CHAPTER 12

From Exception to Norm: The Development of Resilience in a Network

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Abstract: Combining gender theory with research on resilience, this chapter analyzes the effects of an action research project aimed at increasing the number of women in senior research positions at the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences at Oslo University. As a part of the project, the faculty management nominated fifteen women professors and associate professors to attend a programme to improve their skills in writing articles and research applications. Individual interviews with all participants prior to the programme revealed that they would prefer to build a network where they could share experiences and discuss various topics. The two-year programme was therefore structured as a forum where we as action researchers offered theoretical input on topics chosen by the participants and worked with dialogue tools, focusing on these topics, in a structured and time-efficient exchange of experiences. The analysis shows that resilience is an essential skill in organizations characterized by critical scrutiny and competition. In the chapter, we describe how the network participants become more resilient by reflecting themselves in, and sharing experiences with, each other. Being in a context with other recognized top researchers without being the odd one out – the woman who has to prove herself – improves the ability to cope with adversity.

Keywords: gender equality, resilience, network, academia, female managers

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Introduction

Being a researcher means constant exposure to critical scrutiny in an organization characterized by tough competition for jobs, research funding, and publishing. In the first part of this book, summarized by the Bøygen model in chapter seven, we show that women in academic organizations experience more obstacles and problems than men throughout their careers. On the whole, academia is characterized by critical logic, in which researchers – especially women researchers – need to cope with setbacks and stress. Against this background, the FRONT project decided to design a measure for women senior researchers. The purpose of this sub-project was to attain the goal of more women in leading research positions, among others in management positions in the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences in the University of Oslo, but especially as leaders of larger research groups.

In this chapter, we take a closer look at the measure for women senior researchers. We describe the design of the measure and examine how it was perceived by the participants.

The subsequent part of this chapter is structured as follows. It begins with a short summary of the background for the measure, followed by a detailed description of its structure. Then we move on to data gathering and methodology of the study, as well as its theoretical foundation. We then describe the results and analyze developments within the participant group in light of other research.

Background: Career, Networks and Resilience

Networks and collaboration are essential to both career development and research productivity (Pourciau, 2006; Van Balen et al., 2012; Zeng et al., 2016). Researchers find that supportive relationships, such as mentoring programmes, contribute directly to scholarly success (e.g., Van Balen et al., 2012). Moreover, researchers found that women receive less academic support and mentoring than men, and that women have fewer supportive relationships (Fuchs et al., 2001). Minor differences between

women and men, in terms of access and opportunities for building networks in the early stages of their academic career, the so-called rush hour, accrue over time and can eventually become substantial. This, in turn, can affect opportunities for research collaborations, funding and publishing (Fuchs et al., 2001; Hunter & Leahey, 2010; Husu, 2001; Wennerås & Wold, 2000).

Competition for positions, research funding and publication is fierce within academic organizations. As a researcher, you are constantly exposed to critical scrutiny. Peer review requires that applications for jobs or funding and articles submitted for publication or conference participation are examined for flaws and weaknesses by colleagues. A very large number of submitted applications and articles will never be approved or published. Altogether, this means that academia is characterized by a critical logic, where researchers need to cope with adversity (e.g., Sewerin & Jonnergård, 2014).

Recent Nordic studies show that tough competition in an organization can reveal and reinforce masculine hegemonic tendencies (Dockweiler et al., 2018; Snickare & Holter, 2018). In Chapter 5, we illustrate how women experience more obstacles and resistance in their academic careers than men, and that this is not specific to the faculty we studied, but has also been demonstrated in international research. Altogether, this would indicate that women researchers are in greater need than men of coping skills for handling adversity and rejection.

Resilience is the process of adapting in the face of adversity and stress. It involves maintaining flexibility and balance in life, as we deal with stressful circumstances and feel questioned by ourselves or other people. Many studies show that decisive factors for resilience are social support and interpersonal relationships (e.g., Jackson et al., 2007; Kossek & Perrigino, 2016; Powley, 2009).

In this study, we use action research to explore the relationship between the lack of support systems for women researchers and their academic success. By combining gender theory with research on resilience, we analyze how resilience can be created on the individual level in an academic organization.

