

The Contribution of Gender Theory to Investigating Disability and Professional Work

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Abstract

Historically, the sociology of professions was concerned to explain how closure strategies used by social and political elites sustained professional class and status divisions. More recent debate has focused on the more subtle and informal processes and criteria used by professions to reproduce themselves and shape accepted notions of what constitutes an ‘ideal’ professional. Contemporary pressures on professions to demonstrate greater diversity and inclusivity has produced tensions, described in the gender and professions literature as a dialectic of exclusivity-inclusivity. By drawing on the gender, organization and professions literature, and integrating insights from disability studies, this review identifies ableism, disability, impairment and impairment effects, as key interconnections **concepts** that also contribute to the exclusivity-inclusivity dialectic for professional occupational stakeholders.

Introduction

The expansion of the professional workforce across developed and developing economies has been accompanied by a concomitant growth in the employment of women and black and minority ethnic (BME) workers (Muzio and Tomlinson, 2012). The social and economic impact of professional work in general, and as a mechanism for social mobility for individuals, is important in contemporary societies. Nonetheless, evidence suggests that ‘old inequalities’ endure, particularly within traditional professions such as law, accountancy and medicine (Muzio and Tomlinson, 2012). Professionalization has long been recognised as a political project (Larson, 1977), which is gendered and racialized (MacDonald, 1995). However, despite efforts to move from exclusion to inclusion and calls for further understanding of how gender relates to disability as a source of inequality (Duff and Ferguson, 2012; Foster and Williams, 2014; Muzio and Tomlinson, 2012), the literature exploring gender, disability, and professions remains limited.

The nature of professional work often means employees enjoy greater job autonomy, flexibility, control over their work and access to, or influence over, organisational decision-making, potentially creating positive work environments for a range of individuals. However, attributes of professional work such as autonomy, self-regulation, essentially paternalistic and authoritarian hierarchies (Bate, 2000), and unequal distributions of power, are recognized as limiting the development of alternative forms of organizing work, such as non-managerialist forms of transformational leadership (Currie and Lockett, 2011). Further, professional jobs and in a wider sense successful ‘careers’ are often characterised by limitless commitment. The ‘ideal’ professional worker is expected to put work first, and be available to work long hours and put in physical ‘face-time’, despite advances in new technology (Moen & Roehling, 2005; Blair-Loy, 2003; Perlow, 2012; Williams, Blair-Loy, & Berdahl, 2013; Correll et al., 2014). Features of professional work such as flexibility and autonomy can, therefore, be double-edged swords to women and disabled employees, whilst influencing organisational decision-making may be dependent upon extended presenteeism, and work leaking into other areas of life as ‘greedy institutions’ expect more from professional workers.

The gendered character of job design, organisational processes and embodied labour are well recognised in feminist debates, which have effectively exposed difference and disadvantage and have challenged established workplace norms and assumptions..

Nonetheless, while it is acknowledged that commonly held beliefs about what constitutes an ‘ideal worker’, identifiable in managerial and workplace discourses and practices are gendered (Acker, 1991), little attention has been paid to the way in which non-disability is viewed as an organizing norm and how ableist assumptions also shape professional ‘ideals’ (Mavin and Williams, 2012; Foster and Wass, 2013). In terms of professional work and careers this review therefore, highlights the relevance of exploring how gendered and ableist assumptions affect disabled professionals who attempt to organise their work around ‘impairment effects’, the effects of bodily and cognitive variations for expectations of how work is organised (Williams and Mavin, 2015). This focus reflects a recent concern to enhance understanding of ableism in the context of the workplace (Foster and Wass, 2013; Williams and Mavin, 2012) and bring this knowledge into line with epistemological critiques in organization studies that question how and for whom knowledge is produced through the inclusion of alternative theoretical voices and which challenge the notion of the neutral organization of work.

Professionals, because of their educational qualifications and status in the labour market, are a group that should theoretically have access to working practices that are positively associated with continued employment amongst disabled people. The literature nonetheless, identifies a number of problems around the organisation of work reported by disabled professionals, which can also be found in debates on gender and work. Ashcraft et al’s (2012) insightful diagnostic of contemporary professions’ diversity problem – the dialectic of inclusivity- exclusivity - primarily emphasizes gender and reflects the limited focus of the MOS literature. Our aim in this review is to therefore, identify the extent to which gender and disability interests intersect and differ in professions, with the purpose of developing a research agenda to address the current ‘absence’ of disabled. We acknowledge that gendered and ableist organisational processes, norms and values that shape work may be different, but believe that because debates are often disciplinary and take place in silos, potential synergies remain under-analysed. Our review will therefore draw from the gender, organization and professions literature and the disability related research on professions from within MOS, disability studies and the sociology of work and employment. Our overall objective is to address Metcalfe and Woodhams (2012) call for further gender, diversity and organization theorizing, and Williams and Mavin’s (2012) problematization and reconstruction of disability theorizing in management and organization studies (MOS).

