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GIVING AND RECEIVING: GENDERED SERVICE WORK IN ACADEMIA

Abstract

Deploying the perspective of 'relational work', this article investigates the mechanisms behind the gender-unequal distribution of academic service. The concept of relational work is used to analyse how men and women in academia balance collective against individual interests when agreeing or disagreeing on service tasks. Four types of relational work are identified: compliance, evasiveness, barter and investment, with compliance being more common among women, evasiveness and barter being more common among men and investment being tied to temporality in a gendered pattern. The article shows that men are more successful in pursuing individual interests against service demands and how this depends on their relational work as well as organisational role expectations, reducing women's prospects of 'saying no'. The study is based on qualitative interviews with 163 associate and full professors in the social sciences and CV data on their service contributions.

Keywords: Academia, gender, relational work, academic service, individual vs collective interests

Introduction

In the last few decades, scholars have started to focus on the role of service in academia. Academic service can be defined as activities undertaken to fulfil the organisational and administrative needs of one's workplace or profession. There is no consensus on a more

explicit definition of the concept. Some researchers use broad definitions, including research- and teaching-related activities; others equate academic service with 'administration' (for different definitions, see Macfarlane, 2005, 2007; Neumann and Terosky, 2007; Lawrence et al., 2012; Beatson et al., 2017; Heijstra et al., 2017a, b). Many scholars, including ourselves, operationalise academic service by outlining a series of specified activities (e.g. Macfarlane, 2005, 2007; Lawrence et al., 2012; Hanasono et al., 2019).

One subject discussed in the literature on academic service is how the increased use of research metrics affects academics' responsibilities in relation to teaching and service. According to Macfarlane (2011), faculty are moving away from an all-round academic role towards a differentiation of roles focused on *either* research, teaching *or* service, with status and resources being attached to those pursuing the research track. This specialisation, in combination with accountability demands, a diminishment of tenured positions and the rise of a management culture, has, according to Macfarlane (2005), led to a withering of faculty's identification with their 'academic community', here understood as their workplace as well as their discipline (Macfarlane, 2005: 307). Similarly, an article by Beatson et al. (2021), persuasively titled 'The gradual retreat from academic citizenship', shows how publication metrics and other performance measures have made academics less interested in service functions. Beatson et al. (2021) tie this decline in academic citizenship to the replacement of a collegiality-based model of university operation with a new public management model focused on competition and individual accountability.

A central finding in the literature on academic service is that women undertake more service functions than men (O'Meara et al., 2017; Guarino and Boden, 2017; Babcock et al., 2022). Studies show that women are asked to conduct more service tasks (O'Meara et al., 2017) and that they are more inclined to accept service requests once asked (Babcock et al., 2022). Another finding is that different kinds of service are gendered, meaning that men pursue more prestigious service roles (e.g. committee chairing and editorships), whereas women are more involved in low-status working groups, mentoring and student and faculty service that does not show on their CVs (Bird et al., 2004; O'Meara et al., 2017; Hanasono et al., 2019).

Our study extends this research. We develop the perspective of relational work (Zelizer, 2012; Bandeji, 2012), not previously used in studies of academia, in an analysis of the processes leading to an unequal service load among men and women faculty. In our study, 'relational work' refers to the balancing of individual against collective interests when faculty take on, or do not take on, service tasks. Relational work may either occur in personal interaction or more indirectly, when participants invest time and efforts in service activities in the hope of future rewards from other people. The aim of this article is not just to demonstrate a gendered distribution of service work in academia but to offer a detailed analysis of the mechanisms behind this distribution. While some studies explain women's over-involvement in academic service with reference to their social skills and emotional intelligence (Park, 1996; Hanasono et al., 2019: 87), we emphasise the relational work skills faculty need when they decide, avoid, agree or disagree to take on different service tasks. It takes adeptness to balance, on the one hand, the expectations of service

contributions represented by management and, on the other, the endeavour to secure one's own research time, and as we will demonstrate, men are more successful in this than women.

Achievements in relational work do not depend on individual skills and strategies alone but also on one's position and status and on the rights and duties this position/status is associated with. When engaging in relational work, faculty members draw on organisational templates or the underlying ideals and assumptions that relate advantage and disadvantage, status and subordination to certain categories of people in an organisation (Acker, 1990; Bates, 2021). Relational work is a question of handling exchange in a way that is 'acceptable'. What is acceptable, however, is not solely defined by the involved parties but also by the context in which relational work occurs and by the social expectations attached to specific work functions and groups of participants, here men and women. As we will show, relational work is also a question of deciding which faculty members have the right to secure themselves research time (more often men) and which ones have a restricted right to do this (more often women) – a decision that may impede women's career progress and advance that of men.

