Gender, institutions, and institutional change in academia
A framework for analysis

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Introduction

Over the past ten years, the manner in which gender and institutions interact has developed into a prolific research agenda, with a distinctive set of concepts, theoretical frameworks, objectives and tools. This has been made possible by the formation of transnational research networks, the development of research projects, and an expanding body of literature on the subject. Led initially by social psychologists (eg Carli 1999) and organisational studies feminists (eg Kark and Waismal-Manor 2005), and latterly taken up by feminist political scientists, gender and institutions research draws on new institutionalism to understand the role of institutions in the reproduction of gender-power relations; the gendered dimensions of institutional continuity and change and, more particularly, the factors leading to success or failure of feminist strategies such as gender mainstreaming, gender quotas and other gender policies (Mackay, Kenny and Chappell 2010, Krook and Mackay 2011). It has broadened beyond that discipline, and now the insights with regard to gender-power relations in institutional settings

This paper presents a critical review of the literature on gender and institutions. Its aim is to inform the SAGE (Systemic Action for Gender Equality) research study exploring the interactions between gender and institutional change in higher education institutions. Specifically, the study seeks to understand the role of resistances to institutional change in the implementation of gender equality strategies (gender equality practices to "undo" gender bias) in universities. How such resistances can be identified, measured and (ultimately) overcome represents a major challenge for both scholars and practitioners in the field of gender equality in these (and other) institutional settings.

A central tenet of institutionalist theory is that change is mainly driven by the internal dynamics of institutions rather than by broader societal forces or the properties of individual actors (Olsen 2009:9).

Given this, an analysis of institutional change requires knowledge about the institutions under study, including:

> "the internal success criteria, structures, procedures, rules, practices, career structures, socialization patterns, styles of thought and interpretive traditions, and resources of the entity" (ibid).

Higher education institutions have their own set of distinct features when compared to those most extensively studied in the literature –i.e., political institutions such as government bureaucracies and parliaments, political parties and electoral systems, and the corporate world. Therefore, a study of institutional change towards gender equality in universities informed by a (feminist) institutionalist approach requires careful attention to the features as described by Olsen and applied to the higher education context. At the same time, consideration must be given to the significant variation both among and within universities. As Van den Brink and Benschop note (2012: 72), universities are not monolithic institutions, as different academic fields "vary in their core activities, financial resources, career patterns, epistemological issues and publishing strategies". In addition, variation between universities, both among and within countries (depending on different higher education traditions, for example), also needs to be taken into account when comparing institutional change patterns.

The paper is divided in five sections. The first section sets out the contextual background of the study, providing an overview of efforts to implement gender equality policies in higher education institutions in Europe and the impact so far in achieving their goals. Section two provides a review of the literature on gender and institutions, while section three turns to the question of how this knowledge has been applied in research examining resistances to institutional change towards gender equality. Focusing on higher education institutions, the fourth section reviews the literature on resistances to institutional change towards gender equality in these specific settings. Finally, section 5 goes back to the literature on gender and institutions, exploring the ways in which it can inform an analytical framework for a study of gender, institutions and institutional change (and its resistances) in universities.

Contextual background

In universities, policy action towards gender equality, typically in the form of gender equality action plans (GEPs), is becoming widespread. According to CESAER figures, 54% of European universities of

science and technology had a GEP in place in 2014.[2] There is, however, some national variation in relation to the time when this type of initiative started. For example, German universities began to develop gender equality plans as far back as the 1980s; universities in Austria and Sweden in the mid-1990s; those in the United Kingdom in the late 1990s; in Italy and Spain in the mid-2000s; in France and Ireland in the mid- 2010s; while in other EU countries, GEPS in universities are only beginning to emerge. There is a handful of EU countries (Germany, Austria, Spain, Finland, France and Italy) where implementation of GEPs in higher education institutions is mandated by law, although the lack of such a legislative framework is not an obstacle for GEPS in universities becoming widespread, as the example of the United Kingdom shows. Apart from law instruments, there are other mechanisms of promotion and support in place. For example, institutional networks such as LERU (League of European Research Universities) has made a commitment to develop and implement GEPs in all its member institutions[3] and the European Union is actively promoting and supporting this type of action, mainly through their research programme Horizon 2020 and other instruments of 'soft law'.

In the EU context, the lack of women's representation in the scientific community has been on the policy agenda since the late 1990s. In 1998, the European Commission set up an expert group on women in science, tasked with preparing a report on women in science policy in the European Union. Known as the ETAN report and published two years later, it concluded that the under-representation of women threatened excellence in science and made a series of recommendations to a wide range of bodies, including the Commission, the European Parliament, the Member States and research and education institutions.[4] In 1999, the European Commission issued the communication "Women and Science: mobilising women to enrich European research", which marked a first step towards gender equality policy in the field.[5] The stated aim was:

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[2] CESAER (2015) Results of the CESAER Gender Equality Survey 2014 – Final report, available at: http://www.cesaer.org/content/assets/docs/Docs2015/CESAER_Gender_Equality-oct15_incl_annexes.pdf. CEASAER member institutions (51 in total) are universities of science and technology.
[3] LERU (2012) Women. Research and Universities. Excellence without Gender Bias. Available at: http://www.leru.org/files/publications/LERU_Paper_Women_universities_and_research.pdf
[4] ETAN Expert Working Group (2000) Science Policies in the European Union: Promoting Excellence through Mainstreaming Equality, available at: http://cordis.europa.eu/pub/improving/docs/g_wo_etan_en_200101.pdf
[5] Commission of the European Communities (1999), "Women and Science: Mobilising Women to Enrich European Research" COM (1999) 76 final. Available at: http://aei.pitt.edu/13321/1/13321.pdf

"to stimulate discussion and the sharing of experience in this field among the Member States so that action can be taken as effectively as possible at all levels of power and to develop a coherent approach towards promoting women in research financed by the Union".

