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Postdigital Intimacies:
Gendered Perspectives
on the Blurred
Boundaries
of Private and Public
in the Digital Age

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Postdigital Intimacies: Gendered Perspectives on the Blurred Boundaries of Private and Public in the Digital Age

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In the context of an era increasingly being (re)defined by our relationships with and through technology, intimacy has emerged as a figure, a concept, and a practice in need of constant reassessment and feminist interrogation. Indeed, the last decade has seen increasing work on gender, the (post)digital, and forms of relationality and intimacy opened up and foreclosed by technology – a phenomenon which we now perhaps take for granted as being simultaneously embedded in both the public and private spheres. To be sure, intimacy has always been somewhat technological, but it now seems to be everywhere, and all at once, and there is something unique to *this* ‘post’ moment – ‘an era of social networking, virtual domestic assistants and smart homes, artificial intelligence and consciousness, the body-machine assemblage, and our obsession (stronger than ever) with viruses and immunity, on and off our screens’ (Balfour 2023). In short, intimacy is thoroughly enmeshed in the (post)digital, and was coextensive with the emergence of the digital over time, but it is also singularly historical in its need for attention at this moment.

In positioning this issue, we are building on the notable contributions of others in the field, including explorations of the relationship between platforms, intimacy, and labour (Hurley, Evans, forthcoming 2026), the concept of intimate strangers or forms of strange(r)ness (Balfour et. al. 2025), digital intimate publics (Dobson 2018), ‘virtual’ intimacies (McGlotten 2018), the ‘networked public-private’ (Evans, Ringrose



2025), and platform intimacies (Rambukkana, Matthews 2024). These contributions, and more, have exposed the relationship between intimacy and the (post)digital as a complex relational force and a disruption of the dichotomies traditionally associated with the public and the private. This includes a blurring of inside(r) and outside(r), 'real' and artificial, embodied and disembodied, public and domestic, human and machine, digital and analogue, and visibility and invisibility.

Postdigital Intimacies: Gendered Perspectives on the Blurred Boundaries of Private and Public in the Digital Age takes these disruptions as a point of departure, recognising, appreciating, and, at times, exposing the risks of a blurred distinction between the public and the private, particularly as such a blurring occurs across the often gendered thresholds of the body and the home. This issue places emphasis on what is happening at the boundaries or borders of these distinctions, where they overlap and intersect, the contradictions and paradoxes of each coming together, and these liminal and transitional spaces as routes in and through conflict, but also in some cases bringing conflicts of their own. We situate the contributions that follow within this transitory and at times contradictory space, acknowledging the ways in which the public and the private operate in complementary and productive ways, encouraging dialogue and new ways of being together, and being apart, but also recognising the ways in which the promise of new intimacies collapses into a misuse of technology, violence, surveillance, and disconnect.

Intimacy and the postdigital

Our use of 'intimacy' and the 'postdigital' is informed by the above thinkers and, of course, bolstered through the work of Lauren Berlant, particularly their idea of 'living in the ellipsis' as a general state in which one is left with questions rather than answers (2016). Berlant's work is instrumental in shaping how we understand affect, emotion, and desire to transverse the public and private spheres. Indeed, the concept of an 'intimate public' is now widely applied to exploring the ways in which digital cultures in particular no longer distinguish between these realms. Digital technologies make it more possible than ever to experience intimate and private moments in profoundly public and social scenarios – for instance, having an intimate conversation over text message while on a crowded subway platform. For Ali Azhar and Megan Boler (2023), 'digital media scholars have used these conceptualisations to study novel forms of community online and the contradictions these utopic and optimistic forms of intimacy encounter'. In a similar vein, we extend the notion of digital community to include the relations that are initiated, sustained, and foreclosed by a myriad of technologies across multiple media forms. In doing so, we ask a series of questions:

1. What are the mechanisms of the gendered design of the digital (including virtual assistants and other 'smart' home tech, apps and platforms, algorithms, surveillance, stalking, and tracking), and how do they influence our notion of 'private' and 'intimate'?
2. To what extent do gendered digital domestic technologies assuage/exacerbate technophobia and anxiety?
3. What alternative futures and hopes is digitalisation bringing regarding gendered domesticity?
4. How are gendered relations of technology and its impact on the private/public dichotomy represented in social and cultural discourse (i.e. product marketing, popular culture, etc.)?
5. What is the relationship between digital technology and gendered violence?
6. How does the digital challenge our notions of inside/outside, foreign/familiar, public/private?

In what ways does the digital erase women and other marginalised communities from social life or – on the other hand – foster their visibility and empowerment? In responding to these questions – or, following Berlant, asking more questions – we also acknowledge the extent to which the digital has become something so entangled with the experience of living that it is impossible to separate it from the non-digital. Technology, information processing, data, and digital media now inform, and indeed create, all aspects of public and private life, from politics and education, to household shopping and chores, to childcare and intimate health. Just as the public and the private intermingle in irrevocable ways, so, too, is the digital now indistinguishable from the analogue. In sum, we follow Evans and Ringrose (2025) in their conceptualisation of postdigital intimacies:

the intimacies in postdigital intimacies is interested in how subjectivities are shaped by particular intimacies and relationalities between humans and non-human actors, which can include smartphones, apps, and other machines, while also attending to the power of intimacy as both a regulatory force and radical potential. However, what is added to this account of intimacy by the prefix of 'post' is the folding of and amalgamation of digital and non-digital within our notion of the intimate.

Power at the threshold of public and private

This special issue takes as its focus the complex intermingling of private and public and how digital technologies and their gendered design, use, and impact are enact-



ed in what we consider the domestic, intimate, or personal sphere. The contributions here include original research articles, case studies, policy analyses, and theoretical contributions that challenge the traditional private/public dichotomies from a gender perspective and look into what role digital technology plays in re-conceptualising the notion of personal, intimate, or domestic in a contemporary digitalised society. As a contribution to feminist thought and scholarship, we emphasise the blurring of boundaries in particular in order to resist the capitalist and patriarchal construction of binary thought and to make visible the multiple and intersecting forms of intimacy created and sustained in feminist articulations of the home, the body, and the public sphere.

In the past several decades, contemporary societies have undergone rapid techno-social transformation, with a significant increase in the use of digital technology, which now penetrates our work, social, and personal lives. No longer a domain separate from the private and intimate spaces of 'home', the digital is now integrated into our behaviours, activities, and relationships across the borders of public and private, but in such a way that traditional notions of gender remain at the fore. Still, these relations are taken for granted and are so deeply embedded in our lives, relationships, work, and practices that we rarely question their construction or the relations of power within them.

Here, we have sought to present a balanced approach, acknowledging the ways in which the digital has encouraged new modes of relating to and caring for those both known and unknown to us. Indeed, the Covid-19 pandemic not only exposed the extent to which we rely on communicative technologies, but also how essential the digital is, as it was the digital that sustained vital support services such as education, healthcare, grocery shopping, and community building when face-to-face or brick-and-mortar services were out of reach. We recognise, too, the extent to which the digital has facilitated cross-cultural engagement, access to news and information, and grassroots movements and entrepreneurship. For gender and intimacy in particular, digital culture has afforded opportunities for collaboration, community, and resistance to both traditional and technologically-facilitated forms of surveillance, misogyny, and gender-based violence. This issue therefore calls attention to the potential of the digital for emancipation *from* the domestic sphere, the ways in which digital technologies enhance visibility in the *public* sphere, and the opportunities created for harm reduction within technology, including phenomena such as digital interventions that support anti-violence or visibility to those who have historically been excluded from the public dialogue.

Still, the risks of technologically saturated forms of intimacy remain. In cases of technologically-facilitated violence in particular, the boundaries of public and private are blurred, as tools such as GPS tracking, Bluetooth location sharing, and 'find my device' features are increasingly being used to track women and other marginalised

identities from the public sphere into the domestic (Henry, Flynn, Powell 2020). Despite a body of research that now recognises the ways in which women are disproportionately targeted for online harms (Backe, Lilleston, McCleary-Sills 2018), more work needs to be done to explore the extent to which technologies integrated into our homes and private lives, in seemingly benign or taken-for-granted ways, often reproduce patriarchal notions of gendered labour, surveillance capitalism, sexualisation, or erasure. While the Covid-19 pandemic certainly revealed important affordances of technology, the increased use of digital technologies also contributed to the deepening of existing social inequalities (Blomberg et al. 2020; Zhen, Walsham 2021), such as the 'digital divide', and exposed the capacity for misuse. Specifically, the pandemic also shed light on the often invisible impact of unpaid care responsibilities at home or gender inequalities in the public domain (such as representation and decision-making), as well as the extent to which the rapid spatio-temporal changes of Covid-19 led to the deconstruction of the home as a space rendered subordinated to the public space.

Just as physical touch can be a source of pain or pleasure, the forms of intimacy enabled in the digital sphere open new possibilities of being together in the world, but they also risk eliding the very real and material consequences of the digital gendering of labour, surveillance, and power, not to mention the myriad of ways in which even virtual intimacy is often unwanted, non-consensual, and a corollary of violence. In short, what occurs in the digital sphere is a reflection of what happens in our physical world, and it is in these blurred boundaries that more feminist interrogation of the postdigital public-private is needed.

A synopsis of the articles in this issue

The contributions to this special issue collectively interrogate the complex entanglements of intimacy, gender, politics, and digital technology across diverse contexts, scales, and methodological approaches. Each article engages with the central concern of this issue – the destabilisation of public/private boundaries in the postdigital era – by offering situated analyses that foreground gendered experience, technological mediation, and the possibilities and limits of digital agency.

The issue opens with Júlia Karpova's article, 'This Feeling of Multidimensional Disease', which offers an intimate and critical look at how Danish women with Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) engage with self-tracking apps and social media. Through semi-structured interviews and drawing on the logics of care vs the logic of choice (by Anemarie Mol), Karpova demonstrates how these technologies mediate the experience of illness across the public-private divide. While self-tracking apps often reinforce capitalist and individualised models of health, social media emerges as a space



of collective sense-making, care, and solidarity. This article foregrounds the limits of technocratic health interventions and the reparative potential of online communities in articulating new forms of intimate care.

Next, Vojtěch Gerlich and Mohazzab Abdullah turn our attention to a different kind of mediated intimacy through their ethnographic study of participatory radio in Northern Uganda. In 'Empowerment on Air', they explore how radio campaigns addressing gender-based violence, teenage pregnancy, and women's entrepreneurship unsettle normative distinctions between the public and the private. Their work reveals how radio, as a mass yet intimate medium, facilitates feminist consciousness-raising and deliberation, creating what they term an 'intimate public sphere'. The study underscores both the emancipatory potential and the limitations of media-based empowerment, especially in contexts where women's access to technological and institutional resources remains unequally distributed.

Shifting to digital feminist activism in Central Europe, Veronika Valkovičová and Zuzana Maďarová explore how digital activists in Slovakia and Czechia use Instagram to raise awareness about sexual violence and harassment amid rising anti-gender rhetoric and political hostility. Drawing on interviews, the authors examine how digital activists navigate public/private boundaries and the platform's affordances and constraints – balancing visibility, emotional labour, and algorithmic pressures. While Instagram enables the creation of personalised feminist publics and offers an accessible space for awareness-raising, it also exposes activists to hate speech, surveillance, and platform governance that limits sustained collective action. The article highlights how digital feminist subjectivities are shaped at the intersection of political resistance and corporate control and reflects on new forms of feminist praxis.

Building on this regional focus, Karin Holosová's contribution, 'Visible on Our Terms', continues the examination of Slovak digital feminism by attending to the affective and infrastructural labour of the feminist presence on Instagram. Eschewing the spectacular modes often associated with online activism, Holosová introduces the concept of 'ethical endurance' to theorise the slow, relational, and emotionally demanding work that sustains feminist visibility in algorithmically governed environments. The article provides a powerful counterpoint to the assumption that digital activism must be loud or viral, instead offering a nuanced view of what it means to persist in the face of platform logics that often undermine political critique.

While distinct in method and medium, the final contribution shares the issue's core concern with how gendered intimacies are shaped, surveilled, and contested through digital technologies – extending the inquiry from lived practices and activism to cultural imaginaries that illuminate the domestic tech-mediated life. AJ Castle turns to the genre of horror cinema to theorise the emotional landscape of domestic surveillance and artificial intelligence. In 'Let's Play Surveillance', Castle analyses *Child's Play* and

M3GAN to propose the notion of ‘panoptic affect’ – the unsettling feeling of being constantly watched without knowing by whom. These films serve as cultural critiques of AI technologies and their infiltration into intimate domestic settings, especially in ways that intersect with maternal roles and children’s autonomy.

Taken together, the articles in this special issue chart a diverse yet interconnected landscape of postdigital intimacies. Whether through the use of social media for health and activism, the gendered affordances of broadcast technologies, or the cinematic imaginaries of surveillance, each contribution demonstrates how digital technologies both shape and are shaped by the gendered reconfigurations of intimacy, care, and politics. Importantly, these insights are grounded in a rich array of feminist-informed methodologies, including qualitative interviews, ethnography, and film analysis. Several articles privilege the voices and experiences of women and feminist actors navigating digital spaces, while others foreground the symbolic and affective dimensions of postdigital life through cultural and narrative analysis. This methodological heterogeneity not only reflects the complexity of the themes addressed but also affirms the value of multi-scalar, interdisciplinary, and reflexive approaches in the study of intimacy, gender, and technology.

