of a more structural nature, focus on the aspects of work inherent to our economic and political moment, like the fact that work is "something that one must do in order to access the basic necessities and luxuries that make life possible and worth living" (Danaher, 2017, p. 48). Another set of arguments along a similar vein rely less on the characterization of work as bad onto itself, and instead make a relative judgement against non-work; proponents of this line of thinking hold the belief that work may have some good qualities, but that non-work is better.

In answering his question concerning the meaning of human lives in a technologically unemployed future, Danaher argues that "if meaning and fulfilment are at least partly determined by how our individual activities join up with the external world, then there is something to worry about if automating technologies takeover most domains of human activity" (Danaher, 2018, p. 49).

In her 2004 book *Caliban and the Witch: Women, Body and Primitive Accumulation* Silvia Federici approaches the history of capitalism from a feminist perspective, radically reformulating established historical accounts to reveal systems of domination and exploitation. Federici's implicit definition of work then is tangled up in these systems. She

writes that under capitalism, gender is not simply a cultural reality, but a “specification of class relations” and a “carrier of specific work-functions” (2004, p. 14). That is, the “hierarchical ranking of human faculties and the identification of women with a degraded conception of corporeal reality has been instrumental, historically, to the consolidation of patriarchal power and the male exploitation of female labour” (2004, p. 15).

Federici explains that the “transition” from feudalism to capitalism “required the transformation of the body into a work-machine, and the subjugation of women to the reproduction of the work-force”, and that this in turn required the extermination of the ‘witches’” (p. 63). For Federici, it is the body that is the site of this exploitation. She writes,

the body has been for women in capitalist society what the factory has been for male waged workers: the primary ground of their exploitation and resistance, as the female body has been appropriated by the state and men and forced to function as a means for the reproduction and accumulation of labour (2004, p. 16).

Sexual hierarchies are always “at the service of a project of domination that can sustain itself only by dividing, on a continuously renewed basis, those it intends to rule” (p. 8). Therefore, “if ‘femininity’ has been constituted in capitalist society as a work-function, masking the production of the work-force under the cover of a biological destiny, then ‘women’s history’ and the question that has to be asked is whether the sexual division of labour that has produced that particular concept has been transcended” (2004, p 14).

### 5.3 The Girl Boss & Neoliberal Feminism

The term Girlboss was popularised by founder of Nasty Gal clothing brand, Sophia Amoruso, with the publishing of her autobiography, “#Girlboss” in 2015. The book, and the Netflix series that followed of the same name, chronicles Amoruso’s entrepreneurial journey.

Amoruso describes the Girlboss as in constant pursuit of her ambitions, rejecting conformity,

and never settling (Amoruso, 2015). The Washington Post referred to “#Girlboss” as aimed at social outsiders that want to work on their own terms: “Lean In for misfits” (McGregor, 2014). Amoruso is also the CEO of the Girlboss media company and app, which connects ambitious professional women and facilitates women-only networking exercises (Alexandersson & Kalanaityte, 2021). The aesthetic of girlhood “is used to attract the attention of professional women, as a legitimate expression of enterprising femininity” (Alexandersson & Kalanaityte, 2021, p. 433).

Girlhood has been chiefly studied by cultural and media scholars. They have characterised girlhood as inherently ambiguous and contradictory, especially in the context of its commercialisation (Baumgardner & Richards, 2004; Hains, 2014; Hopkins, 2019; McRobbie, 2009; Nguyen, 2013; Russel & Tyler, 2002; Thompson & Ustuner, 2015). Research on girls and girlhood in management studies is sparse and most often considers how to best cultivate the entrepreneurial spirit in girls through education and training (Johansen, Clausen & Schanke, 2013; Tirivangasi, 2017), with a few exceptions that characterise girlhood as a construct (Hunter & Kivinen, 2016; Russell & Tyler, 2002).