First we summarise the approach taken in this review. The paper is then structured around three key issues that the review suggests are relevant to inform future research; social closure strategies which limit access to and progression in professions; the implications of the regulation and opportunity of professional work in different sectors; and the importance of the concept of the ideal worker in shaping the organization of work. These themes are then brought together to outline a research agenda for future gender and disability research on the organization of professional work.

Review Methodology

This review draws on research from academic journals in the disciplines of sociology, business, management and gender and disability studies. Because debates on inequalities in professional work were historically located in the Sociology of Professions, this provided a logical starting point for the literature review. One of the authors had taught a course that included the sociology of professions and used bibliographical references to first examine past debates, which had focused on ways in which class and status inequalities influenced professional social closure practices, reflecting the dominance of Marxist and Weberian social theory in the 1970s and 80s, and how debates had evolved since. One article, ‘The Sociology of the Professions: Dead or Alive?’ published in 1988 by McDonald and Ritzer, summarised the sterility and narrowness of much academic at this time and the composition of the academic community. For example, in the US, the ‘traits’ certain professions displayed were a key interest (Johnson, 1972; Mac Donald, 1995), though little analysis of the value-judgements that accompanied these was evident.

Meanwhile, in the UK, the focus on socio-economic disadvantage and status in professions, meant little attention had been paid to other groups that had also experienced exclusionary practices. Interestingly, debate in this area was less frequent following publication of this article and renewed interest in social closure or inclusivity/exclusivity practices in professions and the inequalities they generated, emerged in the more generic, inter-disciplinary, gender studies literature. Feminist research on gender and professional work has had a significant influence on, not only the focus of debates, but the types of questions asked in relation to the character of the disadvantage experienced by women. This now substantial literature has thus, shifted the critical focus away from defining professional

traits, and formal practices, towards questioning why such traits were favoured in the first place, by whom and with what consequences? Attention is paid not only to the formal aspects of professional exclusion e.g. credentialism, but importantly, to those informal processes and norms that operate at a more subtle level within professions. Using Google Scholar, Scopus and Web of Knowledge, key articles were identified by employing the key words – gender, disability and professional work/ professions.

Literature analysis: themes

Status, class & gender in the professions: social closure strategies

McDonald and Ritzer (1988), summed up the cul-de-sac that many debates in the sociology of the professions field of enquiry had reached in the late 1980s. In the US, discussion had become dominated by a quest to establish a ‘traits model’ of professions and professional behaviour: defining them in relation to other occupational groups and value-judgements based on stereotypical ‘ideal’ characteristics (Johnson, 1972; Mac Donald, 1995). In the UK meanwhile, Marxist and neo-Weberian sociologists had moved beyond definitional controversies and were more concerned with examining ways in which historically, social stratification had been maintained by limiting access to professions and relationships between professionals and the state. The concept of social closure, at the heart of these debates, examined strategies used by social and political elites to sustain class and status divisions (Weber, 1978; Parkin, 1974; Larson 1977). The regulation of professional membership that served to limit entry, and the role played by credentialism in maintaining a shortage of skills to maximise the value, status and income of existing members, was central to this. While such formal strategies were undoubtedly important in sustaining privilege, Muzio and Tomlinson (2012: 460) point out that they were however, “less successful in capturing the informal processes and criteria through which professions reproduced themselves and maintained their exclusivity”. Controlling entry to a profession is just one level at which social closure operates. Once entry is achieved, some groups then experience informal closure practices that operate within internal labour markets and sustain vertical and horizontal segregation (Sommerlad, 2007; Haynes, 2008; Duff and Ferguson, 2012; Walsh, 2012).

One of the objectives of this review is to identify overlapping concerns between gender, professional work and disability. The literature on inequalities in professions is well developed and began by focusing on status and class in professions, later developing to incorporate gender and race. Apart from some research on single professions (e.g. accountancy, academia) in recent years, disability has remained conspicuous by its absence. In the literature on gender and professional work, Ashcraft et al (2012) usefully summarise two views that have dominated. The ‘absence’ view, which acknowledges the historical exclusion of women and advocates inclusion strategies as a remedy, and the ‘presence’ view, which is concerned with women’s inclusion but their lack of equality within professions. The absence view diagnoses the main diversity problem as the exclusion, omission and control of women as ‘Others’ in professional work”, a process that has been both “symbolic and material” (Ashcraft et al, 2012:470). For example, masculine professional identities have dominated in many professions, which has meant that women as ‘Other’ cannot achieve professional ‘fit’, by virtue of their associated characteristics. The presence view alternatively, by focusing on the conceptualisation of skill with sex in professions, identifies the extent to which the value of the professional work is tied to the material, socially categorized, body of those doing the work. This has been evident where so-called ‘feminine skills’ have been characterised in some professions such as medicine and teaching, as less valuable than ‘male skills, to justify demarcations based on occupational sex-stereotyping (see for example, Witz, 1992). Defining a profession has therefore, entailed a process of comparing it with an apposite ‘Other’: essentially making a link between an occupational role and the people performing it. In this way hierarchies within professions based on who performs what work, have served to confirm the inferior status of women. This is reinforced through the symbolism associated with professions, which also distinguishes them from other lower status occupations, and without this gendered coding of the work, an occupation could not maintain its status as a profession. This leads to an exclusion-as-practice view, where the exclusion of Others provides the contrasting figures against which true professionals become elite experts. Ashcraft et al (2012:472) argue that there are problems with both absence and presence views. They propose a third approach that seeks to theorize both inclusivity-exclusivity, one which, “highlights the relation between exclusion and inclusion (as the presence view wisely advocates) yet stays curious about its evolving manifestations”. By doing so they acknowledge that professions are socially constructed and are therefore not time bound, but subject to social, political and economic change. One such contemporary change being an increased scrutiny of equality and diversity policies and practices, presenting