Conclusion

Taken together, the contributions in this special issue illuminate the deeply gendered and power-saturated nature of postdigital intimacies. Across diverse geographies, media forms, and methodological approaches, the articles map the ways in which digital technologies not only traverse but reconfigure the boundaries of public and private life, often reinscribing hierarchies of gender, race, and class within these blurred thresholds.

This issue was conceived as an intervention into the binary thinking that underpins dominant technological narratives – particularly those that separate intimacy from politics, the personal from the public, and digital life from material consequence. By centring gendered experiences and feminist methodologies, we sought to foreground the often-invisible labour, vulnerability, and care that define our digital entanglements, while exposing the structures of surveillance, extraction, and violence. While the contributions here are grounded in theory and an intellectual critique of the binary dimensions of power and gender, they are resolutely praxis-oriented and argue for radical and re-energised ways of thinking through the relationship between gender and technology, while highlighting the ‘real-world’ risks of postdigital intimacies and simultaneously attending to their emancipatory potential.

The analyses here underscore the urgent need for a more activist scholarship that not only interrogates the mechanisms of power embedded in digital technologies



but also participates in imagining and enacting alternatives. Whether through subtle acts of feminist endurance on platforms designed to undermine them, or through reappropriations of media and cultural forms, the authors in this issue point to the political possibilities that emerge from within and against digital infrastructures.

As Big Tech continues to consolidate power – constructing worlds through extractive data economies, opaque algorithms, and the arrogance of ‘tech bro’ futurism – this issue can hopefully portray a different future. One in which intimacy is not instrumentalised, where the private is not a site of exploitation, and where digital spaces become terrains of resistance, care, and collective reworlding. In these entangled, often uncomfortable zones, we find not only critique but the radical hope of[for] a postdigital feminism. As Pedwell and Stowe (2024) remind us, this ellipsis (Berland 2016) prompts us to ask questions, to reaffirm intimacy with and through the digital, to undo the binary thinking that forecloses justice, and to ‘tune into the affective glimmers of alter-worlds which might offer hope for an otherwise’.

In a time of overlapping crises – of war, displacement, ecological collapse, and the erosion of democratic freedoms – the role of digital technologies in shaping intimacy, agency, and gender is more urgent than ever. These are not remote issues; they permeate our classrooms, our research agendas, and our personal lives. As scholars and practitioners, we must confront the complicity of digital infrastructures in surveillance, militarisation, and the commodification of care, while also resisting the lure of neutrality in the face of violence. We are called on not just to critique the world as it is, but to participate actively in imagining and building the world otherwise – to foster technologies and relationships rooted in solidarity and justice.

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‘This Feeling of Multidimensional Disease’: How Women with PCOS Narrate Their Experience with Self-Tracking Apps and Social Media¹

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Abstract: Polycystic ovary syndrome, or PCOS, is a common condition that combines such symptoms as absent or irregular menstruation, elevated levels of ‘male’ hormones, excess facial and body hair, and problems with glucose metabolism. Receiving a PCOS diagnosis can be a disorienting experience. This article focuses on this medical condition to explore the role of different digital technologies in managing women’s health across public and private domains. Relying on seventeen semi-structured interviews with Danish women, I suggest that self-tracking mobile applications and social media provide PCOS patients with different modes of caring and drawing boundaries between public and private. Whereas applications are designed according to the capitalist logic of paying to manage your health and fitness, social media offer solidarity and mutual care. This article elucidates how patients use self-tracking apps and social media to make sense of their unique configurations of symptoms, often without any connection to their clinical visits and communication with medical providers. I employ Annemarie Mol’s theory of the logic of choice vs the logic of care and the notion of ‘social-material networks of biosensing’ by Mette Kragh-Furbo et. al. to argue that social media partially compensate for the inadequacy of self-tracking apps for handling PCOS and offer care and solidarity through the sharing of personal stories.

Keywords: polycystic ovary syndrome, self-tracking apps, social media, the logic of choice, the logic of care, social-material networks

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'I think it gave me a bit of calm, knowing all these stories and knowing that it does not look only one way.'² This is how Paula,³ a Danish woman in her early twenties, evaluated her experience with social media discussions of a medical condition that she has: polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS). PCOS is relatively common: it affects 5% to 20% of women and AFAB⁴ persons worldwide (Hachey et al. 2020). In medical terminology, PCOS is not a 'disease' but a combination of several symptoms, such as absent or irregular ovulation and menstruation, elevated levels of 'male' hormones, excess facial and body hair, and problems with glucose metabolism (Mousa, Tay, Teede 2023). Receiving a PCOS diagnosis can be a disorienting and even scary experience: this is what I learned from my interviews with Paula and sixteen other women. The quote from Paula suggests that social media provides information about the diversity of PCOS experiences and a connection to fellow sufferers, and this information and connectedness can mitigate the frustration of falling outside the medical and social norms of health, fitness, and femininity. The idea that technologies can not only diminish but also reinforce women's agency echoes research in feminist HCI (human-computer interaction) on the role of digital technologies in the everyday bodily experience – health and illness, menstruation and pregnancy, and ageing and menopause (Bardzell 2010; Bardzell et al. 2019; Epstein et al. 2017; Homewood 2018; Lazar et al. 2019; Taylor, McDonagh, Hansen 2017). Social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram (Gammelby 2021; Tiidenberg, Baym 2017; Warfield, Abidin, and Cambre 2020), platforms for telecommunication between doctors and patients (Mort, Finch, May 2009; Nicolini 2007; Oudshoorn 2011; Pols 2012), and self-tracking apps (Epstein et al. 2017; Esmonde 2020; Fellows, Smith 2022; Lazar et al. 2019; Lupton 2013; Sanders 2017a; Smith, Vonthethoff 2017) have been analysed as re-framing the visions of health and wellbeing and redrawing the boundaries between private and public.

How do digital technologies impact intimate lives in the context of PCOS, a common but little-discussed condition that challenges both medical and social gender norms? Furthermore, does the connectedness that digital technologies offer PCOS patients come at the price of losing privacy? I suggest that self-tracking mobile applications, including those categorised as FemTech, technologies targeting women's health (Balfour 2023), on the one hand, and social media, on the other hand, provide PCOS patients with different modes of connecting and drawing boundaries between public and private. I will investigate these different modes based on ethnographic

² The quotes in this article are cited verbatim as spoken by interviewees whose first language is not English, and their grammar and word choice have been edited.

³ All names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

⁴ Assigned female at birth.

fieldwork. I will elucidate how patients use self-tracking apps and social media to make sense of their unique configurations of symptoms, often without any connection to their clinical visits or communication with medical providers.

The article starts by outlining the transition of a PCOS diagnosis from a clinical to a domestic setting and the role of digital technologies, namely self-tracking mobile applications and social media. The domestic handling of PCOS can be considered a part of 'e-escaped medicine' – medical knowledge that has moved from medical institutions to cyberspace (Nettleton 2004). Next, I will zoom in on the use of self-tracking mobile applications in PCOS and explain it through the notion of 'the logic of choice' (Mol 2008) – the vision of individuals as autonomous and able to maintain their health and fitness by purchasing and using specific services. Siding with recent criticisms of self-tracking and 'mobile health', I will demonstrate how the material realities of PCOS challenge the capitalist logic of choice and produce 'mundane' data (Pink et al. 2017). Next, the article moves to online support groups and influencers' accounts on social media that allow the 'sense-making' (Kragh-Furbo et al. 2018) of PCOS. I will suggest that such groups help mitigate against the disappointment from self-tracking apps by being more sensitive to the diverse sets of symptoms and needs of women with PCOS. Further, I will introduce 'the logic of care' to analyse online communities as sites that enable the sharing of individual patient experiences. Women with diverse PCOS symptoms look for relatable stories in online communities and thereby participate in caring for each other without offering any 'perfect' solutions. They navigate between the wish for privacy and the search for connection and recognition. In conclusion, I will argue that 'social-material networks of biosensing' (Kragh-Furbo et al. 2018: 48) offer an alternative to the capitalist vision of an empowered woman who can afford to manage her health and blur the boundary between private and public domains.

Data and method

Between January and December 2023, in Denmark, I conducted 17 one-to-one semi-structured interviews with Danish women aged 23 to 42 (see Table 1). I recruited the interviewees (whom I will call 'respondents') from Danish-language social media communities: a private support group on Facebook and a private forum managed by an Instagram influencer. This influencer later also posted information about my research openly in her feed, which attracted a few more respondents. Sixteen interviews took place face-to-face, in a respondent's home or a café, and one interview was conducted via a video call.

All the interviews were conducted in English because the level of my spoken Danish is not yet good enough for this purpose. Occasionally, my respondents used Danish

terms when they did not know the English equivalents, and later I translated these. The quotes are slightly adjusted to avoid repetition while the idiosyncrasies of the spoken language and the specificity of speaking in a foreign language are preserved. If a respondent emphasised a certain word verbally, I highlight it in italics.

The interviews lasted between forty minutes and two hours, depending on how much a respondent wanted to tell. In addition to recording the oral interviews, I provided a drawing pad and crayons so that the respondent could use drawing to visualise her story. Only two respondents used this option. The fieldwork was approved by the Data Protection Officer. All the participants signed a consent form before the interviews.

I used two criteria for selecting respondents: having a PCOS diagnosis and experience with the Danish healthcare system concerning this diagnosis. Even though PCOS is often related to subfertility, reproductive health was not at the centre of my research. Therefore, my interview pool included women in various situations regarding reproduction: those who were going or had gone through fertility treatment; those who became pregnant easily (but had other PCOS-related health issues); those who were not yet thinking about children; and childfree women. That is, fertility status was not a selection criterion.

The fieldwork's demographic was limited to cisgender middle-class women, only two of whom were women of colour. In this article, I use the term 'women' to refer to my respondents, while keeping in mind that PCOS can affect people assigned female at birth who have different gender identities.

Sixteen of my participants currently reside in Denmark; of these sixteen, two moved to Denmark as adults, and one was adopted by a Danish family from abroad and brought to the country as an infant. One participant experienced her first PCOS symptoms in Denmark but received her diagnosis after moving to Norway. I felt the inclusion of this respondent in the pool was justified because the healthcare systems in Nordic countries are very similar, and this respondent regularly visits and spends time in Denmark. I assigned a pseudonym to each respondent and removed any precise geographic details. I transcribed all the interviews verbatim and performed a thematic analysis of the transcripts and accompanying drawings, combining theoretical and inductive (data-driven) approaches (Braun, Clarke 2006).

Unlike the researchers who scrutinised patients' online discussions (Kragh-Furbo et al. 2018), I rely on my interviewees' accounts of their use of social media. This information, though indirect, reveals each patient's own perspective on the role of social media in their everyday handling of PCOS and making sense of the data from their self-tracking applications.

Bringing PCOS home

As a chronic condition, PCOS is experienced in a domestic space daily. After the doctor announces the diagnosis in a clinic, the patient goes home with the burden of processing this information and figuring out how to live with this syndrome, about which she had previously known little. How does she handle this challenge? In the last two decades, digital technologies have helped patients with chronic illnesses (Oudshoorn 2011; Pols 2012; Wada, Wallace 2022). PCOS, too, is a chronic condition. Its management has been affected by digital technologies that are available at home and at one's fingertips. Moreover, PCOS is a gendered condition: it challenges the medical and social norms of femininity and fertility. Some of the technologies used by people with PCOS are dedicated to tracking menstruation and ovulation, which are still mainly associated with womanhood and femininity despite the growing discussion of a more gender-inclusive approach to these biological functions (Epstein et al. 2017). Other technologies aim to gather less explicitly gendered data on, for instance, sleep, exercise, nutrition, and blood sugar levels. Nonetheless, these parameters are still gendered: thinness and fitness are values imposed on women by marketing and advertising (Sanders 2017; Al Derham 2023). My fieldwork revealed the details of using digital technologies in daily life with PCOS.

According to my interview data, gynaecologists provide only a minimum of information about PCOS when informing their patients of this diagnosis. Typically, they advise the patients to 'eat healthy and exercise' and ask them to return when they plan to have children. That is, women with PCOS are encouraged to modify their lifestyle for optimal health and fertility outcomes. This medical advice is in tune with the capitalist logic of self-improvement (Ward 2015). Doctors, however, rarely go beyond generic advice and explain what exactly 'eat healthy and exercise' means in the case of PCOS. At best, they hand patients a folder or booklet with basic guidelines on lifestyle and the pharmaceutical management of symptoms. This, for example, happened to Cecilie, Veronica, and Sofia: none of them received more detailed guidance from their gynaecologists. Several respondents said they felt confused and neglected by their doctors and nurses when they left the consultation room. Some complained about the insufficiency of knowledge about PCOS on the part of Danish gynaecologists as well as GPs. Veronica, for example, wondered, 'We are told that we need to eat vegetables and fruit and all that stuff, right? So, what's happening in the body and why? And also, why are the hormones so different [for different women with PCOS]?' She could not find sufficiently distinct and personalised advice for women with PCOS with different body types and different hormonal profiles. This made her question the informative value of the diagnosis itself: 'Why do you put one label on something that looks so different?'