Girlhood is not “an inherent quality of feminine-gendered children, but rather an active engagement with the attributes and artifacts, associated with hegemonic discourses of feminine childhood”; it is a “distinct form of femininity that can be deployed by a person of any age, as a way of challenging (or ignoring) social norms, associated with adult self-expression” (Alexandersson & Kalanaityte, 2021, p. 420). Moreover, “cuteness, together with ugliness, is central to understanding the relations of power, vested in the construction of girlhood” (Alexandersson & Kalanaityte, 2021, p. 421). While cuteness is “the aestheticization of powerlessness and accentuates helplessness and vulnerability”, ugliness is an aesthetic of provocation (p. 421). This contrast of cuteness and provocation, pink and edgy, is central to girlhood:

The expression and celebration of vulnerability, passivity, excess, and lack of respectability are central to the construct of girlhood (Alexandersson & Kalanaityte, 2021, p. 418)

Confidence is an important part of the Girlboss' story. This is consistent with literature concerning the 'confidence gap' that characterises low confidence amongst girls and women as having a negative effect on their performance (often regardless of 'actual' ability), whether it be in school (Orenstein, 1994), sport (Comeig et al., 2016), or entrepreneurial endeavours (Kirkwood, 2009). These studies conclude that confidence is just as, if not more, important than competence (Casciaro & Lobo, 2008; Guillén et al., 2016). However, it is worth noting that critics, especially feminist scholars, have argued such studies focus on a narrow male-centric understanding of confidence within specific patriarchal contexts (Davis & Steiger, 1993).

In a 1979 interview Simone de Beauvoir explains, "as soon as they [women] gain power, they acquire all the male's defects" (Simons, Benjamin & de Beauvoir, 1979, p. 343). Nevertheless, there is opportunity in the Girlboss. She is culturally produced in such a way that "cuteness and pinkness are placed alongside excess, revolt, and ugliness" (Alexandersson & Kalanaityte, 2021, p. 424) and although at the moment that revolt is couched in commercialisation and for capitalist ends, there is room still for a u-turn; Girlboss, Amoruso's app holds an "annual Girlboss Rally" where the "core values of the network": "feminine care, ambition, and revolt" are represented through "various shades of pink, edgy quotes and design, pitch competitions, self-care booths, and in0house astrology readings" (Alexandersson & Kalanaityte, 2021, p. 430).

Girlhood aesthetic could be seen as a revolt against not only adulthood, but also narrow white middle-class gender norms (Alexandersson & Kalanaityte, 2021, p. 433)

The ugliness of the Girlboss can take a different form where sinister studying can take place.

## CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

### 6.1 Walking and Talking



Liked by emcooklundgren and 24 others  
wmnhud Déu n'hi do!

In April 2022 I was an artist in residence at Can Serrat in El Bruc, Catalonia. I had been granted a bursary for the residency in 2020, but my plans were scuttled by the COVID-19 pandemic. It was my intention to write “like a mad woman” while I was there, but my routine consisted more substantially of walking, drinking wine, and talking to the other artists; But this time was most definitely not wasted. Each morning I went on a long walk with my dear friend Zack, a non-binary writer based in New York City. One morning, as I was expressing frustration about the writer’s block I was experiencing, Zack encouraged me to talk about my work. Below is a transcription of my trying to explain what I’ve done and why:

There’s a collective, summative thing that is happening that people can recognize. There’s purposeful ambiguity in characters that perhaps concepts do not allow for. And in Management, and in the tech sector, there’s a bunch of masculine archetypes that we all

accept like “startup bro”. I’m talking about feminist archetypes. The Girlboss is a character- Sheryl Sandberg. There’s something useful about the unity an archetype can provide, but also, it’s reductive. Labels provide a structure for us to define ourselves, but they don’t always fit. Not all archetypes are aspirational, some of them are. I think the management ones are only aspirational.

The two characters I’m working with are the Tomboy and the Girlboss. The tomboy is like this nostalgic archetype because the women are yearning for a gender liminality that is only accessible in childhood, where gender boundaries are more fluid. They’re using that to explain their success in the industry, so they’re talking about how they’ve always been comfortable in male dominated spaces. It’s almost like a justifying story that they talk about. The Tomboy is really cool because they’re transgressive in some ways but then they also kind of reaffirm the gender binary in other ways. Does hockey truly get too rough for women to join? Or is (given the amount of severe brain injuries incurred in play) it too dangerous for everyone altogether?