The research questions of this article are: What are the mechanisms behind the unequal distribution of internal and international service tasks among men and women in academia, and more specifically: How do men and women faculty engage in relational work when negotiating the balance between self-interest and the collective interests of their workplace and/or profession? The article is based on 163 qualitative interviews with associate and full

professors in the broader fields of economics, political science and sociology at three Danish universities, as well as CV data on their service contributions.

Previous research on service in academia

Although definitions of academic service vary (Macfarlane, 2005; Neumann and Terosky, 2007; Lawrence et al., 2012; Beatson et al., 2021; Heijstra et al., 2017a,b), most studies conclude that it counts less than research and teaching when candidates are evaluated for hiring and promotion (Park, 1996; Macfarlane, 2007; Misra et al., 2011; Cruz-Castro and Sanz-Menendez, 2021; Westoby et al., 2021). Service work 'is not easily "measurable" in the modern parlance of "inputs", such as teaching hours, or "outputs", such as published research papers' (Macfarlane, 2005: 309). Macfarlane (2007: 266) suggests using a 'line of visibility' that divides esteemed from disesteemed forms of service, for instance, being head of department or chairing a university committee, as compared to student and collegial service disconnected from prestigious leadership roles (Macfarlane, 2007; see also Bird et al., 2004; O'Meara et al., 2017; Hanasono et al., 2019).

In the book *The No Club*, Babcock et al. (2022) show that women conduct more non-promotable, non-recognised academic service work than men, and that this is an important explanation as to why women experience more challenges when it comes to hiring and promotion. Another contribution to gender research in this field is Guarino and Boden's (2017) much-cited survey study, confirming that women are more involved in academic service than men. These findings are echoed in the study by O'Meara et al. (2017) using faculty's daily registries of their job assignments. This study demonstrates that women are

more involved in time-consuming small service and teaching tasks, whereas men spend more time on research. On average, women reported spending six hours less than men on research per week and more time on campus service and student advising (O'Meara et al., 2017).

Two concepts used for service tasks that are unevenly distributed among men and women are 'academic housework' (Heijstra et al., 2017a, b) and 'institutional housekeeping' (Bird et al., 2003; Guarino and Borden, 2017). Heijstra et al. (2017a: 767) discuss the large amount of time women faculty spend on 'student-related academic housework' instead of doing research and 'career-making' housework. Yet another way to approach service work is to make a distinction between 'task-oriented service' and 'relational service', with the latter being less acknowledged and dominated by women (Hanasono et al., 2019). Hanasono et al. (2019) use the term 'secret service' to highlight the invisible service work conducted by many women. Women faculty are, according to these scholars, more engaged in mentoring, low-status committee work and 'emotional labour', whereas men take on leadership roles in committees and editorships (Hanasono et al., 2019).

In summary, previous research shows that service work in academia receives little recognition when faculty are evaluated for hiring and promotion. Studies indicate that the introduction of performance measurement systems with their focus on, primarily, research output and, secondarily, teaching input may further diminish the recognition of service work in academia. Women have been shown to do more academic service work than men, especially low-status tasks. However, there is little clarity or agreement when it comes to

specifying which service activities should be considered task-oriented vs relational, prestigious vs non-prestigious or acknowledged vs invisible, and which processes lie behind the gendered pattern of service work.

We contribute to this research by conducting an in-depth analysis of men and women participants' involvement in different forms of service, identifying gender differences in relational work. Neumann and Terosky (2007) call for further research on the 'giving and receiving' aspects of service in academia, suggesting that some forms of service are associated with more personal and professional benefit than others. Tying the question of giving and receiving to relational work, our article provides detailed information about the ways in which faculty balance, and are allowed to balance the pursuit of individual interests against collective interests. In some cases, we identify giving without receiving; in others, we identify receiving without giving. In other cases again, participants make a deal with management, whereas in others, academic service takes the form of investment in the future.

Relational work

We propose 'relational work' as a key concept for analysing academic service and its gendered character. The concept has been used in different contexts, such as in linguistic studies of politeness and research on emotional labour and social care (for reviews, see Zelizer, 2012; Garcia, 2014; Bandelj, 2020). We are inspired by economic sociology, where the concept has been used to analyse how people handle beneficial transactions when different social interests are at play. Zelizer (2005, 2012) introduced the concept to

economic sociology, defining relational work as the creative efforts people make in managing interpersonal relationships when exchanges of benefits are involved (Zelizer, 2012: 149). She also stresses that relational work operates within boundaries set by structural and cultural constraints as well as in response to historically accumulated meanings (Zelizer, 2012).