Network, Empirical Data and Method

As a part of the FRONT project, department heads at the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences in Oslo University nominated eighteen female professors and associate professors to take part in a programme for female researchers. The nominees must have the ability to lead major research projects, to be top researchers. The FRONT research team began by conducting individual interviews with all nominees. The interviews revealed that the nominees explicitly wanted access to a qualified network where they could share experiences with other women researchers.

A general challenge for all programmes, training schemes and measures is how to apply skills and learning to the participants' everyday life and reality. In a comprehensive meta-analysis focusing on identifying the most effective kind of leadership training, Lacrenza et al. (2017) found that the most effective programmes: were structured according to the target group's self-defined needs; offered training sessions; gave continuous feedback; and used a variety of methods. The best results were achieved when there was a clear link between theoretical input and experience-based training related to the everyday challenges that participants face. The transfer from the learning situation to reality is achieved by practising new skills to get feedback in and from the everyday context (Lacrenza et al., 2017). Another meta-analysis focusing on team-based training and effectiveness showed that theoretical knowledge can produce background understanding that increases interest and relevance. But hands-on practice is needed to integrate new knowledge and result in changed behaviour over time (McEwan et al., 2017).

Based on this want of a network for sharing experiences, and on the research described above, the 2-year programme was designed as a forum where we, as action researchers, offered theoretical input on themes chosen by the participants. The themes suggested by the participants were essential to understanding and managing day-to-day activities in the participants' various tasks and roles. With these themes as our point of departure, dialogue tools were applied to enable structured and time-efficient exchanges of experience. To create a safe space for sharing

experiences, the process-oriented workshops were designed with a familiar structure, described below:

Check-in: Participants were paired up and had a few minutes to discuss three questions relating to their expectations for today's theme, and how they wanted to contribute. The goal was to give the participants an opportunity to connect with each other and the theme, and to clearly shift from "outside" to "inside".

Theoretical introduction: Research-based lectures on a theme chosen by the participants including: self-compassion, time management, goal formulation, effective teams, and academic leadership. The purpose of these lectures was to give participants a theoretical basis for understanding the challenges they face daily.

Trio-coaching: A model for peer guidance with the roles: focus person, coach, and observer. In the first conversation, the focus person describes a concrete challenge related to the workshop theme to the coach. The coach listens and asks follow-up questions, and the observer remains silent. In the next conversation the coach addresses the observer, and together they reflect on the focus person's story, linking it to their own experiences and thoughts. During this conversation, the focus person remains silent. In the third and final conversation, the coach again talks to the focus person, and the observer listens. In this conversation, the focus person has the opportunity to reflect on what the others have said about their own experiences, and the coach can ask Socratic questions and give advice if requested. Then, the participants change roles and a new sequence begins. The purpose of trio-coaching is to provide a clear format that enables active listening and dialogue, where the focus person can practise looking at a concrete challenge or problem from several perspectives.

Collective reflections on the day's theme and exercises: In this session, the group had the opportunity to hear everyone's experiences and thoughts, contributing to increased systemic understanding and further learning.

Check-out: Each participant has the opportunity to briefly reflect on their current situation in relation to the day's theme and activities (this can be through a word, a feeling or a thought).

The two researchers who followed the project have had somewhat different roles. One has been engaged full-time in the FRONT project,

meeting with participants in other FRONT activities. This researcher also conducted the individual interviews and organized programme activities. The other researcher was involved exclusively in carrying out the programme workshops. In terms borrowed from Herr and Andersson (2005), the researchers can be described as *outsider within* and *outsider*, meaning one person was an employee in the project, and thus in the same organization, but in a different role than the participants, and one was only involved in planning and implementing the workshops.

This chapter is based on individual interviews and a group interview, and the researchers' notes and observations from programme activities. Immediately after each completed workshop day, the researchers examined their own individual notes and wrote a joint field diary. Flipchart sheets and other material produced by the group were also gathered and documented in the field diary.

Analysis began using an inductive approach, where all the material was studied several times, to identify recurring themes, similarities and differences. In effect, the coding was based on the participants' own descriptions. In the subsequent phase, the material was interpreted according to the theory of resilience and self-compassion described in the following section.