many professions with the dilemma of: “how do occupational stakeholders encounter and manage the contemporary dialectic of inclusivity-exclusivity?” (Ashcraft et al 2012:474).

Women’s entry into traditional professions such as law and accountancy has only taken place in significant numbers over the past 20-30 years (Muzio and Tomlinson 2012). In accountancy, Duff and Ferguson (2012) refer to a ‘gender explosion’ caused by an expanding service sector that drew on women as a reserve army of labour. As the presence of women became more permanent, gendered social closure practices have however, begun to be challenged, for example, through a greater acceptance of flexible working arrangements. Presence alone, nonetheless, has failed to significantly affect horizontal and enduring vertical gendered occupational segregation, with only 10 per cent of women occupying partner positions (Duff and Ferguson, 2012:79). A similar picture can be found in law where women constitute approximately 44 per cent of legal professionals and the majority of graduates, but occupy only 22 per cent of partnerships (Crompton and Lyonette, 2011; Walsh, 2012:509;). Sommerlad (2002:217) describes women in law as a ‘transient proletariat’ and the operation of what Walsh (2012: 510-11) terms a ‘tournament promotion system’ in private legal practice, where the majority of women are located, contributes to this. An ‘up or out’ model, effectively meaning that those not deemed eligible for partnership are expected to leave the firm, operates. Eligibility for partnership is based on attributes such as ‘cultural fit’ (Wilkins, 2007) and ‘relational capital’ (Dinovitzer et al., 2009; Walsh 2012:511) determined largely by male characteristics. Women report exclusion from social networks and lack the kinds of social and cultural capital that typify men’s experiences in law firms (Sommerlad and Sanderson, 1998:124). Achieving partnership status is also often dependent upon activities that take place outside normal working hours, that are aimed at expanding a firm’s client base (Wass and McNabb, 2006).

Walsh (2012) examines Hakim’s (2000; 2002; 2006) controversial work that suggests it is women’s own preferences and aspirations that self-limit their careers. Whilst drawing important distinctions between her research and Hakim’s, she nonetheless argues that the interplay between organizational structure, culture, policies and women’s preferences and aspirations has been largely ignored. Hakim’s analysis identifies historically significant social, attitudinal and legislative changes that have affected the position of women in the labour market, but she attributes women’s continued lack of progress to their choices preferences, aspirations and life-style choices. Walsh disputes the relative importance Hakim

gives to individual as opposed to structural and societal barriers and challenges Hakim's (2006) portrayal of 'work-centred' women as unresponsive to organizational work-life balance policies. Nonetheless, she cautions against rejecting Hakim's focus on women's aspirations altogether. In her own research Walsh (2012) found women who had strong aspirations to progress to partnership positions in law, did not fit into Hakim's sociological ideal-type of childless individuals, immune to work-life balance. Instead the factors she identified as significant in affecting women's career aspirations were whether they worked in a law firm that already offered flexible working, reduced hours or flexi-time, and whether women in that firm had already achieved partnership status. This led her to conclude that where law firms are active in accommodating women's work-life requirements and particularly where they have embedded such policies into the culture of the organization, there is a positive effect on women's own perceptions of their promotional opportunities.

The above debate is of interest to us because we are not only trying to map intersecting concerns between women and disabled professionals in the labour market, but also potential differences. While we explore these in greater depth in later discussions, at this point we note that alongside structural and organizational barriers, the gender and professions literature suggests that the interaction of organizational culture and individual aspirations (what might be possible) is also important. The relative importance of societal, organizational and individual factors, we speculate, may differ within and between different groups/ communities (e.g. women and disabled people). Thus, for example, workplace adjustments are not usually seen as individual choices or preferences, however, they often fall into the category of flexible working arrangements. Furthermore, aspirations may differ between women (particularly women with childcare responsibilities) and disabled professionals, because flexible working (those practices that make things possible), not only symbolise different things to each group, but may make a crucial material difference (i.e. be more or less significant in determining actual ability to work). It is also important when discussing preferences and choices in relation to flexible working arrangements, to avoid over-emphasizing their individual character. As we saw in Walsh's research, it is prior existence of flexible organizational practices and a supporting organizational culture that positively influences aspirations, therefore, it is essential that organizations 'own' policies and practices.