Bandelj (2012, 2020) specifies that relational work is not a synonym for sociality: 'It is relational *work*, in the sense that it is an intentional effort or activity directed towards the production or accomplishment of a goal' (Bandelj, 2012: 179, italics in original). In specific organisational settings, these goals may be more or less other- or self-directed. Fletcher (1999), for instance, analyses the strategies people use at workplaces to validate their colleagues' and/or their own expertise, differentiating between mutually empowering and team-creating practices on the one hand and self-achieving practices on the other. In this perspective, relational work is a combination of collectively-oriented and competitive enactments, with the weight of the two components varying across individual actors, contexts and interests at play.

As pointed out in previous research, relational work is more pertinent in ambiguous settings than in settings characterised by clear expectations and role definitions (Zelizer, 2012; Schilke and Rossman, 2018). This is because non-standardised settings leave more room for negotiations about investments and rewards and more variation in outcome, dependent on participants' bargaining skills. In academia, service is a less scripted activity than research and teaching. Most university departments do not have standards for how much or

what kinds of academic service faculty should conduct, whereas research and teaching demands tend to be more clearly specified. The obscurity surrounding academic service means that relational work skills become important when it comes to deciding which tasks individual faculty members should take on and which they (or some of them) are allowed to reject. By 'relational work skills', we do not refer to empathy or social competence in general but skills to strike a balance between one's own and others' interests and to resist the demands of powerful counterparties without ruining one's relationships with them. This balance, however, is related to organisational expectations regarding which faculty members should conduct what kind of tasks, meaning that participants enter the negotiations from very different starting points.

In classical studies of men and women in organisations, gender is seen as one of the fundamental principles for creating and maintaining organisational structures (Acker, 1990, 2009; for reviews of the 'gendered organisations' literature, see Britton, 2000 and Bates, 2021). Language and culture support the divisions between the behaviours that are expected from women and men, respectively, to the extent that the divisions are internalised and comprehended as natural (Risman and Davis, 2013). Relational work creates a link between the interactional and institutional levels of organisations, rendering the social arrangements of work divisions between men and women legitimate. Hence, relational work is a reflection of and contribution to gendered structures, also representing built-in mechanisms of social control. Issues of allocation – about who is to do what, and what activities are more worthy of recognition than others – may seem gender-neutral but are often not. Relational work in academia involves a complex of normative expectations regarding

men's and women's 'duties' that sustain relationships of inequality. In this perspective, relational work and the resulting uneven distribution of service activities between men and women faculty may be a central mechanism behind the unequal career prospects of men and women in academia.

Developing the concept of relational work (Zelizer, 2012; Bandelj, 2012, 2020) in a study of a gendered (academia), we identify four types of relational work, leading to different service profiles: compliance (doing service work without reward), evasiveness (doing as little service work as possible), barter (exchanging service work with reward) and investment (doing service work in the hope of a future reward). As will be shown, compliance is more often (but not exclusively) found among women, whereas evasiveness and barter are more often (but not exclusively) found among men. Investment is gendered in the sense that women tend to describe investment with expectations of rewards sometime in the future, whereas men invest in order to gain more immediate rewards. Before analysing the four types of relational work, we describe the context and methods of the study.

Context and methods

Like all institutions of higher education in Denmark, the three universities included in the study are publicly funded. They are internationally oriented, with a considerable proportion of faculty (varying from one-third to half of the staff members) being from other countries. The student-to-faculty ratio is similar across the three universities: 22–25 students per faculty member. The percentage of women varies between disciplines, with the proportion

being lower among economists (25%–30%) than in the fields of political science and sociology (30%–45%).

The participants are 96 associate professors (55 men, 41 women) and 67 full professors (41 men, 26 women). Compared to other studies in the field, our participation rate is exceptionally high. Among the invited associate professors, 82% agreed to participate; the corresponding proportion among full professors was 87%. The average age of the associate professors was 42 years, and that of the full professors was 48.5 years at the time of the interviews. The participants work within the broader areas of economics (58), political science (63) and sociology (42). We invited faculty who had reached their recent position (associate or full professor) less than 12 years ago (around 2010 or later). This criterion was used because we were interested in the cohorts that have received tenure under the still relatively new performance measurement system. In this system, the criteria for hiring and promotion have increasingly become dominated by publication metrics and successes in external funding, a development that may further decrease the acknowledgement of service activities in academia (Macfarlane, 2011; Beatson et al., 2021).