Resilience and Self-Compassion

Within organizational research, resilience is defined either as a trait, a capacity, or a dynamic process (Rook et al., 2018). A more general definition emphasizes a resilient individual's ability to handle change in a positive way, and to recover quickly from setbacks and adversity (Tugade et al., 2004). Thus, resilience includes both *adapting* to adversity, and *recovering* from it, thereby effectively getting past adversity. Applying a cross-disciplinary approach, Rook et al. (2018) review various aspects of resilience to understand why certain individuals adapt and recover from adversity more optimally than others. The researchers describe resilience as a dynamic process resting on four pillars that together can give an optimum functional adaptivity. These pillars consist of individual tolerance built on previous experiences, mental coping, physiological recovery

and physical functionality. Rook et al. (2018) claim that all these factors can be influenced and improved so as to increase both individual and organizational resilience.

Thus, resilience is built by interaction between individual traits, acquired abilities and environmental factors. The work environment, for example, is central to most people throughout their working life. Here, resilience is about responding positively to work-related adversity by, for instance, creating beneficial and nurturing professional relationships, responding to feedback as an opportunity to learn rather than as negative criticism, and coping and calming down when encountering setbacks. Tugade and Fredrickson (2004) suggest that everyone has the potential to be resilient, but the level is determined by individual experiences, qualities, the environment and by each person's balance of risk and protective factors. Protective factors help individuals to achieve a positive outcome regardless of the risk (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). After reviewing literature on resilience as a strategy for responding to workplace adversity, and identifying strategies to enhance personal resilience in nurses, the researchers conclude that an individual's capacity to develop and improve resilience relies on developing strategies to reduce vulnerability, and strengthening the individual's influence on factors that are obstacles in the workplace (Jackson et al., 2007).

Self-compassion is a concept used in both clinical and non-clinical contexts. From a non-clinical perspective, Neff (2003) describes self-compassion as an approach characterized by being supportive and sympathetic to ourselves when faced with our own imperfections and failings, instead of being judgmental and critical. According to Neff, there are three elements of self-compassion, comprising attitudes, skills and abilities:

1. Self-kindness – being understanding and caring towards ourselves instead of being critical when we fail or experience difficulties.
2. Common humanity – the awareness that all humans suffer, fail and are imperfect.
3. Mindfulness – the ability to observe our own pain without being caught up and swept away by our feelings.

Self-compassion can, in other words, be described as a skill that contributes to the individual's resilience and ability to cope with being criticized and questioned in the working environment. People with a high degree of self-compassion are better equipped to recover after failure and stress. They brood less, are less afraid of failure, have a lower tendency to blame others for their failures and react more appropriately to feedback, than individuals with low self-compassion (for more details, see Neff & Germer, 2017).

Several studies show that even short-term exercises in self-compassion can have major effects. A common intervention in clinical studies is to ask clients to write kind and considerate letters to themselves when they feel self-critical, "as if they were writing to their best friend". Shapira and Mongrain (2010) found, for instance, that seven days of letter writing led to significantly lower depression levels in a group of depressed individuals.

There is very little research on self-compassion from a gender perspective. A meta-analysis by Yarnell et al. from 2015 showed that women have a slightly lower degree of self-compassion than men, which is also consistent with previous research showing that women are more self-critical than men, and that women are often more compassionate towards others (DeVore, 2013). The authors stress, however, that the gender differences are minor and should not be overestimated.

From these perspectives, we conclude that mental resilience and self-compassion are essential skills in organizations characterized by critical scrutiny and competition. Environmental factors such as workplace culture and relationships are vital to building resilience and self-compassion, but both these skills can also be improved with practice.

A Network for Women Senior Researchers

Different Experiences Mean Different Needs

As mentioned previously, the department heads had been asked to nominate candidates for this programme. Nominees should be researchers with the potential to build and lead large research teams. No criteria were specified for the nominee's career stage, except that they should have a

permanent position as a professor or associate professor. Consequently, some participants were relatively newly-appointed associate professors, while others were established professors heading large research teams. The network created in this programme thus filled different needs of the participants.

Hedda, for instance, told us that she had participated in a similar network earlier in her career. Being nominated for that programme was the first time she felt that she was acknowledged as a qualified researcher, someone with a future in academia. She says, "And I think that's the first time in my career anyone told me, 'You know, you're going to make it, if not here then somewhere else, so don't give up!'". She adds, "When you reach a make-or-break point, being acknowledged can make all the difference". Today, she is an established researcher, and being nominated, being acknowledged by the department head as a researcher with the potential to lead large research teams, is not as important. She already knows she has that potential.