Disability and professional work

There are far fewer studies of the experiences of disabled people in professional work than there are of gender. This means that whilst there are numerous accounts of women's experiences of professional work, there are few studies of disabled women. Duff and Ferguson's (2007; 2012) UK research of disabled accountants and Basas's (2008) account of the experiences of US disabled women attorney's, are exceptions that we explore below. This paucity of research also applies to state professions, acknowledged by the former Disability Rights Commission (DRC) who carried out a formal investigation into disability and professional work in teaching, social work and health in 2007. The DRC highlighted how historically, a range of complex legislation and statutory guidance has been put in place by the state and regulatory agencies, setting so-called 'competency' to practice physical and mental health requirements, to work in these professions. Arguing that these requirements "frequently led to discriminatory attitudes, policies and practices"(DRC, 2007) the DRC points to how 'professional competence' has been routinely conflated with health in a way that has justified the exclusion of disabled people. It is interesting to note that when the DRC undertook their investigation in England and Wales, health requirements for teachers and social workers in Scotland had already been removed. No evidence existed of a fall in professional standards, but significantly, there was also no evidence that negative attitudes towards disabled professionals had ceased to persist (especially in health). The subsequent abolition of pre-employment health questionnaires under the Equality Act 2010, as a consequence of this DRC investigation, shifted the statutory emphasis away from the screening out of disabled applicants, towards enabling their entry to professions through means of reasonable adjustments. We are not aware however, of any research in the public sector that has evaluated whether this policy change has been accompanied by a change in attitudes which have resulted in increased access to the professions for disabled people.

In the accountancy profession, Duff and Ferguson (2012), like Ashcraft et al (2012) identify two prevalent forms of discrimination against disabled people – "access" and "treatment" discrimination. The first is more likely to be experienced by people with visible impairments: employer attitudes and prejudices being the main contributor (ibid, 2012:85; Cunningham et al 2004; Wilson- Kovacs et al 2008). The second, is experienced once entry to accountancy has been achieved and may vary according to the type of impairment (visible/non-visible), and the point in life when one experienced disability. "Treatment

discrimination”, typically takes the form of limited opportunities for promotion, training and ghettoization in unchallenging work (Duff and Ferguson, 2012:75). The disabled accountants in Duff and Ferguson’s (2012:80) study reported both horizontal and vertical segregation and being confined to non-client facing, office-based roles, leading them to conclude that these were the means by which “accounting firms mediate and facilitate their unequal treatment” (Duff and Ferguson, 2012:87).

Organisational policies and practices, norms and values also contribute to discrimination (Stone and Collela, 1996). However, like the women in the legal profession in Walsh’s (2012) study, it is important to understand how ableist as well as gendered organisational norms interact with the perceptions and aspirations of disabled people. Self-limiting (and self-fulfilling) behaviour can often be a consequence of actual or anticipated discrimination. Ways in which organisations recognise and seek to address ableist and gendered organisational cultures will, therefore, have an effect on individual career aspirations. For example, a disabled person who has struggled to secure workplace adjustments, may, once this has been achieved, stay in the same organisation for fear that if they leave to secure promotion this struggle may be reignited. This can create what Roulstone and Williams (2013) refer to as ‘glass partitions’, to highlight the precariousness of horizontal moves which may limit progression opportunities for disabled people. The metaphor of glass partitions suggesting the move may not be understood without an appreciation of the ways in which impairment effects and context are intertwined in complex ways (Williams and Mavin, 2012). By impairment effects we mean the bodily and cognitive variations labelled impairments, which may be both integral to their experiences and contribute to disabled people’s “expectations, interpretations, and responses to, social contexts” and the legitimacy of requiring working arrangements which reflect this: or alternatively of negating impairment effects in how they negotiate work arrangements (Williams and Mavin, 2015:129). This is distinct from organizational barriers which reflect ableist assumptions that work cannot or should not be organized around impairment effects, to which disabled people may challenge or reject. Whilst this provides a complex picture of the negotiation of work arrangements, we suggest this is potentially an everyday aspect of disabled people’s work experiences which requires further investigation beyond Williams and Mavin’s (2013) study of disabled academics.

Duff and Ferguson’s (2012) research found disabled accountants were marginalised, under-employed and struggling to secure adjustments. They experienced limited

opportunities for professional development or promotion and often preferred to work in small (less attractive career-wise) regional firms, simply because these work environments were more accommodating. The consequences of this were however, reflected in inferior pay, job security, and terms and conditions of employment.