And then obviously the Girlboss. I think of it as only negative. I wonder if there are multiple ways into that character. I’m working really with neoliberal feminism, like that idea that individual achievement is analogous to feminist aims. Like the individual career success, or like having more women as CEOs is good for feminism. Is it? And it’s this cooption of capitalist neoliberal logics over feminism which is really individualistic. Preserving the status quo- you’ve got feminist leaders. It doesn’t promote any sense of solidarity at all, and it’s still like- is the goal that we just want women to also be as exploitative as men? Like I don’t want women to be CEOs, I don’t want anyone to be a CEO. How are we coming to find ourselves fighting for more representation on boards that have no moral or ethical responsibility? The hope is that, maybe by doing so, it will make them more moral or ethical? The weight of being a Girlboss is also that there is a looming expectation that they will change things.

Sheryl Sandberg got pregnancy designated parking spots and inspired a generation to “lean in”, but what was really achieved? The process of becoming one of those women is a naturalization process of forgetting.

Nostalgia is always hiding something- disguising violence, it’s covering something up, it’s okay to be nostalgic- what are you forgetting in order to be nostalgic? It wasn’t better? The Girlboss one is a future imagining one where all of us are emancipated through our accumulation of capital or powerful positions in organizational structures and it’s also this wistfulness and this forgetting. What gets overlooked in order to have these temporal dreams?

Archetypes are important because they provide a history and a future when there might not be one. We know the stories of men in tech- Stanford dropouts with their computers in their garages, but women’s stories have been neglected, or even excluded. There are many women involved in tech- we have always been here and everywhere. Archetypes allow me to tell stories of ambiguity. The Tomboy tells a nostalgic story, the Girlboss a wistful one. Of course, there are as many, if not more stories, as there are men. But these provide a disruptive starting point in Management at which we can begin to tell more stories with characters because stories are not purely entertainment, they are also powerful.

The method of reading, as informed by paranoia and diffraction, taken together with the story telling mode of writing produce a novel site for the production of knowledge. The stories of the Tomboy and the Girlboss provide examples of how transcripts, or other texts, can be read to reveal, with gentle openness. Adding character driven stories to the writing differently landscape expands its scope as to allow for new and varied kinds of stories to be told, including those through which we can envision bright feminist futures. This orientation has been taken up already, by Indigenous scholars and activists who write towards a radically

changed environmental future (Kimmerer, 2013). Out from storytelling can emerge interdisciplinary contributions, it “brings together the personal, the political, and the theoretical” (Beavan, et al., 2021). I can envision a future where stories and characters, carefully crafted and pleasurable to read are amongst the most impactful sites/cites of knowledge creation. The possibility for radical and utopic feminist storytelling is boundless.

## 6.2 Gender as Thin-centred Ideology

It is not my intention, nor do I think it would be particularly useful, to map my theorization of gender exactly onto Mudde and Kaltwasser’s concept of populism. Instead, in this section I endeavour to use some of the aspects of thin-centred ideologies they have identified as departure points for discussion and exploration.

Just as Mudde and Kaltwasser state that their concept of populism as a thin-centred ideology exists *alongside* other theories of populism, so too do I imagine my theory of gender as a useful alternative to the theories outlined in Chapter 1. That is— my theory is not meant to be an all-encompassing replacement of concepts of gender as performative or located within intersectional structures of oppression. Instead, I see this ideological framing as complimentary to these.

Recall that an ideology is a set of normative beliefs or, a worldview that informs how we believe the world ought to be. Gender as an ideology then is a collection of beliefs about men and women, whatever those are, and masculinity and femininity. Conceptualizing gender as a thin-centred ideology allows us to turn it over, hold it up close, to pick at its loose bits exposing its fabrications, threads, and patches. Gender as ideology is held together solely by an antagonism between the masculine and feminine. That is why, the Tomboy’s aggression is celebrated while she is young, or in the gym, or by her parents, and then condemned as she gets older, or in a professional context, or by her colleagues. There is an important distinction

here between how gender is read as performative in this example, and how gender is functioning as a thin-centred ideology. The Tomboy's gender is performative because as Butler describes it is made up of a set of routinized practices, socializations, but gender is also "hanging in the air" the way an ideology does. Because the only tenant of gender as a thin-centred ideology is an unequal antagonism between men and women, it will function in a myriad of inconsistent ways to hold that central truth. That is- gender will consistently behave inconsistently to maintain patriarchal logics.