For Kari, on the other hand, the nomination changed her perception of herself as a researcher. Until then, she had seen herself as a teacher, primarily, but being nominated made her see that the department head had confidence in her as a researcher. She says, "I saw myself as a teacher. I thought that was what they wanted … what they had ordered. I didn't perceive myself as a leader of a research team". Participating in the network gave her more agency. She adds, "After the first meeting … that boosted my self-confidence … and I realized it would actually be possible to write an application. Now, I've applied for research funding … and got it".

Several participants accepted the offer to take part in the programme even though they, like Hedda, felt they had passed the stage in their career where they needed it. Anna said yes because she likes sharing her experience with younger researchers. She says, "But I also appreciate being able to share knowledge. We've all had our problems, and I can see that when someone else describes it now, I've experienced the same thing. And I think the group discussions are good and honest".

Sigrid also chose to participate although she was unsure of the benefit to her personally. "I thought, well, the head of the department chose me, I was asked to do this, so I'll try to get something out of it that's good for me."

Taking On a New Role

> I can tell you a bit about what it was like before I became an associate professor. So, I've published frequently, and been very active in the international community, and I started to get a lot of invitations. Then I transferred to the university, and there I was … in the past, I was the one doing everything. I was a post-doc or a researcher doing the research. But now I need to delegate instead, I'm learning how to make others do the work, and yeah, I'm changing a little bit.
>
> (Marthe, associate professor)

An associate professor is expected to take an active part in building a research team. Even if the associate professor has had several previous, temporary post-doctoral or research positions and applied for various kinds of research funding or jobs, the associate professor position involves new demands. One must apply for other kinds of research funding, and the role of leader of a research group is more pronounced. Marthe, recently appointed associate professor when the network began, describes the change in the above quote. She was a successful and well-published researcher with a large international network when she started as an associate professor. Her new position meant not only that she had to stop experimenting in the laboratory herself in order to build and lead a team of doctoral candidates and post-docs, but also that she would lead the process of building a laboratory in practice, involving everything from ventilation to equipment, as well as developing new courses and teaching students on graduate and master levels. When she cannot focus on research, the number of papers she publishes per year decreases, which she finds frustrating.

One thing an associate professor needs to know, and which several participants mentioned, is how to handle rejected applications for funding. For Marthe, the new role involved applying for new kinds of funding, and she often received rejections. She says,

> The last two years, let's just say I've been failing a lot. But also winning a lot. Learning from the failures, I got better and better, and I did get some funding. So, I mean, that's how it is. It was heartening to hear all of you and other people. It helped me with this sense of failure. And now I just say to myself, "Okay, so I failed, like everybody else".

Marthe was not used to having her research funding applications turned down, so it felt like failure. By sharing experiences in the network and mirroring herself in other researchers who had advanced further in their careers, she realized that a rejection does not mean that she is a bad researcher, or that her idea was poor, or her CV was not up to par. Most applications are turned down. The reason Marthe no longer sees a rejection as proof that she is a bad researcher is the discussions in the network. Other members, whom she regards as very skilled researchers, have also had their applications for funding turned down. For Marthe, that no longer contradicts her being a top researcher. Bente describes a similar experience: "I think the network, and listening to other people's stories … I've had a few years of failure, but it's good to know that others have failed as well".

For Thea, the group has changed her perspective on herself as a researcher and what funding she should apply for. "It's true that during the process, and by listening to the rest of the group, and especially the meetings we had with the others who had applied for big projects, encouraged me to think even bigger and especially not to be afraid to fail." Thea says that the group encouraged her to "think big". She is now planning to build a larger research team and is not afraid of having her application for funding turned down. Maren has had a similar experience of being in the network, and was encouraged to apply for new kinds of funding. "At least, I think this group has given me a bit more momentum than I had before. Yeah, pushed me to apply, and other stuff."