As a profession, accountancy has done little to identify potential barriers to improve access to disabled people. Professional identity and socialization, image and appearance (Grey, 1998), client discourse and rigid accounting practice, have all negatively affected disabled people (Duff and Ferguson, 2012:78). Whilst Brown's (2015) review highlights the possibilities for identity and identity work in organizations is mediated through the interstices of structure and agency, where organizational members may refute or accommodate the identities made available to them, professional embodiment based on a white middle class, male and ableist 'ideal' can act as a closure barrier in traditional professions like law and accountancy. Haynes (2012) uses the notion of physical capital, for example, having the right body image, as fundamental to professionalism. Looking professional is therefore closely associated with 'being' professional, which has significant implications particularly for disabled people with visible impairments. Accountants who become disabled while in work report negative effects on their working life, status and professional identity. Whether a person's impairment is hidden or visible is also known to be significant in determining participants' concepts of themselves and their treatment by others, including whether colleagues 'believed' their disability to be genuine or not (Duff and Ferguson, 2012:85-86). From the narratives of disabled accountants in their study Duff and Ferguson (2012:92) thus conclude "that the dual identities as disabled people and professional accountants are closely inter-linked, rather than opposed".

In a US study of disabled women attorneys Basas (2008) examines the dual oppression experienced by disabled women in the legal profession. Acknowledging that non-disabled women have only relatively recently gained acceptance (Harvard law school admitted its first women in the 1950s), she speculates that "a profession so dominated by paternalistic power and hierarchies, incentives and social (dis) order takes time to reach the actualization of the values it espouses – fairness, respect and justice – in its own professional culture" (Basas, 2008:20). The image of the legal profession in the US as in the UK, has historically been masculine and in the same way that women have been asked to deny their identity to succeed, Basas argues, disabled people are expected to conceal their impairment and difference. Her research found many attorneys reluctant to express their legal rights for

workplace adjustments for fear of stigmatization, while “co-workers and partners could not stop focusing on their disability” (ibid: 55). To be female argues Basas (2008:49) is one step away from the ‘male ideal’, however, to refuse, or to be unable to conceal one’s disability, is to be “perceived as weak by being both female and disabled”.

The concept of ‘covering’ is used by Basas to describe how disabled attorneys try to conceal impairment through self-accommodation. This could mean anything from buying adaptive technologies, selecting job roles that are so-called ‘disability friendly’ and flexible, or as with accountants, becoming self-employed. Covering or self-accommodating strategies reduce the visibility and stigma for disabled people (especially if an impairment is non-visible). It may also allow the disabled person to feel they remain in control, because requests for adjustments can always be refused. As a strategy, covering has also been used by women, however, argues Basas (2008:70-1) “Women battle perceptions of difference and sameness in the same ways as individuals with disabilities.... Yet, employees with disabilities also suffer from employers silent and stereotype-fuelled perceptions of decreased productivity”.

The strategy of covering or self-accommodation by disabled female accountants is also reflected in Williams and Mavin’s (2015) study of disabled academics, which suggested the negation of impairment effects from work remits (work patterns, responsibilities and workloads) was a strategy used to negotiate work contexts where impairment related requirements may have necessitated working in ways which differed from normative practices and expectations. Whilst some disabled academics made their requirements known, and requested changes to working practices, others negated impairment related requirements or chose work contexts, or work roles where standard working practices were easier to meet. The study also highlighted that visibility of impairment, or advising colleagues and managers, did not always ensure agreed work arrangements would endure. Colleagues would forget, or changes in line management would require an ongoing renegotiation of agreements.

The organisation and regulation of professional work: the public, the private and the self-employed

Earlier we examined how the state regulation of professionals through processes of revalidation and periodic re-registration to prove fitness to practice, have operated to the

detriment disabled people. The importance attributed to the different public / private sector employment context, in part relates to the perception that the former provides more conducive employment to disadvantaged groups in the labour market. It is true that women are represented in large numbers within the public sector and historically, it has used a quota system for the employment of disabled staff. Replaced by the DDA in 1995, this tradition of positive action in public sector policy continued with the introduction of Public Sector Equality Duties: used as examples of equality and diversity (E&D) ‘best practice’. However, despite its ‘model employer’ image and the widespread presence of a professional developed HR function, evidence does not support the perception that the public sector is a ‘safe haven’. Instead, these often large, formal and complex bureaucratic arenas are often inflexible and intolerant. This can particularly be the case in the context of negotiating individual workplace adjustments (Foster, 2007) and during times of work intensification and government cuts (see Cunningham et al 2004).

