

# TACKLING GENDER INEQUALITY IN DOCTORAL SUPERVISION – AN INTERSECTIONAL TOOLKIT INVOLVING HEARTS, MINDS, POLICIES, AND PRACTICES

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*“You might not be able to change people’s values, but you can certainly change their behaviours through training and regulations which are implemented”*

(Pro Vice-Chancellor, UK university)

## Abstract

Doctoral supervision is both a rewarding and challenging experience for supervisors and doctoral students, while effective supervision and research practice is of crucial importance for the developmental process and both students’ and supervisors’ careers. Although several challenges in the research journey are strictly research-focused, supervision is a human activity where intersectional aspects influence actions and activities. Power dynamics are involved in supervisor and research student interactions, many of which link affective with intellectual domains, and many are based on differences, of gender, age, race, or intersectionality. Here, we are mainly concerned with how to tackle challenging issues that grow from gender differences and intersectionality. Within the complex landscape of doctoral supervision, this paper is based on both research and educational development practice, since as authors and practitioners we are engaged with this. We use research, policy, widely available literature, and professional practice to underpin, build and share our developing “gender equality toolkit”. We use case studies to support constructive policies and practices and engage colleagues in reflective and practical development aimed at tackling issues concerning gender and intersectional inequalities in doctoral experiences and supervision.

**Keywords:** Gender and Intersectionality; Doctoral Students; Supervision; Policy and Strategy; Professional Practice.

## 1. CONTEXTUALISING GENDER-RELATED INEQUALITY IN DOCTORAL EDUCATION

Universities are increasingly paying attention to diversity and inclusion (Byrd, Brunn-Bevel & Ovink, 2019). However, globalisation, internationalisation, and “massification” of higher education have created a super-complex world requiring new awareness of gender inequality related to other social identities, including race, ethnicity, age, class, and nationality – and how they connect and produce lived experiences within higher education institutions (HEIs). This theoretical framework of intersectionality is “rooted in the premise that human experience is jointly shaped by multiple social positions” following clear intersectional patterns characterising everyday practices in HEIs (Crenshaw, 1989; Akala, 2019; Bauer *et al.*, 2021; Bhopal & Preston, 2012; Fisher *et al.*, 2020). Meanwhile, Bengtson and Barnett (2017) consider a growing “darkness” within higher education to comprehend situations not easily understood by agendas of quality assurance and professionalisation and address emerging “gender and ethnic conflicts”, “isolation and loneliness”, among other emotional impacts (Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013). In this article we focus on gender and intersectional challenges for women doctoral students in HE, then share our research and experience-based “Gender equality toolkit”, which we intend to use to support universities to work with gender and intersectional inequalities at policy, strategy, and practice levels.

Ethical processes for this research paper are straightforward. We conducted no new empirical work, relying instead on freely available university documents, policies, strategies, reported practices, and published toolkits, blogs, books, and journal articles. We invented workshop cases and names (see appendix).

Our article first considers literature (including our own earlier work) on gender and power issues in Higher Education, particularly concerning doctoral students and supervision. Next, it builds on recent

findings related to gender inequality within higher education, sourced from published and publicly accessible cases. Then it considers several examples of effective institutional policies, strategies and practices from international contexts selected from our international institutional research and development work on doctoral supervision. Together these illuminate a variety of challenges and gendered inequalities that could affect doctoral researchers' careers and indicate institutional ways of tackling them. From these examples we built a "gender equality toolkit" and a range of case studies to support constructive policies and practices and engage colleagues in reflective and practical development. Taken together with positive change in policies and strategies at institutional levels, these research, and practice-based developments, engaged activities and suggestions are intended to lead to healthier, positive, gendered, and intersectional policies, practices and behaviours, particularly in relation to doctoral student experiences and doctoral student-supervisor interactions.

What gender-related issues are there in HE? And what gender-related issues are there in research supervision in particular? Feminist research (Wisker, 1996; Holmes *et al.*, 2015) uses feminist praxis, and in the 1996 book, an educational development background to focus on empowering women in universities at all levels of management, leadership, and professional practice. Others (Johnson, Lee & Green, 2000), on the other hand, expose a form of "family originated" interaction where male supervisors express power by being "hands-off" in supervision, expecting students to be immediately autonomous, while women supervisors become endlessly motherly and nurturing, putting in ever longer hours. They argue "beyond the family drama as the only frame within which to think about the relationships appropriate to managing the challenge of the PhD" (Johnson *et al.*, 2000: 10). These replicated basic gendered roles can lead to fundamental issues concerning inequalities of power, and following this, of negative and destructive experiences as noted by others (Haynes *et al.*, 2012). However, there are more damaging practices, some predatory, some involving bullying, side-lining, or silencing which, accompanied by insecurities of reporting, can lead to long-term damage to doctoral researchers. The thriving of research cultures, research, and researchers are all at stake here. Gender issues can impact supervisory relationships, research progress, mental health, and student success. In this context, supervisory roles and relationships present a special case where positive gendered behaviours can enable better research and healthier working relationships.