The Problem Is Real

Few associate professor positions are advertised, and competition is often fierce. Several network members describe how they, as relatively new associate professors, feel pressured to prove their worth, that they are qualified researchers and will contribute to the milieu to which they were recruited with top research, realized through publishing and research funding. Bente relates, for instance, that she finds it hard to say no to assignments. "If I always say yes, then everyone will see that I'm qualified. So, I say yes." She also describes how the breadth of the network,

with people from different departments and at different stages in their careers, has helped her see her own situation from new angles, helping her to know when to say yes or no to assignments. She adds, "There aren't that many in the department I can talk to about this, who share my experience. So, meeting others who know what it's about … and talking to them so I understand more, that's really nice".

Agnes has almost the same experience. She feels that teaching takes so much of her time that she has little left over for writing applications and articles to the extent expected of her. But to admit that she has more teaching hours than she can cope with would be the same as saying they had recruited the wrong person. She adds, "Being able to discuss with others who are, or have been, in the same situation has been incredibly helpful in this relatively demanding start-up phase of my academic career".

Talking to others in the network, and sharing experiences, has meant that personal feelings of inadequacy or failure can be identified as actual problems, things that need to change. Agnes continues, "I was really, really fed up with everything, and this trio coaching, where I managed to put into words what I really feel, helped me to see that this is actually a big problem … It was good to realize that, okay, this is a problem, so I have to do something … it was really an eye-opener". When Agnes identifies the problem as being outside herself, she also becomes more able to take action. She can do something to change her situation. Discussions in the network also helped Kathrine see her situation from new perspectives. She emphasizes the importance of having an exclusively female network:

> So, first of all, being part of this group helped me a lot, because I'm in an environment where all my colleagues are male, and I have never had the opportunity to discuss things more deeply with a female researcher on my level or higher. … So, for me, it's very encouraging, and very positive to share things in the group. … Compared to a year ago, it has helped me a lot having a network, to understand what steps I can take to improve my career profile. I have people to ask too, that's very important. And women, also. Which, for me, it's completely new, it's like paradise.

It Is Like a Safe Zone

The network has helped young researchers handle the fiercely competitive academic culture, critical scrutiny and frequent rejections of various kinds of applications. Sharing experiences has also made them see their individual problems as something outside themselves, which they should address. But what has the network meant to more experienced researchers? Those who were unsure of whether they had anything to gain from participating.

Silje says that academia is so individualistic that the network gave her something she needed, "a sense of community". Ella agrees. She says she lacks opportunities for informal contact with colleagues. There are very few women in her workplace, and her male colleagues socialize in ways that make it hard for her to join in. For instance, they jog and enter marathons together. She says,

> When we meet with female colleagues we go and have coffee, things like that. And then we talk shop and such, and create a group. The same happens for men, because in reality we're all the same. But they do it in a separate context. And since they are the majority, they think everybody knows, but of course that's not the case, because we weren't there. And that doesn't even occur to them.

Ella says that informal groups of only one gender can be a problem, especially in workplaces like hers. The information exchanged in the group does not reach those outside the group. The network gives Ella information about the faculty that is not available elsewhere to her as a woman. Had she been a man, she would have been able to get the information when she was out running with her colleagues. Younger researchers also describe how, through the network, they obtained information, which they would not have been able to obtain otherwise. Kathrine says,

> Thanks to this network, I'm also more aware of things happening in the faculty. … I have more contacts, and it helps me understand a bit better what I need to do. … And the network helped me quite a lot, I feel I'm in a safe environment, and if there's something I don't know, I can just ask. This is good. This is exactly what I needed, a group or human resource, a source of information, and awareness.

Nora refers to another dimension of the network, describing how it feels to be acknowledged. She says,

> I feel I've been seen. And that's important. In another way perhaps than how I'm acknowledged in the workplace. … Being able to discuss kids and stuff, that it's a problem not getting home on time, that sort of thing. That there are things we find … challenging for family life. It may sound strange, but little things like that.

Nora says that she can't talk about all aspects of her life with her male colleagues. They see her as a skilled researcher. But to maintain that image, she can't mention her kids, or the demands on her as a mother. That would mean emphasizing gender differences, that she is the only woman in a male group.

Maria says that the network fills a need by not including her close colleagues. "Yes, I felt that this was a forum I needed, people who are neither friends nor colleagues." She feels that she can talk about things in the network that are hard to mention to friends and close colleagues. Friends work in other sectors and do not share the same experiences or know how an academic environment works, and colleagues are competitors. The network provided this opportunity. "Talking more about general things and experiences, without it getting too personal, which it does with colleagues, when everyone knows everyone. It can be hard. … I felt it was very useful. And when we had coaching, that was very good. It forced me to dig deeper. There were things that had been painful, and I felt it was really good to have the chance to debrief."