For these purposes, the Commission established a coordinating structure - the Helsinki Group on Women and Science. This Group was tasked with: a) developing a gender and science watch system within EU funded research, b) gathering and disseminating data on women participating in EU funded research activities, c) stimulating dialogue among the Member States and within the scientific community, and d) serving as a point of contact for those involved in promoting women in European research. In June 2001, a Council resolution on science and society and on women in science[6] invited the Member States and the European Commission to support the Helsinki Group in continuing its work and to deepen cooperation to promote the role of women in European research. In 2002, this Group produced national reports on the situation of women scientists in their respective countries as well as a European report describing and analysing the different national contexts and policies.[7] In addition, the Group cooperates with the European Commission in the production of statistics and indicators on women in science and research, published the Directorate General for Research and Innovation every three years.[8]

More recently, the issue of gender inequalities in both academia and research have received a significant boost in the European agenda. In 2015, the European Parliament called on the Commission and the Member States to address gender imbalances in the decision-making process and within the bodies responsible for hiring and promoting researchers, and to consider the creation of gender equality plans as a precondition for access to public funding in research, science and academia.[9] In that same year, the Council conclusions on advancing gender equality in the European research area[10]

[6] Council of the European Union (2001) Council Resolution of 26 June 2001 of science and society and of women in science (2001/C 199/01). Available at:
https://ec.europa.eu/research/swafs/pdf/pub_gender_equality/council-resolution-june-2001_en.pdf
[7] Teresa Rees (2002) National Policies on Women and Science in Europe. Available at:
http://cordis.europa.eu/improving/women/policies.htm
[8] SHE Figures: Gender in Research and Innovation. Available at:
http://ec.europa.eu/research/swafs/index.cfm?pg=library&lib=gender_equality
[9] European Parliament resolution of 9 September 2015 on women's careers in science and universities, and glass ceilings encountered (2014/2251(INI)). Available at:
http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+TA+P8-TA-2015-0311+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN
[10] Advancing gender equality in the European Research Area - Council conclusions. Available at:
http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14846-2015-INIT/en/pdf

invited EU Member States and research funding organisations to provide incentives to encourage higher education institutions and research organisations to revise or develop gender-mainstreaming strategies and/or gender equality plans (GEPs) and to mobilise adequate resources to implement these plans. The EU also supports the development of GEPs in higher education and research institutions across Europe through its Horizon2020 research programme. In order to facilitate the development and implementation of these plans, it has also made key tools available (i.e, GEAR tool of the European Institute for Gender Equality).[11]

Data on progress in gender equality in higher education institutions suggest that those policy and legislative efforts have made some impact. For example, in the EU the proportion of women at the top levels of the academic hierarchy rose from 15% in 2004 (EU-25) to 21% in 2013 (EU-28). However, the figures continue to portray a sector in which significant gender inequalities persist. These concern the gender distribution of staff both at different steps of their academic/research careers (vertical segregation) and across different disciplines (horizontal segregation), as well as in university governance structures. For example, in 2013, women made up only 21 % of grade A staff (professorial level) in the EU, and this gap was even more pronounced in the field of science and engineering, where women represented only 13 % of staff at this grade. Gender gaps also persist in governance bodies: in 2014 the proportion of women among heads of higher education institutions in the EU-28 was a mere 20 %, while they made up 28 % of scientific and administrative board members and only 22% of board leaders.

If these figures are contrasted with similar data in other sectors (for example, the judiciary, the executive, the legislative or the public administration) it becomes clear that progress towards gender equality in higher education institutions is less advanced than it is in other fields. For instance, in 2014 women made up 57% of judges (EU-28) 29% of senior administrators in national administrations, 27% of senior ministers and 27% of MPs.[12]

Quantitative data, however, only reveal the tip of an iceberg and are symptomatic of endemic gender inequality practices in academic institutions. Furthermore, experiences in gender equality initiatives

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[11] EIGE (2016) Gender Equality in Academia and Research- GEAR Tool: Making a Gender Equality Plan. Available at: http://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gear
[12] European Commission (2013) Women and Men in Leadership Positions in the European Union, 2013. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/gender_balance_decision_making/131011_women_men_leadership_en.pdf

elsewhere have shown that even if women reach parity with men in different structures of the academy, there is no guarantee that those institutions will operate in a more egalitarian manner. As Van den Brink and Benschop describe it (2012: 71), 'gender inequality resembles an unbeatable seven-headed dragon that has a multitude of faces in academic life'.

In understanding the dynamics of gender power relations in universities, why policy efforts towards gender equality are not being translated into desired outcomes or why the pace of progress in this regard is so slow, the literature on gender and institutions, particularly its feminist institutionalist variants, can provide an illuminating framework of analysis.

Gender and institutions

Feminist scholars have been interested in gender and institutions since Kanter's (1977) pioneering work on gender and the dynamics of organisational behaviour. The focus of her research was not on the inherently gendered nature of institutional structures, but rather on the numerical composition of management teams. However, her work had a very important influence on research into gender parity in a variety of institutions, as she considered what happens to women when they are present as 'token' members within a group where men are a majority in terms of performance pressures, career barriers, hostile working environments and social interaction constraints (Lewis and Simpson 2012).

It was Joan Acker (1990, 1992) who first theorised the institutional embeddedness of gender. She defined the term 'gendered institutions' to mean that gender 'is present in the processes, practices, images, ideologies, and distributions of power in the various sectors of social life' (1992: 567), and argued that while the norms and values of organisations are presented as 'gender neutral' (i.e., wrapped in a veil of objectivity and assuming a disembodied and universal worker) they are de facto deeply androcentric. Such invisibility of gender is the reason why, in her view, a theory of gendered organisations should be developed. In her theory, she identified the multiple ways in which gender relates to organizations. First, the gender segregation of work takes place through organizational practices, second, organizations provide arenas where images and norms of gender take shape and are reproduced, and third, individual gender identities can be products of organizations. In developing her account, she draws on the work of Raewyn Connell (1987), particularly the role of hegemonic masculinities in the construction of images, symbols, and ideologies that justify, explain, and give legitimacy to institutions (Acker 1992: 568).

The work of Connell on gender regimes has also provided an important contribution to the thinking on gender and institutions. Institutions, according to her, can be seen as gender regimes – a patterning of four sets of gender relations that includes: the gender relations of power; the gender division of labour; the gender dimension of emotion and human relations; and the gender dimension of culture and symbolism (Connell 2002). Acknowledging the existence of a gender regime is important because it provides new insights into how power relations in institutions produce and contest gender inequalities.