To make up for the lack of attention and information received from their health-care provider, patients turn to digital technologies when they get home. They google PCOS and its specific symptoms. They learn to critically assess the sources they find – or, like Cecilie, a trained journalist, they utilise their professional skills to evaluate the credibility of information found on the Internet. Some of my respondents were satisfied with the facts and guidelines provided by the official websites of the Danish Health Authority Sundhed.dk and Netdoktor.dk, and the websites of the British NHS and the American Mayo Clinic. Ane Kathrine Gammelby points out the functional continuity between such websites and the family health encyclopaedias that used to be found in some homes in the 20th century (Gammelby 2021: 11). The medical research database PubMed similarly offers information based on clinical trials and systematic reviews, but its use requires extra effort to assess the quality of the research papers collected there. Rikke, an interviewee who was always keen to learn about the connection between PCOS and other physical and mental conditions, told me that she visited PubMed regularly. Furthermore, nearly all my interviewees mentioned browsing through the social media accounts of medical professionals providing information about PCOS and of influencers with this condition, who are sometimes called ‘expert patients’ in the medical humanities literature (Cordier 2014; Fox, Ward, O’Rourke 2005).

Collecting online sources is usually the first step in engaging with PCOS digitally. The next step is tracking PCOS through various mobile apps and following online communities. These two modes of digital lives with PCOS – self-tracking and communicating online – are at the centre of this article. They correspond to the global process of ‘repositioning healthcare, locating it within the domestic domain rather than the clinic’, and, at the same time, the transition from the physical to the virtual so that ‘the home becomes one node of a dispersed network of healthcare technologies’ (Lupton 2013: 261). Sarah Nettleton came up with the term ‘e-scaped medicine’ to describe the transition of medical knowledge from the clinic and the laboratory to various locations, including the home, through information technologies. The home thus becomes a part of ‘cyberspace’, where ‘knowledges of the biophysical body’ move out of medical institutions (Nettleton 2004: 673).

For my interviewees, e-scaped medicine is not about communication with doctors. Once they received a PCOS diagnosis, they were rarely offered follow-up visits to their healthcare provider, whether virtual or in-person. However, self-tracking apps and social media frequently appeared in their stories. Below, I will discuss how the logic of self-tracking relates to the needs of PCOS patients, after which I will suggest that social media can mitigate the shortcomings of the apps.

Self-tracker apps: the logic of choice

Self-tracking apps can be categorised as part of ‘m-health’ (where ‘m’ stands for ‘mobile’) or FemTech (Balfour 2023b; Lupton 2012). Women and people who menstruate use a variety of apps – from fitness and calorie trackers (Didžiokaitė, Saukko, Greifenhagen 2018; Esmonde 2020) to menstruation and fertility trackers (Balfour 2023; Epstein et al. 2017; Homewood 2018; Polzer et al. 2022; Kragh-Furbo et al. 2018). Studies in feminist STS (science and technology studies) and HCI (human-computer interaction) have critically assessed such trackers as playing an ambivalent role: they empower women by giving them greater awareness of their bodies, while at the same time they reinforce cis- and heteronormative stereotypes and further self-surveillance. Jessica Polzer and her colleagues, writing specifically about menstruation and fertility tracker apps (MFTAs), call the latter role ‘biopedagogical’: the apps’ designers present the body as a mystery to be solved. Furthermore, ‘bodily demystification promised by apps, and suggested in many of the testimonials, is ultimately achieved through the users’ participation in vigilant self-surveillance’ (Polzer et al. 2022: 170). Mikki Kressbach focuses on a different potentially negative effect of MFTAs: while they seemingly inspire users to break menstrual taboos, through their neutral icons and their logic of predicting menstrual cycles ‘they reinforce the perception that menstruation is an entirely private experience of self-management’. Offering users greater knowledge of their bodies, MFTAs allow planning activities around menstrual cycles so that they remain hidden: ‘The logs function as a way to monitor physical and emotional changes, and by detecting patterns, they may allow users to better conceal traces of their menstrual status’ (Kressbach 2021: 248). Therefore, the protection of users’ privacy comes at the price of reinforcing menstrual taboos and bodily shame.

I suggest that the biopedagogical messages of MFTAs operate according to what Annemarie Mol explains is ‘the logic of choice’, based on the neoliberal idea that the individual is responsible for their health and not dependent on public welfare services (see also Ward 2015 for the connection between neoliberal economic policies and the notion of self-care). The marketing of medical devices such as blood glucose monitors tells prospective consumers that ‘choice is a good because it offers individual autonomy’ and that everyone is entitled to make normative judgements about the best possible treatment (Mol 2008: 85–86). As Polzer and her colleagues demonstrate, the choice to use an MFTA is the choice to meticulously share personal information. This leads to learning more about one’s own body based on the app’s predictions. Its users become ‘prosumers’: they actively provide data about their mental and physical condition for the app’s algorithm so that they can consume the customised statistics on and predictions for their menstrual cycles (Polzer et al. 2022: 172). This does not apply only to MFTAs. In her book on self-tracking technologies

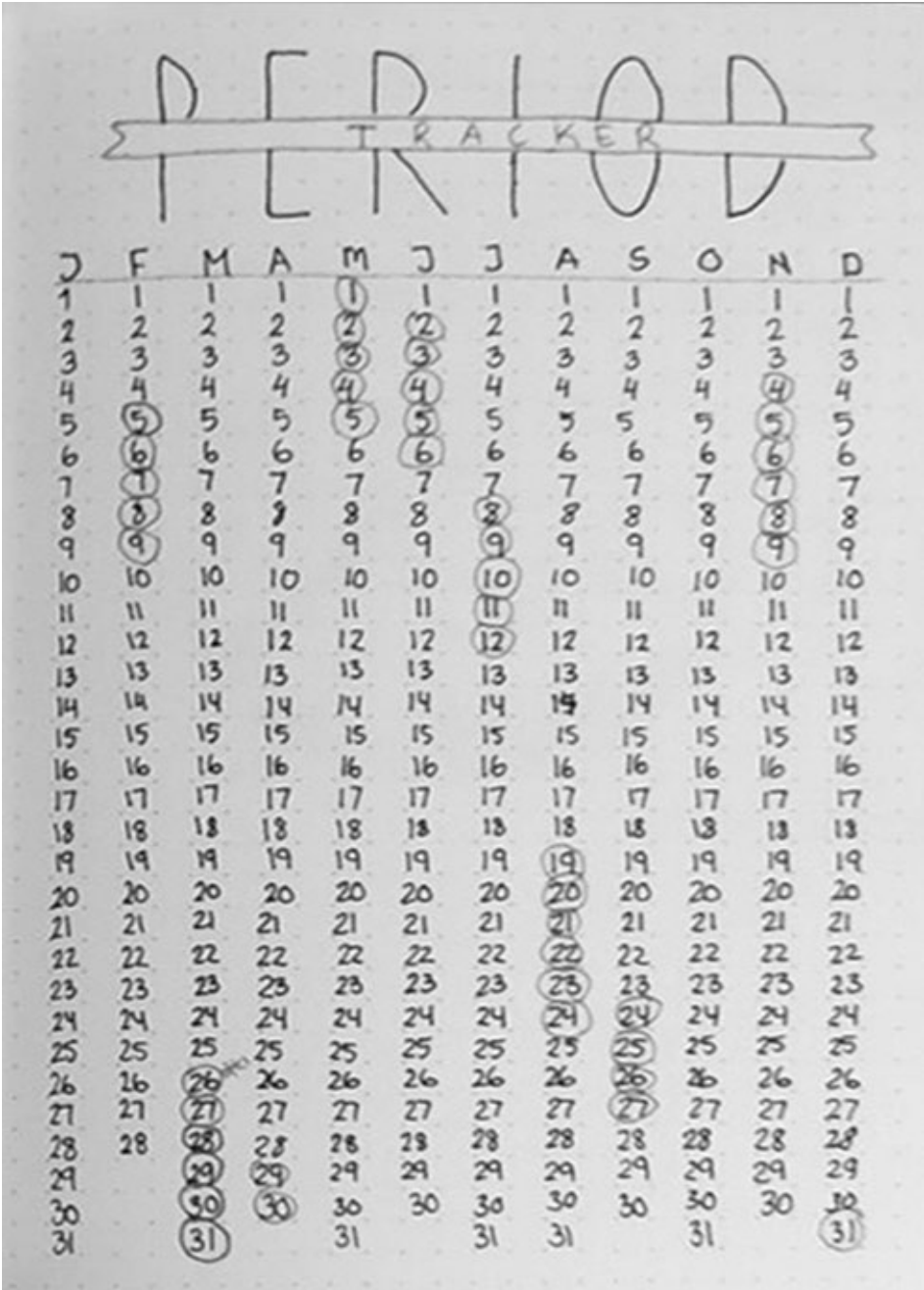
in general, Lupton describes users who choose which 'lively data' (meaning data that reflect both bodily functions and social relationships) to collect and how to collect it (Lupton 2016). While one may refrain from sharing certain data with the app (Esmonde 2020), the logic of choice presupposes active patient engagement in self-monitoring to obtain maximally precise customised information (Lupton 2013). Therefore, keeping certain symptoms or behaviours (such as eating or exercising) private and invisible to the apps would compromise the goal manifested by the market of health technologies: becoming knowledgeable about one's body and capable of achieving excellent health and fitness.

However, as Mol notes, the logic of choice does not fit well with a life with chronic medical conditions: 'When it comes to the question as to which treatment, product, goal or life is best, the logic of choice provides no answer.' (Mol 2008: 85) As my interviews show, the choice to share as much data as possible does not guarantee accurate predictions or explanations of menstruation patterns. One common PCOS symptom is irregular or absent ovulation and menstruation. Some of my respondents barely have a period once a year and do not see any point in tracking their cycle. Others have fairly regular periods and can therefore track them just like women without PCOS do.

Those who have a few irregular and unpredictable periods now and then are in the trickiest situation. For example, Esther was quickly disappointed with the popular app Clue because her periods happened only occasionally and did not fit the app's algorithm. When she entered her physical symptoms into the app, Clue could, for example, 'predict' that a period would start in 10 days, and then 20 days would go by without any sign of it. That is, the 'biopedagogical messages' of the app proved powerless in the face of the physical reality of PCOS (Lupton 2016). In addition, Esther did not see the point of tracking her emotions, an option that Clue offers, because she could never be sure that a particular mental state had anything to do with her long and irregular menstrual cycles: 'I don't rely on apps to tell me how I feel on a certain day because if it were memorable, I would remember it.' She quickly abandoned Clue and started using a bullet journal instead to track both her emotions and her period (Figure 1). In this case, the low-tech, material solution proved to be more adaptable to the everydayness of PCOS than datafication of the body. While Sarah Pink et al. argue that the digital and the material are always tightly intertwined into 'assemblages of humans–technologies–software–data' (Pink et al. 2017: 3), in Esther's case the material supplanted the digital as a more workable, meaningful alternative, allowing for more agency over private data.

Other interviews demonstrated that digital-material assemblages can be an integral part of daily life. For Karolina, the everyday home environment includes a variety of objects: balanced meals, plastic-free containers, dumbbells for exercising, her

Figure 1: A period tracker in a bullet journal owned by Esther.



Source: Photo by the author taken on 4 February 2023 in Denmark.

smartphone with the Flo app installed, and, at the time when she was trying to conceive, pregnancy tests, the Flo app's fertility mode, and attentively checked bodily fluids (specifically the 'egg-white' cervical mucus that indicates ovulation). I would call this totality of objects 'digital materiality'. As soon Karolina, as a 20-year-old, heard from her gynaecologist that PCOS makes it harder to conceive naturally, she was determined to be proactive and do everything possible before turning to fertility treatment. Therefore, she ditched her Tupperware to avoid its allegedly harmful effect on egg quality, abstained from coffee and fast carbs to balance insulin levels and thus regulate ovulation, drank enough water to stay hydrated, exercised regularly, and tracked all these activities in Flo. The app, therefore, became a part of the domestic environment of Karolina's suburban home – the repository of what Pink and colleagues call 'mundane data' (Pink et al. 2017).

Yet these data were not simply a reflection of daily routines: they were curated by the user. If Esther refused to track her period in an app altogether, Karolina avoided tracking certain data, namely, negative pregnancy tests. Self-tracking is arguably far from total and continuous self-surveillance: it is a messy and selective practice (Esmonde 2020). Negative pregnancy tests affected Karolina's self-confidence and challenged her self-perception as a prospective mother. Viewing a negative test as a 'mistake', she did not want to record it in the app. While such an omission could be counterproductive for the app's algorithm, it was necessary to maintain the user's mental health. It made the app feel ordinary and familiar rather than powerful and capable of solving the 'mystery' (Polzer et al. 2022) of the body affected by PCOS: 'And it was the thing I had to tell myself every day, that an app is just an app, it's not something that promises you a baby.'