The problems and challenges we identify with gender and intersectional inequalities as they affect women doctoral students are not new. Acker (2006) indicates multiple social inequalities regarding intersections of race, class, and gender in organisations affecting women's power and management: "Gender and race are important in determining power differences within organizational class levels... In some organizations, women managers work quietly to do the organizational housekeeping, to keep things running, while men managers rise to heroic heights to solve spectacular problems." (Acker 2006: 446). If women refuse the maintenance work, speaking out against structural inequalities, they face a name-calling backlash, something which can easily happen to doctoral students calling out sexism and issues arising in intersectional-based concerns in relationships with supervisors. How many women doctoral students are silent over side-lining and harassment, we can only guess. "Women enacting power violate conventions of relative subordination to men, risking the label of 'witches' or 'bitches'" (Acker, 2006: 447). In other work, women doctoral students question why, although they have already shown themselves competent and intelligent, they must use all their energies in avoiding and challenging negative responses to their work and being put down (Healy, Bradley & Forson, 2011; Husu, 2005; Jacobsson & Gillström, 2008). These authors from 2008 underline the issues of intersectionality and inequalities, also building on Acker, while others deal with "rational"-based practices and those based in organisation and management (in HE as elsewhere) which could reinforce gender and intersectional inequalities. These can be tackled with feminist organisational theories and practices which are "situated in wider social systems and bear responsibility for social justice, equality, solidarity and care for others" (Benschop, 2021; Ely & Meyerson, 2000) and are based on a belief in equalities (Nussbaum, 1999). There are some examples of positive strategies supporting women doctoral students' wellbeing and success (Hattingh, 2012; Pifer, & Baker, 2016; Manathunga, 2019). In our context, this entails promoting policy and practice change to better enable women doctoral students to thrive.

Not all lauded equality practices solve gender and intersectional power imbalances, however, as Conrad and Philips (1995) indicate when exploring the seemingly positive establishment of supportive (writing) communities for doctoral students. They build on Kramarae and Treichler's (1985) research with American postgraduates, which found that a small group, chiefly male, dominated discussion, and women "were more likely than were the men to object to the lack of what they thought of as collaborative

work" (Conrad & Philips, 1995: 51), so highlighting dangers of such communities being dominated by particular forms of masculine power and voice which effectively silence women. Clearly processes and practices aiming at change for equality and fairness are complex and multifaceted.

We next consider contemporary examples of high-profile cases of gender and intersectional problems, specifically those faced by women doctoral students. We suggest policies and professional practices to challenge such poor practices and ways of engaging in practical professional routes to effect positive change in university contexts and behaviours, particularly for the benefit of doctoral students. Finally, we share the developing "Gender equalities toolkit", which is both research-based and built on experience we have gained over many years in the field. It prompts thoughts and actions on core aspects and challenges that might arise in relation to gender and intersectional inequalities in doctoral research supervision.

## **2. GENDER AND INTERSECTIONAL ISSUES IN THE PRESS**

According to Revolt (2018), more than half of all students in the UK experience unwanted sexual behaviours. Since the advent of the 'MeToo' movement in around 2006, social media has helped fuel the sharing of information, bringing sexual harassment and violence more generally into the open so that it can and must be tackled, including in the context of doctoral student experiences with which we are concerned here. There are some high-profile examples of sexual harassment and discrimination in relation to women doctoral students, and widespread less visible instances of bullying, silencing, sidelining, and undermining, which also grow from unchecked discriminatory beliefs and behaviours fostered, rather than exposed and condemned, it seems, throughout international higher education. Gender issues are particularly important in research supervision because of power relations, close working, and the precarity of the students' working positions at the university.

A recent report "Sexually harassed at work – an overview of the research in the Nordic countries" (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020), states that sexual harassment and gender inequality are common in academia, occurring in all groups and disciplines and among students. The most contested position concerns doctoral students. Historically, despite Kirkpatrick and Kanin's (1957) "Male sex aggression on a university campus", little has been shared about sexual harassment and violence across all years of university study, including first years to postdoctoral researchers. Some are embarrassed to speak out, some suffer from confusing self-blame when they are in fact victims not culprits, and for some the damage has been so great that it has already led to depression, self-harm, and agoraphobia, among other physical and mental harm. However, another report suggests that social media has made it possible to feel less isolated and silenced (Gender and Policy Insights CIC, 2018), a first step to visibility and hopefully to action to tackle damaging behaviours at every level.

Reputation is an important issue for doctoral researchers, as it is for women doctoral students experiencing harassment and gender inequalities. Also important is access to research opportunities, materials, and of course the thesis, the quality of work, and access to conference and publication opportunities, since supervisors often have the "hidden" and "visible" power and connections, which can enable (or not) project funding, jobs, book contracts during and beyond the doctorate. Here we present arguments for working against discriminatory behaviour, highlighting what that negative behaviour might look like, and what non-discriminatory positive behaviour looks like.

There are both published research and media high-profile instances of gender inequalities and discrimination, which any of us might also meet in supervising or being supervised. There are also reports and guidelines for institutional best practice, which offer useful guidelines for universities deciding to improve their institutional culture and, in the context of the work shared here, their research and research supervision culture and practices. Underpinning such policy and practice-oriented work is the fundamental belief that gender equality and respect are essential and should be seen as good practice. Building on this we consider the arguments for working against discriminatory behaviour particularly regarding gender and intersectionality, look at the consequences of poor behaviour and introduce the idea of a university-wide strategic policy and practice-based structure which sets out to support behaviours which enable equality and diversity to flourish.