In addition to the work of Kanter, Acker and Connell, feminist scholars have long been interested in institutions and policies such as women's policy agencies, positive action interventions and gender mainstreaming. For example, state feminism research has analysed in detail the interaction between women's movements and political institutions within the context of political opportunity structures, with the aim to understand the factors facilitating and constraining change towards gender equality (Mazur 2001, Outshoorn & Kantola 2007, Lovenduski et al 2005, Lovenduski 2008, McBride & Mazur 2010). However, in understanding the varying degrees of success of those initiatives, state feminism research has come up against important limitations. One such limitation is a narrow focus on gender-specific institutions, which make it difficult to grasp the internal gender dynamics of institutions and institutional change more generally. A second limitation is a tendency to overemphasise women's agency, without paying sufficient attention to structural constraints in achieving institutional change (Waylen 2014: 215)

Against this background, gender and politics scholars turned to new institutionalism, with a view to improving the analytical frameworks for understanding institutional continuity and change in relation to gender equality, (Chappell 2011; Kenny 2011; Krook & Mackay 2011; Mackay, Kenny & Chappell 2010; Mackay & Waylen 2009; Chappell & Waylen 2013).

A basic premise of new institutionalism is that institutions 'matter', since they shape, and are shaped, by political, economic and social forces (March and Olsen, 1984: 747). Emerging as a reaction to the behaviourist tradition, which viewed institutions as the sum of individual actions (Lowndes, 2010), new institutionalism defines institutions as 'the rules of the game in a society or [...] the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction' (North 1990: 3). Since then, the field has developed around five distinct approaches: rational choice institutionalism; historical institutionalism; organizational or sociological institutionalism; and discursive or constructivist institutionalism.

Rational choice institutionalists focus on the behaviour of actors and on the role of institutional rules in constraining this behaviour. In their view, actors' behaviour is driven by a strategic calculus that is aimed at maximising their own interests, although this calculus will be affected by expectations about how others are likely to behave. Institutional rules structure these interactions by restricting actors' choices but also by eliminating uncertainty (Hall and Taylor 1996, Shepsle 2008).

Historical institutionalists focus on the development of institutions over time. Once an institution is created (as the result of a mix of contingent events and political struggles) they tend towards a 'path dependency' which limits what can be achieved and when it can be achieved (Pierson, 2004). Historical institutionalists' central goal is to unveil the causal mechanisms underlying institutions' historical development through comparative research and historical process tracing (Waylen 2009: 246).

In contrast to both rational choice and historical institutionalism, sociological institutionalists emphasize the social, rather than the structural features of institutions. In their view, institutions are 'systems of meaning' that reflect shared understandings of the way the world works (Thelen, 1999: 386). Thus, for this variant of new institutionalism, institutions do not only include rules and practices, but also 'symbol systems, cognitive scripts and moral templates that provide the "frames of meaning" guiding human behaviour' (Hall and Taylor, 1996: 947). Institutional actors are, in sum, social beings who act in habitual ways, following a 'logic of appropriateness' that both prescribes and proscribes certain types of behaviour (March and Olsen, 1989).

Discursive institutionalism is the most recent variant of institutionalism. Focusing on ideas and on the interactive processes of discourse through which these ideas are generated and communicated, they view institutions as 'simultaneously constraining structures and enabling constructs of meaning' (Schmidt 2008, 2010: 4). The main point of divergence from other institutionalist analysis lies in their treatment of institutions as internal, rather than external, to actors seeking to realize complex and contingent goals (Schmidt, 2010: 4).

Despite important differences between these approaches, a common feature of all new institutionalisms is the attention given to informal as well as formal institutional rules. Thus, in an often- cited definition of institutions, Helmke and Levitsky (2004: 727) see them as 'the rules and procedures (both formal and informal) that structure social interaction by constraining and enabling actors' behaviour.'

What are the differences between formal and informal institutional rules? Helmke and Levitsky define formal rules as those which 'are created, communicated and enforced through channels widely accepted as official' (2004: 727). In research, formal rules are rather easy to identify, as they can be distinguished by codified rules that are 'consciously designed and clearly specified' (Lowndes 2005: 292). By contrast, defining and identifying informal institutional rules is a much more difficult task. In defining informal rules, some authors have emphasized their customary element, as they are understood to come from socially transmitted information and to be part of culture (North 1990: 37). However, Helmke and Levitsky contend that informal rules are not exclusively based on custom, as they can also be manifested in practices (such as illicit behaviour) that have nothing to do with culture (2004: 727). In their view, informal rules stem from shared expectations rather than evolving from shared values. This delineation of informal rules allows shared expectations and the practices to which they give rise to be considered separately from cultural norms that may, or may not, reinforce these expectations (2004: 728). Their definition of informal rules thus sees them as 'socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated, and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels' (2004: 727).

Some scholars have highlighted the role of informal rules in both reinforcing and resisting institutional change (Leach and Lowndes, 2007: 186). As we will see, this is one dimension of new institutionalism that feminist scholars have been particularly interested in.

Feminist institutionalism developed in the early 2000s in response to both the strengths and weaknesses of existing new institutionalist theories (Kenny, 2007; Mackay & Meier, 2003; Mackay & Waylen, 2009; Weldon, 2002). Critiquing the gender blindness of these theories (as until then engagement with feminist political research had been minimal) they argued that the application of a gender lens could provide fresh insights into the field, at the same time that it recognised the potential of new institutionalism for improving an understanding of core feminist questions about gender in institutional design, institutional practices and institutional change. Borrowing on the different variants of new institutionalists theory, often a mix of approaches depending on the specific focus and objectives of research, feminist political scholars have found new institutionalist frameworks particularly useful for analysing the gap between formal rhetoric and practice of gender policy

initiatives as well as for understanding the dynamics of resistance to institutional change (Driscoll & Krook, 2009, 2012; Mackay, Monro & Waylen 2009; Waylen 2009, Chappell 2006).[13]

For feminist institutionalists, to say that an institution is gendered means that constructions of masculinity and femininity are intertwined in its daily life or logic rather than 'existing out in society or fixed within individuals which they then bring to the institution' (Kenney, 1996: 456). Apart from establishing gender as a crucial dimension of institutions, a significant contribution of feminist institutionalism is that it brings power to the forefront of institutional analyses. While issues of gender and power have long been a central concern of feminist scholarship in general, it is only recently that feminist social scientist has turned to the importance of institutions in both reflecting and reinforcing gender-power relations, as these are seen not only as 'institutional' but also as 'institutionalised'. By contrast, new institutionalists are often criticized for underplaying the importance of power relations, an aspect that is still under-theorised in the new institutionalist literature (Mackay, Kenny & Chappell 2010: 578).