Fundamental to populism as a thin-centred ideology is the antagonism between the people and the elite. The people, "is a construction, which allows for much flexibility, it is most often used in a combination of the following three meanings: the people as sovereign, as the common people, and as the nation" (2017, p. 9) and the elite are "one homogeneous corrupt group that works against the 'general will' of the people" (p. 12). In this context, there is no room for existing outwith these categorizations. It's a binary and "the crucial aspect is morality, as the distinction is between the pure people and the corrupt elite" (p. 11). This binary is obvious in gender as an ideology. The story of the Girlboss illustrates how the gender binary works to pull and push, tug and squeeze people into alignment. Of note here is also the way in which ideologies function at the systemic, and individual level. That is, there is gender as an ideology, an ideal of men and women, and then there are those who espouse certain tenants of gender. Using the lens of gender as an ideology allows us to examine the space between the structural and the individual.

Mudde and Kaltwasser are careful to distinguish thin from thick-centred ideologies:

unlike 'thick-centered' or 'full' ideologies (e.g., fascism, liberalism, socialism), thin-centered ideologies such as populism have a restricted

morphology, which necessarily appears attached to – and sometimes is even assimilated into – other ideologies. In fact, populism almost always appears attached to other ideological elements, which are crucial for the promotion of political projects” (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 6)

This observation about populism, that it attaches, or is embedded within other ideological elements is instructive for how gender works as a thin-centred ideology. In this thesis I have shown how gender is irrevocably “attached” to the ideology of capitalism, work, and technological utopianism.

Once they have established populism as a thin-centred ideology, Mudde and Kaltwasser state that its opposite would be liberal democracy. In Chapter 3 I suggest that gender is fundamentally juxtaposed to justice. What I intend here of course, it to further politicize gender as an ideology. If gender is the opposite of justice, it is partial, unfair, and unethical. The difference, and resultant exclusion, harm, and erasure produced by gender is the opposite of justice.

Mudde and Kaltwasser conclude that “by conceiving of populism as a thin-centred ideology, it is possible to understand why populism is so malleable in the real world” (p 19).

## CONCLUSION

This thesis was set out with two distinct, interrelated aims: (1) to propose a theorization of gender as a thin-centred ideology and (2) to tell the stories of the Tomboy and the Girlboss-stories that provide opportunity for feminist future imagining. This research is situated at the nexus between gender, work, and technology. Therefore, in Chapters 1 and 2, I reviewed literature in Management and Organization Studies concerning these concepts. I then take up

alternative theories of gender, work, and technology than those posed in Management literature. In Chapter 3 I describe the cyborgian and glitchy approach I have taken to this thesis. Chapter 4 tells the story of the Tomboy, and Chapter 4 tells the story of the Girlboss. Finally, in Chapter 6 I elucidate the political usefulness of conceiving of gender as a thin-centred ideology.

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## CHAPTER 1

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## CHAPTER 2

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Demographics

Fifty-two qualitative life history interviews were performed with professionals working in the technology sector in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland. Forty-eight interviewees identified as women and four as men. Two identified as queer. Their socio-economic status, as well as their educational backgrounds, were diverse. There were twenty different nationalities represented across the group, with American, English, and Scottish as most prevalent. Their time in industry ranged from seven months to twenty years with an average seven years. At the time of interview, the people I talked to were living and working in either Dublin, Edinburgh, or London.

<b>Demographic Data of Participants</b>			
<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>	<i>Job Title</i>
Katherine	23	White	Associate product manager
Catarina	26	White	Associate product manager
Rhonda	23	White	Technical founder
Marnie	33	White	Senior growth manager
Donna	27	White	Product manager
Paula	30	White	Product manager
Mary-Kate	32	White	Product manager
Tina	44	White	Spam operations
Kasimma	28	Black	Market lead
Nandi	24	Black	Market specialist
Kiera	30	White	Developer
Jackie	28	White	Project manager
Winnie	37	White	Manager