We selected qualitative interviews because we were interested in the participants' personal experiences with academic service and the detailed mechanisms, here conceptualised as relational work, behind the gendered distribution of service activities. To attain a more complete numerical picture of the interviewees' service work, we also collected information from their CVs, which in 60% of the cases were updated and publicly available on their departments' websites. As regards the remaining 65 participants, we asked them to

send details about their service activities via e-mail, which 50 of them did. Hence, the analysis of service activities is based on interview data and CV data for 91% of the participants and only interviews for 9%.

The interviews were semi-structured, meaning that we combined a thematic interview guide with a range of improvised follow-up questions varying somewhat from interview to interview, dependent on emerging themes. Most interviews lasted between 1 and 1.5 hours (five were shorter, six longer); the average length was 70 minutes. The interviews were conducted during spring and summer 2021 (associate professors) and summer and autumn 2022 (full professors) by the two authors of this article. All interviews were recorded and transcribed in full.

We started with an inductive analysis of academic service among associate professors (the group we interviewed first). Data were analysed in NVivo, identifying all text segments containing accounts on service. We sorted the material along two simple service dimensions: internal departmental or organisational service and international service to the profession. This categorisation was selected because previous research describes a difference in status between internal service and international service (Bird et al., 2004; O'Meara et al., 2017) and because we expected women to be over-represented in the former and men in the latter. We then categorised the participants into three groups, dependent on their level of internal and international service activities: high, middle and low, and analysed the gender differences in their interview accounts and CVs. This classification was based on detailed questions about service activities in the interviews as well as

information derived from participants' CVs on leadership and coordinator roles, committees and working groups, supervision, conference and seminar organisation, editorial work, etc.

At this stage, we became aware of the phenomenon of relational work and its gendered character. We consulted the relevant theoretical literature and developed a conceptual framework for our analysis. Using this frame, we were able to focus on the giving and receiving aspects of the participants' engagement in academic service (Neumann and Terosky, 2007) and to investigate how men and women in academia balance individual interests against collective interests when they agree or disagree to service activities.

The project follows the Danish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (Ministry of Higher Education and Science, 2021) for informed consent, participant anonymity and secure handling and storing of data. Participants were guaranteed full confidentiality, and we have anonymised individuals, departments and universities. We do not reveal individual participants' age, discipline or affiliation, and no personal matters, anecdotes or events that can be tied to individuals, their departments or universities are reported. We have used encrypted data storage and data sharing. In four cases, participants asked to see the quotes used from their interviews before they were published, which we agreed to.

The following sections present analyses of the participants' internal and international service work, first with the help of a classification of them into three groups based on the

interviews and CV data, and then by presenting interview accounts describing the mechanisms behind this distribution.

Distribution of service activities

A general picture of gendered service contributions is shown in Table 1 (in the Appendix): women are over-represented in the group of 'high' performers, regardless of which type of service activity we review. As regards internal service, 37% of the women associate professors, compared to 11% of the men, report time-consuming organisational positions (such as head of studies or section/centre leader). At the opposite end of the scale, almost two-thirds of the men associate professors, compared to one-third of the women, qualify themselves for the designation 'low' when it comes to internal service. Characteristic of this group is that their primary organisational contribution is supervision of one to two PhD students or membership in one to two low-intensity working groups – or, for a smaller group of men (but no women), no service contributions at all. At full professorship level, men's participation in service work is greater. The group of high-performing men is now one-quarter, whereas the lowest-performing group constitutes 41%. However, with 60% in the highest group of service providers and only 15% in the lowest, women remain at the forefront of internal service work.

A similar pattern can be found regarding international service; women are much more involved than men. Thus, among women, 34% of the associate professors and 39% of the full professors are placed in the group of high performers in international service, with the corresponding numbers among men being 11% and 15%. The basis for being positioned in

this group is the fulfilment of two or more of the following criteria: editorship or associate editorship of international journals; extensive organisational experience (conferences, streams, sessions) and wide-ranging experience with international assessment work (of dissertations, associate and full professorships, research applications). In contrast, the low-performing group, where men are over-represented, consists of faculty whose main or only international service contribution is reviewing journal papers (which all participants have experience with), sometimes in combination with a limited organisational or assessment contribution, for instance as coordinator of faculty seminars for one semester or evaluator of one to two PhD theses at other (often Scandinavian) universities.