According to feminist institutionalists, new institutionalist frameworks can be particularly valuable for illuminating questions of institutional continuity and change (Waylen 2014). New institutionalism has been often criticized for focusing more on institutional stability than on change, and therefore this is an area where the feminist contribution to the theory can prove significant, and where the potential for mutual learning and dialogue between mainstream and feminist strands of the theory can be most fruitful (Mackay, Kenny & Chappell 2010: 576).

A major point of commonality between feminist approaches to institutionalism and new institutionalism is a focus on both formal and informal institutional rules. The distinction between formal and informal rules (discussed above) can be very useful not only for understanding why the introduction of new formal rules are not always translated into intended actions and desired outcomes but also why, in some contexts, institutional change towards gender equality has been possible. Why are some gender equality institutional reforms more difficult than others to achieve? Here, informal rules must be analysed since, according to Chappell and Waylen these can have an important role in undermining, replacing, supporting or working in parallel with formal institutions (2013: 606)

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[13] For a more thorough discussion of feminist institutionalists' use of the different variants of new institutionalism, see section 5 below.

The role of informal rules in undermining institutional change can also explain why, in some cases, a change in the formal rules of an organisation may end officially sanctioned gender bias, without ending gender bias in all its institutionalised forms. One of the reasons for this is that the enforcement of informal institutions can often take much subtler forms, such as shunning, social ostracism, and covert resistance (Waylen 2014).

Despite their interests in informal institutions for understanding continuity and change, feminist institutionalists also emphasise the importance of strategic agency, highlighting the ways in which actors initiate change within a context of opportunities and constraints (Chappell 2002, 2006). Indeed, a central tenet of new institutionalist theory is that individuals and institutions are mutually constitutive (Peters 2012). Institutions, in sum, are not only gendered but they can be de-gendered as actors make changes to the status quo. For Kantola (2006), this means that individuals are bound by gendered institutions where they learn the norms that define appropriate behaviour (resistance to change appears when individuals internalise the existing informal gender norms) yet they can also change the norms and institutional structures in which they operate. This is made possible because institutions are full of contradictions and conflicting interests and, therefore, they can create opportunities for individual feminist agency (Kantola 2006).

However, despite a recognition of the role of agency in effecting change towards gender equality, feminist institutionalism stresses the need to pay attention to the institutional context in which actors operate, since this will act to constrain or facilitate actions in important ways (Chappell & Waylen 2013). Understanding institutional context involves paying close attention to the gender dimensions of the informal rules that exist in any given organisation. The task of identifying informal rules and evaluating their role in facilitating and constraining institutional change towards gender equality poses important challenges. The reason for this is that informal rules are hidden, as they are embedded in everyday gendered practices that are disguised as 'standard' and are, therefore, taken from granted. Overcoming this challenge requires, according to Chappell and Waylen, carefully designed research methodologies. Actors within institutions may not even perceive the existence of informal rules because these are normalised and taken for granted; therefore, identifying these rules will require more sophisticated data-gathering techniques than simpler methods for recording actors' beliefs, such as standard survey techniques.

How feminist institutionalist theory – in its different variants - can be used as a framework for an analysis of institutional continuity and change in specific academic contexts is a question to which we will return in section 5.

Resistance to institutional change

An increasing number of universities across Europe are developing gender equality action plans (GEPS). While their adoption can often be unproblematic, cases of unsuccessful implementation abound, where the objectives are not reached and the status quo is maintained.[14]

Theories of organisational change interpret this phenomenon as a failure to translate ideas and objectives into actions and sustained practices. On this point, Erikson-Zetterquist and Renemark (2016) make a distinction between formal and informal elements of institutional change. Gender equality may be easily introduced into the formal structures of an organisation – for example through the adoption of a GEP - but this may only constitute a 'façade' that provides an external image to the organisation. However, for these formal elements to make an impact on the day-to-day routines of the organisation, they need to be translated into stabilised practices, otherwise gender equality goals can easily fade away.

While cases of unsuccessful implementation of gender equality initiatives are common, systematic analyses of this phenomenon represent a relatively new area of research. The reason is that, traditionally, the focus of research has been mainly placed on understanding success. However, researchers are beginning to recognise that, in order to understand institutional change towards gender equality, looking into what has not worked, or not worked as intended, is also necessary (Bergqvist, Bjarnegård and Zetterberg, 2013: 281).

In analysing cases of implementation failure, several feminist scholars are using the concept of 'resistance to institutional change' as an organising principle of research with a powerful explanatory potential. While the literature on this topic is still meagre, this section presents a review of research

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[14] For experiences in the adoption and implementation of GEPs in universities, see, for example EGERA (2015). Available at:
http://www.egera.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/Deliverables/D13_Summary_of_experiences_shared_through_A GORA_regarding_GEPs____implementation_69519.pdf. For the specific case of Italy, see Galizzi and Siboni (2016)

on resistances available to date, and discusses how it could inform a framework to better understand barriers to institutional change in academic contexts.

Mergaert and Lombardo (2013, 2014) unpacked the concept of resistance to institutional change in a study examining failure in the implementation of gender mainstreaming in EU research policy. As a typical case of unproblematic policy adoption but of little tangible progress resulting from policy implementation, their analysis focused on the concept of resistance as a primary factor explaining lack of success. They defined resistance as:

> …a phenomenon that emerges during processes of change— such as when gender equality policies are implemented—and that is aimed at maintaining the status quo and opposing change (2013: 299).

