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Original Citation

Niemeyer, Beatrix and Colley, Helen (2015) Why do we need (another) special issue on gender and VET? *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 67 (1). pp. 1-10. ISSN 1363-6820

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Editorial: why do we need (another) special issue on gender and VET?

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Published 9 January 2015 in *Journal of Vocational Education and Training* Volume 67, Issue 1, DOI: 10.1080/13636820.2014.971498

The *Journal of Vocational Education and Training* last had a special issue on gender and vocational education and training (VET) in 2006. In the intervening 8 years, the journal has published 264 research papers, of which just 10 - that is, less than 4% - addressed the issue of gender in any substantive way. This is something of a disappointment, as editors always hope that a special issue will provoke increased discussion and debate in the journal about its theme as well as providing a focused resource. Is the problem that, compared to the effects of global labour migration flows, constantly rising youth unemployment figures or emerging skills gaps in an aging society, gender issues have lost their relevance as just one category of social inequalities among many others? This can hardly be the case, since it is obviously a most thorough-going and persistent one. Despite over 30 years of gender studies, and numerous policy initiatives to address gender inequalities, gender segregation persists in VET as well as in the labour market. Women still earn less, hold the majority of part-time contracts, tend to be stereotyped into caring and personal service work, and are largely under-represented in leadership positions. Is the problem then that there is nothing new to be said about gender and VET? We do not agree that that is the case either: gender injustice remains a central issue in VET and the labour market; and as the social, political and economic landscape changes rapidly in today's world, it is inevitable that gender inequalities are produced and reproduced in new and different ways. So we felt the need to call once again for a collection of papers dedicated specifically to this topic, and one that would reflect this evolution.

Looking back in history – insights gained

From an historical perspective, there is a stunning persistence of gender inequalities in the field of VET in general, both in the vertical and the horizontal dimensions. Although better qualified, women often find themselves in lower-qualified positions compared to men in a gender segregated labour market as is repeatedly documented in labour market statistics (cf. for example European Commission's Expert Group on Gender and Employment, 2009). These inequalities were a major driver when the first wave of gender research turned its attention to VET in the late 1980s. After a first period of naming and blaming gender-stereotyping of occupations, the pay gap, sexist practices and discrimination gender inequalities were reconstructed as social practices, inherent to social structures and normative orientations which are constantly reproduced through institutional arrangements as much as individual actions (Mayer, 2001; Heikkinen, 2001; Wetterer, 1995). VET has been identified as contributing to these patterns of constructing gender differences and the resulting gender inequalities (Mayer 1998; Fraser 1999). It is therefore a complex mixture of individual choice, social orientations and institutional arrangements which sustain the general social division of labour between men and women. Through such deeper insights into the historical, cultural and socioeconomic reasons that impact on the organization of work and training, a more complex picture developed. It pointed to the social dimensions of VET and how it has developed within culturally shaped systems of labour division (Heikkinen, 2001; Mayer, 2001). Although some

national differences had to be taken into account, the persistent inequality between women and men was and is still related to the general division between paid labour and unpaid homework, closely linked to societies' constant reproduction of gendered patterns.

Driven by arguments of social justice, gender inequalities at the workplace and in training were often addressed as problems of occupational choice. The under-representation of women in male-dominated occupational areas was addressed by a variety of strategies and interventions to improve employment politics. However, in the public view this under-representation tended to be interpreted as being caused by women themselves, as unwilling, unable or unmotivated to engage in stereotypically male occupations or to take employment in masculinised environments. Research on the construction of gender in VET again revealed the structural patterns and normative orientations that are constantly contributing to the reproduction of female (and male) career aspirations on the part of the individual (see for example Rahn, 2001; Ostendorf, 1996; Fuller, 2013; also Høst, Seland and Skålholt in this special issue).

It took a while until the structural difficulties of balancing work and life in women's life-course were identified and addressed. International comparative studies gave evidence to the structural dimension of inclusion or exclusion of women from the labour market, pointing for example to differences in the provision of childcare as closely correlated to women's employment rates (see Haasler and Gottschall in this issue). Not just the sociologies of education and work, but other disciplines such as political science and women's and gender studies have addressed the inter-relationship of women's work in the home and family as well as in paid employment, both theoretically and empirically (see for example DeVault, 1991, Federici, 2004; Fortunati, 1995; Mies, 1998; Weeks, 2011; and Colley, in press, offers an in-depth review).