Like Karolina, who did not want to enter negative pregnancy test results into Flo to avoid reminders of her challenged fertility, Alberte felt uncomfortable about her irregular period, regardless of any reproductive plans. Cycles, the app Alberte used, repeatedly sent her erroneous reminders of forthcoming periods, while in fact her periods did not arrive. Alberte described the app as 'such a fragile place'. She explained: 'Because you feel like you're not doing what you're supposed to do (...) Your period is supposed to just be there because you're a woman of a certain age, not 60 or whatever, a 20-something-year-old woman. Why aren't you ovulating? What is wrong with you?' Even outside her reproductive plans, Alberte thus views menstruation as an essential attribute of being a young woman and its absence as something diminishing her womanhood. The app makes the user fragile by constantly reminding her of her 'failure' to fit medical and social gender norms. This story of fragility echoes the negative perception of telecare technologies by people with chronic heart conditions analysed by Nelly Oudshoorn: self-monitoring makes one constantly think of the illness, not only in the clinic but also at home (Oudshoorn 2011: 175–177).

Several interviews revealed that rather than relying on the apps as powerful sources of knowledge about their bodies, women with PCOS tinkered with them: they entered some data and not others, ignored erroneous period predictions, and tried different apps or switched apps during pregnancy (for example, Preglife instead of Clue). Three respondents tracked their periods not in MFTAs but in the inbuilt health apps on their smartphones, such as Apple Health (this was what Diana, Isabella, and Lærke did). These apps, too, can be useful for some purposes but not for others. Isabella shared that she uses Apple Health to detect correlations between her menstrual cycle and physical symptoms such as indigestion or pelvic cramps. However, she was unable to guess the timing of her irregular ovulation. Even expensive ovulation kits were no help because false positive results are common in PCOS, so she ultimately neglected this option.

Some interviewees preferred combining different types of apps – MFTAs, fitness and calorie trackers, and reminders to take medicine – rather than entering all the symptoms or activities in one tracker. MFTAs were most often described as disappointing. For example, Diana tried to enter as much data as possible into Flo to receive accurate predictions of her irregular periods, but she did not achieve the desired result. While she appreciated the educational information on different phases of the menstrual cycle this app offers, Diana was no longer expecting to receive accurate predictions and used the app solely to record her period when it arrived. Rikke found it hard to track her cycle in an app due to her ADHD (attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder) because tracking requires concentration and consistency, which is challenging for someone with this type of neurodivergence. Nanna and Olivia both tried different apps and preferred Clue for a while, but eventually found it not very useful and gave up tracking. Olivia ended up using the Notes app on her smartphone to track her period, which can be described as a digital version of a bullet journal that works outside FemTech and the ‘practices of dataism’ – the practices of gaining insights from adding one’s own data to large data sets (Esmonde 2020: 78).

All in all, the everyday, mundane use of self-tracking apps that my respondents described does not follow the capitalist, market-driven logic of choice. Their typical use pattern is trying various apps in the hope of making sense of a menstrual cycle or conceiving a child, getting disappointed by the result, and abandoning the technology or using it sporadically and selectively, not viewing it as a source of education and empowerment. This finding is contrary to the argument of Didžiokaitė et al. that, unlike the members of the Quantified Self movement (an international community dedicated to actively using and designing self-tracking tools), ordinary users trust the app’s algorithms and do not try to meddle with it (Didžiokaitė et al. 2018: 1478). My respondents, too, are ordinary users, not Quantified Self enthusiasts. However, rather than simply following what the apps suggest they do, these women view the

apps as imperfect but still occasionally and fragmentarily useful. They understand that an app can promise neither a desired pregnancy nor a thorough understanding of one's menstrual pattern, and none of the respondents reported that the apps help them communicate with their doctors. The data women with PCOS produce in their apps is mundane in the sense Pink and colleagues describe it – 'always incomplete', 'ongoing', dependent on the flow of everyday events, which can include feeling certain emotions, having poor digestion, throwing out yet another negative pregnancy test, or deciding not to spend any more money on expensive ovulation test kits (Pink et al. 2017). For a better understanding of their bodies and their unique configurations of PCOS symptoms – or 'symptom packs', as Karolina phrased it – they turn to social media.

Making sense of PCOS online

As I have shown, self-tracking apps are not flexible enough to capture the diversity of symptoms that PCOS patients can have. The irregular menstrual cycles that apps fail to predict correctly is just one possible symptom, and it is not one that all PCOS patients have. Insulin resistance, which is considered a part of PCOS pathophysiology (Panidis et al. 2012), was named as a problem by several of my respondents. To battle this problem and prevent the development of type 2 diabetes, patients can benefit from the use of nutrition and fitness apps, but first of all they need guidance on what diet and exercise plan to follow depending on their vitals, body mass index, relationship with food (whether someone has the experience of an eating disorder), reproductive plans, and so on. In order to make sense of the blood tests, physical and mental sensations, menstrual patterns, and reproductive prospects it is necessary to go beyond private self-tracking and solitary searches for information on PubMed or the websites of Danish and foreign medical organisations.

Above I mentioned the insufficient information that my respondents received from their gynaecologists, GPs, and nurses. For example, when Diana, a Danish woman living in Norway, stopped taking her contraceptive pill at the age of 28, she had only ever menstruated once and had been waiting for a long time for her next period to come. Concerned, she turned to a gynaecologist, but this doctor refused to perform an ultrasound: 'She said, well, yeah, I don't think you have PCOS. You don't look like anyone who has PCOS.' Diana had to convince the doctor to perform the ultrasound, and as a result, she received a PCOS diagnosis but no good advice: 'I think she just wanted to get me out of the room.' Similarly, Johanne, a 27-year-old woman with several chronic illnesses undergoing fertility treatment, told me that it was hard to communicate with her doctors. She doubted that 'they have the empathy for this feeling of multidimensional disease and a lot of things going on mentally and physically'.

When Isabella received her PCOS diagnosis at the age of 18, she had many questions for her gynaecologist:

I was just like, okay, what's wrong with me? What can I do? What can I do in the future? And all he said back to me then was, 'If you want children, we can help you.' And then I said to him, But what can you do now? Because I'm 18. I'm, I'm in school. What can you do for me now? (...) And I said if you can't do anything now then I'm just about to leave, because his focus was only on, you know, getting me pregnant at [laughs] 18 years old.

Isabella therefore turned to Google and social media for information.

For Diana, Isabella, Johanne, and others in my fieldwork, social media offered the opportunity to be heard and seen with their different symptom packs and needs, whether those needs were improving their diet, figuring out what the results of certain blood tests meant, or discussing postpartum recovery – because, as Rikke put it, 'PCOS doesn't stop when you've had kids'. Offline support groups are almost non-existent. For example, Nanna told me about PCO Foreningen (Polycystic Ovaries Association), an organisation for women who have PCOS and polycystic ovaries but not enough symptoms to receive a PCOS diagnosis. For a while, PCO Foreningen arranged meetings in different regions in Denmark, but it ceased operating several years ago, and its website is inactive. Nearly all my respondents are members of private Facebook groups dedicated to PCOS.

Similarly, almost all the respondents told me that they follow doctors specialising in PCOS and expert patients on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. These public social media pages provide fewer opportunities for discussion and dialogue because any comments under the influencers' posts are visible to the broader public, which my respondents often find discouraging. The most frequently cited Danish Instagram page on PCOS 'Cysterskab' (a wordplay analogous to the English 'cysterhood', popular in PCOS communities) has very few comments under its posts (@cysterskab), but the influencer who runs this page also manages a private forum. According to many of my respondents, discussions in this forum are active and useful even for those who are reluctant to participate. I chose not to have access to this forum for two reasons. First, if I wanted to analyse the comments and discussions posted there, I would have to deal with the complicated ethical and legal issue of obtaining GDPR-compliant consent from participants. As Gammelby explains in her study of patient support groups on Facebook, if a researcher occasionally looks at some participants' comments, telling these participants about the research and the need for consent according to GDPR can feel 'disproportionally invasive' (Gammelby 2021: 128–139). Respecting the privacy of participants in the 'Cysterskab' forum, I found it more ethically appropriate

to rely on my interviewees' narratives about their use of this forum. It is not my aim to examine how they actually use the forum. Instead, I am interested in their impressions of and feelings about this digital space. Similarly, I abstained from joining any PCOS support groups, except for the one that I used to recruit participants and to get a general idea of its posts and discussions.

The distinction between public and private on the Internet is problematic: it is not defined by a division of space, and even the private status of Facebook support groups or password-protected forums does not guarantee that shared personal information is protected (Bennett 2011; Lupton 2012: 238–239). However, my interviews revealed that the desire to find relatable stories (or 'illness biographies', as Kragh-Furbo and colleagues call them) outweighs privacy concerns (Kragh-Furbo et al. 2018: 58). Esther admitted that a forum for PCOS patients makes her 'feel less alone' and provides answers to her questions about personal symptoms and needs. She finds it useful that other participants often share and discuss their blood test results. Paula, quoted at the beginning of this article, liked having the opportunity to share her frustration about unwanted body hair in support groups on Facebook: 'There's someone you can complain to and they *know* what you're talking about.'

Sharing private 'biosensor data' can be conceptualised as a 'sense-making activity', even if these data were gathered not by the patients themselves on personal m-health devices but by their doctors, as in the case of my interviewees (Kragh-Furbo et al. 2018: 57–58). Blood test results, diets and recipes, medications to lower blood sugar, birth control pills to mitigate menstrual pain and irregularity, and remedies for body and facial hair – all this is discussed in online communities. Like the members of the patient forums analysed by Kragh-Furbo and colleagues, participants in PCOS-themed Facebook groups and forums 'together attempt to make sense of their bodies' by engaging in 'conversations based on speculation, hypothesis and personal experiences' (Kragh-Furbo et al. 2018: 49, 57). They also share advice about doctors who are knowledgeable in PCOS and about the best reproductive clinics, as well as information about clinical trials of medicines for PCOS, such as SPIOMET4HEALTH, in which three of my respondents volunteered to participate (<https://spiomet4health.eu/>).

To be precise, online communities do not necessarily provide a full sense of acceptance and relatability. Patients with less common phenotypes, such as those with regular cycles or leaner bodies, find it harder to relate to other participants. Feeling like a 'non-typical' PCOS patient can discourage a person from joining online communities. This was, for example, Olivia's situation: when trying to conceive, she read a lot about PCOS on the Internet and could not find relatable information on medical websites: 'I felt like I didn't fit in any of the boxes that were described or any of the other symptoms that were described. So maybe I felt like, "What's the point of talking to other people?" Because what helped them is probably not going to do anything for me.'

At the same time, patients who feel like they are a ‘special case’ may be driven to join a community because they know PCOS is ‘multidimensional’ and that, therefore, the odds are that they will find people with similar phenotype profiles on social media. Furthermore, as I mentioned, the empathy sought by members of PCOS-themed groups and forums can come from people with different ‘symptom packs’ and experiences. For example, Johanne, a woman with a smaller body, expressed her empathy for people with larger bodies who are fat-shamed by their doctors. She also remarked that ‘a lot of people write really nice things’ in online communities when she shares feelings of sadness and loneliness.

If for Johanne online communities are first and foremost a source of emotional support, others have more practical goals. Veronica collects information in English-language Facebook groups and explores it further through a Google search: this is her mode of sense-making. When Nanna failed to find enough discussion about becoming pregnant after undergoing a fertility treatment specifically for women with PCOS, she launched a Facebook group on this subject and later another group about postnatal experiences. That is, she aimed to fill a gap on social media to help people with experiences similar to her own to make sense of them. Veronica admitted that for her it was important to see that there were other people with even worse experiences with facial hair or acne treatment who were nonetheless brave enough to share their pictures online. Mie made a similar comment: ‘I saw a lot of people online, like on Instagram and TikTok, who were on the same pill [systemic retinoids] that I was, and I saw the way they were experiencing [dryness and redness of skin], which was a lot worse than me.’

Whatever way PCOS patients choose to use social media, my interview data indicate that doing so helps them to make sense of their body better than self-tracking apps do. The access to the private details of others allows them to feel less alone and gives them clues to interpret their own specific symptoms, such as evaluating the degree of facial hair growth or, in the case of lean PCOS patients with insulin resistance, collectively looking for the best nutrition plan. By communicating in provisionally ‘private’ digital communities, patients are not simply consuming data provided by state medical labs (as in the case of the bloodwork ordered by their physicians) or generated by self-tracking apps. Instead, they are taking a critical approach to these data and helping each other to interpret them.

Caring through sharing

From the thematic analysis of my interview data, I conclude that social media tend to be more helpful for women with PCOS than self-tracking apps in understanding their bodies and symptoms. I explain this difference through Annemarie Mol’s theory of

different logics in healthcare. I have already argued that self-tracking apps follow the capitalistic logic of choice, where autonomous individuals choose to input their 'lively data' and thus control their well-being. However, PCOS bodies, which have diverse irregularities and defy gender norms, escape this logic. Social media communities operate according to a different logic, the logic of care, which, as Mol explains, involves constant tinkering and adjustment. Instead of assigning individuals with full responsibility for their health and making the best consumer choices, care involves negotiations between patients and their doctors, nurses, and significant others in the search for workable solutions. These solutions are not directed at curing the patient – because PCOS, like many chronic diseases, is incurable – but at achieving an experience of daily life that is good enough and bearable, with minimal pain, moderately good blood sugar levels, a blood pressure that is not too high, and so on (Mol 2008: 14–27).