Resistance is thus a largely invisible phenomenon which only becomes manifest (and therefore easier to identify and analyse empirically) during processes of institutional change. For analytical purposes, these authors made a distinction between two main types of resistances - institutional and individual- both of which can be expressed either explicitly or implicitly. Institutional resistance, they suggest, is 'revealed by a pattern of aggregated action or inaction that is systematically repeated and that suggests a collective orchestration against gender change' (Mergaert and Lombardo 2014: 9), while individual types of resistance are exercised by individual actors and manifested in action or inaction opposing change. It is important to note the analytic, rather than ontological, nature of the distinction between institutional and individual types of resistance. While useful for the purposes of guiding empirical analysis, in real life both types of resistance will be intermeshed, as instances of individual resistance may (or may not) have their origins in the norms and values of an institution, and vice versa.

Institutional resistance to gender equality is of special interest to scholars analysing implementation failure from a feminist institutionalist perspective. While acknowledging the role of individual resistances (which may be traceable to the formal and informal rules of the institution under study but also to broader societal gender norms) these scholars highlight the systemic character of institutional types of resistance, as these are deeply rooted in institutional rules (both formal and informal).

Analysing resistance to institutional change presents a number of challenges. The first one is how to select case-studies of implementation failure. Bergqvist, Bjarnegård and Zetterberg (2013) draw a distinction between two forms of non-decision-making – 'failure' and 'status-quo' – and contend that

for 'failure' to happen the 'status-quo' must be challenged in one way or another. It is only in such cases that resistances can emerge and, therefore, be identified, although they also emphasise that the likelihood of resistances emerging will depend on the transformative character of the policy in question.

Once the case-studies of implementation failure have been selected, a second challenge is how to identify instances of resistance. If the concept is not adequately defined and operationalised, resistance can be either misidentified and/or misrecognised. An added difficulty is that both institutional and individual types of resistance can be expressed implicitly. Explicit manifestations of institutional resistance will be easier to detect as these 'can take the form of policy discourse that expresses ideas and aims that distance themselves from the goal of promoting gender equality, or it can take the form of actual policy actions that go against that goal' (Lombardo & Mergaert 2013: 301). By contrast, implicit resistance does not manifest overtly and it can find an expression in lack of action (Mergaert & Lombardo 2014: 8). This renders its identification rather problematic as not all instances of inaction can be interpreted as expressions of implicit resistance. Therefore, identifying this type of resistances requires a thorough empirical analysis of data collected through qualitative methods such as participant observation, semi-structured interviews and/or focus groups. The main focus of these data-gathering exercises will be on the strategies participants use to resist institutional change. According to Annesley and Gains (2010), these actors may work either collectively or individually, but they may also work across institutional boundaries. For example, in higher education institutions, actors opposing change may be part of wider academic, research or policy networks and thus it may be necessary to look beyond the organisation to understand the dynamics of resistance in the implementation of a given gender equality action plan.

Once resistances have been identified, new institutionalist theory posits that they should be traceable to institutional rules, whether these are formal or informal. It is important to note that identified resistances to gender equality will not necessarily be traceable to institutional rules that are specifically about gender. Gains and Lowndes contend that, in developing an analytical framework for the study of gender(ed) institutional design and change, the focus should rather be on rules that have gendered effects. Examples include informal rules about what makes a good leader, about timing and location of meetings, or about the appropriate age for specific roles within the organisation (Gains & Lowndes 2014: 528). Mergaert and Lombardo's study of resistances to gender initiatives in EU research policy (2014) found evidence of the existence of both individual and institutional resistances

in the implementation of gender mainstreaming. Both types of resistances were found to be interconnected. Expressions of institutional resistance were detected in actors at the highest levels of the institution with decision-making power with regards to different aspects of the implementation of the plan.

Other studies on gender mainstreaming implementation produced very similar findings. For example, Benschop and Verloo (2006) highlighted organisational resistance to change as a key reason for the ineffective implementation of gender mainstreaming. In their case-study, focused on a project to integrate gender in Human Resource Management at the Ministry of the Flemish Community in Belgium, institutional resistance was again detected among key decision-makers (i.e., civil servants at the Ministry). As this was a transformative project that problematised the organization's contribution to gender inequality, the civil servants involved resisted change by not recognising the existence of a problem.

For Cavaghan (2017), the mismatch between gender mainstreaming policy rhetoric and practice is a problem of translating abstract commitments to action (as defined in policy) into workable prescriptions for activity. Her analysis showed how these processes of 'translation' are hindered by an institutionalized indifference and non-engagement with gendered policies. Resistance was also found to be linked with actors' loyalties to pre-existing practice and assumptions of what constitutes legitimate and credible activity.

However, the analytical frameworks so far developed for feminist research on resistance to institutional change must be refined and adapted to other institutional contexts, as Mergaert and Lombardo (2014) recognise. The next section turns to the question of resistances to gender equality in academia.

Resistances in academia. The role of 'merit'

There is very little scholarly research exploring resistances to gender institutional change in university settings. Experiences in the implementation of GEPs in higher education and research institutions have detected a number of resistances, yet these have not been systematically analysed. For example, the GEAR tool of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) includes resistance in a list of common obstacles in the implementation of gender equality policy. Following Mergaert and Lombardo's typology, it distinguishes between individual and institutional resistances and between their explicit

and implicit manifestations. It also notes that those actions that are particularly transformative in character, such as changes in the mechanisms of promotion and selection quotas, are the ones most likely to activate resistances (EIGE 2016: 29). In addition, the GEAR tool lists a variety of other obstacles alongside resistance. These include: a lack of understanding of gender equality or of a GEP; conviction that commitment to merit or excellence negates the need for gender equality work; perception that gender equality is not required; lack of sufficient financial and human resources; lack of institutional or organisational authority, lack of relevant statistics; lack of institutional autonomy, and others. Nonetheless, how these other obstacles are linked to institutional or individual resistance is left unexplored.

The project EGERA also addressed the issue of resistances in the implementation of GEPS in their partner institutions (EGERA 2015). In doing so, they drew on the analytical framework developed by Mergaert and Lombardo and used online forums as the main methodology of data collection, where project practitioners shared their experiences. Four questions were addressed (p.15):

- Can you account of the main individual resistances or obstacles encountered for GEP's implementation (where are they located, how do they express, how are they framed?)

- Can you account of the main institutional resistances or obstacles encountered for GEP's implementation (where are they located, how do they express, how are they framed?)

- Through which means (group discussion, surveys, personal interviews, other) these resistances were identified?