Such research has shown that the unpaid work of caring for family members and the home is still largely undertaken by women, but despite the essential nature of this work, it is deeply obscured by its representation as 'non-work'. It is viewed, for example, as 'natural' that mothers provide the bulk of child-rearing and adult daughters the bulk of elder-care, so that men can occupy the normative position of 'family breadwinner'. Although a considerable proportion of the workforce globally is now female, such norms mean that many women have to undertake a double workload, in paid employment and in the home; and this, along with socially gendered expectations and aspirations, restricts their opportunities for employment, and hinders their access to non-traditional jobs as well as to vocational learning and career development. Insofar as much household and caring work (though by no means all) has today been commodified and marketised, it still continues to fall mainly to women, often women of colour, typically with low wages, poor working conditions, and high levels of precarity. In researching and analysing these questions, this body of literature has also linked issues of gender with those of race, class and sexualities, and emphasised the importance of understanding how closely different forms of oppression are inter-related.

From liberal feminism to Marxist feminism: a more expansive understanding of gender and VET

In relation to gender inequalities in VET and the labour market, much research, policy and practice has taken a liberal feminist stance which seeks to create a 'level playing field' for women - a strategic approach which, as we have already noted, has only had limited success. From a more radical

perspective, Marxist-feminist scholarship has offered a critical contribution to expanding our understanding of VET, not least by drawing attention to the centrality of gender in the analysis of learning for work. In particular, it calls us to consider the very nature of vocational learning: what is it that is developed through VET? For Marx, this is represented by the concept of 'labour-power' - the capacities human beings have to work consciously, purposively, creatively and freely, in ways that do not just utilise but transform the world around us (Marx, 1844/1959: 31, section XXIV). It is this capacity which he saw as the lifeblood of capitalism, since the exploitation of labour-power is its key source of profit. However, just as in common-sense notions about VET, Marx saw our capacities solely as those of mind or body:

By labour-power or capacity for labour is to be understood the aggregate of those *mental and physical capabilities* existing in a human being, which he [*sic*] exercises whenever he produces a use-value of any description. (1867/1999: unpaginated, emphasis added)

This definition overlooks the domain of the emotional and its centrality to caring occupations and other forms of human service work largely done by women. From the 1970s and throughout the second-wave women's movement, Marxist-feminists contributed important extensions to the understanding of labour-power in this regard. Hochschild's (1983) seminal study of the training and workplace learning of airline cabin crews developed the concept of 'emotional labour', the learned and prescribed management of feelings. Emotional labour 'requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others' (Hochschild, 1983: 7), because the 'emotional style' of providing a service is a central aspect of what is being sold. This is a deeply gendered process, not only because so much human service work is carried out by women, but also because women are socialised into caring roles from an early age through their life in the family as well as through broader social norms.

Emotional labour could be seen as a particular form by which late capitalism seeks to intensify the exploitation of labour-power as it relies ever more heavily on the service sectors and the drive for consumerism. Even in public rather than privately-owned services, often conceived of as work 'for people', the commodification of human service work recasts it as a service 'to consumers' (Goffman, 1969; Stacey, 1984). The labour of practitioners within these services then - and related VET - becomes 'more controlled, supervised or managed, and often deskilled or ... de-intellectualised' (Allman, 2010: 56). Not only must service be given, but it must also now be given 'with a smile' or with an exhortation to 'have a nice day'. Call centre workers in India must remain calm and polite in the face of racist abuse from clients (Mirchandani, 2012). Childcare practitioners must walk a tightrope between loving their charges and maintaining the emotional distance to discipline them (Colley, 2006). As Steno and Friche discuss in this special issue, male catering trainees must be tough enough to 'take the heat in the kitchen' and nurturing enough to produce healthy food.

This entails not only our heads and our hands, but our hearts as well. In this respect, the capacities developed and honed by VET go beyond specific elements of cognitive knowledge and practical skills to incorporate personhood itself - emotion, identity and sexuality - but in a context which can therefore create severe alienation (Hochschild, 1983). Expanding our understanding of VET to incorporate the development of emotional capacities in particular gendered ways therefore brings into focus deeply damaging *injustices* that may arise in learning for work, over and above enduring inequalities of opportunity and pay.