Gender and power are clearly linked in research, management and teaching/learning structures and behaviours. Clear institutional values, strategies, policies, and practices underpin positive behaviours, including those between supervisors and doctoral students, while an institutional commitment and steer

enables re-training and training, rewards, and recognition throughout the university for good behaviour. The only way to ensure equality in practice beyond goodwill, human kindness, and an innate sense of equality, which naturally leads to sound practice, is to embed the regulations and expectations in university statutes, policies, regulations, structures, reporting norms and recognition systems.

Grand claims and intentions are vacuous if not supported by development, rules, and regulations, rewards, and some consequences for poor behaviour. If good behaviour is explicitly defined, trained, normalised, and rewarded, this has a better chance to become the norm.

There is also much written and spoken evidence of discrimination based on gendered hierarchies and normalised gender discriminatory poor practice, which spring from gender, intersectional, and power-related problems in supervision and research groups. The problems play out in poor practice, damaging individuals, and damaging research. They include preferential treatment for some while ignoring others' skills and insights; giving an important piece of work or a regard to one person rather than another largely based on gender and assumptions around gender; excluding some people more than others because of gendered norms.

Whom does this damaging behaviour affect? It is intersectional so it is difficult to label directly; however, gender, ethnicity and age intersect, and in the UK at least so do class and economic background, while religion may also play a part. What is clear from the research in terms of damaging research relationships is that mostly targeted or ignored are doctoral students who are younger women, older women, and researchers from minority ethnic groups. Some gender and intersectional-related bad behaviour are deliberate, some inadvertent, not planned, unintentional, and based on lack of guidance and positive models. Some younger, less structurally powerful women hesitate to point out or complain about discriminatory behaviour because they worry about being seen as destructive, shrill, unprofessional and being further discriminated against as a result. However, some find when they do bring it to attention it is ignored, hidden and they are quietened. The poor behaviour of course is then reinforced because it is not dealt with, and others suffer. Much of what has been discussed so far relating to gender and power concerns possibly somewhat broken or underachieved relationships, lack of support, and lack of access to opportunities which supervisors might afford doctoral students. A main approach in work shared here aims to tackle issues of poor behaviour arising from gender discrimination at strategic, policy and practice levels. However, to begin to tackle it, it is first important to look at the even darker side of gender imbalances, and so at sexual harassment.

### **3. SEXUAL HARASSMENT – THE DARKER SIDE OF GENDER AND POWER STRUGGLES IN DOCTORAL SUPERVISION**

There are a worrying number of examples of sexual harassment concerning doctoral students and supervisors reported in the international media and in commissioned reports. American, UK and Scandinavian contexts are particularly noticeable.

Freyd notes that a 2015 survey of 539 graduate students at the University of Oregon found that nearly 40 percent of female graduate students report sexual or gender-based harassment by faculty or staff. These rates of sexual harassment of women in graduate education were almost identical to those nearly 30 years ago on large university campuses. (Freyd, 2015).

The same report notes that close working, e.g., in labs, leads to vulnerability, while inequalities of power can encourage those abused to avoid sharing details for fear of academic reprisals. Gender and power are combined to marginalise and silence women students who are vulnerable to professors and to their (potential lack of) academic support in the future. Those who conduct research in labs depend on tenured faculty and mentors for their funding and so are doubly vulnerable:

graduate students are in a potentially risky position for three reasons. First, some stay at the same university for a number of years (in the case of doctoral students, up to 6 or 7 years). Second, they may work in close proximity with faculty (collaborating on projects, publishing papers together, etc.). Third, graduate students are often highly dependent on a small number of faculty members." (Rosenthal, Smidt & Freyd, 2016: 366.)

All of that heightens the imbalance in power dynamics and make students potentially vulnerable both physically, and for their future research success.

Considering rates of sexual harassment among college students at different levels, Freyd notes that graduate students are more likely to be sexually harassed because they work in such close relationships with professors. “I think there’s a story here of opportunity and power,” she says, and “Those relationships tend to be marked by very, very strong power asymmetries, where the graduate students can be dependent on the faculty member for their funding in many cases, for their letters of recommendation, for their ability to stay in the program” (Rosenthal, Smidt & Freyd, 2016).

The damage goes beyond the individual concerned to institutional reputation, as we also note in high-profile cases considered next. Freyd argues that the current hierarchy of American higher education leads to institutions betraying their students.

The negative impact of sexual harassment affects academic futures, the future of science and research, and impacts destructively on the mental and physical health, as well as the security and safety of the women students involved. They might become depressed and withdrawn because of it, and the lack of any way to report or control it. In the context of turning a blind eye, the accuser is often constructed as in the wrong. In an atmosphere where predatory behaviour is tolerated, if onus is put on the female student to report harassment, this could potentially negatively affect her own career. It can also lead to victim blaming.