- How would you describe the degree/extent of both individual and institutional resistances to GEP implementation at this stage of EGERA?

In the context of the EGERA project, detected resistances were classified as individual rather than institutional. Practitioners noted that the lack of observed institutional resistances was due to the fact that the GEP was fully supported by top institutional actors. As for individual resistances, they highlighted the belief that 'everything in terms of gender equality is already done'. Furthermore, individual resistances were classified as implicit rather than explicit, and for this reason, project practitioners highlighted the difficulty involved in identifying, measuring and evaluating them. At any rate, the EGERA report on resistances is quite vague as it is based on practitioners' impressions only. Only practitioners from one partner institution provided a more elaborated account of observed resistances, drawing a clearer distinction between them. With regards to individual resistances, they pointed to the belief that the problem of gender inequalities lies in the supply rather than on the

demand side and, therefore, that what needs to be 'fixed' are women rather than the institution itself. As for institutional resistances, practitioners from this institution pointed to the idea that the processes of recruitment, selection and promotion are based on the merit principle, and therefore that these processes are gender neutral and objective:

> The merit principle creates a general belief that all procedures aim at equality among employees, and operates, in fact, as an important resistance point to the achievement of gender equality (EGERA 2015: 20).

At any rate, since the EGERA report on resistances is based on practitioners' description of their own impressions, the data provided is not robust enough for conducting a systematic analysis of the role and dynamics of resistances in hindering institutional change towards gender equality in higher education institutions. However, it does give an indication of the complexity of the problem in identifying, and accounting for, informal resistances towards gender equality.

Understanding the role of resistances in accounting for cases of failure in the implementation of GEPs in higher education institutions thus requires a more systematic analysis with the aid of more sophisticated methodological designs. Using a qualitative content analysis of interviews as their main methodology, Van den Brink and Benschop (2012) conducted an empirical study of the obstacles in the implementation of gender equality initiatives in the recruitment and selection of full professors in seven Dutch universities. The core objective of their study was to reach a better understanding of the limited effect of gender equality practices in achieving sustained institutional change in academic organisations.

Although their study does not explicitly draw on feminist institutionalism, it contains two innovative aspects. The first one concerns a distinction between gender equality and gender inequality practices, both of which are regarded as gender practices within an organisation that work to 'do' or 'undo' gender inequality. In their own words, 'gender practices include both the practices that continuously reproduce gender inequalities and the practices that aim to bring about gender equality' (2012: 73). A focus on both types of gender practices has the advantage of allowing the researcher to look at each separately, as well as at their interaction, in policy processes aimed at bringing about institutional change. Indeed, in understanding cases of failure, it is fruitful to examine not only gender inequality practices hindering policy implementation, but also gender equality practices (e.g., GEPs) since an assessment of their conceptual framework and transformative potential can bring a better

understanding of resistance to change. For example, in their analysis of gender equality practices, these authors found that the most common policy initiatives to achieve gender equality in the recruitment and selection of professors mainly targeted women candidates (e.g., mentoring programmes and providing special women´s chairs). Thus, the main focus of policy was on women and the barriers that they encounter in the organisation, while transformative actions aimed at more profound institutional change were absent.

A second innovative aspect of Van den Brink's and Benschop's study is their rejection of the idea of 'academia' as a monolithic entity. Gender practices, they contend, operate in a variety of ways in different academic fields.

> Academic fields vary in their core activities, financial resources, career patterns, epistemological issues and publishing strategies (…). An important point of departure for this article is, therefore, the acknowledgement of differences in the academic field and the production of situated knowledge for different academic fields with regard to potential routes to gender change. (2012: 72)

Interrogating the monolithic character of academia opens new lines of inquiry for research on gender equality in higher education institutions and offers the possibility of illuminating differences that would otherwise have remained invisible.

The study focused on three academic fields: medical sciences, humanities and natural sciences. It found a myriad of gender inequality practices that hinder, obstruct, and even hijack, gender equality practices aimed at a more balanced representation of women and men in professorial posts.

Yet, one particularly salient resistance to gender equality initiatives found in all the fields under study (although it was more apparent in the humanities, due to the large share of women among academic staff members and students) was a strong ideology of meritocracy that dictates that candidates should be appointed on the basis of merit. The academic recruitment system is therefore assumed to be gender neutral and to offer equal opportunities to all candidates in so far as they are equally meritorious. In sum, gender is not seen as something that matters in the selection of a full professor.

In the light of these findings, the authors conclude that the deep institutional entrenchment of an ideology of meritocracy renders invisible the discrepancy between academic values (merit) and actual practices and outcomes (the unequal share of women appointed). As a result, institutional rules go unquestioned: standards for promotion and appointments are viewed as gender neutral, offering the

same chances to all candidates, and therefore institutional change in that respect is not deemed necessary. Furthermore, as institutional rules in recruitment and selection processes are seen as beyond reproach, gender inequality is automatically related to women's personal choices, or, to put it differently, the problem is regarded as one of 'supply' - women lack the record or experience to be appointed.

An important contribution to the very nascent debate on resistance in academia is the FESTA (Female Empowerment in Science and Technology Academia) project, funded under the EU FP7 programme. This seven-partner project sought to identify the micro-practices of resistance found in universities of different intellectual traditions.[15] The project sought to 'give a deeper understanding of resistance that emerges during processes of change when gender equality policies are implemented' (FESTA 2016:6). Drawing on feminist institutionalism, the FESTA partners identified the role of both individuals and institutions in creating resistance to change prompted by gender equality actions, pointing out that 'one should carefully assess the role of the organization when implementing a new structure' (FESTA 2016: 9). Influenced by a Foucauldian interpretation of power, they consider resistance to be symptomatic of a deeper problem, and that 'when resistance appears, it is time for a careful exploration of the difficulty to find out what the trouble is' (FESTA 2016:9). They identify 17 specific causes and indicators of resistance, organised into six groups, covering both individual and institutional practices. For example, gender equality projects can be viewed as a threat to meritocracy. The project specified five general forms of resistance, again encompassing individual and institutional behaviours, and recommended practical strategies for reducing or eliminating resistance to gender equality in higher education. The analytical and prescriptive aspects of the FESTA findings are accompanied by a telling of stories of resistance from partner institutions across all stages of the project, from inception to dissemination.[16]

In a similar vein to the work of FESTA, Powell, Ah-King and Hussénius (2017) offer a perceptive analysis of resistance to gender change in a Swedish university. Through analysis of discursive practices ('what can be said, thought and done and by whom in the specific context'), they sought to understand resistance to gender equality. They identified the upholding of meritocratic norms as a site of

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[15] SAGE working paper 1 discusses the main intellectual traditions shaping European higher education.