We now turn to the analysis of the mechanisms behind this gendered distribution of internal and international service tasks by using the four forms of relational work mentioned above: compliance, evasiveness, barter and investment. Because of the comprehensiveness of our interview material and the variety of service activities analysed, we focus on accounts from associate professors in the first two sections, after which we turn to the interviews with full professors (for information about the distribution of forms of relational work, see Table 2 in the Appendix). When presenting quotes from the interviews, we refer to participants by using the letters W (for women) and M (for men), followed by a randomly assigned participant number.

Academic service and relational work

Compliance

Compliance refers to situations where faculty, willingly or unwillingly, accept a high level of service activities because they feel obliged to do so. This form of relational work is most common among women, and especially among associate professors, where about two-thirds of the women describe situations of compliance, as compared to one-fifth among men (Table 2 in the Appendix). This finding is in accordance with previous research showing that women are both asked to conduct service tasks more often than men and more inclined to accept the requests when asked (O'Meara et al., 2017; Babcock et al., 2022).

Asked why they take on so many service tasks, two women associate professors say: 'I haven't thought much about why I do it, but we all have to contribute to the running of this department, don't we' (W63); 'I find it difficult to reject management's requests because I think the conclusion that is drawn is that you as a woman are not able to work hard and you're just whining and complaining' (W74). W74 further explains that she does not 'get into disputes' with her Head of Department about service tasks because 'that wouldn't be appropriate' and because 'in our department these things are settled in peace and order, and for me, it's natural to help out when my services are needed' (W74). The self-evident way in which W59, W74 and many other women accept service tasks can hardly be explained by individual preferences alone. Rather, these participants explain that their extensive involvement in service activities is an 'integral' (W63) or 'mandatory' (W74) part of being an academic, and that resistance – or even hesitance when it comes to accepting service tasks – would be a sign of incapacity or disloyalty.

Part of the interviewees' reasoning on academic service is the conception that women are better at service activities than men. One woman says: 'There are literally male professors and associate professors that I have never seen [in service functions]. They are never asked, and people are like, "Yeah, but he is not going to be really good at it, or he is going to delay the process"' (W67). According to several women, the idea that women faculty are more competent service providers than men faculty is shared by management at their department. W78 explains: 'Often, my HoD [Head of Department] says: "Could you please do this because if I ask other people, they are not going to do this well", and these other people are usually men'. W59 tells a similar story, adding that management's conception of women's superior service competences is 'a mix of truth and flattering that I often pander to; it's nice to be told that you are good at these things' (W59).

Characteristic of the accounts describing compliance is that they refer to relational work where there are no direct trade-off agreements or exchange of rewards – except for 'good vibes' (W66) and management's and participants' satisfaction with getting things done. Participants following this pattern spend months of work hours fulfilling organisational needs without any security as to how this will affect their academic progress. Among the women associate professors classified as high performers based on their CVs (Table 1 in the Appendix), many are attentive to their over-involvement in service but feel things cannot be changed. Other women in the high-performing group seem to be unaware of the fact that they conduct far more service than many of their colleagues and that other faculty members, and especially men, consider service activities as something you can opt in and out of.

Evasiveness

The interviews with men associate professors show a very different relationship to internal service than the one reviewed above. In fact, more than half of them practise evasive relational work, meaning that they actively try to avoid these kinds of tasks, e.g. committee work or leadership and coordinator roles. One man explains: 'My strategy in relation to administrative tasks is maximal minimisation' (M14). Another man says: 'When the HoD asked me to be part of this committee, I said: "You know I am not lazy; I always work hard, but don't ask me to be involved in bureaucratic processes. I think all these committees are completely useless" […] Obviously, that was okay; at least he didn't ask me again' (M37).

Completing women participants' conception that women are better service providers than men, several men identify themselves as poor or incompetent when it comes to service tasks (which none of the women say about themselves). One man explains: 'On the rare occasion when service things land on my table, I tell the HoD: "Are you sure this is the right address? Administration is not my core competence". We joke a little about that, and my HoD typically agrees [laughs]' (M51). A strategy used by some men is to accept a minimum of small service tasks in order not to be burdened with more time-consuming ones: 'I use the tactics of signing up for some trivial things, being part of a committee that meets a few times a year, things like that […] When the HoD or Head of Studies asks me to be part of some working group, I can always refer to these activities, "Look, I already have this and this and this; I simply can't handle more at the moment"' (M23). Another strategy

is to use as little time as possible on the organisational tasks one actually gets involved in: 'You can devote much energy and time into doing something, committee work, and all of that, and you can engage in it just enough […] Our HoD doesn't check who is doing what in these groups [committees and working groups]' (M19). These accounts – presenting oneself as incompetent, admitting involvement in as few organisational tasks and as little engagement in them as possible – can best be understood if related to the low status many (if not most) men associate professors attribute to service work. A final quote exemplifies this: 'It also has to do with how big you feel you are. It's a kind of status thing to feel you are allowed to say no to organisational tasks, or maybe you are not even asked […] It's all about convincing your HoD that you're more useful to the department as a researcher and let those who are interested in administration do the service work' (M40).