These developments also indicate that it is no longer exclusively the question of women that has to be problematized when reflecting on the social constructions of gender within VET. Normative presentations of masculinity can also be brought into question, in both explicit and more tacit aspects of capacity building and recruitment practices: this is illustrated by the now-pervasive image of disadvantaged boys (see Steno and Friche, and Jørgensen, both in this volume). The male model of craft trades, which still permeates the organisation of VET in the ideal of apprenticeships, is losing its significance in a growing service industry, not only in relation to women, but also in relation to different forms of masculinity and non-hetero sexualities. Indeed, a growing literature in queer studies addresses the difficulties faced by gay, lesbian, transgender and bisexual people in the workplace (e.g. Griffith and Hebl, 2002) that may also be highly relevant in VET.

These advances in gender studies across a range of (inter)disciplinary fields have therefore identified the social practices that produce and reproduce gender, and elaborated corresponding bodies of theory. Yet these concepts, theories, and findings have hardly been acknowledged in the area of VET research and practice: with a few notable exceptions (e.g. Bates, 1991, 1994; Colley et al., 2003; Skeggs, 1997; Fuller and Unwin, 2013), VET and gender have remained 'unrelated debates' (Niemeyer, 2004). Consequently, the gendered nature of VET has been mirrored in the related field of academic research, much of which seems to remain blind to its own masculinist bias.

In the editorial of the first special issue of JVET on gender in 2006, guest editors Elaine Butler and Fran Ferrier stated that:

This special issue of the JVET is the first with the focus on gender, and specifically 'doing gender' for and with women, in the broad, dynamic and complex field that is work-related VET. It opens a valuable space both for the presentation of a diverse range of accounts that illustrate just how much gender does matter in VET and for continuing global and local conversations between those engaged in this challenging work ... We were well aware of the lack of contemporary publications that centred on women, work and work-related learning in the 21st century, especially publications that engaged with current issues across disciplinary and international boundaries ... There was no doubt that the gap we had identified did indeed exist. (Butler and Ferrier, 2006)

We argue, then, in response to our first question at the start of this introduction, that gender issues have *not* lost their relevance in VET. But what of our second question: is the problem that there is no longer anything new to say about it?

What is changing? Transformations and reconfigurations of gender and VET

While the basic structural reason for gender inequality may be rooted in the social division of paid employment and unpaid work in the home and family, the social and individual consequences may vary in the context of a globalising labour market, the demands of lifelong learning economies, and a generalised reduction of welfare provision. As global economic developments, particularly the financial crisis of 2008 and its fall-out, impact on the institutional provision of VET, they also impact on its inherently gendered aspects.

The global division of labour and a globalised labour market calls for workplace mobility. Families have to cope with temporary disruption if the breadwinner, whether male or female, is leaving the home country to work elsewhere. Labour migration is challenging gender relations in many respects. The global financial crisis is affecting the developing world as new rounds of primitive accumulation of capital in the Third World dispossess women of traditional work - such as handicrafts or farming (Whitehead, 2010) - or leave them to labour alone in the countryside as men migrate to new industrial centres (see Shan, Zhiwen and Li in this issue). Transnational careers are affected by the difficulties related with the transfer of qualifications (see Webb in this issue). At the same time they go along with emerging transnational biographies, which are challenging individuals and families. Moving to another country also involves the emotional and social 'work of belonging' (Devos, 2014) when moving between differing cultural and social contexts. These challenges call for educational 'boundary work' (Seddon et al., 2014), working the boundaries between employed labour and family work as an additional task affecting the life-courses of both men and women, and challenging traditional concepts of masculinity and femininity.