The cumulative effect of sexual harassment is likely to ultimately involve a negative impact on the integrity of the research. Should students leave or not pursue research careers because of the effects of the harassment, it will also cause a costly loss of talent probably particularly in science, engineering and medicine (where the work is mostly conducted in labs), and this could have negative consequences for the nation's economic and social well-being, its public health, and advances in solving a range of crucial problems. Female graduate students are often bullied out of career pathways in science, engineering, and medicine. Elsewhere, race and gender play out in treatment and supervision of women doctoral students (Rossello, Cowan, & Mairesse, 2020).

Kurt Carapezza (2019) reports that at Brandeis University, USA, which has a strong gender and women’s culture, the exposure of harassment and the establishment of firmer rules, controls, and setting up a structural part of the university to turn to, have made some positive differences:

Julia, a fourth-year PhD student, working 40-80 hours a week, teaching, taking classes, and researching cancer therapy and drug design, said she feels lucky that she hasn't been sexually harassed or assaulted personally, but has seen her colleagues harassed:

*“I’ve seen them give up hope, give up their careers, give up on everything about themselves due to harassment, discrimination and assault.”*

Julia has faced gender discrimination:

*“I’ve been condescended to,” she said. “I’ve been told that my work is not as good”* (Kurt Carapezza, 2019: 19).

Brandeis spokesperson, Julie Jette, points first at the problem and then at ways in which the university is responding constructively:

*“Students cannot freely engage with ideas and reach their fullest potential if they are fearful of harassment or are unsure about where to find advice, support, and protection.”* (Jette, in Carapezza, 2019: 19).

Jette highlights policy and structural steps taken by the university, which has established an Office of Equal Opportunity, increased training for employees and students, and publicised reporting options. “While we have seen an improved awareness of where and how to report, we recognise that our internal surveys of students’ experience of harassment continue to mirror national surveys of other colleges and universities; we must all do better for our students” (Jette, in Carapezza, 2019: 19).

There is a current high-profile problematic case reported in several contexts including *Inside Higher Ed* as “The Tip of the Iceberg” (Flaherty, 2022).

In a serious case of asymmetry of information, and of power, Harvard faces a lawsuit by three graduate students who say for years it ignored their warnings and complaints about a prominent anthropologist before making minimal findings against him (Flaherty, 2022).

Here, some 38 Harvard professors initially closed ranks, writing letters supporting the one accused of sexual harassment, and so silenced the accusers. Their public letter of concern about how the university treated their colleague, supported his reputation based on his graduate success rate as an excellent colleague, advisor, and committed university citizen who has for five decades trained and advised hundreds of Ph.D. students of diverse backgrounds, who have subsequently become leaders in universities across the world. We are dismayed by Harvard's sanctions against him and concerned about its effects on our ability to advise our own students (Cho & Kim, 2022).

In conflating his reputation as a great, significant, and influential researcher (not in question) with innocence in a sexual harassment case (a historical series of incidences, which did not quite become cases), these colleagues were recognised as and warned against, closing ranks by Claudine Gay, Edgerley Family Dean of Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences. She responded to the letter with one of her own, warning supporters against the "obvious dangers of an asymmetry of information in a situation like this. If you have not reviewed the full findings of an investigation, it is hard to assess the proportionality of the response" (Flaherty, 2022).

The plaintiffs in the case, three women doctoral students in anthropology at Harvard, Margaret Czerwienski, Lilia Kilburn, and Amulya Mandava, argued that Harvard protected Comaroff since before it hired him, and the university was aware of Comaroff's reputation as a "predator" and "groomer" at the University of Chicago, where he worked from 1979 to 2012, yet "welcomed him anyway." The result was "predictable," the lawsuit says. The women doctoral students reported him; however, Harvard allegedly did not investigate at that time. While there have been sanctions against him to reduce his lone contact with and power over individual graduate students: a one-semester suspension, not being able to teach required courses, take on new students who do not have a co-advisor, or chair dissertation committees in the 2022–23 academic year, and his current graduate students being able to switch advisers, the "plaintiffs" argue that Harvard effectively denied the case "allowing him to continue teaching after a slap on the wrist" (Flaherty, 2022).

The case, downplayed to focus on one piece of advice he gave to a student, ignores "a long list of harassing and uncomfortable embarrassing behavior" (Flaherty, 2022). This is a high-profile case and there are three women giving evidence rather than one, worrying about their future if they speak out; however, the press is littered with similar cases, and there must be many more which never become public.

#### **4. IMPLICATIONS, MODELS OF GOOD PRACTICE, AND SUGGESTED DEVELOPMENTS**

When considering this and other extant or potential cases, we might think about our own universities, asking:

1. What are the issues?
2. Can it happen here?
3. What can be done to mitigate against such bad practices?
4. What should have been done earlier?
5. What should be done now?
6. What should be in place to alert predators to the results of bad behaviour so they self-censor?

We argue that university culture needs to change to ensure that there are clear regulations and visible enacted sanctions against poor behaviour of sexual harassment, marginalising, inequalities, and even bullying. These changes should be supported by and accompanied with training, behavioural and practice changes so poor behaviour cannot be seen as acceptable, hidden, or an unspoken norm operating in plain sight. Developments include:

1. Policy-driven, strategic level, regulatory and statutory actions – from Human Resources, unions.
2. Pastoral support systems regulating and preventing discriminatory actions.