Since network participants were in different phases of their careers, from all the faculty departments, this was a place where Maria could talk to people who understood her problems without being in a competitive situation. She adds,

> But it was also about being in the same situation, without being too close. I didn't need to worry about tactics or positioning, or that she knows him, or that they've worked together, so I had to … I felt it was like taking a break from it all, like a safe zone. I have colleagues I can talk to as well, but it often feels like I've said too much. I realized how much I needed this.

Maria says that talking about problems at work also leaves her feeling vulnerable. To discuss problems, she has to reveal sides of herself other than the perfect researcher without failings or weaknesses. Thea agrees. She says, that in order to build relationships you need to open up, which makes you vulnerable. "When you share something personal, you open up. You make yourself vulnerable, but you also get something back. And then you really start to discover things and can start building connections." The only way to get something back is to be personal, and vulnerable, according to Thea.

Networks to Enhance Resilience

Not Having to Be a Woman Researcher

The programme was designed as a qualified network, because the nominated women researchers were very clear about wanting to build a network where they could share experiences and discuss various subjects. They also describe in the interviews how important it is for them to meet other women through a network. Even if their contact with male colleagues is good, and they have many female friends, they miss having a place where they can meet and talk to other women researchers. Marthe's description of this opportunity to talk to other women researchers is, "It's like paradise".

Men are in the majority on the professorial level in all faculty departments except one. On the student and recruiting levels, males have a majority in five departments, while two are more or less gender balanced, and women dominate two.[1] That means that nearly all network participants come from departments where men are in a clear majority on their level, and most come from departments with male dominance on both student and professorial levels. However, even those from departments where there are more female than male professors, emphasize the value of women-only networks.

Being a minority entails working under special conditions (Halford et al., 1997; Kanter, 1977; Snickare, 2012; Wahl, 1992, 2003; Wahl et al., 2018). In eight of the nine participating departments, women are a minority

in leading research positions, and therefore stand out more than men. However positive this may be, it also entails more pressure to perform and do the right thing (Wahl, 1992, 2003). What the majority has in common is also manifested in the minority. Only when a woman joins the research team does it become conspicuous that it was previously all male. The minority members are not considered as individuals, but as representatives of their category, that is, as women researchers, rather than as researchers with a variety of capabilities and characteristics. In effect, women in leading research positions are treated and judged according to generalized notions about women and men, whereas men are treated as individuals (cf. Kanter, 1977; Snickare, 2012; Wahl et al., 2018).

Understandably, a network for women researchers would be welcome in departments where women are in the minority, but why do women in departments with a majority of women researchers also feel this is important? As described in the introduction to part three of this book, the FRONT project is based on a processual approach to gender, that is, seeing gender as an integral part of everything that goes on in an organization. Gender is something that is *done* in the organization (cf. Acker, 1990; Butler, 1990, 2006; West & Zimmerman, 1987). That means that femininity and masculinity are regarded as social constructs – concepts constructed in relation to one another, where the contents of one cannot be the contents of the other. *Gender coding* is a term used to describe how a profession or position is associated with a particular gender (cf. Andersson, 2003; Baude, 1992; Sundin, 1998; Wahl et al., 2018; Westberg, 2001; Westberg-Wohlgemuth, 1996). Gender coding is characterized by the notion that genders are very different, almost like competing "classes". Wahl, for instance, shows how leadership is linked to the construction of masculinity. "Leadership becomes an instrument for creating an ideal male image. An ideal image in this context signifies an opposite to 'the other', that is, femininity. In practice, leadership becomes a way of expressing and confirming this ideal image" (Wahl, 1996, p. 18, translated from the Swedish). In a study on investment banking, Snickare and Holter (2018) demonstrate how work is constructed as an ideal of masculinity, making it impossible for the men interviewed in the study to leave their jobs despite strong dissatisfaction with working conditions.