Gillean	43	White	Manager
Julia	29	White	Market specialist
Chloe	31	White	Program manager
Lauren	29	White	Project manager
Zoe	22	Black	Account manager
Charlotte	35	White	Manager
Emma	28	Asian	Developer
Alice	31	White	Developer
Megan	29	White	App manager
Demi	42	White	Manager
Alicia	36	White	Director
Ella	33	Asian	SCRUM master
Freya	25	White	SCRUM master
Kayleigh	40	White	Manager
Jasmine	25	Black	Escalations specialist
Harriet	30	White	Market specialist
Erin	28	Asian	Market specialist
Isobel	32	White	Response specialist
Caitlin	34	White	Data analyst
Jodie	33	White	Communications
Kate	34	White	Project manager
Laura	28	White	Technology officer
Scarlett	35	White	Project manager
Aoife	29	White	Project manager
Samantha	30	White	Project manager
Jewel	27	Biracial/Latina	Investigator
Erika	34	White	Engineer
Jin	32	Asian	Software engineer
Rebecca	31	White	Team lead
Sherry	29	Asian	Project manager
Irene	28	White	Market specialist

Morgan	31	White	Market specialist
Nina	25	White	Market specialist
Elizabeth	45	White	Software engineer
Sheila	24	White	Software engineer
Toby	26	White	Product manager
Frank	28	White	Software engineer
Leo	25	White	Freelance Developer
Timothy	34	White	Product Director

### Appendix B: Access

As an MPhil candidate at Trinity College Dublin, my dissertation was a case study of a small technology start-up at which I was employed. In this role I made many personal and professional connections with people working in the sector. I relied on these relationships to make initial contact with women for this study. Two individuals, both working in large organizations were able to use internal communication lines (Slack groups or email lists) to solicit participation. Based on these two contacts I was able to build a network across several organizations in three cities: Edinburgh, Dublin, and London. Once I started interviewing, I was also able to ask the women to pass along the details of any additional colleagues who might be willing to speak with me. A small proportion of the women were contacted outside of this process through my own posts on Meetup and Facebook.

Most women were interviewed in private meetings rooms at their place of employment. I was conscious that, although this was the most convenient option, it also may have contributed to some discomfort in my asking them to speak frankly about their experiences of work. I attempted to address this by reminding participants that I am an external PhD student, that I have no interest in proprietary information, and that their identity is protected. In other instances, I would meet with the women wherever was most

comfortable for them. In one instance, at the request of a woman on maternity leave who brought along her infant, I conducted an interview in my home.

I was greeted by interviewees with unexpected enthusiasm. I am grateful for their generosity of time and spirit; they sighted two primary motivations for wanting to be interviewed. First, the interview provided a “legitimate” break from their mundane workday. Second, many of the women expressed a desire to share their stories and be heard, in the hopes of contributing to positive outcomes for women in technology.

### Appendix C: Interviews

I conducted unstructured life-history interviews because I wanted interviews to be as informal as possible, allowing for the women to speak at length about the issues most important to them. Interviews lasted between 16 and 92 minutes with an average of 34 minutes. They were digitally recorded. I began each interview by asking about where and when they were born. Following this I consciously took a “hands off” approach by asking questions like, “And, then what happened?”, or “Tell me more about that”. This style of open conversation was meant to encourage the women to tell their stories in their own way, placing emphasis on matters important to them. In this sense, I did not prescribe “themes” or “areas of interest” onto the women. This is especially true for the first round of interviews (23), and less true for the following rounds because of the iterative process of data analysis. Essentially, as I interviewed, I naturally began to formulate ideas and then ask slightly more specific questions.

### Appendix D: Transcription

If possible, I transcribed interviews almost immediately (within 48 hours). In rare cases I transcribed interviews up to a month after they took place. The level of familiarity afforded by quick transcription made the process easier. For instance, I was able to recall from

memory words or phrases that were not entirely audible on recordings, or to understand accents more clearly. The process of producing comprehensive transcriptions and notes on each interview gave me the opportunity to formulate initial groupings and themes.

#### Appendix E: Analysis

During transcription I annotated transcripts with further information that I had observed about the “feel” and “vibe” of the organization (Parker, 2000, p. 238) and the emotional tone (Rowlands & Handy, 2012) of the interview. An iterative process of reading and rereading each script, making notes, and categorizing memos followed (Kringen & Novich, 2017).