3. Development, training and support provision and positive actions to enable people to change poor practice and recognise, learn, and enhance good practice.

## 5. EXAMPLES OF CONSTRUCTIVE DEVELOPMENTS IN RESEARCH AND POLICY

There are several examples of whole university good practice at the levels of policy, strategy, and practice, examples of inspirational and practical guidelines, and positive developments for change at all levels, accompanied in many cases by implementation processes and data gathering to monitor progress and achievement, all of which are essential if guidelines are to be more than recommendations in the ether.

For example, the ERAC Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation (<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/councileu/preparatorybodies/europeanresearchareaandinnovation-committee-erac/>) calls on all stakeholders to take concerted action to make the European Higher Education and Research Area “a truly safe environment where all talents can thrive.” It urges a focus on gender harassment to be seen as serious as research misconduct and argues that such poor behaviour has been under-noticed and under-researched. It suggests that the first steps include recognition, plans which are in line with EU strategy and so likely to be mainstreamed and taken seriously, and argues universities need to “Step up the work for gender equality and diversity through Gender Equality Plans, in line with the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 and the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention 2019” (ERAC). The main emphasis in it is compliance with EU policy and practice norms for the benefit of all stakeholders and ensuring various forms of success including financial. Mainly oriented at including and informing stakeholders, and towards policy, it encourages positive change and looks very useful at a policy level, involving awareness raising at management and user levels. However, it is not either focused on developing supporting communities or on professional development programmes, although it can be argued that its work can be so used should universities develop plans to make positive changes to ensure good positive practices and gender equality in doctoral research experiences and supervision. The work argues for recognition that there are gender inequalities in doctoral research experiences, although women are very involved in research, and it argues for a range of positive changes, recognising that “Setting up and implementing a plan requires strong arguments about the benefits of working towards gender equality in universities and research institutions” (ERAC).

Addressing researchers, they consider positive practices which we argue could usefully inform the practice of universities more widely, fundamentally, and visibly including:

- Mainstreaming gender knowledge among researchers and supporting women’s contribution to knowledge production;
- Awarding gender-sensitive research;
- Enhancing social dialogue by achieving gender equality;
- Addressing social partners;
- Improving working conditions by tackling gender inequality, (ERAC).

The gender monitoring plan underpinning this set of expectations for change is the whole university and involves action stages in a cycle of “Define–plan–act–check” stages, based on gathering data and identifying issues, supporting positive changes, and monitoring their effectiveness. Planning leads to action, and to mentoring others producing a developmental plan.

Some barriers are seen. A commitment to only excellence means ignoring a gender-informed plan, lack of data, models, ideas, authority, power to develop and implement a gender equality plan, lack of focus on gender orientation in the organisation and a lack of allies.

What this range of ideas suggests is that organisations need to be committed to high-level policy for gender equality, acting positively for this and mitigating poor, negative practices and behaviours. This need embedding as normal in policy, which guides and directs at the highest level. Strategy then follows so that there are strategic plans to action gender equality. Equality is seen not as making everything equal but as making it equally accessible to all, constructed initially from a basis recognizing the contextual needs, constraints, directions, and choices of both women and men, and those from intersectional backgrounds. This leads to action plans, rules, regulations, and measurements of

effectiveness. It also involves data, which helps monitor effectiveness in changing and enhancing practices and noting achievements set against measures of success.

The Norwegian Committee for Gender Balance and Diversity in Research provides six key arguments on its website. These deal with:

1. fairness;
2. democracy and credibility;
3. national research objectives;
4. research relevance;
5. research quality;
6. competitive advantage (Committee for Gender Balance and Diversity in Research: Norway), (<https://kifinfo.no/en/content/why-work-improve-genderbalanceandincreasediversityresearch>).

Speaker notes address the need for gender quality in research for different levels of staff within the organisation, recognising senior managers will be concerned with figures and comparability with work done in other institutions, local and international. It is very thorough and helpful in terms of persuading all involved to work at different levels of influence. Thus, liability, organisation, change, access to funding and competitiveness are each considered, and categories of staff identified who can work in different ways to ensure equality and diversity, including senior managers, HR managers, and researchers. One section focuses on "Securing gender expertise to increase knowledge" (Committee for Gender Balance and Diversity in Research: Norway).

Data reveals issues in gender, career, work-life balance, and supports "gender-friendly" practices. There is "exhaustive" data about aspects such as hiring, career breaks, and access to life-long learning, etc. But except for staff categories, we produce little sex-disaggregated data. And yet, we know that career opportunities differ for our male and female staff, depending on the types of position, the scientific discipline, and other factors" (Committee for Gender Balance and Diversity in Research: Norway).

Improving work-life balance is crucial for staff achievements and retention. "Work environments which pay greater attention to work-life balance are reported to attract more talented researchers and staff and to retain them longer" (Committee for Gender Balance and Diversity in Research: Norway).

This also helps women move up the career ladder and give their full potential. The committee acknowledges:

We have developed new tools for selecting and evaluating people, and to help them develop their skills. And yet, we have paid little attention to work-life issues. A survey or a forum could help us in assessing whether this has had an impact, and to collect innovative ideas about gender-friendly work organisation (Committee for Gender Balance and Diversity in Research: Norway).