My interview data suggest that PCOS-themed Facebook groups and forums operate according to the logic of care in three ways. First, they acknowledge the chronic character of PCOS and provide long-term support through continuous posting and discussions. Online communities can help their participants to keep trying to mitigate their symptoms without promising to eliminate them. Mol explains: 'But the fact that health is out of reach does not mean that you should give up.' (Mol 2008: 32) For example, Alberte once posted a question on a forum about when and how to tell a man you are dating about your reproductive health problems. This was a question that acknowledged possible long-term difficulties that cannot be avoided and, therefore, had to be shared with a prospective romantic partner.

Second, as I argued in the previous section, the groups allow for the discussion of diverse 'symptom packs', needs, priorities, and goals. To be sure, groups tend to focus on some issues more than others, such as weight loss or trying to conceive. As a result, patients with smaller bodies (the 'lean PCOS phenotype', explained, for example, in Goyal, Dawood 2017), like Karolina and Johanne, or child-free people, like Lærke, found it harder to encounter relatable stories. Therefore, the care online communities provide is not necessarily straightforward and universally applicable. However, according to Mol and her colleagues Ingunn Moser and Jeannette Pols, care can never be perfect, it can only be 'good enough' (Mol, Moser, Pols 2010: 13). It may take more time and effort to find fellow PCOS patients who have smaller bodies, more regular menstrual cycles, or without an interest in reproduction, but it is not impossible. You can post about your specific problems and attract participants with similar 'illness biographies'. Or, like Nanna, you can launch a new group, dedicated to a specific subcategory of PCOS. This is how the logic of care deals with the dilemma of 'the individual vs the collective'.

I can think of Danish women with PCOS as a collective that consists of individuals with different symptom packs, needs, and goals, or I can identify various sub-collec-

tives, such as 'lean' or 'child-free' PCOS patients, who need different kinds of care. Mol explains that the logic of care starts with collectives rather than individuals. These collectives are defined by the particular circumstances in people's lives, their habits, and their immediate social circles. The general guidelines for PCOS treatment are not universally applicable: each subcategory, or collective, needs its own solutions in terms of, for example, diets, exercise, regulation of menstrual cycle, facial hair removal, or management of fatigue or cravings. 'The character of the collectives that are relevant to care is not given but somehow needs to be established.' (Mol 2008: 68) Online communities, I suggest, serve as arenas for establishing the character of different collectives of PCOS patients. If the logic of choice that defines m-health technologies views patients as autonomous individuals, the logic of care 'is attuned to people who are first and foremost related' (Mol 2008: 72). Online communities facilitate relations between those who suffer from or successfully manage (though do not eliminate) similar PCOS symptoms.

Third, the members of online communities relate to each other by sharing their stories. Their posts and comments can be viewed as storytelling or as narrating 'illness biographies'. While Mol, in her study of the logic of care, focuses on medical settings, she recognises that through stories, care moves outside the doctor's consulting room to journalist reports and social scientists' papers, as well as to patients' daily lives. In Mol's case study, Dutch patients with type 1 diabetes told stories to 'their relevant others, their relatives, their friends'. These stories differ from arguments (which are used in clinical research and marketing) in that they allow for diverse interpretations. 'While sound arguments should be clear and transparent, powerful stories work by evoking people's imagination, empathy and irritation. While conflicting arguments work against each other, conflicting stories tend to enrich each other. And while adding up arguments leads to a conclusion, adding stories is more likely to be the way of raising even more questions.' (Mol 2008: 88)

My interviews demonstrate that reading unrelatable stories can be difficult. 'I just got so discouraged about all the stories that I didn't see myself in', Diana admitted. Unrelatable stories raise questions such as: if others can make their menstrual cycles more regular by losing weight, what can you do if you already have a small body and losing more weight could be bad for your health (Karolina)? How to remember to take birth control pills for menstrual regularity if your ADHD makes it hard to remember about (Rikke)? Or how to manage fertility treatment emotionally if your cardiologist believes that it could be dangerous for you given your chronic heart condition co-existing with PCOS (Johanne)?

Nevertheless, patients can keep telling stories even if they do not meet anyone online with a similar experience and at least find empathy from people who try to relate to them. They can create new communities for telling such stories, just as Nanna did

when she was pregnant and then became a mother while still struggling with PCOS symptoms. Or they can tell stories offline, like Rikke, who chairs an ADHD foundation and talks about her PCOS at its face-to-face meetings. Sense-making can transcend the boundaries between the Internet and the tangible world, between private and public. As Mol argues, 'Public life deserves to be infused with rich stories about personal events. Private events should not be hidden behind the desire to be free' (Mol 2008: 102). Stories about personal events can be more relatable or less relatable, but if patients keep telling them, everyone gets a chance to make better sense of their lives with PCOS.

Self-tracking devices are designed for individuals who want freedom and privacy to manage their physical and mental health. In exchange, however, they require self-surveillance. They present data, to use Mol's expression, as 'clean, contained and unemotional, far removed from the messy contingencies and uncertainties of the body and its ills and the distressing or unsettling emotions associated with these'. Online communities, conversely, offer stories about uncertainty. In the case of PCOS, these can be stories about, for example, messy menstrual patterns, confusing hormone levels, or uncertainty about the best diet for preventing diabetes. Telling private stories is a 'form of public coordination' (Mol 2008: 102). By telling stories, members of PCOS-themed online communities collectively navigate diverse questions, define the characteristics of collectives with different symptom packs, and thereby offer continuous care without promising any perfect outcomes.

However, the logic of choice and the logic of care do not necessarily need to be in sharp opposition. The socio-material networks of biosensing can accommodate both types of logic. While my respondents turned to social media to share stories and ask for advice, they kept making individual choices about which influencers to follow, which websites to visit for up-to-date medical information, and which products to consume for managing PCOS, be it a gym membership or a book of PCOS-friendly recipes. Just like the use of self-tracking apps, participation in online communities can be selective. At different stages of one's life, either the logic of choice or care can make more sense and be preferred.

Furthermore, care is not devoid of power inequalities. While scholars advocating a 'feminist ethics of care' frame care in opposition to neoliberalist individualism and associate care with global solidarity (Kittay 2011; Robinson 2015), the notion of care can also be used to mask inequalities. Michelle Murphy, in her analysis of the political discussions of care in the 1970s, criticises these discussions' reliance on 'white privilege, capitalism, and postcolonial humanitarianism' (Murphy 2015: 720). In the case of Danish PCOS support groups and forums, I can assume they are predominantly made up of white, middle-class, cisgender heterosexual women, whose concerns and opportunities define the topics of the discussion threads. The fact that most of my

respondents belong to this category confirms this assumption.⁵ People with PCOS who are from marginalised groups would feel less safe in such online communities, not least, presumably, because of privacy concerns. Therefore, I am not suggesting that social media can make up for the shortcomings of the capitalist logic of choice and produce a perfectly inclusive sisterhood. Nonetheless, I hypothesise that online communities have the potential for what Murphy calls ‘unsettling care’ – applying critical tools to problems that already exist, ‘reckoning with a world already violated’ (Murphy 2015: 732). Sharing more stories about PCOS as experienced in different cultural, social, and political contexts, shaped by different economic conditions, can make care more flexible, inclusive, and effective.

Conclusion

This article offered a theoretical analysis of digital technologies used by women with PCOS, a complex chronic medical condition. My analysis of the interviews showed that at least some women with a PCOS diagnosis can engage with digital technologies to make sense of their symptoms and identify their needs. I focused on two types of technologies: self-tracking apps and online communities. I argued that self-tracking apps follow the capitalist logic of choice based on the idea of the autonomy of the individual – for example, of an empowered woman who knows her body very well through consumer technology. Online communities operate according to the logic of care and rely on the sharing of personal stories to find collective solutions. But rather than presenting the two types of logic in sharp contrast, I suggested that PCOS patients constantly navigate between them. The examples from my interviews often demonstrate the simultaneity of the wish to self-sustain through FemTech products and the drive to show solidarity and share advice. If a menstrual tracker annoys patients with irrelevant notifications, they can abandon it in favour of a bullet journal. An influencer on Instagram or TikTok can inspire patients to choose themselves how to treat their symptoms instead of following the generic advice from their doctor. However, if their choices do not produce the desired result, they can find a Facebook group or a forum in which to share their frustrations, or they can even organise a new online community. Digital technologies can be a source of despair because PCOS is stubborn, incurable, and impossible to explain via self-tracking apps. But these technologies can also bring one closer to people with similar despair who can empathise

⁵ My limited command of spoken Danish limited my choice of respondents to those with strong English proficiency, that is, well-educated middle-class women. Even though the average level of English proficiency among young Danes is quite high (EF 2024: 18), I assume that people with higher education are more confident communicating in English with an interviewer.

and offer possible solutions, and if these solutions do not work, they can all collectively look for alternatives. The capitalistic logic of choice that defines self-tracking apps and other FemTech products can be frustrating for women with PCOS. Still, these products are not necessarily useless: my respondents gave examples of their instrumentalising them as just one component of their sense-making.

In navigating between the logic of choice and the logic of care patients are blurring the boundaries between private and public. The everyday management of PCOS encompasses the privacy of home, the relative privacy of online communities, and the publicity of social media accounts by medical influencers and expert patients. The private, semi-private, and public spaces of everyday life with PCOS comprise ‘socio-material networks of biosensing’ (Kragh-Furbo et al. 2018: 267–268). A PCOS patient, for example, can simultaneously keep some of their symptoms out of self-tracking apps and share them instead with virtual strangers in a Facebook group or post a photo of their facial hair before shaving it in order to feel more confident in an offline meeting of a mental health support community. Publicity and privacy exist and fuse in the everyday reality of PCOS, just like the practice of digital self-surveillance interweaves with mutual caring through sharing in online communities. A woman with PCOS is not a self-sustained, autonomous individual, but a member of numerous collectives in which technologies find multiple uses.

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Empowerment on Air: Challenging Gender Norms Through Participatory Radio in Northern Uganda

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Abstract: Mass media such as radio blurs the distinction between the public and the private. This article explores the gendered soundscape of a participatory radio campaign in Northern Uganda, which aimed to empower women and initiate debates on gender norms, including gender-based violence, teenage pregnancy, and women's entrepreneurship. Drawing on feminist critiques of the public and private spheres, we explore the impact of radio on women's empowerment. Ethnographic research found that participatory radio has the capacity to create a sense of community, an 'intimate public sphere', and critical consciousness about denied choices as a condition for further empowerment. Participatory radio also provides opportunities for women to deliberate and express opinions on public matters. The instances of political participation facilitated by the radio described in this paper exemplify feminist critiques of the supposed boundary between public and private activities. This paper thus encourages a rethinking of what counts as political engagement, recognising that intimate, everyday acts can contribute to promoting democratic participation and deliberation. However, radio's impact is ultimately dependent on access to and control over technology, political institutions, and public social life – which women typically have less of – and the receptiveness of institutions and structures to popular change.

Keywords: public sphere, interactive radio, women's empowerment

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In Uganda today, radio is both the main and the most trusted source of information amongst a population of whom only 10% are internet users (NITA-U 2022: 93; Twaweza East Africa 2023; World Bank 2024). Given its popularity, ease of accessibility, low operating costs, and capacity to reach rural populations (Macueve et al. 2009: 24), radio is seen as a technology capable of facilitating debates, challenging social norms, and fostering community engagement. In the region we studied, radio has a solid listener base rooted in its wartime history. In the war in Northern Uganda between 1986 and 2006, rebel groups, which later merged into the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), fought against the Ugandan army. The local radio MEGA FM played an important role in conflict reduction. Launched in 2002 in Gulu City and funded by the British Department for International Development (DFID), MEGA FM facilitated peace negotiations and reconciliation efforts among populations affected by the war. One of the key programmes was the 'dwog paco' ('come back home') programme, encouraging LRA fighters to abandon rebellion, accept a government amnesty, and reintegrate into their communities (Adyanga 2019). Eighteen years after the war, MEGA FM radio remains one of the most popular and most-listened-to stations in the region.

The present study focuses on an alternative utilisation of radio than conflict resolution. What are the outcomes of employing radio as a tool to stimulate debates on gender stereotypes and social norms that perpetuate discrimination against women? A non-profit organisation called TRAC FM collaborated with MEGA FM and other radio stations to implement an interactive campaign addressing three key areas: teenage pregnancies, gender-based violence, and women's economic empowerment. Audience engagement was facilitated through SMS poll questions and studio call-ins, where participants answered multiple-choice questions like 'What is the biggest challenge for girls to get back to school after pregnancy?' One could ask whether answering multiple-choice radio polls through SMS engages respondents in private thinking or public deliberation. Indeed, even without the interactive polling, radio and other mass media could be posited as a tool that brings the public sphere to bear on the private, and an SMS poll potentially enables the reverse as well. However, we argue that interactive radio does not simply blur public/private boundaries, it reveals them as fluid, historically contingent, and constantly renegotiated. Building on hooks (2006), Young (2005), and others, we assert that rather than erasing the private, interactive radio reconfigures it as a site of political engagement and empowerment, while simultaneously challenging its assumed separation from the public. Participation and deliberation in the public/private sphere as a form of empowerment and distinctions between the 'public' and 'private' are therefore key concepts addressed through this study of interactive radio.