Examining the role of equality and diversity policy and practice in organisations that saw themselves as leaders of ‘best-practice’, Gardiner and Tomlinson (2009) found a number of interesting distinctions between the public and private sectors. For example, in the private sector E&D monitoring was most likely to be well developed where flexible working arrangements (FWA) were linked to business strategy and E&D work provided an evidence base for resourcing (Gardiner and Tomlinson 2009:678-9). By contrast, in the public sector, the rationale for E&D monitoring of policies and practices was related predominantly to compliance with statutory equality duties. How far actions motivated by compliance actually change organisational culture is questionable, though interestingly, it was found that statutory duties gave E&D managers greater influence over the development of management information systems. Of particular significance from Gardiner and Tomlinson’s (2009:684) study was the finding that the influence of E&D managers was dependent upon their “positional power” in the organisation, which they found operated differently in the public and private sectors because of “distinct market and regulatory contexts”.

It has been noted previously that many professional roles should theoretically, provide the type of flexibility in terms of job design that should be more amenable to accommodate women and disabled employees. Basas (2008:14) research into female disabled attorneys consistently cited factors such as “‘fit’, willingness to accommodate needs, flexible work schedules, low stress environments, telecommuting, and disability supportive attitudes” as reasons for choosing employers. She also found that many disabled women who began their

career in the private sector moved to the public sector or self-employment, during their careers because of an increased need for flexibility. However, only the self-employed entrepreneurs in her study identified a workplace that met most of their needs because they created it for themselves. Duff and Ferguson's (2012:88-93) research into disabled accountants also found that they were more likely to be "segmented into self-employment and smaller regional firms; options less attractive to non-disabled people" suggesting that "closure strategies of stratification, segmentation, and sedimentation remain at an early stage". Self-employment offers a potential refuge to both female and disabled professionals in some occupations, allowing for potentially unlimited job redesign and leadership experience that is often denied elsewhere. The risks associated with self-employment are nonetheless high, and this route must be seen as the ultimate form of self-accommodation (Basas 2008:43) with disabled professionals in particular, bearing all the costs of workplace adjustments. Many also sought refuge in self-employment and by doing so encountered more risk, as well as becoming responsible for the provision of their own adjustments. This may also include associated costs if these fall outside of the increasingly narrow support available from Government schemes such as Access to Work in the UK. This reflects Boylan and Burchardt's (2002) study for the Small Business Service in the UK which suggested that self-employment for disabled people may be 'necessary entrepreneurship' rather than 'opportunity entrepreneurship'.

The organisation of work and the concept of the ideal professional worker

If we view, as Larson (1977) does, professionalization as a political project aimed at maximising occupational exclusivity and value, then historically, it is evident that this project has been shaped by elites and influenced by class, gender, race, ableism etc. Failure to achieve professional status is also associated with the extent to which 'fit' cannot be achieved with an 'ideal' norm, that has been white, male, middle-class and ableist (Acker, 1990; Foster and Wass, 2013; Rees Davies and Frink, 2014; Kmec et al. 2014). History provides examples of semi-professions, such as nursing and primary school teaching, which due to feminization have lacked political and economic power and have struggled to achieve full professional status (Witz, 1992; Bolton and Muzio, 2008). Norms surrounding the 'ideal worker' "are therefore, built into the structure and culture of the workplace" (Kmec et al. 2014:64).

Professional work is skilled work often conferring on the post holder a high degree of flexibility, autonomy, control and independent decision-making. Flexibility for many professionals can, however, be a double-edged sword. Professional norms can demand long working hours, presenteeism ('face time'), work devotion and after hours training and networking (Blair-Loy, 2003; Cha, 2010). The taken-for-granted but unproven correlation between long hours and productivity is often accompanied by an expectation that the public sphere of work will take precedence over the private, or that the boundaries between the two are permeable. Working time is indeterminate and overtime insufficiently demarcated. Employees who do not, or in the case of disabled staff, sometimes cannot, fulfil these 'ideals', report experiencing ill-treatment in the workplace (Williams, 2000; Kmec et al., 2014; Foster, 2007; Fevre et al., 2012). This ill-treatment includes a 'flexibility stigma', distinct from the structural flexibility that often characterises professional work, it applies to workers who seek or it is "assumed by others to need, workplace accommodations" (Cech and Blair-Loy, 2014:87). Perceived as violating ideal worker norms, such individuals often report stereotyping, labelling them as uncooperative, uncommitted, inflexible and poor organizational citizens. The consequences of which negatively impact upon promotion and remuneration (c.f. Gardiner and Tomlinson, 2009; Duff and Ferguson, 2012; Cech and Blair-Loy 2014).