One learning point from this is the use of data to show issues, successes and changes in behaviours in relation to changes in policy and practice, work-life balance policies, and effectively changing practice to be "gender-friendly", which means aware, genuinely intending to be equal and fair, but also supportive in the face of inequalities of access and different life demands on women.

These policy and regulatory-based publications offer useful, research-based recommendations to enhance positive practices at doctoral student and postdoc researcher levels, and they also change norms and expectations enhancing positive supportive work contexts, whether they be around hiring practices, gender and intersectionality-friendly workday length, and lab or other work context and research and publication norms. Such changes normalise and enable a positive workplace for doctoral students, postdoc researchers and supervisors alike.

Along with strategy and practice documents to underpin positive change, there are also more practical examples and suggestions, which appear in researcher-focused toolkits, of which our own developed for the University of Tromsø, Norway, is an example.

## 6. RESEARCHER FOCUSED TOOLKITS

There is useful good practice from Uppsala, Sweden, in the “Gender Sensitive PhD Supervision: Supervisor’s Toolkit” (<https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gear/action-toolbox>). This interview-based report and set of recommendations focuses on a range of activities involved in and beyond supervision, including group meetings and advice for future careers.

The objective is to minimise the negative effect of gendered interactional patterns in academic environments on career opportunities for women researchers. More specifically, the activities target the supervisory relationships by addressing the socialisation of Ph.D. students and by improving supervisory practices. This can be the case in male-dominated research environments, in which it may be relevant to help women at the beginning of their careers to find ways of surviving and competing. This will advance women’s academic careers in two ways: 1) they will become more fully integrated into the community and therefore more motivated for an academic career and 2) the visibility of their specific value to the research community will be improved (p. 38).

The Uppsala report contains a toolkit for gender awareness in supervision covering the following topics:

- A professional approach towards supervision.
- Gender-related expectations in the relationship between supervisor and supervisee.
- The socialisation into a scientific (and gendered) community of practice.
- Gendered norms and practices within academia.
- Constructive and non-gendered feedback.
- The research seminar as an academic practice and arena for feedback and encouragement.
- Discussing future perspectives with the supervisee – a supervisors’ task?
- Alternative models for supervision.
- Postgraduate education – the supervisors as well as a departmental responsibility.

A notable focus in this work is on the appropriateness of relationships that foster equality and what I have called “professional friendships” (Wisker, 2012) (referred to here as a personal professional but not quite friendships), and there are useful practical tips about where to meet and how to behave (see Schnaas, 2014: 3).

## 7. GOOD PRACTICE AT THE STRUCTURAL REGULATORY POLICY LEVELS: SOME STATEMENTS

If there are visible and approved structures supporting good behaviour in terms of gender equalities, and other equalities around the full range of difference in ethnicity, disability, age, and sexuality, then there can be a rich and creative diversity of colleagues and students bringing and sharing their different perspectives, knowledge, and skills. Positive research and work cultures will support and nurture this. If there are explicit regulations against, and penalties for, poor behaviour, it will initially be silenced, and longer-term it will disappear entirely. If there is developmental support for training and re-training and making explicit what is not acceptable, such as poor behaviour in relation to discrimination, bullying, undermining, and harassment because of difference (and here our focus is on gender, but this applies across the whole range of difference), then good practice will become the explicit, shared, supported norm.

There need to be proper sanctions against bad behaviour, and development and reward for good behaviour – valuing diversity and equality.

People can be retrained; many are more flexible than they often appear, and as the PVC noted, what we seek is acceptable, positive, non-discriminatory, non-sexist, non-racist, non-ableist, non-ageist (etc.) behaviour that will be to everyone’s long-term benefit and to the benefit of respectful, harmonious, productive working environments in which difference is valued and recognised as enriching.

Regulations, models, recognition, and rewards are important. Setting regulations, making good practice explicit, and offering and sharing models at the levels of behaviour and language, drawn from equalities training and neurolinguistic re-programming principles and practices, all of this enable reinforcing sound behaviours. Respect, trust, and leading from the top are all sound practices.

Simultaneously, if there are clear recognition systems and visible rewards for supporting and enabling good practice in equality, it will become the norm.

## 8. A “GENDER EQUALITIES TOOLKIT” FOR TROMSO – FROM ISSUES TO SUPPORTIVE PRACTICES: A DEVELOPING RESOURCE.

The “Gender equalities toolkit” is research and experience-based and aims to explore several issues and poor gender/intersectionality-based practices which might occur, and engage users of the toolkit in action, with reflection, discussion, and development of positive practices at every level. There is a need to identify the development, training, and support provision and positive actions to build on experience, research and practices which have been effective in other universities. There is also the need to explore and expressly indicate the policy-driven, strategic level regulatory and statutory actions and the practices, e.g. from Human Resources, unions, and pastoral support systems, which will visibly regulate and prevent discriminatory actions; identify the development, training, and support provision, and positive actions to enable people to change poor practice, and recognise, learn and enhance good practice; and explore and suggest further developments of the support systems, practices, and actions seen to work elsewhere at the level of the university community and specific groups, to provide a safe environment.