[16] The FESTA discussion and recommendations on resistance and its management can be found online: http://www.resge.eu

resistance to gender equality, expressed often as essentialist conceptions of women's situation in academia – women were not suited to academic life due to the long-hours culture, competitive environment and its encouragement of individualism (2017:5). The analysis reveals that resistances are nuanced, complex and diverse, and that reactions to gender equality vary widely. This micro-study, which also drew on the insights of feminist institutionalism among others, complements and enriches the growing body of work on resistances in academia and to which this SAGE project can contribute.

While there are many drivers, impulses and motivations for resistance, the three studies discussed have unveiled 'academic merit' as a core institutional rule that is at the root of much resistance to change, not just in policy implementation but as early as policy formulation. If it is assumed that the 'merit' principle governs not only the processes of selection, recruitment and promotion of academic staff, but other academic activities as well (e.g., publication and dissemination activities, research grant allocations, and so on) the concept must be deconstructed and its role in gender practices in academic institutions unveiled. As one feminist scholar puts it, this is a concept that 'lies at the heart of the intractable gender binary within the academy' (Thornton 2013: 128).

The task is not without challenges, as it is a concept that goes unquestioned while it shapes the way we interpret reality. This means that any evidence of gender gaps in relation to percentage of professors, research project leaders, or publications, is not seen as a problem with 'merit' but rather as one of gender barriers that keep women from reaching the standard of excellence required. Given the invisibility of the gendered construction of 'academic merit', uncovering its role in perpetuating gender inequalities and hindering institutional change in academic settings requires a well-designed conceptual framework and methodological approach.

In sum, these investigations of formal and informal resistances to gender equality are building an understanding of the dynamics of gender-power relations in higher education. Many more studies of this kind are required to provide further evidential basis for theory-building on the one hand and action (including Gender Equality Plans) on the other. In looking at the interaction of gender equality and gender inequality practices through the lens of resistances through the full cycle from proposal to implementation, these studies of resistance yield important insights. This holistic approach is in contrast to analytical frameworks looking at resistances to institutional change in the context of gender mainstreaming, where the transformative nature of the strategy is taken for granted and the focus rests mainly on implementation. As Powell, Ah-King and Hussénius conclude 'demands for

change must start with answering what problem we are trying to solve when we start a new GE [gender equality] project' (2017:15).

Researching gender(ed) institutional change in academia. A feminist institutionalist framework.

In researching the origins, continuity and change of gendered institutions, feminist institutionalists have developed their own analytical frameworks by drawing on the different variants of new institutionalism: rational choice (RCI), historical (HI), sociological (SI) and discursive (DI). While each of them (often in combination) have been used for understanding different aspects of the relationship between gender and institutions, the choice of approaches largely depends on the type of institutions under study and the specific questions, objectives and focus of the research. Of the all the new institutionalisms, the historical and discursive variants have been found to be particularly fruitful for feminist research looking at political institutions specifically. However, as higher education institutions have their own distinct features, it is important to examine the advantages and limitations of each variant in developing an analytical framework for a study on resistances to institutional change towards gender equality in these specific settings.

The historical institutionalist (HI) concept of 'path dependence' can help illuminate questions concerned with the role of institutional legacies in resisting change towards gender equality in higher education. Historical institutionalism can also illuminate comparative analyses of varying outcomes of gender practices, not only in different academic institutions but also in different academic fields. As we have seen in the previous section, academic institutions are not monolithic entities, and one of the explanations of this is that they are historically constituted. For example, how the 'merit' principle became a core institutional rule (both formal and informal) in academic practices and procedures; how this is being interpreted in different universities and academic fields and why it produces varying gendered outcomes, is a question that historical institutionalism can help illuminate. Another advantage is HI's attention to power. As Hall and Taylor contend (Hall and Taylor 1996: 941), HI is more likely than other variants to assume a world in which institutions have, historically, privileged some groups over others, giving them more access to decision-making process. Feminist researchers exploring the relationship between gender and institutional change (and its resistances) in higher education institutions can find this particular framework quite useful, as the concept of power is central to their analyses.

However, this variant of new institutionalism has limitations. One problem with some (albeit not all) HI's approaches is their view of institutional actors as essentially rule-followers and self-interested individuals. In this sense, it borrows RCI's view of the relationship between actors and institutions according to which institutional rules constitute 'external' constraints that limit actors' strategic choices. As discussed below, other new institutionalisms can offer more illuminating frameworks to feminist institutionalists looking at higher education institutions by moving away the focus from actor's behaviour in terms of rule-constrained strategic choices to rule-bound institutional practices. Another limitation of this approach is its focus on 'causal factors'. This can be problematic for a study examining resistances to change in academic institutions as the interest goes beyond understanding its 'causes'. Thus, the question of how a rule like the merit principle is created, re-created, reinforced, contested and/or subverted through institutional (gendered) practices goes beyond its historical, path-dependence, legacy. Summing up, HI approaches can help with some questions, particularly when conducting comparative analyses at the organisational level (macro and meso-levels) to account for differences among institutions and institutional fields. However, it has limitations for micro-level analyses looking at institutional practices in specific contexts (e.g., hiring and promotion).