Within feminist literature, radio has been conceptualised as a ‘gendered soundscape’ (Järviluoma, Vilkkö, Moisala 2003; Ehrick 2015). Soundscape is, generally, the ‘acoustic environment’ of societies (Schafer 1993: 7). Radio’s capacity to transcend spaces and social contexts gives the radio soundscape both public and private properties. As examined in the following discussion of the feminist critique of the divide, notions of the public and private are central for the debates on gender norms; according to Michael Warner, they are ‘bound up with meanings of masculinity and femininity’ (2002: 23), associating women with the domestic or private sphere and men with the public. In the digital world, as Hannes Bajohr (2023: 869) argues, the notions of public and private have become not only increasingly blurred but shifted from ‘having the quality of a place or state to that of an action – a gesture’. ‘Publicing’ and ‘privating’ are, according to Bajohr, gestures of making a space public and private. As such, gestures are multidimensional actions made by the communicators encompassing psychological, physiological, and cultural dimensions (Bajohr 2023: 872).

While we agree that the public and private are not inherent qualities of a space, the idea of a gesture captures only one type of radio’s character in the context of this dichotomy. Throughout our research, they were not only meanings performed by communicants and interpreted by listeners, but also imagined spaces enabling different modes of engagement. In other words, the public and private are, simultaneously, ‘abstract categories for thinking about law, politics, and economics’ (Warner 2002: 23). In this article, we argue that the concept of soundscape enables one to conceptualise the public and private as qualities of a sphere extending beyond the radio’s boundaries. The radio broadcasts of TRAC FM have the potential to open the debate about this distinction, both in content and form, and thus also about gender norms.

In this work, we explore how participatory radio challenges the public and private spheres and the issues associated with them, as framed by three TRAC FM campaign themes. The article is structured as follows: In the theoretical section, we demonstrate the ways in which the public and private spheres have been problematised within feminism. While there is considerable overlap between the critique and our own position, we contend that the distinction itself can also be a space for women’s empowerment. Our view takes critical consciousness to be a necessary, but not sufficient, precondition for empowerment. Stronger forms of empowerment might better be located in women’s practices of engaging with the public sphere to influence sociopolitical structures and institutions. Subsequently, we present the research setting and the methodology employed. In the empirical section, we present three cases exemplifying three ways in which radio programming provides comfort to women who have experienced trauma or stigmatisation, fosters community activities, and enhances public political engagement. We then examine the impact of radio as a conduit for

community and public political activities, challenging the dichotomy between public and private spheres. Finally, in the Discussion, we evaluate the positive effects and limitations of radio on women's empowerment, as well as the barriers to accessing participatory radio programming.

Theoretical background

Much has been written about whether public and private are separate zones. In addition to traditional philosophical perspectives, from Immanuel Kant to John Dewey, from Hannah Arendt to Jürgen Habermas, the distinction between private and public has been a focus of feminist analysis. Carole Pateman (1989: 118) asserts that the dichotomy of the private and the public is, 'ultimately, what the feminist movement is about', as it has been 'central to almost two centuries of feminist writing and political struggle'. Any critique of gender must inevitably address issues related to the public and the private because to question gender is to question private life publicly (Warner 2002: 31). Challenging the public/private distinction has, thus, become a key objective within feminism at various points in its history.

A border dispute: public and private

Jeff Weintraub (1997) summarises the feminist critique of the public/private distinction in three overlapping points. First, the two zones have been studied by theorists in a way that treats the domestic and private spheres as trivial or ignores them outright. Second, the public and private domains are themselves imbued with gendered characteristics. These characteristics are often gendered according to a common pattern, whereby men and women are assigned disparate spheres of life based on their perceived 'nature'. Third, by classifying institutions such as the family as private, the segregation serves to insulate abuse and harm from political and legal intervention (Weintraub 1997: 28–29). If the public sphere is conceived of as a domain for public deliberation and governance, the private sphere is, to a large extent, not subject to such oversight. By questioning the boundary between private and public, social institutions that are associated with women in these spheres, such as family or marriage, and phenomena such as sexuality, intimacy, and gender become 'legitimate areas of common concern' (Warner 2002: 33).

It is therefore unsurprising that some feminist scholars propose the complete abandonment of the public/private distinction. Given that '[f]or women the measure of intimacy has been the measure of the oppression', feminism had to 'explode the private', Catherine MacKinnon (1989: 191) argues. However, as Ronnie Cohen and Shannon O'Byrne (2013: 47) point out, other strands of feminism seek to uphold the

public/private distinction, maintaining that women's interests include privacy rights – such as reproductive freedom, freedom of partner choice, and the ability to make decisions in childcare arrangements. Importantly, bell hooks posits that the private sphere can serve as a conduit for empowerment (hooks 2006: 44). In *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (2006), hooks critiques mainstream feminist thought for presupposing that all women experience private life in an identical manner, particularly white, middle-class feminism, which heightens the importance of escaping from the private sphere and access to public life. For women in postcolonial settings, the home and private spaces have historically functioned not only as places of subjugation but also as sites of survival, intimacy, and community building. This is also evident in our case study, where radio broadcasts facilitate women's education, enhance self-esteem, and instil the confidence to engage in discussions on sensitive topics in the relative safety of the domestic sphere. The privacy of the domestic sphere, in this conceptualisation, 'describes conditions that make the political possible' (Young 2005: 140). This insight is particularly important for understanding how participatory radio in Northern Uganda challenges gender norms: the radio does not simply enable women access to the public from the private but makes the home a site of political and public engagement while largely staying in the domestic sphere.

In the context of radio studies, some scholars have – as a supplement to the duality of public and private – put forth a third notion of an 'intimate sphere'. Recognising that who is entitled to engage in public activities, and the delineation of what should be considered private, is ultimately a power struggle (Lloyd 2020: 15), the intimate sphere has, in Justine Lloyd's view, 'the potential to operate as a third term that unsettles clear divisions and taken-for-granted hierarchies between public and private' (2020: 24). In this article, we do not attempt to replace the private with a notion of an intimate sphere, but to understand the 'dynamic of closeness and distance' inherent to radio (Lloyd 2020: 19), in which we observed empowerment (or its limitations) during our fieldwork. To denote this dynamic, we adopt Lauren Berlant's (2008) conception of the 'intimate public sphere', which we find fitting for the empowering environment that participatory radio offers to women in Uganda. An intimate public sphere is a space structured by shared experience and affect, providing a sense of social belonging (Berlant 2008: viii). Participatory radio creates a mediated space where private experiences are shared publicly, but participants/listeners remain physically within private settings. This creates a space where women's voices and concerns gain public recognition and collective resonance; but in a way where women can choose the extent of their involvement and address their struggles in a manner they deem suitable. Although the word 'public' may seem to reinforce the categorical binary of public/private, this is not the case; we use this notion to highlight how

shared affect and mediated participation expose the political nature of the so-called private. Therefore, we build on Berlant's concept with the insights of hooks, Young, and others, emphasising that interactive radio does not erase private qualities, but transforms the private itself into a site of potential empowerment.

Empowerment

Notions of *public* and *private*, as well as *empowerment*, are terms that provoke heated debates among scholars. As with public and private, the utility of empowerment is contingent upon how it is defined, understood, and applied in specific contexts. Despite substantial criticism of the term, empowerment's complex theorisation among researchers enables us to frame the overall goal TRAC FM strives to attain and the affordances of participative radio to transform gender relations in general. In essence, empowerment pertains to change; Naila Kabeer (1999: 437) defines it as a process of change from a position where people are denied the ability to make choices. To start this process of change, it is widely agreed that empowerment is contingent upon the initial realisation ('consciousness') that the choice exists but is denied (Alsop, Heinsohn 2005; Cornwall 2016; Raj 2020). The interactive radio campaign of TRAC FM opened debates on sensitive topics, such as the stigma teenage mothers face when in school, gave listeners factual information about the health-related effects of contraceptives and the causes of teenage pregnancy, and shared examples of the economic entrepreneurship of women. Overall, the essential part of the programming was what many respondents dubbed 'sensitisation' of the community. But while gaining this critical consciousness seems to be a necessary condition, empowerment does not depend solely on an individual realising that their abilities are greater than imagined due to the constraints of, say, cultural norms. Empowerment is unavoidably about a change of power relations. A frequent criticism of empowerment strategies of large humanitarian organisations is the expectation that 'women should somehow be empowered to participate within the economic and political structures of society' (Rowlands 1997: 11). If the empowering process does not result in a transformation of the underlying power structures, it is unlikely to succeed. We return to this issue repeatedly.

Deliberation and participation as empowerment

A step beyond consciousness, empowerment requires one to aspire to change the status quo and engage in the process of change (Raj 2020). One way to engage in change is to involve oneself in public discussion around issues where one wishes to effect change. Within democratic theory, this has been explored through the lenses of participatory and deliberative democracy. While often discussed separately, both traditions emphasise citizens' involvement in shaping political and social life. Participatory democracy stresses the inclusion of voices typically excluded from decision-making.

Deliberative democracy focuses on the quality of citizen dialogue. For Lyn Carson and Stephen Elstub (Carson, Elstub 2022), each approach emphasises either the breadth (participation) or depth (deliberation) of citizen engagement. In this paper, we view both the breadth and the depth of citizen engagement as desirable, aligning with Elstub's (2018: 186) finding that 'it is desirable and coherent to pursue a "participatory deliberative democracy"'. This framework challenges a clear boundary between the private and public and instead reimagines it as a continuum. Change may begin with private opinions and organically develop into political or social demands played out in street protests or voting patterns aimed at influencing formal political institutions. In fact, it can be argued that private thinking or intimate discussions are a necessary precondition for organic political movements, demands, and practices.

Deliberation and participation as citizenship practices

If empowerment is defined as the aspiration to change the status quo and actively engage in the process of change, then empowerment requires citizens who practise both deliberation and participation. We consider participation and deliberation to be practices of an active definition of citizenship. Such definitions have been used in previous ethnographic studies of Northern Ugandan citizenship. Marjoke Oosterom's study of the effects of conflict on citizenship practices among the Acholi and Langi peoples of Northern Uganda defines the practice of citizenship as the 'individual and collective actions undertaken by people to engage in the politics of the public sphere, with other social actors and with state and non-state institutions' (Oosterom 2016: 75). Deliberation inherently possesses public qualities – one can hardly think purely 'privately' of 'public' matters. Deliberation, therefore, is a practice of citizenship that does not easily fit into categories of private or public. To train people in deliberation is to create empowered citizens who can better *participate* in the public sphere and influence political outcomes.

Deliberation and participation in TRAC FM's theory of change

TRAC FM's conceptual underpinning is also articulated in the language of the public sphere. Ironically, our later findings will show that TRAC FM's greatest impact cannot be fully appreciated without borrowing from feminist scholarship that questions the public/private divide. Before that, let us lay out TRAC FM's theory of change.

Using a Habermasian framework, TRAC FM's theory of change aims to fuel 'a vibrant, empowered, and informed civic space where citizens articulate views and needs and hold leaders accountable when reasonable'.¹ The campaign's project proposal

¹ TRAC FM. 2021. Application for Project Funding in the Field of the Promotion/Protection of Civic Spaces. TRAC FM internal documents, provided 01/2023.

further declares that TRAC FM's success is 'primarily measured by citizens' capacity to perform their democratic duty of debating matters of public importance' (ibid.). Although deliberative or participatory democracy is not mentioned, this framework assumes that greater participation and deeper deliberation are crucial for holding democratic representatives accountable. Furthermore, by participating in debate and discussion, citizens empower themselves to debate public interests in a way that contributes to the change of norms, behaviours, and attitudes.

TRAC FM's framework aligns with Nancy Fraser's model of participatory democracy, for whom the public sphere is 'the space where citizens deliberate about their common affairs... It is a site for the production and circulation of discourses which can in theory be critical of the state' (Fraser 1992: 110–111). Seyla Benhabib (1997: 9) also defines deliberation as an act of creating or taking advantage of better opportunities to think about public matters. The process of deliberation is what gives rise to ideal democratic citizens with rationally ordered preferences which form the basis for their votes. However, as she points out, such opportunities are not always availed or equitably available – for example, to women. When that is the case, the conceptual foundation of democracy as an amalgam of the rationally ordered desires of citizens begins to falter. In this view, TRAC FM's feedback loop of poll questions and corresponding talk shows aims to provide a 'better opportunity' for as many Ugandan citizens as possible to consider public matters where they normally have less access to information and capacity for engagement. This, again, shows how TRAC FM grapples with how best to combine aspects of participatory and deliberative democracy.

TRAC FM appears to pursue deliberative and participatory democracy in tandem, seeing no tension between the participatory emphasis on 'quantity' and the deliberative emphasis on 'quality.' Scholars point to this classic contention between deliberation and participation: 'Clearly, there is a trade-off between large numbers of participants and in-depth participation' (Carson, Elstub 2022: 18). However, these differences might matter more in institutional settings. As a small NGO, TRAC FM seems satisfied to promote both deliberative and participatory qualities among citizens without having to consider how they would play out in institutional practice.