Engagement with the toolkit enables us to recognise the damage poor gender, intersectionality, and power-based practices may have on doctoral candidates and supervisors as individuals and the university. The toolkit invites us to address the importance of clear values, structure, and organisational culture, urging that higher educational institutions explore and expressly indicate a clear vision, policy-driven at different strategic levels within institutions. The toolkit intends to help change poor practices, following up actions with Human Resources, unions, and pastoral support systems, which will visibly regulate and prevent discriminatory actions, issues, and poor practices which might occur, recognising the damage they do to individuals and the university as a whole.

### Part 1

This section (full toolkit extract) offers a few examples of ways of identifying and dealing with institutionalised poor practice in terms of postgraduate supervision and ensuring that good practice fundamentally underlies postgraduate supervision in reaction to strategies, policies, sanctions, and other ways of dealing with poor behaviour, and reward and recognition for good behaviour.

**Table 1: Toolkit – Situations and common issues which might arise. Research and experience suggestions and practical tips.**

Situations and common issues which might arise – gender	What is the problem? Diagnosis	Research and experience-based information and suggestions	Practical ideas and tips
<p>Gender is suggested in scenarios but also – switch genders around in the same scenario</p> <p>1. Older male supervisor, younger female student.</p> <p>Female feels – silenced and unheard. Undermined.</p>	<p>Unreflective use and experience of (poor, unbalanced) traditional gender and age, power-related behaviours.</p>	<p>Putting the imbalance and unacceptable behaviours on development agendas for discussion.</p> <p>Regulations explicit about behaviour.</p>	<p>Engagement with positive, proactive development processes.</p> <p>Coaching and mentoring to develop positive behaviours.</p> <p>Students supported to maintain communities to share awareness, support and practical tips.</p>

2. Male supervisors (largely?) unaware of sexist behaviour from excess chivalry to patronising.	Unreflective behaviour or deliberate behaviour: ignoring of explicit equality rules and respectable behaviour rules.	Regulations explicit about unacceptable, inappropriate behaviour, explicit about equality.	Development materials and activities to highlight problems, make the unacceptable explicit, and share alternative good practice, offering language and behaviour re-training examples.
3. Joint publications miss off female students or staff names or always put them after the names of a chief male when this does not reflect the effort or originality in the research and/or writing.	Unreflective behaviour or deliberate behaviour: ignoring of explicit equality rules and respectable behaviour rules.	University research regulations and guidelines for good practice explicit about good practice and ethical behaviours.	The research office demands clear information on the proportion of input to research and publications and vets project bids and publications submitted bi-annually to ensure equality and fair recognition.
4. Evaluations indicate research students, both male and female, prefer and highly evaluate younger male supervisors than older females.	Internationally women teachers and supervisors receive poorer evaluations, replicated here.	Research-based guidance on evaluation mechanisms and gender etc. discrimination explicit in introductions to evaluations.	Evaluation scales to include gender-related behaviours.
5. "Research time clock" indicates expectations of research output /publication production which takes no real notice of women's disproportionately (to men's) high other demands of childbearing, child rearing or elder parent care resulting in slower promotion journey.	Women are more likely to be caregivers (children, older relatives) which can (or it is assumed will) impair research productivity and published outputs.	Scandinavian models of maternity/paternity leave recognise the research time clock and have mechanisms to recalculate expectations and outputs, as do examples of research exercises in the UK.	Slower research clock expectations for caregivers naturally engaged with at management and HR level (managers support, individuals can apply, or it is mechanically applied) when males or females-students, supervisors, researchers etc. have to balance other responsibilities.

Sources to consult for debates and positive practices include Athena Swan, WIASN (Women in academic studies Network) and reports included with this article in the second bibliography.

## 9. CONCLUSION

Gender and power are clearly linked in research, management, and teaching/learning structures and behaviours, particularly with unequal power relations in doctoral supervision which can silence, sideline, undermine and oppress women and students with intersectional characteristics. The only way to ensure equality in practice beyond goodwill, human kindness, and an innate sense of equality naturally producing sound practice, is to embed good practice expectations in university statutes, policies, regulations, structures, reporting norms, and recognition systems. Grand claims are vacuous if not supported by development, rules and regulations, consequences for poor behaviour and rewards and recognition for good practice and behaviour. If good behaviour is explicitly defined, trained, normalised and rewarded, it will become the norm. Once there are visible and approved structures supporting good

behaviour in terms of gender and intersectional equalities, the rich and creative diversity of colleagues and students bringing and sharing their different perspectives, knowledge, and skills can thrive. Even if you cannot change people's values, they can be required and educated to change poor practices to ensure equity. The toolkit, including cases, aims to build awareness, helping to change behaviours through reflection, engagement, development, and training underpinned by policy and strategy, guided by regulations, to provide a safe, healthy working environment for the full diversity of postgraduate students and supervisors supported by positive research and work cultures. With regulations against and penalties for poor behaviour, that behaviour should disappear, and in the longer-term positive behaviour and awareness be built within HEIs. With developmental support for training and re-training, making explicit what is not acceptable (discrimination, bullying, undermining, harassment because of gender, ethnicity, and intersectionality differences), then statutes, policies, regulations, and management will act to prevent harassment, bullying, disempowerment, discrimination, silencing. Good, positive gender and intersectionality-based practice will become the explicit, shared, supported norm in doctoral supervision.