A study by Kmec et al. (2014) found women were more likely to report perceived ill-treatment after returning to work following parenthood and flexible working, than men. A number of potential explanations are advanced by the investigators, including the possibility that men better internalize 'ideal' norms as a consequence of the association between masculinity and breadwinning and, that men are more likely to view ill-treatment as 'deserved' because taking time off for childcare deviates from ideal worker (and masculine) behaviour. In terms of long-term consequences, Kmec et al (2014:78) also suggest that employers may be less likely to disinvest in fathers who adopt flexible working patterns, because flexible working arrangements for men are more likely to be viewed as a temporary abhorration. Further questions are, however, raised by Cech and Blair-Loy's (2014) research into academic scientists and engineers: chosen because flexibility is integral to their work. Both mothers and fathers in their study reported experiencing flexibility stigma, despite the fact that such stigma was "semi-detached" or dislocated from the *actual* requirements of their jobs. They identified broader cultural beliefs "about" work and what the workplace community expected, as most important in maintaining flexibility stigma (Cech and Blair-

Loy 2014:104), suggesting its roots stem from ‘ideal worker’ norms, not the practical requirements of a job. An additional finding of relevance, was that the very existence of a flexibility stigma in the workplace and the cultural schema that supported it, had a negative impact on productivity, competitiveness and staff turnover. This was the case even amongst those who were not parents, because it created a working environment where it was perceived that work-life balance and job satisfaction were undervalued (Cech and Blair-Loy 2014:104-105).

A number of themes of interest to disabled employees emerge from research that has primarily focused on the consequences of parental flexibility and work. Foster’s (2007) study of the experiences of disabled employees seeking workplace adjustments, also reports ill-treatment including bullying, so too has subsequent research by Fevre et al (2013). The finding by Kmec et al (2014) that perceived permanence, or continued uncertainty surrounding requirements for flexible working were important predictors of flexibility stigma, could also apply to disabled employees requesting long term adjustments. This is particularly important if, as suggested, employers disinvest in employees if their flexible working arrangements are long term. Similarly, from a disability perspective we are interested in Cech and Blair-Loy’s (2014:87) findings that suggest flexibility stigma is more likely to be attributed by employers and co-workers to an employee when it is believed it is “an individual’s choice to utilize work-life policies”. Does this mean disabled employees are less likely to experience stigma because workplace adjustments are rarely justified on the grounds of ‘choice’? Or should we assume that the extent to which disabled workers avoid flexibility stigma may be dependent upon managers and co-workers appreciating the integral character of workplace adjustments, often as a prerequisite for undertaking a job role? If certain types of flexible working arrangements are universally stigmatised, one wonders whether co-workers and managers care whether these were granted by choice, particularly if they are part of a more general “*cultural schema*” around ideal worker norms operate (Cech and Blair-Loy, 2014).

Research on the interrelationship between flexible working and equality has predominantly concentrated on the distributional or relative benefits of FWA for either employers or employees (Perrons, 2000; Sheridan and Conway, 2001; Smithson et al., 2004). It is moreover, generally accepted that where flexible working is based on the needs of employers or business, it is strategically ‘just’ (Fleetwood, 2007). An increase in statutory rights to request FWA has led to an equivalent rise in individual workplace bargaining,

particularly where union equality bargaining is under-developed or absent (de Vroom, 2004:674). This individualization extends to the negotiation of workplace disability adjustments, as illustrated in research by Foster (2007) and Foster and Fosh (2010). One significant consequence of this, is that employers present the outcomes of FWA negotiations as ‘concessions’ to individual employees (Gardiner and Tomlinson, 2009; Foster and Fosh, 2010), leaving inflexible and sometimes dysfunctional organizations and their wider policies and practices unchanged.

In Gardiner and Tomlinson’s (2009) investigation of ‘leading edge’ diversity management organizations, they examine the extent to which FWA policy initiatives were driven by business strategy or legal compliance. They provide a number of examples of collective FWA developed by organizations, which in most cases were introduced prior to statutory regulation, suggesting that business strategy rather than legislation was the prime influence on policy. Examples of organizations engaged in strategic approaches to E&D include, a company that offered flexible working to attract and retain older and disabled employees and a media organization that wanted to increase the presence of disabled people through traineeships, by providing support to managers to make adjustments and improving the working environment generally for disabled people (Gardiner and Tomlinson, 2009:681). For the purposes of this article, it is of interest that they found a number of organizations attempting to address social group and structural inequalities through job redesign. For example, a bank redesigned the post of area director to make it accessible to people wishing to job share and to encourage more women into management positions. A telecommunications company were actively looking at redesigning work to open up access to employment for disabled people. In each of these cases Gardner and Tomlinson (2009:683) observed that the role of E&D managers was central to policy development and job design and that they acquired “positional power to effect progressive organisational change, including addressing structural inequalities”. In organizations where statutory regulations were viewed as more important to the development of policies, by contrast managers reported that relying on ‘best practice’ arguments to drive FWA was ineffective. Mindful of academic criticism of the business case for equality Gardiner and Tomlinson (2009:683) say that “Whilst business case rhetoric around flexibility and diversity was pervasive across organisations, this analysis suggests that the rhetoric conceals a range of organisational approaches which do not fit neatly within managing diversity or equal opportunity paradigms”. Perlow and Kelly (2014:112) suggest a common principle which underpins

flexible approaches to work is the ‘accommodation’ of the worker to fit work demands, doing little to challenge exclusionary work practices. This is despite significant changes resulting from globalization and technological advances which lead to changing expectations in “when and where work is done”. Rather than accommodation of the worker, they argue a redesign of work is required which shifts the approach from one premised on allowing some workers (e.g. those with caring responsibilities) to ‘work differently’, to a collective change in work arrangements. Such a move can effectively reduce any penalty certain workers may experience from asking for different arrangements, and as Perlow and Kelly (2014) suggest, engage all workers in the critique of work arrangements to improve the quality of working lives.