TRAC FM's approach seems to build on Elstub (2018: 186): 'many citizens would welcome more opportunities to participate in, meaningful and consequential, deliberation'. Using Uganda's two most accessible mediums (radio and mobile), TRAC FM aligns with participatory principles of providing 'opportunities to those who have traditionally been silenced or left unheard' (Carson, Elstub 2022: 21). However, TRAC FM also aims for objective, high-quality debates, aligning with the view that '[d]eliberative advocates ... are process-driven rather than issue-driven' (ibid.: 23). Multiple-choice

polling ensures that deliberation is ‘on topic’ and that listeners are exposed to the votes and views of others, encouraging them to consider different perspectives. Within this narrow format, participation is open to virtually anyone with a basic mobile phone. Poll results are broadcast on talk shows featuring trained guests (usually with opposing viewpoints) conducting an exciting but rational and fact-based debate. TRAC FM’s model, therefore, attempts to encourage maximum participation while aiming to build civic skills required for robust deliberation among every participant.

Research setting and methods

A man in a white shirt and black trousers is sitting on a wooden chair outside a thatched hut. He is holding a mobile phone in his hand. On the hardened ground next to him sits a woman with short hair in a patterned shirt, four preschool children, and behind them an elderly woman in a scarf. They are listening to a transistor radio that stands against the wall of the hut. Moments later, a voice says in the Lango language: ‘Please send us your answer ... Go to your phone and type WA, then a space, and then your answer’.

The vignette describes a Northern Ugandan family engaged in an interactive radio show put on by the non-profit TRAC FM. The NGO runs multiple-choice radio polls and related talk shows to discuss poll results on a variety of topics, with the objective of developing an informed and inclusive ‘public sphere’. TRAC FM is not a radio station itself but partners with regional stations airing in local languages across Uganda, co-operating with MEGA FM in the Northern region. At the time of research, the topics under discussion were threefold: teenage pregnancies, gender-based violence, and women’s economic empowerment. Radio listeners participated via toll-free SMS by answering multiple-choice questions announced on the radio. Direct call-ins to the studio were less common, limited by the number of listeners and the format of the debates. Radio hosts discussed poll results with guests, and the statistics were further used for advocacy campaigns with other organisations and the Ugandan government.

Unfortunately, the vignette does not depict one of our fieldwork encounters. None of them looked as portrayed above; it is a description of a promotional video of the organisation. Our findings indicate that radio listening frequently occurred in smaller, more intimate groups, not infrequently in solitude. Radio ownership was uncommon; most listeners accessed the programming via push-button phones. The participatory process was not as straightforward as it appears in the video either, as SMS polls occurred two weeks before the actual radio discussion. This implies that not all participants (those who responded to the SMS poll) were also listeners (of the radio show), and vice versa. However, the video depicts certain phenomena accurately.

For instance, phone ownership was more prevalent among men, most women sat on the floor in the presence of men, and the simple setting with thatched huts and mudbrick houses effectively portrays the typical settings of our fieldwork sites in rural Northern Uganda, Acholi subregion, where we met with TRAC FM poll respondents.

To examine participatory radio's role across the three themes and the public/private divide, we employed ethnographic methods. Fieldwork took place in Northern Uganda between January and April 2023 as part of both authors' thesis research toward masters degrees at the University of Amsterdam. During this research, we held semi-structured group and individual interviews with 33 TRAC FM poll participants. TRAC FM and MEGA FM provided participant phone numbers under conditions of anonymity for research purposes after receiving confirmation of research clearance from the Department of Anthropology. Consent for interviews was obtained in English or through local-language phone calls, followed by conversations in which participants were encouraged to ask about the research purpose. To protect our interlocutors, we assigned pseudonyms and obscured identifiable information. Following similar standards, one additional ethnographic account – that of Blessing, who appears in the Discussion – is drawn from TRAC FM's 2024 internal midterm evaluation activities. During this period, and the article's writing, one author was employed in an Evaluation role at TRAC FM, but steps were taken to ensure objectivity.

From 33 interviews conducted either in English or with the help of a translator fluent in both the Lango and Luo languages, we selected excerpts that best capture interactive radio's impact on women's empowerment and the public/private boundary. Throughout the research, we were struck by how overwhelmingly positive the listeners were about both the TRAC FM programme and the MEGA FM radio. As we show in the findings, the content itself was valued for giving women comfort and reassurance. But in addition, there was something special in the approach to the radio itself. Apart from radio being Uganda's dominant medium, we began to understand that MEGA FM has been instrumental in the lives of many. The war between the LRA and the Ugandan government displaced up to 1.8 million people (IDMC in Vorhölter 2014: 22) into internally displaced people's (IDP) camps. During and after the war, MEGA FM played a crucial role in maintaining some semblance of a public sphere amid severe social destruction:

That was the peak of the north LRA insurgency. (...) People would always get information [from MEGA] and if you ask them, they will tell you 'It's MEGA that has been giving us hope!' You know, you are running away from your home. You go to the bush. You cannot even sleep because it is cold. Mosquitoes are there, and then the only thing you have is to tune to your radio in the bush. And then you put a very low volume, that it doesn't even go beyond 5 metres,

but you are able to hear what is happening. Where did the LRA attack again today? What is happening? What is the government doing for people who are here suffering? (Bale, MEGA FM host)

In this context, we found individuals who turn to MEGA FM for emotional reassurance, social guidance, and hard information. Aisha, a survivor of gender-based violence, Mirembe, a respected and elderly woman, and Loyce, a women's rights activist, found what they sought through TRAC FM programmes on MEGA FM. We selected these three cases as exemplary for three ways that we identified among the 33 participants of how the TRAC FM programming offers public comfort for public problems, fertilises community activities, and fosters public political engagement. Through the findings below, these accounts show the programme's value for individuals and localised public spheres, with potential large-scale impact due to the nature of radio.

Findings

Public comfort for private problems

Aisha is a young mother who became pregnant while still a teenager. Her first partner abandoned her, and she then entered a relationship with a second man who became abusive.² After her marriage dissolved, she became a single mother. Especially in rural communities in Uganda, single mothers commonly face shame and stigma, family rejection, lost career prospects, and in the case of being teenage mothers are unlikely to continue school education (Webb et al. 2023). When asked how she felt while listening to the TRAC FM programming, Aisha replied:

When I hear the discussion after the results, it is also encouraging me in one or another way. How to stay strong. Then, if I am single, it helps me to stay strong, the examples of how others are going through these experiences. She [the guest/host] tells how to overcome these issues and the problems we are facing. (Aisha, 29 years old)

For Aisha, the TRAC FM radio shows – and radio in general – offered a supportive platform where issues relevant to her life were openly discussed. In particular, the show's focus on teenage mothers and the stigma they face helped bring a traditionally private issue into public discourse in a way that was both sensitive and empow-

² Due to the sensitivity of the events, further details were not sought, and the interview was only taken as far as Aisha was willing to divulge.

ering. Although Aisha herself, at 29, was not considering returning to school, she found motivation in stories of other single mothers who had managed to make some money and not give up. Hearing others' experiences further reassured her that she was not alone in her struggles.

For the interviewed women who were teenage or single mothers, such as Aisha, campaigns like TRAC FM offer a space that is private, as they capture the personal experience of stigma and hardships that their position brings. However, due to the shared nature of radio, these spaces also entail considerable publicness. A particular characteristic of radio is the ability to transcend space despite spatial distances and thus to mingle the contexts of disparate social situations. In one of the oldest meanings, coming from the Roman notion of the *res publica* (Warner 2002: 26), the private is a spatial signifier in opposition to the public, representing that which is bounded by the walls of the home (Bystrom, Nuttal 2013: 309). If public and private are understood spatially, radio effectively breaks down this separation; both conceptually and literally. And yet, as hooks (2006) and Young (2005) emphasise, this does not imply abandoning the private but reclaiming it as a site of agency. For Aisha, having a home in which she could listen to broadcasts safely was particularly important.

Aisha lived under the protection of a relative who let her occupy part of the house in exchange for taking care of her two children and the household. The simple mudbrick house, comprising two rooms, stood largely abandoned outside a village, amidst the arid savannah of Northern Uganda. Like many other listeners, Aisha listened to the radio either alone or with a friend. It was evident that radio listening often occurred in solitude. Beyond the stigma attached to teenage motherhood, solitary listening in Northern Uganda stems from broader societal changes. Modernisation and urbanisation have reshaped Ugandan family structures (Stites 2020), while war in the North has displaced and torn families apart (Mergelsberg 2012; Whyte et al. 2014). These disruptions partly explain why solitary listening is relatively common.

In accordance with our findings, most people experiencing loneliness in Uganda are women (Nzabona, Ntozi, Rutaremwa 2016), and radio has frequently served as a source of companionship for those experiencing high levels of loneliness. Jo Tacchi's (1998) study of Bristol radio listeners illuminated the role of radio as a protective factor and an antidote to loneliness. While Tacchi's research was situated in a context distinct from Northern Uganda, her findings resonate with the notion that radio can foster an environment that is both social and secure, thereby enabling listeners to work on their sociality at their own pace (Tacchi 1998: 27). Clearly, radio can introduce 'private' issues into the 'public' in a manner that is both sensitive and effective. Joining the critique of the public and private dichotomy, the capacity of radio to open space for discussion of intimate, often silenced topics is, nevertheless, not a transfer across spheres, but a disruption of the very logic that treats them as separate in the

first place. It politicises personal experience, making private listening part of collective meaning-making and resistance.

Following this, we return to the shared characteristic of participatory radio. For Aisha and many other listeners with similar life histories, such as being single or teenage mothers, the awareness of sharing similar situations with other women was particularly supportive:

It is encouraging. Because when they discuss, they ask people questions. And then when I look [figuratively, she does not visit the website] at the number of people answering the same, the one I have also answered, it means that I am not the only one. Other people are also experiencing it. (Aisha)

Discussing sensitive or taboo topics related to sexuality, pregnancy, and family structures carries inherent risks, from misunderstanding to rejection and re-traumatisation. Self-exposure or exposure of others' intimacies, collectively termed 'intimate exposure', reveals 'inner aspects and places of the self and self-making' (Bystrom, Nuttall 2013: 310). Radio's anonymous participatory nature makes this exposure potentially more sensitive and safer. While there is a certain vulnerability in listening to a programme concerning intimate topics, whether due to others near the radio or the psychological impact of the content itself, the listener is not exposed to the *personally* evaluative perspectives of the communicators participating in the programme through that medium. In this sense, it is possible to speak of an 'intimate public sphere' (Berlant 2008). According to Berlant, such a sphere entails the sharing of a 'worldview and emotional knowledge' that is based on shared historical experience (2008: viii). As Aisha and some other women explained, knowing about others 'answering the same' to a poll question is highly encouraging. But despite the intimate public sphere being an 'achievement', Berlant argues (*ibid.*), it does not necessarily change the conditions in which the subordinate group find themselves but supports them by raising awareness of their commonality. Bystrom and Nuttall (2013: 320) describe the intimate public sphere as "'juxtapolitical" rather than political'. It 'thrives in proximity to the political, occasionally crossing over in political alliance, even more occasionally doing some politics, but most often not' (Berlant 2008: x). For this group of listeners, whose attitudes are exemplified by Aisha, this intimacy serves primarily a function other than public participation in politics.

Some of the other women we encountered, however, demonstrated a greater level of political engagement – such as Mirembe and Loyce in the following sections. Besides, it would be erroneous to hastily dismiss activities as non-political, because as Marta Ackelsberg (2010) notes, our understanding of public and political participation is inherently gendered. In the context of public political participation, women

are frequently excluded from the male-dominated domain of politics. The structure of political institutions effectively renders women 'second-class citizens' (Olufemi 2020: 22) and disqualifies their participation. During our research, we observed forms of political engagement that challenge conventional definitions. These activities, we argue, represent non-institutional political participation and informal contributions to the community that exist outside formal political structures.

Community activities as political participation

Mirembe is a 64-year-old retired mother of six residing on the outskirts of Gulu City in Layibi sub-county. She regularly participated in TRAC FM programming, providing responses to five poll questions, and even recalling district-level teenage pregnancy rates discussed on the radio. The overarching theme for Mirembe, in consideration of the campaign theme, was parenting. She regarded the issue of teenage pregnancy, which we discussed with her, as a consequence of inadequate parenting. In her response to one poll, she advocated educating parents and communities as a means of providing support to pregnant girls, enabling them to overcome the shame associated with returning to school.

Her life story offers an illustrative example of parental support. Following the death of her husband, she herself provided the financial backing for her children to attend university in Kampala (she described how 'we had to struggle together so the others could also finish university'). While Mirembe only completed the primary level of education, most of her children graduated, with her youngest daughter pursuing a PhD. Despite residing in a modest dwelling made of mudbricks and not being affluent, she was not as impoverished as most of the interlocutors we encountered. In her role as a mother and grandmother, she underscored the necessity of providing guidance to the next generation of women, a responsibility she fulfils through talking:

to our girls, mostly now our grandchildren. It is mostly we women who talk to girls, so it is not men [that really talk]. ... I really encourage the mothers to speak with their daughters a lot! (Mirembe, 64 years old)

With her sister-in-law Regina, Mirembe discusses the content of TRAC FM shows precisely because she 'also has grandchildren'. Her engagement with younger women and their guardians should not be framed as a familial obligation within the household or community, because such actions are also clearly political. 'For many community-based activist women', Ackelsberg (2010: 37) observes, 'political life is community life; and politics is attending to the quality of life in households, communities, and workplaces'. Mirembe uses TRAC FM programming to reflect on the upbringing of young women. Rather than situating her efforts within the traditional framework of

private caregiving, we recognise them as citizenship practices shaping gender norms within the community.