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**There is also a broad range of briefs, regulations guidelines and toolkits on offer including:**

The ERAC Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/councileu/preparatorybodies/europeanresearchareaandinnovation-committee-erac/>.

Committee for Gender Balance and Diversity in Research (Norway), kifinfo. Available at: <https://kifinfo.no/en/content/why-work-improve-gender-balance-and-increase-diversity-research>.

Gender Sensitive PhD Supervision: Supervisor's Toolkit, from Sweden ([https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/festa\\_phd\\_supervision\\_toolkit.pdf](https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/festa_phd_supervision_toolkit.pdf)).

Policy brief, available at: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-1206-2020-INIT/en/pdf>: Mobilising to eradicate gender-based violence and sexual harassment: A new impetus for gender equality in the European Research Area.

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## APPENDIX

### Part 2 – Case Studies for Development Workshops

(Extract from full toolkit) In this section, 4 case studies are offered for development purposes to be used reflectively and actively either by individuals considering their own practice and/or by workshop groups engaging in identifying problems and discussing ways of dealing with them using current good practice or suggested improvements at policy and strategy level. Working with case studies encourages individual and agreed group responses dealing with issues while managing potential conflicts and the avoidance silences prevalent in HEIs where colleagues fear reputational damage, being scapegoated, considered weak or outspoken for highlight issues and suggesting solutions, changes, ways forward. Sensitive cases are best engaged with in small groups in a confidential setting with an experienced developer leading the workshops. There are four cases below, the first fully developed with possible outcomes, the others to be considered without solutions or choices being offered.

#### Case 1 (Developed case)

##### Annikie

Annikie helped devise and plan an important piece of social science work which she submitted for funding and won some money to undertake wider research, hire a part-time assistant/ have the data professionally analysed. Her supervisor Dr X was supportive throughout all of the work, and she reported to him regularly, but he took little part in the actual project and has not written anything about it or arising from it.

Annikie is now producing drafts of articles based on the work she led on. Dr X has not had time to work with or discuss them with her, as he has been very busy with research and meeting other students. Just as she has a publishable draft, Dr X calls her into his study saying what an important piece of work this is for the department. He says he'll be the lead author on the paper and thanks her for her work so far. *What should she do?*

##### Some Suggestions

- A) Nothing. This is perfectly normal; she is happy his name will help get the piece published and attract more readers, eventually reflecting well on her. Anyway, everyone knows with publications that the lead professorial author has not done most of the work so she assumes readers will guess she was the main researcher and author.
- B) Nothing. She is seriously concerned that mentioning this as a problem will cause Dr X to side-line and undermine her work, and her career.
- C) Immediately/very soon after hearing this, find a moment to discuss the issue of authorship with Dr X and say it is excellent news that he will be on the paper as this will attract a larger readership and status but that it is very important for her career that she is recognised as lead author since it is mainly her work and she hopes he realises that and can be one of the authors.

Or?

#### Gender related case studies to reflect on in HEIs

**Please consider and discuss these situations in relation to issues which have arisen over gender what should you do?**

##### Case 2

Upon taking early retirement Peter was commissioned to undertake historical doctoral research by his ex-company into the history of the company. He has been assigned a very much younger female member of staff as his supervisor. Sheila has a doctorate and is a specialist in organisational analysis. Peter has never had a woman boss and finds it very difficult to take direction from Sheila. Sheila finds it awkward to advise Peter, who clearly has a great deal of experience but in fact is taking a rather

prosaic surface-learning oriented route through his research: documenting without asking questions or problematising, never being critical or evaluative, never considering how and why decisions were made, instead recording events factually. Their supervisions always seem to end up with little movement forward and Peter is as sure as ever that collecting and recording facts about the company, he knows is the way to gain his PhD.

### **Case 3**

A student wishes to undertake feminist methods-based research and proposes to interview women about their lives using open-ended semi-structured interviews. She intends to ask rather sensitive questions but is working within a tight knit lesbian community and is very clear that she will seek the permission of the respondents, check out the research questions with them, tape and transcribe the interviews herself and check them out with the respondents again before encoding them then extracting to illustrate her exploration of life journeys among this particular community. Finally, she wishes to archive the material (names anonymised) for further researchers to use as there is so little valuable on the lesbian community. Some colleagues on the research degrees ethics committee have problems with the use of life histories and the seemingly rather unstructured flow of the work. They question allowing others access to the material. The student senses some members have a problem with the work being undertaken in the lesbian community.

### **Case 4**

One colleague, more senior, male, white, is supervising a younger Black female colleague as director of studies. During their supervisions, he suggests that they meet in pubs, or in his house in the evenings. He has just broken up with his wife and is clearly rather distressed, but the student is worried about the changing nature of their relationship and insists that they meet as usual in the office for supervisions. His next communication to her is to belittle her work, suggesting that she is “not up to this kind of research”, that the work is ill-conceived, poorly researched and going nowhere. She is now in a state of embarrassment and confusion.