Although 'maximal minimisation' of academic service work may seem like a straightforward strategy in some interview accounts, evasiveness takes a lot of relational work. Internal service is a necessary dimension of academic work, and reasonably, all tenured faculty should contribute. However, what the interviews show is that a considerable number of men bypass these expectations without management's sanction. By all accounts, these participants have found ways of 'saying no' that are accepted by their HoD, head of studies and sometimes also their women colleagues, who (as shown above) share the conception that some men (but not women) are 'clumsy administrators' (M14; W71). Furthermore, several women describe situations where they have tried to say no without this being accepted or respected by management. For instance, one woman associate professor explains how 'an administrative service function was forced upon her' although

she had ‘fought hard to avoid it’, and how, in consequence, her ‘feeling of job satisfaction’ was gone (W60).

As pointed out by Babcock et al. (2022), there are strong social expectations that women in general and only some men are organisational team players. While women may be praised (and praise themselves) for their service skills and diligence, these contributions tend to hold little weight when it comes to hiring and promotion within the university. Men are more inclined to conduct relational work aimed at securing themselves research time, in full agreement with the institutional fact that, in the long run, publications are the pivotal criterion when academic performance is measured.

Barter

Barter refers to a direct agreement to service by faculty in return for another service by management. The clearest examples of this in our interviews are negotiations where an (increased) involvement in service work is the price to be paid if a participant is to be hired or promoted to a full professorship. Accounts describing this type of barter were more common among men than among women professors.

Barter can be compared to Rossman’s (2014) category of ‘disreputable exchange’, that is, relational work where the trading of benefits is not fully legitimate. Consequently, barter is not something that occurs in the open but discreetly and sometimes indirectly in order not to challenge ‘exchange taboos’ (Rossman, 2014: 43). Given that academic service is one of the officially stated qualification criteria for full professorships at the departments we have

studied, one would expect promotion to occur *after* a candidate has collected enough service experience and not *before*. Our interviews show that this is not always the case.

Hence, some men explain that they (in a closed job interview setting) were offered a full professorship on the condition that they accepted a demanding service function such as head of studies or section/centre leader. One of them says: 'It [promotion] was a question of shouldering some leadership tasks. The HoD told me these things came hand-in-hand. I agreed, although I was anxious not to have too much administration on my plate, administration is not what I am here for' (M162). One woman, W109, tells a similar story: 'At the job interview, the HoD asked me if I was interested in becoming section leader, and I thought I'd better say yes […] You can't start arguing in that situation'. That you can 'start arguing [also] in that situation' is shown in the account of another man professor: 'When I applied for the job, I was asked if I was willing to become head of our largest research centre. I said: "I have learned never to say no to such requests at a job interview, so I would like to think about it". I guess they realised that I wasn't interested and were okay with that' (M148).

There is an interesting pattern in the group of men professors with minimal service contribution: the group contains some of the most successful men, measured by their number of publications in prestigious outlets and by the fact that many of their colleagues talk about them as 'excellent'. These professors match the differentiated model of academic work described by Macfarlane (2011), in which some academics are following a prestigious research track, and teaching and (especially) service are regarded as low-status activities

that can be taken care of by ‘para-academics’. The group’s commitment to research, typically secured by prolonged periods of external funding and ‘buy-outs’, has disconnected them from teaching and internal service and secured them an ‘uncontaminated’ (M140) researcher role, one that is accepted by management because of these scholars’ reputations as ‘excellent’. We do not find the same pattern among women professors, most of whom, regardless of their publication profile and potential status as ‘excellent’, are actively involved in service functions.

Investment

This final section addresses relational work in the form of investment among associate and full professors. We focus on time-consuming academic service forms with expectations of ‘pay-off’ in a distant future (more common among women), as compared to brief service forms with a more immediate connection between giving and receiving (more common among men). Two types of international service are used as examples: the organisation of international conferences and seminars and editorial work. Unlike the internal service forms reviewed so far, international service to the profession is (typically) not something management requires faculty to do; rather, it is service activities participants select themselves. For this reason, investment is seldom described as enveloped in concrete personal interaction between two parties. It is more a question of participants taking on certain activities in the hope of a positive future return (from an undefined circle of other people). Also here, however, our data reveal striking differences between men’s and women’s ways of balancing work input with expected output.