Feminist revisions of sociological institutionalism (SI), particularly its attention to culture, can remedy some of the limitations associated with HI (like its over-emphasis on causal relations or its rational-choice conception of institutional actors) and illuminate an analysis of the role of informal rules in resisting institutional gender towards gender equality in academic settings. As seen in section 2, for SI, institutional practices are not rooted in rationality but rather in a 'logic of appropriateness' based on norms which are widely valued within a culture and which enhance the legitimacy of a given institution. Yet, borrowing from these SI main tenets, feminist institutionalists have unveiled the gender dimensions of the 'logic of appropriateness' and its role in resistances to institutional change. More specifically, they have shown how the 'logic of appropriateness' is presented in a 'gender neutral' disguise and how, the more embedded and enforced this norm of gender neutrality is, the harder it is for feminists to advance claims of gender bias (Chappell 2006). This finding resonates with the deep entrenchment of the norm of neutrality of the merit principle and can help explain how hard it is for feminists to contest it and subvert it. By focusing on the role of culture, SI analyses of gender and institutions can be quite useful for explaining institutional similarities (for example, isomorphisms in institutional norms, procedures and practices in universities across different countries), yet it has

difficulties for explaining differences resulting from institutional change, particularly endogenous institutional change (Mackay, Monro and Waylen 2009: 260; see also Hall and Taylor 1996: 954).

Discursive institutionalism (DI) has been particularly amenable to feminist appropriations and theoretical developments and it is thus the preferred variant of many scholars investigating the interplay between gender, institutions and institutional continuity and change. DI is interested in the institutional contexts 'in which and through which ideas are communicated via discourse' (Schmidt, 2010: 4). Instead of seeing institutional rules (both formal and informal) as 'constraints' that are external to actors, these are viewed as "simultaneously constraining structures and enabling constructs of meaning which are internal to strategic actors seeking to realize complex and contingent goals" (Schmidt, 2010: 4). In contrast to SI, this variant is able to account for power and institutional change. First, DI highlights the importance of discourse and its relationship to power in generating and legitimizing ideas and cementing the 'status quo' through processes of socialisation. Yet, it also acknowledges the existence of discursive struggles and how this 'status quo' is also capable of change through interactive processes of communication (Fischer 2003). One problem with DI is that it erases the distinction between institutions and discourses to the point that some FI researchers see discourses as a type of informal institution (Freidenvall & Krook 2007). Once this distinction becomes so blurred, it is hard to tell which are the dependent ad independent variables. Thus, it is difficult to identify the conditions under which actors 'use' discourse to effect institutional change (that is, a change in the formal/informal rules of the organisation) or when actors are being 'used' by discourse in resisting such change.

Given that each variant of NI has both advantages and limitations, feminist institutionalists have often used a combination of them. Kulawik (2009) shows how historical and discursive variations of new institutionalism complement each other and how they can be used in an integrated (feminist) approach by deconstructing the dichotomy of causal explanation versus meaning and description and reformulating (rather than eschewing) the concept of causality. In her view, an adequate explanation must include the concept of meaning. In carrying comparative analyses, it is important to take into account that countries differ not only in terms of their institutions "but also in in the way that problems and their causes are interpreted, which, in turn, influence the solutions that are deemed appropriate" (Kulawik 2009: 266). Thus, in contrast to HI view, power is not only composed of strategic strengths (like, for example, to be a member of decision-making bodies within the organisation), but it is also the ability to put one's own interpretation of problems onto the agenda

and to push for one's own solutions and proposals by influencing actor interests, preferences and behaviours (Campbell and Pedersen 2001).

An integrated approach that borrows from the strengths of both HI and DI can be particularly useful for an analysis of institutional change towards gender equality and the resistances to such changes in academic settings, allowing for discourse analyses of how gendered institutional rules such as the merit principle is interpreted, who holds the power and legitimacy over these interpretations and how change can come about through discursive contestations. At the same time, the HI concept of "path dependence" can illuminate a meso-level analysis of differences among and within higher education institutions with regards to varying interpretations of institutional rules such as the merit principle. In addition, it allows for an analysis of the wider institutional context in which change occurs, looking for critical junctures and opening up the possibility that change may be unforeseen at the time, or be the outcome of 'unintended consequences'.

Given the dearth of studies on (gendered) institutional continuity and change in higher education institutions informed by feminist institutionalist frameworks, the different variants outlined in this section can only offer different approaches to guide the methodological design and analysis. Yet, which approach is more adequate for this specific type of institution remains an open question that can only be settled after some empirical research has already been undertaken.

Conclusions

This paper has provided a review of the literature on gender and institutions for the purposes of informing the analytical framework of a research study focused on institutional change in higher education contexts. Drawing on the feminist institutionalist literature that explores the relationship between gender, institutions and institutional continuity and change the core aim of this review was to evaluate how this body of work could be adapted to a study seeking to understand the dynamics of implementation of gender equality action plans (GEPS) in university institutions around Europe.

While GEPs in universities are becoming rather widespread and there is evidence of some progress towards gender equality in this type of settings, their efforts are not always translated into desired outcomes. In understanding the factors hindering implementation, this review paper turned to the concept of 'resistances' to institutional change. The concept of resistance has been unpacked through understanding institutions, as well as individuals, as sites of resistance. This enables

researchers to gain a better grasp of cases of 'failure' (or partial success) in the implementation of gender equality initiatives, and is developed in detail with respect to gender equality and politics. This work has uncovered the role of informal (gendered) institutional rules – often expressed implicitly – in hindering change towards gender equality and has also highlighted their informal ad implicit nature. In the light of this, this review paper discussed the challenges involved in the construction of appropriate methodologies for the identification, analysis and evaluation of resistances in the context of empirical research in Higher Education.

However, while the gender and politics literature inspired in new institutionalist frameworks can provide useful conceptual and methodological tools for constructing a research design focussed on academic institutions, an isomorphism with political institutions cannot be assumed. For this reason, this review paper turned to research examining resistances to institutional change towards gender equality in these specific settings. This research highlights the role of academic merit as a principle hindering gender equality initiatives and practices in academia and, therefore, as a major obstacle to institutional change. Disguised as a gender neutral and objective norm, it constrains transformative change not only in implementation processes but also in earlier processes of policy formulation and adoption.

There are different feminist institutionalist approaches (each drawing on the different variants of new institutionalist theory) that can be used to inform a research design aimed at a better understanding of the merit principle as a major source of resistance constraining the design and implementation of GEPs. This review paper ended with a discussion of the merits and weaknesses of each of these approaches for a study focussed on academic institutions, concluding that an integrated approach borrowing from more than one variant has two advantages. First, it provides the flexibility needed for a study where there is very little research available to date, and second, it can remedy the shortcomings associated with the rigid adoption of just one individual approach. At any rate, the choice of approach ultimately depends on the specific research questions, objectives and methodologies of the study.

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