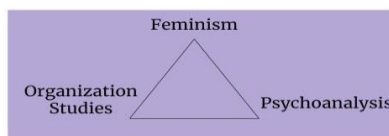
# Applying Feminism & Psychoanalysis to Recruitment

## The Face- First Impressions (Introduction)

The vitality of the body to my research is threefold: 1) I'm trying to elucidate lived experiences - that is, the experiences of women in their bodies throughout the recruitment process, 2) I'm writing from the body via cyborg writing, a radical disruptive approach to scholarship, and 3) I'm making sense of my research process by mapping it onto the body, as illustrated by this poster.

## The Neck- Direction (Theoretical Framework)

I locate my research at the nexus between feminism, psychoanalysis, and organization studies. There are obvious conflicts and tensions between these disciplines. For instance, the patriarchy, as understood as an intrinsic and unavoidable aspect of organizations, has rendered the academic study of organizations uniquely inaccessible (or undesirable) to feminists. Nevertheless, I believe the the critical and reflexive landscape created by these tensions is useful and ripe for exploration.



## The Brain- Reasoning (Objectives)

The aim of my research is to first explore, and hopefully establish, the recruitment process as a series of unconscious encounters. Recharacterizing the experience of recruitment as an attempt to address one's own lack provides a lens through which affects such as fantasy and anxiety are made meaningful. Additionally, I aim to elucidate how and in what ways this experience of lack and the recruitment process can be gendered. Essentially the objective of my research is to expose the emotionality of the recruitment process in the hopes of better understanding how women experience it, and how it might be improved upon.

## Hands- Tools (Methods)

- Oscillation between inductive & deductive data collection & analysis
- Feminist/psychoanalytic interviews
- Reflectivity
- Observation, site visits etc.
- Cyborg writing & publishing

## The Ribcage- Containing (Context)

Occupational gender segregation is a powerful force in the labour economy. It is informed by the organizational principles of the past (the pre Second World War era, when men were often the sole monetary earners, while women performed household labour) yet, it manifests itself anew with changing trends. Although there is a pattern of increasing levels of employment among women, especially since the 1990s, a clear division still exists between "women's work" and "men's work".

In the EU, women's employment participation tends to be poorly paid, of low status, and highly precarious. Much of the work women do is in the "care" service sector. Nursing is the most predominant professional level occupation for women in the UK, while the most common for men is computer programming and software development.

The technology sector is infamous for its gender inequality. Demographic data, often collected by companies themselves, show alarmingly few women working in the field. Women who do work in technology report shocking experiences of social exclusion, systemic career immobility, and sexual harassment. The focus of this research is women's experience of the recruitment process at technology start-up firms.

## Feet- Moving Forward (Dissemination Plans)

### Conferences:

#### Academic Year One

- October 2017: International Interdisciplinary Conference on Gender Studies and the Status of Women
- June 2018: Eighteenth International Conference on Diversity in Organizations, Communities & Nations
- July 2018: 34th EGOS Colloquium- Surprise in and around Organizations: Journeys to Unexpected

#### Academic Year Two

- October 2018: International Interdisciplinary Conference on Gender Studies and the Status of Women
- July 2019: 35th EGOS Colloquium
- August 2019: Academy of Management Annual Meeting

### Publications:

- 2018: "Fantasies of Dream Jobs & Ideal Candidates: A Psychodynamic Perspective on Recruitment as an Unconscious Encounter"

## Writing From The Body - Cyborg Writing

Donna Haraway's 1984 essay "A Cyborg Manifesto" sparked a paradigm shift in feminist scholarship at the time. The cyborg is a mythical character inhabiting indefinite liminality. It's primary objective is to probe and dismantle ideological dualities which produce unmerited privilege and inequity. This agenda is realized through disruptive writing practices.