Lund (2012) borrows Acker's term of the *ideal worker* (see Acker, 1990) in an examination of how the ideal image of an academic career and worker are constructed. She describes the ideal academic worker as a "superhero", someone who works around the clock, writing research funding applications and articles. They always prioritize work and have no interests or obligations beyond that. The ideal image is created by those with the prerogative of interpretation within the organization (e.g., Wahl, 1996). Since men still hold the majority of leading positions in academia, the image of the ideal academic worker is constructed by men as ideal masculinity, like the image of the ideal leader and investment banker, an individual who, unlike female academics, is not responsible for the care of others. Even in departments where the majority of professors are women, the descriptive norm for senior researchers remains male. This means that men in academia are acknowledged both as researchers and as men, since the concept of man and ideal academic worker are mutually enhancing.

Even in departments where the majority of professors are women, the descriptive norm for top researchers remains male. For female academics, this means having to deal with being women in a profession, a role, constructed by and for men – in addition to being severely underrepresented in their department, as most of the network participants are (cf. Snickare, 2012; Thun, 2018; Wahl, 1992, 2003). This is not about managing work-related demands, but is rather about being a woman in a role created for a man. Women in male-coded professions are expected to balance male and female styles in clothing, language and behaviour by not dressing, expressing themselves or behaving in ways that emphasize femininity. However they must also avoid anything that suggests they are trying to be men (Husu, 2005; Wahl, 1996). Informal workplace activities that are normally gender-segregated, such as sports, are especially hard to handle, since they emphasize gender differences (Wahl, 1996).

In a study based on the interviews with the participants prior to the start of the network, Thun shows that the responsibility for handling "awkward" situations is individualized, and that women handle these matters themselves (Thun, 2018, p. 131).[2] Being mistaken for a student when you are a professor, not being notified when the conference starts

because the organizer did not think you were participating, getting comments on your appearance and clothing from students in their course feedback – these are just a few examples of "awkward" situations that the interviewees handled in their everyday working life. Always being a little bit wrong, not fulfilling expectations of what a professor or conference participant should look like (i.e., male), means forever having to prove your qualifications. Being treated as a woman rather than as a lecturer, in comments on clothing and appearance, has the same effect: the role of lecturer has to be conquered.

Edmondson (2014) defines psychological safety as "a shared belief that the group is safe from interpersonal risk taking". It feels safe to be yourself and show others who you are without running the risk of rejection by the group. This term is used in a variety of contexts to denote organizational structures, work structures, and team interaction. In this context, it also describes the mental and physical space that participants call a safe zone, a free space. In the safe zone, it is possible to be whole, in the sense of being *both* a woman and a successful researcher. Here, women are not gender-labelled and do not need to negotiate the academic, critical, judgemental eye. It is permissible to talk about kids and partners, along with professional victories and setbacks. The structured format for network meetings kept all discussions within the framework of academic positions, but experiencing the forum as psychologically safe seems to have entailed that the academic position was renegotiated to include their *entire* life situation. In the safe zone, no one is a *woman* researcher but a *researcher*, with a life within and beyond academia.

Seeing the Potential to Act

Something that is stressed in all the interviews is the importance of sharing experiences with other women researchers in similar situations. Being able to hear the experiences of others and comparing them with their own not only helps participants see that rejected funding applications are a matter of course for research leaders, but can also increase their own scope of action. Several participants say the network discussions

encouraged them to see themselves in new roles, higher up on the career ladder, and to take active steps to improve their chances of achieving that position. This indicates that identifying, through sharing experiences with others, "who are like me", that is women and top researchers, increases the individual's perception of her scope of action.

All participants also agree that sharing experiences meant that they gained new perspectives on their own situations, and saw new possibilities for what they could do to solve problems, etc. When seen in relation to other people's stories, personal experiences that were previously perceived as one-off events or personal failures start to form patterns and structures. When the individual problem is seen as part of a structure, this opens up new possibilities to act. If, for instance, an individual sees the problem of delivering excellent results in both teaching and publishing as a personal shortcoming, the ability to find a solution is different than if expectations for one's work efforts are considered unreasonable. Likewise, demands and evaluations from students can be handled differently if they are regarded as part of a structure with different expectations for female and male researchers, rather than as personal shortcomings.