Discussion: disability, gender and profession: towards a distinctive disability research agenda

This review has highlighted a number of areas that can inform a future research on gender, disability and professions. There are areas of similarity in the literatures which suggest women and disabled people face comparable barriers to participation in professional work, and issues that are raised by the disability literature reviewed which need to be explored in relation to and with an intersectional gender lens.

Similarities include the tendency to individualize flexible working practices which then mean these are seen as a ‘problem’ for individual women and disabled employees rather than a collective issue requiring organisational or professional change. Moving away from an individualization, or ‘accommodation’ perspective (Perlow and Kelly, 2013) to challenge less inclusive work arrangements brings to the fore the ideal worker norm which is much debated in gender, if less so in disability research. We suggest that fusing a concern for gender and disability brings ableism to a critique of ideal worker norms, to further understand how assumptions associated with the organization of professional work limit opportunities or create difficulties for disabled people and for professions seeking to address equality and inclusion in a meaningful way.

Where disability may extend the research agenda is the potential of impairment effects and ableism to explicate Ashcraft et al.’s (2013) ‘third approach’ which suggests

paying attention to the emerging manifestations of professions attempts to maintain both social closure whilst attempting to address equality for differing social groups. This may challenge notions of fitness to practice premised on 'health' for some professional groups as the DRC (2007) argue for teaching, social work and health, or reveal unexpected professional standards/professional practice tensions in others where 'health' is not so closely tied to the professional identity, and where there are less well articulated expectations of how the profession should be practiced. It would also be interesting to gain a deeper understanding of how such expectations change over professional career life cycles including studying, qualifying, registering and working in differing professions or even country contexts. This brings the relationship between professions and work organizations to the fore to explore the implications of expectations from either body for disabled professionals' experiences.

By incorporating impairment effects and ideal worker expectations we also suggest future research can explore the extent to which disabled professionals are negating impairment effects to 'fit' with professions or organizational expectations. The disability literature suggests negating impairment effects to fit organizing requirements, turning down intra-organizational opportunities or covering by compensating for the lack of organizational provision by buying disability related equipment to self-accommodate are possible strategies which in turn may contribute to limiting the development of alternative forms of organizing work.

A further area of potential future research relates to the extent to which these experiences and disabled professionals self-organizing strategies are influenced by the visibility/invisibility and type of impairments, and the point at which impairment is acquired. The literature explored in this paper has highlighted the potential for discrimination in terms of access to employment (related to visible impairments) or treatment in employment (related to invisible impairments). In addition, the possibility of negative perceptions of suitable professional identity where bodily or cognitive variation deviates from normative expectations. An area where the gender literature adds an additional dimension is the possibility for disinvestment when workers acquire impairments. The gender literature has suggested this is an employer response to professional women acquiring caring responsibilities and adopting flexible working arrangements which was not reflected for men, as caring responsibility related flexibility was perceived as temporary. Exploring the extent to which acquired impairments (or perceived acquired impairments for those whose impairment becomes known), impairment type and impairment effects (for example fluctuating or stable)

could contribute further to current debates on flexible work arrangements and the construction of professional work. The intersections of these issues for disabled female professionals with caring responsibilities is of particular interest. These literatures bring our attention firmly to the impaired and gendered body.

The issue of employer responses is further highlighted by the research suggesting market and regulatory factors, drivers for monitoring equality and diversity, the position of equality agents such as E&D managers, private or public sector location, employment status (employed/self-employed) all impact on organizational equality practices governing the support available for disabled professionals. The literature reviewed suggests disabled professionals may both assess employers on the basis of the support available, and move on or out, where necessary, to particular work environments to secure the flexibility or work practices they needed. Extending Duff and Ferguson (2012) and Basas's (2008) concern that professional closure strategies lead to stratified, segmented and sedimented locations for disabled female accountants and female attorneys (respectively), may provide greater insights into the extent to which different professions (and possibly professions operating in different sectors) offer less scope for disabled professionals to flourish or choice of potential work roles and contexts. The extent to which expectations of long hours, productivity and private/public conflict inter-weave with such factors is also suggested to be of interest in contributing to a narrowing of opportunities for disabled professionals.

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