When asked about international service, women more often than men mention the arduous work of organising conferences. A woman associate professor says: ‘I spent months on organising this huge conference, and there was virtually no reward in terms of how many hours the department credited me […] Somehow, I keep wishing for some kind of fairness in these things’ (W85). Like W85, many women talk about ‘fairness’ and ‘reasonableness’ (W83) when it comes to taking on international service tasks, hoping that their work will be ‘remembered by central people’ (W72), that it will ‘help in building a strong network’ (W112) or ‘assist me in marketing my research to people in other countries’ (W122). Although many women talk about networks emanating from their international service activities, there is a conspicuous imbalance, stressed by the interviewees themselves, between the workload they put into conference activities and the benefits they receive from them.

Such accounts are seldom found among men. Instead, they often emphasise the importance of not spending too much time on international service (just like they did with internal service), explaining that they mainly select activities with a clearly specified output. One such activity is the organisation of small departmental seminars with international guests, the only service form that men are more involved in than women. M3 explains that he is constantly ‘weighing service activities against career’. In his opinion, seminars are ‘worth the time’ spent on them, as he gets in touch with ‘eminent scholars from abroad and enhances his possibilities for co-authorship’.

Journal editorship (or associate editorship) is an international activity that the interviewees agree can be immensely time-consuming. While previous research has shown that men more often than women hold editorial positions and that this should be related to the high status of editorship (Park, 1996; Bird et al., 2004; O'Meara et al., 2017), our study reveals a different picture. Men professors have less experience with international (co-)editorship than women professors, and by all accounts, women are more preoccupied with achieving editorial positions than men. For instance, the small group of women professors who hold editorial positions at prestigious international journals all describe how hard they have worked to be offered an editorial role. They explain how they sat on 'a billion committees' (F114), edited numerous special issues (F113) and 'organised a lot of panels and conferences in order to put forward an agenda and make a name for myself' (F105) before they were finally invited to become associate or (in a few cases) chief editors.

In comparison, many men with editorial experience describe how they effortlessly and as a natural consequence of their belonging to central networks were invited to (associate) editor positions, for example: 'I have published a few things there and was part of the inner circle. So they just asked if I was interested in being on the board, and later I became associate editor' (M152). Several men say that they have declined invitations to editorial positions because of the workload they are associated with or because editorship is not 'appealing'. M160 says: 'I have learned that editorial work isn't that much fun. And I know with myself that if there is a task that I don't find fun and interesting, I'm not good at doing it either'. This idea that a well-executed task requires that you find it 'fun and interesting' is primarily found among men participants. Again, it indicates that men more than women feel they are

entitled to select service functions (internal as well as international) that are enriching and rewarding and to say no to time-consuming service that 'leads nowhere' (M142).

Discussion

This article advances theory on academic service by developing the concept of relational work, analysed as different types of interaction: compliance, evasiveness, barter and investment, and showing how these four types of relational work lead to a gendered distribution of service work in academia. In this, the article also contributes to filling an empirical gap. Numerous studies demonstrate that women faculty undertake more service tasks than men faculty (e.g. O'Meara et al., 2017; Guarino and Boden, 2017; Heijstra et al., 2017a, b; Hanasono et al., 2019), whereas few studies (an exception being Babcock et al., 2022) investigate the mechanisms behind these gender differences. Our study offers a detailed analysis of the processes through which women, willingly or unwillingly, end up conducting the bulk of academic service yet receive little reward for their contributions. While previous research describes women's service activities as 'invisible work' (Hanasono et al., 2019; Babcock et al., 2022), we claim that much of the relational work lying behind the gendered distribution of service activities is also invisible.

Relational work theorists vary in how much they emphasise individual agency (skills, personal strategies) vs the social and cultural context of relational work. For instance, Zelizer's (2005) original contribution has been criticised for foregrounding participants' agency while paying little attention to the elements of power and inequality that are integral to relational work (Bandelj, 2012). Bandelj (2012: 186) is explicit in defining the relational

work perspective as an alternative to rational action theory, stressing that the successes of participants in relational work reside in the amounts of resources they control and that these resources are socially defined. In line with this, we comprehend relational work as enactments related to organisational templates, including gendered conceptions of rights and duties when it comes to work allocation.