As housework and family work is more and more exposed to marketization and welfare provision is more and more privatised, a new type of global labour division cuts across established gendered patterns, as can be seen in the caring sector. Hence career orientation has become an important issue, not only with reference to job placement, but more and more also for broadening male and female job orientations. In view of the growing demand for labour force, the caring sector can longer be conceptualised as a typically female one. Strategies to increase the attractiveness for both sexes are tried out (see Høst et al. in this issue). At the same time we hear the demand to increase womens' engagement in technical occupations and in management positions. Gendered patterns of occupational choice have turned into an economic obstacle. While a broader career orientation which is transcending established gender patterns is broadening individual choice and chances it contributes to the transcending of normative orientations of masculinities and feminities (see Steno and Friche in this issue). The classical model of a male breadwinner with a life-time work contract is obviously facing its limits in many ways. As established patterns of labour division neither serve the needs of individuals and families nor the demands of the labour market. there is a growing need to look for strategies to improve the balancing of work and family life, as 'human resources' are limited, whether male or female. The demand for labour-power is also changing, foregrounding social and emotional competences and extending the skill demands of VET itself. As already noted above, strategies and practices of competence-building and work organisation now go beyond the dichotomy of mental and manual labour (Fineman, 2008).

Research on gender and VET in this special issue

The papers in this special issue speak to all of these issues of persistence and change in the gendered aspects of VET, across a wide range of national and international contexts, and using different theoretical analyses. The papers by Shan, Zhiwen and Li and by Webb open the special issue by addressing some transformations in VET created by globalisation, especially relating to the growth of migration within and between countries. Shan et al. review evidence about the development of VET for 'Liushou' women: rural women in China who are 'left behind' as the men from these regions join mass migrations to new and expanding industrial centres. The introduction of VET for this

vulnerable group of women has been part of China's development strategy, which the paper relates historically to the positioning of women in development projects worldwide. The authors ask important questions about the extent to which this strategy also promotes equity for Liushou women, since VET programmes have been delivered for them without consulting the women or taking account of their needs, interests and existing knowledge. In particular, they argue that conscientization, participation and control of VET opportunities could be engendered in an empowering way for Liushou women, and that policy needs to address this need. In doing so, Shan et al. offer a compelling combination of theoretical tools drawing on critical feminist perspectives that: integrate issues of gender with those of race and class; focus on the social relations of power expressed through these inequities; and so could be valuable in analysing VET not only in relation to gender but to other forms of social injustice as well.

Webb's paper considers a contrasting aspect of the global phenomenon of migration, that of movement to an advanced capitalist country - in this case, to Australia from other Anglophone countries, the Asia-Pacific region, and Africa. Through qualitative narrative research, it focuses on the under-researched experiences of highly skilled women migrants, and the negative impact migration tends to have on their careers. The analysis draws our attention to the temporalities of their experiences, and the gendered and racialised ways in which processes of career disruption, deskilling, intensification of domestic responsibilities and re-feminisation of health and human service work play out through tensions between migration policies and policies in education. Here Webb also draws on a theoretical analysis that views gender as inter-related to other inequalities, as well as notions of 'gendered geographies' that reveal unequal power relations at play in migration processes.

The two papers which follow, by Steno and Friche and by Jørgensen, address another key shift we have noted, towards an interest in masculinities and a concern for boys' disengagement from education even within VET. Drawing on the theoretical notion of 'vocational habitus' adapted from Bourdieu by Colley et al. (2003), Steno and Friche analyse two contrasting forms of masculine habitus - one nurturing, one macho - evoked by different male celebrity chefs on television. Their study shows how young male catering trainees must navigate between these masculinities as they progress through their VET, and as they encounter the pressure, speed and dangers of working in a real kitchen without the glamour of televised cookery shows. Interestingly, whilst trying to demonstrate that they are 'tough' when necessary (after cutting or burning themselves, for example), these young men are also strongly drawn to notions of cooking as a compassionate and caring occupation that keeps others healthy and happy, and might eventually (they dream) allow them a more sustainable lifestyle growing and cooking their own produce.

Jørgensen's paper discusses the moral panic that has grown internationally around boys' disengagement and under-achievement in schooling, and analyses how this is expressed within dual-system VET provision in Denmark. He links this both to gender divisions and to the low currency of some VET in the labour market, as well as to subjective and institutional factors that influence boys' decisions to drop out of VET. The data from Jørgensen's qualitative research with a large group of VET students show that most boys in the sample value VET as an alternative to general, academic education. However, social and institutional processes of differentiation in vocational schools places a significant group of students in a position where they have little chance of completing the programme, and recent reforms to VET have only exacerbated this situation. The problem of drop-

out, Jørgensen argues, is not located in the boys' identities and subjectivities, but in the structures of dual-system VET itself, so policies need to be targeted in this direction.