Shifting the perception of a problem from personal shortcoming to something outside the individual entails seeing it as "a real problem", something that can and should be dealt with. When personal experiences are aggregated with the experiences of others, patterns and structures become visible. Recognizing these patterns happened gradually, however, and interactively with the other participants. For example, the group strongly resisted the gender theory framework for the project when it was presented at the first network meeting.

The theories encountered strong resistance in the participant group. The dichotomy of structural explanation models and individual agency became very clear. References to gendered structures were perceived as irrelevant and obsolete, positioning women as the passive victims of a male dominated structure. The participants saw structural explanation models as a way of avoiding personal responsibility, and treating women as less aware and in need of targeted support. Alma describes the group's reactions. "We kind of agreed that we weren't interested in this gender

thing." As the project proceeded and the participants were able to share their experiences in trio coaching and discussions, their attitudes towards structural explanation models changed from negative to positive. In the concluding group interview, Alma says,

> I think we became more aware of the facts, and also recognized that there were these domination techniques. So, I think this is more important than I perhaps would like to admit.

Maya agrees with Alma and adds:

> Yes. Maybe we are afraid, or I'm afraid, of receiving negative judgment, or whatever. But if you read situations without judgement, like you read a text, and you see the cold facts, that's the whole point. I admit I am biased. And that's not a man's fault, that's society, how it is. So, to realize this also made me relax. It's like, I know I can work on it, and I see it. Like now, I'm recruiting for a PhD position, and I just see the qualities of the candidate, not their gender or where they come from.

When the participants, through sharing their experiences, gradually discovered how individual episodic stories were part of a structure, their attitudes to gender theory changed and they saw it as a useful tool in the process of change. Understanding how academia is systematically constructed, in some respects, on traditionally male values and concepts that can impede women, was no longer a theoretical model but something based on their own experiences.

The common elements in their stories gave them a sense of being part of a possible process of change that grew into something greater than an individual striving to write better applications, no longer being devastated by rejected funding applications, or blaming themselves for not being able to set boundaries. From at first perceiving their ability to take action and responsibility for their individual situations being limited by an understanding of structures, they later on became more empowered through understanding the structural framework. A structural model of how gender organizes academia created more space to manoeuvre, instead of creating the feeling of being a victim.

Conclusion

As described previously, resilience is an individual's ability to handle change in a positive way, and to recover quickly from setbacks and adversity (Tugade et al., 2004). Resilience can be improved with practice (Rook et al., 2018). It is built through interaction between the environment and the individual's characteristics and skills. For most adults up to retirement, the workplace is the most important environmental factor (Rook et al., 2018).

In the paragraphs above, we show how participants in a network for women researchers become more resilient, mirroring themselves in and sharing experiences with each other. Being in a context with other recognized top researchers without being the odd one out, the woman who has to prove herself to be included, is energizing. In the safe zone, they are not *female* researchers but *researchers* – with permission to talk about and share experiences from their entire life within and beyond academia.

Sharing experiences enhances the ability to cope with adversity and handle problems by changing one's situation. Realizing that even the most prominent researchers have their funding applications rejected, for instance, means that fear of failure need not limit one's actions. Similarly, identifying obstacles as "real problems" rather than individual shortcomings also increases one's ability to act. Sharing experiences and examples also changed the perception of gender theory and models, from limitations to individual freedom of action, to useful tools for navigating an organization. Once the theories were linked to their own reality through concrete examples, participants were able to use them to reveal structural gender inequality.

Participants stressed that it was the genuine exchange of experiences that formed the core of the network. As described earlier, the purpose of the process-oriented network meetings was to provide a safe zone, with a clear, recurring structure, where participants could share their experiences. The idea behind checking in and checking out was to give the workshop a clearly defined framework. By checking in, participants could connect with each other and mentally transfer their attention from their hectic work-life to the workshop theme. Similarly, gathering for a concluding session including reflection and check-out was intended to

give participants a chance to round off the workshop theme and the discussions with each other. The theoretical injections of themes raised by the participants were aimed at adding perspectives on and introductions to trio coaching. Trio coaching is a method in which participants with different experiences, from different academic positions, can share their experiences and coach each other on an equal footing. In our opinion, this is where resilience has developed, while other workshop activities have facilitated the effects of trio coaching.

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Notes

1 Gender balance is described and discussed in greater depth in Chapters 1 and 2.

2 See Chapter 7 for more on internalizing disadvantages and setbacks.