Fletcher (1999: 179) describes 'women's work' as traditionally associated with practices of 'selfless giving with little expectation of reciprocity', whereas men's activities are defined as 'real work' and something that should be rewarded. While the idea of 'selfless giving' may be an exaggeration when applied to women academics today, engagement in service work in academia continues to follow a dualistic pattern where women are expected to show their worth as organisational team players (cf. Babcock et al., 2022), while men are allowed to pursue academic paths characterised as 'careerist' and 'self-achieving' (Fletcher, 1999; O'Connor et al., 2015) or as 'uncontaminated' by mundane service duties (M140).

Our analysis indicates that women are more driven by feelings of obligation than men, meaning that they regard academic service, and especially internal service activities, as less discretionary than men do. Previous research on gender and organisations (other than academia) has shown a similar pattern and also that men are more likely than women to regard their organisational commitment as an 'exchange relationship' – that is, they are willing to go the extra mile for their organisation and colleagues, not because they feel obliged to do so, but because their workplace does something good for them in return (Thompson et al., 2020). Women's obligation-driven relationship with their workplace can

also be associated with a fear of negative reactions if they select not to engage in service activities, a fear that several of our women participants describe as justified.

Yet, organisational templates requiring more service work from women and women's fear of repercussions cannot explain all gender differences in service activities. Women are not only over-represented in internal service but also in international service, where involvement is (typically) selected by the participants themselves. Furthermore, there is an ambivalence in many women's descriptions of their involvement in internal service work. Organisational demands play a key role, but many women also describe a genuine interest in taking on academic service tasks (e.g. coordinator or committee chairing roles), not least because they associate such tasks with influence, respect and becoming 'part of the inner circle' at their department (W59). In contrast, very few men talk about academic service in this way. The reason may be that many men (but obviously not all) have found other ways of gaining influence and respect at their department.

While previous research has depicted different *types* of service as gendered (Bird et al., 2004; O'Meara et al., 2017; Hanasono et al., 2019), we found little evidence of this. In our study, men are not over-represented in 'high-status' service tasks (editorial posts, powerful managerial posts, chairs of prestigious committees), nor is the differentiation between institutional service and service to the profession (Neumann and Terosky, 2007) a gendered distinction. Among the participants, women outperform men across areas of service. These findings also apply if one takes into consideration the amount of work associated with different service tasks. Hence, it is not the case that men take on fewer but more time-

consuming service tasks than women. Quite the contrary, women's service activities are to a higher degree than men's, centred on tasks with a heavy workload, e.g. the organisation of conferences as compared to small department seminars, or (co)editorial posts as compared to article reviewing.

Previous studies indicate that research-related performance measurement has increased tensions in the tripartite role of academics, pushing service activities further into the background (Macfarlane, 2011; Beatson et al., 2021). Because we did not analyse differences between generations of faculty, we do not know if the over-representation of women in all areas of service is a new phenomenon. Further research is required to clarify whether it is an increased devaluation of academic service that lies behind the fact that women are now over-represented in all service forms, including 'non-prestigious' as well as 'prestigious' (Macfarlane, 2007; O'Meara et al., 2017), 'secret service' (Hanasono et al., 2019) and 'promotable' service tasks (Babcock et al., 2022).

A final note on the gendered service patterns in the study is warranted. Depicting men as involved in more self-beneficial exchange than women does not mean that all men practise relational work characterised by evasiveness or barter or that all women's accounts describe compliance and long-term investment. Among men, a small group of associate professors (11%) and one-quarter of full professors belong to the group of high performers of internal service functions, just like one-third of the women associate professors and 15% of the women full professors are characterised by a limited scope of service work. These groups, the high-performing men and the low-performing women, have not been the focus of the

article, as our primary interest was to flesh out the dominant gender pattern in service work. However, an interesting follow-up study would be to investigate the relational work of men and women breaking this pattern and what effects such gender-atypical performance has on their careers.

Taking up Neumann and Terosky's (2007) suggestion that scholars should focus on the 'giving' and 'receiving' aspects of service, we conclude the following. The unequal distribution of service work in academia is dependent on relational work, where participants balance individual against collective interests in gendered ways. Our findings reveal that men are more likely than women to engage in evasive and barter relational work; that is, they tend to either avoid academic service (a common strategy among men associate professors) or agree to certain types of service as a direct condition for promotion (a strategy found among several male full professors). Women, for their part, more frequently describe a tendency towards relational work characterised by compliance and long-term investment, meaning that they feel they cannot say no to service requests and/or that they provide service with a diffuse hope that their hard work will pay-off in the future. These gendered forms of relational work are embedded in organisational templates, giving some faculty members (men more often than women) the right to say no and expecting others (women more often than men) to comply. In this sense, relational work is a site for negotiating equality and inequality between men and women in academia.

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