The final three papers in this special issue present findings from specific national contexts, and all focus on the ways in which VET systems and their linkage to the labour market may reproduce gender stereotyping. Haasler and Gottschall use an international comparative study of France and Germany to question the supposedly ideal example of the German VET system, often held up internationally as a paragon of excellence. Focusing on the childcare sector, which has seen an international trend towards professionalisation, the paper demonstrates the complex dynamics between welfare state policy, qualification structures and gendering processes in the labour market. The 'male breadwinner model', which still appears to dominate German policies and social norms, is compared with the situation in France, where the state has traditionally been viewed as centrally responsible for childcare up to the age of six. The paper discusses the impact of these different norms on both horizontal and vertical patterns of gendering in occupations, and the authors call for more gender-sensitive research in the field of VET as a whole.

Taylor, Hamm and Raykov discuss the experiences of young women in high school apprenticeship programmes in Canada, and consider how young women's experiences in families and schooling fit with the everyday realities of trades work. Using both quantitative and qualitative data, including in-depth vignettes of three apprentices, the paper draws again on Bourdieu's sociology and the notion of vocational *habitus* (Colley et al., 2003), as well as Fuller and Unwin's work on expansive learning environments (2006), to theorise the findings. The authors reveal the importance of families and external factors in supporting young women's choice of apprenticeship; and the different challenges faced by female apprentices in male- and female-dominated workplaces.

The paper by Høst, Seland and Skålholt discusses an interesting historical development in Norway, when in the mid-1990s national policies for promoting gender equality led to a specific policy intervention into VET for health and social care - the introduction of new types of post-school apprenticeships. The apprenticeships were designed to enhance both VET provision and working conditions for this predominantly female occupational area, and thereby to improve the gender balance of the workforce. Twenty years on, health and social care VET remains highly feminised, and the apprenticeships introduced are often eschewed by learners, most of whom prefer to move on from school-based apprenticeships into higher education. Drawing on extensive quantitative and qualitative data, the authors demonstrate that even targeted initiatives such as this may not break down the academic-vocational divide; they may create only a very limited degree of social mobility; and they may weaken rather than strengthen the position of the overall workforce.

Gender still matters in VET: a call for further research

In conclusion, then, we would argue - as the papers in this special issue clearly demonstrate - that gender still matters, and that it matters greatly in VET. The societal division of labour between paid labour and unpaid work in the house and family has been stabilised by VET practices and the training pathways and opportunities provided by VET institutions. At the same time, concepts of gender difference according to a clearly defined dichotomy of male and female are no longer sufficient - masculinities, femininities and sexualities can be lived and represented in a variety of ways that also

matter (Butler, 1990; 1995). Moreover, gender injustices in VET may be re-inscribed by new forms of work organisation, in flexible and globalised labour markets, as well as by qualifications and learning practices. In particular, emotions and personhood have become drawn into and shaped by VET for their exploitation in the labour market. How do such developments regulate the masculinities and femininities of learners? And how might the costs of learning to labour with emotion be mitigated through VET?

Processes of migration and of economic growth in the developing world also raise important questions. How is gender addressed by VET in rapidly industrialising countries such as India and China? Or in countries receiving migrant workers? How does gender interact with race and ethnicity? What response is offered by way of VET? And do these responses reduce or reinforce inequalities?

VET research therefore needs to take gender into account, including its integration with other inequalities such as race, sexuality and class, as a central issue. The pages of this journal have always - and rightly so - reflected a great deal of attention to class inequalities and the potential of high-quality VET to generate social mobility for some of the most disadvantaged learners (though we caution here against the myth that education itself can resolve all social ills). However, we use the occasion of this special issue to call for more attention to gender in VET research, across the breadth of gender-related matters we have discussed above. A small trickle of papers on gender have provided an important thread between this special issue and that of 2006. As guest editors, we hope we do not have to wait several more years to see this grow to a more balanced proportion of the journal's overall content!

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