Cyborg writing has recently been taken up as a radical approach towards doing academia whereby scholars "write from the body" by moving meaningfully between their own personal experience, the presentation of data, and its analysis. Sara Louise Muhr and Alf Rehn explain how cyborg writing remedies the shortcomings of previous feminist approaches to writing in their 2015 article, "On gendered technologies and cyborg writing". For instance, they point out the ways in which Helen Cixous' *écriture féminine* unwittingly reinforces gender binarism, while cyborg writing takes into account the performative nature of gender as described by Judith Butler. In her 2016 article, "Cyborg writing as a political act: reading Donna Haraway in organization studies", Ajnesh Prasad explores what she refers to as "the myriad possibilities for actualizing Donna Haraway's concept of cyborg writing in the field of organization studies". Alongside her own work, Prasad draws attention to the scholarship of Jo Brewis, whose writing, she contends, is exemplar cyborg writing. It is my hope that my work will be held in similar regard.

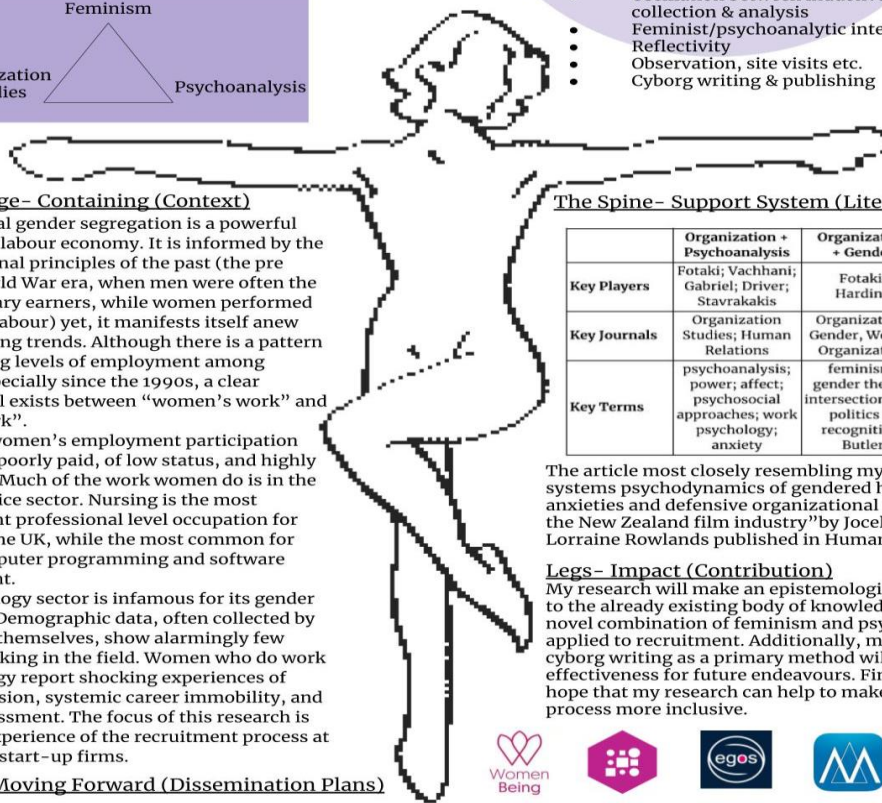
## The Spine- Support System (Literature Review)

	Organization + Psychoanalysis	Organization + Gender	Gender + Technology
Key Players	Fotaki; Vachhani; Gabriel; Driver; Stavarakakis	Fotaki; Harding	Haraway; Prasad; Wajcman
Key Journals	Organization Studies; Human Relations	Organization; Gender, Work & Organization	Gender, Work & Organization
Key Terms	psychoanalysis; power; affect; psychosocial approaches; work psychology; anxiety	feminism; gender theory; intersectionality; politics of recognition; Butler	cyborg writing; male-dominated professions; gendered occupational culture

The article most closely resembling my research is "The systems psychodynamics of gendered hiring: Personal anxieties and defensive organizational practices within the New Zealand film industry" by Jocelyn Handy & Lorraine Rowlands published in Human Relations in 2016.

## Legs- Impact (Contribution)

My research will make an epistemological contribution to the already existing body of knowledge through its novel combination of feminism and psychoanalysis applied to recruitment. Additionally, my adoption of cyborg writing as a primary method will illustrate its effectiveness for future endeavours. Finally, it is my hope that my research can help to make the recruitment process more inclusive.



End