Mirembe's engagement with TRAC FM illustrates how even informal, everyday conversations – such as those she has with her sister-in-law Regina or with her grandchildren – are acts of public deliberation. Her advocacy for and expectations of other mothers to engage in involved parenting, along with her assertion that parents who fail to support their teenage daughters are 'very bad parents', suggest that she believes she has something to contribute to the public. She does not pass judgement on specific individuals. Rather, she judges a particular type of parenting or parenting practice that she deems detrimental to society at large. In this case, she is concerned about depriving pregnant girls of an education and, more generally, about allowing teenage pregnancy to happen at all.

TRAC FM poll questions, even when not accompanied by the associated radio shows, provide a platform for public deliberation among poll participants. But it is important to note that TRAC FM is not the only nor the first actor to raise women's issues in Northern Uganda. In the region, there has been a massive presence of international and national development organisations, especially from 2000 onwards (Vorhölter 2014: 23). That was evident in participants' use of terms such as gender-based or domestic violence, and their ease in discussing topics like underage sexual activity and contraception use. For instance, Dorothy, a 62-year-old retired teacher, openly chatted about her menopause and contemplated whether it might be associated with the use of contraceptives. It became clear that TRAC FM shows are 'just' one in the cacophony of voices being heard in both the radio and the public debates on gender and health. That does not disqualify, however, their contribution to offering opportunities for empowerment, either in the intimate or more collective sense. While for Mirembe and other local activist women whose stances drew on life experiences, the participative campaign offered a means to initiate discussions on topics that attempt to disrupt harmful gender norms and practices.

Radio broadcasts contribute to women's public political activity

None of the listeners we interviewed were political figures like LC1, LC2, or LC3 officials.³ However, a significant proportion of the programme's audience comprised women engaged in community work in a variety of capacities. For nine women of the thirty-three individuals interviewed, TRAC FM shows were not only spaces of intimate understanding and sharing of hardship; the encouragement gained from the programming made them continue to act beyond traditionally defined 'private' spaces. Of these nine women, six stated they were grammar school teachers who

³ Chairpersons of Local Councils at the village, parish, and sub-county level, respectively.

deal with gender- or health-related issues in their teaching, one was a social work student, and two were volunteers with local women's NGOs. While already active in community work in various ways, the radio shows – given how dominant the medium is – justified their actions and strengthened them in their efforts. Loyce, an activist of Thrive Gulu, the local branch of a USA-Ugandan NGO, was asked what the show provided to her, given that she is already knowledgeable about women's empowerment and gender-based violence.

It makes me not to forget of my trainings, like the teenage pregnancy, and still add on it ... It makes me recall... Because trainings, we did it maybe once or twice. But on radios, at least after some weeks, they're still talking on it, it makes you even stronger. It has strengthened me. It has strengthened me as an activist. (Loyce, 40 years old)

Loyce found the TRAC FM programming beneficial for two reasons. It reinforced her existing knowledge about the issues she deals with in her activism, and it provided her with a sense of confidence that she is not alone in her efforts. These two effects recurred among the nine women interviewed. For teachers, the broadcasts constituted a valuable source of information and inspiration for classroom discussions on related topics. One teacher, for instance, mentioned that she incorporates radio into her lessons (although the programme was not part of the TRAC FM campaign). Most of them mentioned how, with the argumentative support provided by the programming, they encourage parents to provide their children with sexual education and, in cases of teenage pregnancy, to keep them in school. The social work student highlighted the value of being aware of comparable initiatives. While she enjoys the work, it was apparent from the stories she shared that the cases of domestic violence or the treatment of pregnant girls can be drastic. In this context, knowing she was not alone in fostering community improvement was particularly important.

These nine women not only empowered themselves but also engaged in public debate and deliberation on sensitive topics. Their emphasis on having a supportive voice in the most-listened-to regional radio shows how inherently relational empowerment is. This relationality extends beyond a mere support network of familial and social ties and encompasses the formation of connections with actors outside local social structures, including development and humanitarian actors. As Mosse (2005: 218) notes, 'in development, poor people become "empowered" not in themselves, but through relationships with outsiders'.

Unfortunately, this very networking appears to be a significant limitation of the TRAC FM programme, particularly if its objective is to advance to greater levels of empowerment. TRAC FM, from our observations, did not refer listeners to local or-

ganisations. Some of our visits ended with the question ‘What to do next?’, and we were asked a few times about the location of our office for further guidance. This signified the weakening network that would support listeners beyond the radio programme. Additionally, the most common suggestion from participants for improving the programme was not related to its content, but rather to its format. Listeners frequently proposed extending the programme beyond radio to include direct engagement ‘deep in the community’, i.e. organising debates in person. They emphasised that not everybody possesses a radio and that not all listeners are necessarily aware of the programme, but also that they do not always have the authority to instigate a debate in the community.

From that it becomes clear that the empowerment facilitated by TRAC FM radio programmes was subtle but potentially acting on a large scale. Although some listeners claimed the radio programme itself motivated them to take action, the evidence that it can be attributed solely to radio, let alone to TRAC FM, was unconvincing. But this does not mean that TRAC FM did not empower anyone. In cases such as Aisha’s, the shows allowed women to gain confidence and self-compassion despite the ubiquitous stigma. Gaining consciousness about denied choices, we argue, is an essential prerequisite for any level of empowerment. For Mirembe, Loyce, and other more politically active women, the shows were a source of confidence and reassurance, leading to more communal activities. Moreover, the shows and polls informed them not only about campaign themes but about the attitudes among MEGA FM listeners, engaging them in a public, community debate about the status and rights of women in Uganda. This matters because, as scholars note, ‘Ugandan women, especially in rural communities, are still struggling with discrepancies between citizenship as a legal status and their lived experience, between entitlements granted in government legislation and social controls exercised in everyday life’ (Ndidde, Ahimbisibwe, Kontinen 2020: 117). That is, provisions of rights ‘on paper’ often exceed or belie the restrictions of rights ‘in practice’ for rural Ugandan women.

Interactive radio broadcasts provide the basic but necessary first step of making women aware that they, in fact, have legal provisions for freedoms and rights which are not being actualised, whether due to failures of state implementation or enforcement, or due to the social and material conditions of their environments. Furthermore, the ‘interactive’ component of the broadcast provides a platform, argumentative frameworks, and public opinion data that allow women to express themselves publicly via SMS. Recalling Raj (2020), one may argue that this is the first step of empowerment. However, it would be equally fair to say that the TRAC FM methodology does not go beyond this important first but elementary step.

Discussion

While radio is not a silver bullet for women's troubles in Uganda, TRAC FM's programming provides an important, albeit limited, avenue for empowerment. The campaign's impact is constrained by broader structural barriers to institutional politics. Despite these constraints, participatory radio facilitates access to information, fosters critical discussions, and creates spaces for women to engage in dialogue on gender norms and rights. The radio poll participants we spoke to were indeed gaining information and drawing on that information for varying private or public degrees of expression and discussion. This marks an important step, but it primarily lays the groundwork and does not directly instigate social or political change. TRAC FM does not directly empower women to take part in institutional politics. For Ugandan women to achieve higher levels of empowerment, the state's internal functioning, including the discrepancy between women's legal and actual status, must be transformed. However, we also discussed above how 'modest' and more private deliberation or even private thinking about public matters is a precondition for the emergence of organised political movements, the changing of voting patterns, or the organic formation of interest groups – the organs of change in a functioning democracy. TRAC FM's impact is strongest in producing the preconditions necessary for a public sphere capable of challenging the status quo – a modest intervention at the individual level can empower individuals to take the next steps towards systemic change.

This fundamental form of empowerment, that is, gaining critical consciousness, often does not allow for sufficient *formal* political engagement. Despite Uganda's reputation as a regional women's rights pioneer due to its legislative and policy measures, women's political participation and emancipation remain significantly constrained (Ndidde, Ahimbisibwe, Kontinen 2020: 107). Acknowledging the political and public qualities of less formal women's practices does not diminish the potent criticism that women face structural barriers to accessing the 'bona fide' public sphere and institutional politics. Radio programming's success should not be seen as a reason to postpone the tearing down of these barriers. However, it is still worth recognising that TRAC FM's approach provides a platform for women to deliberate and express opinions on public matters – women who might otherwise not have had such opportunities. Interview quotes from a young Acholi woman named Blessing, who participated in a TRAC FM poll, are a good example:

These men in the [family] meetings, they stop women ... Let me say when two people, a man and a woman, raise up their hand: they will point to a man to talk. They think that the woman doesn't know anything. [Q: How do they stop

women?] They [men] can just laugh at them [women]. Then maybe they [women] will just keep quiet. (Blessing, 20 years old)

Blessing believes that this has discouraged the women in her village, family, and clan from trying to participate in discussions: 'They are very shy!' When explicitly asked if radio polls and SMS replies can help women overcome their shyness, Blessing responded:

Yeah, for the first time [speaking publicly], I was very shy. Then it got easier and easier. I started when I was still in school. I was a compound prefect [student monitor], you have to talk to people so that they vote. So you are experienced even from a young age ... But radio is simple [compared to talking publicly in-person]. Because even if you are shy, yeah, no one is seeing you. (Blessing)

When we asked Blessing if she thought this was a way of 'practising' public speaking to gradually build confidence, she nodded in confirmation. This aligns with our theoretical framing that practising civic skills, such as public debate and discussion, in fact improves those skills.

The effectiveness of the interactive radio campaign is not, as stated, exempt from structural barriers and is affected, in addition to social and cultural norms, by more immediate, practical challenges – namely, access to radio itself. As noted earlier, call-in radios are regarded as accessible technologies, having great potential as agents of change in reaching rural populations. Operating costs are low, broadcasts are free to listen to, and access is not dependent on individual ownership – people can listen in public places or together at home (Macueve et al. 2009: 24). However, while this is generally true, it does not mean there are no obstacles to participation in a programme such as the interactive radio campaign of TRAC FM. Although radio is the dominant medium in the country, access to it is hugely divided by rural or urban settlement, education, and gender (Internews 2021). In Northern Uganda, a significant proportion of the population does not possess a radio, and most interlocutors listened to the programming via mobile button phones. According to a BBC Media Action (2019: 3), 74 percent of Ugandan adults have access to a mobile phone, but ownership is divided by gender. The report indicates that 81 percent of men owned a phone, compared to 63 percent of women.⁴ Women may be further constrained in their involvement in the programme due to the demands of domestic work, as Karen

⁴ These figures represent the average for the Ugandan population. The divide is likely to be significantly greater in poorer, rural areas.

Hampson et al. (2017: 643) posit, and may not have an equal say when devices are shared. Kazanka Comfort and John Dada (2009: 45) describe in a study from Nigeria how radio technologies have ‘acquired a social status that tends to emphasise existing gender inequalities’. Although we cannot directly endorse the findings from their study, where ownership of a transistor radio was a status symbol for village men, we commonly observed instances where the man was the one operating the radio or the mobile phone, determining where it is and when it plays. We also noticed that the restriction of women’s access to radio is not exclusive to the context of partnerships. Dorothy, a retired primary school teacher, stated:

I have a radio, but sometimes I use my phone. ... You see, I have that last born of mine. I bought my radio, but he comes and picks [it], so I have almost surrendered to him. ... I have given it to him. He stays with the radio in his room. Now when I’m here, I use my phone. (Dorothy, 62 years old)

Therefore, radio is a medium beset with power inequalities where ownership and access are dependent on gender and economic and social status. Nevertheless, radio is an important ‘enabling factor’ (Rowlands 1997) in women’s empowerment, as the research demonstrates, even if it represents only the beginnings of such change.

Conclusion

Radio has the potential to reconfigure a person’s ‘being-in-the world’ (Bessire, Fisher 2013). Our ethnographic study found that TRAC FM’s interactive radio programming facilitates debate on sensitive matters, bringing gender- and health-related issues into public in a way that is both empowering and considerate to those facing stigma. Our theorisation of empowerment began with the observation that its premise is the acknowledgement of the existence of potential choices that are, however, effectively precluded. Attaining this critical consciousness represents one of TRAC FM’s strongest capabilities. By promoting discussions on the three topics – perhaps more privately than preferred – the organisation encourages the re-evaluating of gender norms. For women who experienced trauma or stigmatisation, the shows provide an environment of recognition and a safe space in which they can feel supported and resist harmful stereotypes. For listeners more active in community work, radio serves as a conduit for information that bolsters their existing knowledge base and buttresses their ongoing activities through a sense of a shared goal. Furthermore, instances of political participation facilitated by radio throw into question the boundary between public and private activities, encouraging a rethinking of what counts as political engage-

ment and a recognition that intimate, everyday acts can contribute to shaping civic identity and promoting democratic participation. However, the acknowledgement of the political qualities of informal practices women engage in does not diminish the fact that women face structural barriers to accessing more formal and institutionalised political spaces. Radio's transformative impact is further dependent on access to and control over technology, and women typically have less of both.

Engagement in the programming and the sharing of experiences with other women facing similar circumstances are facilitated by a space which we conceptualise as an intimate public sphere (Berlant 2008; Bystrom, Nuttal 2013; Lloyd 2020). This concept does not attempt to replace the public/private sphere and erase it of any private qualities. Our findings align with hooks' (2006) and Young's (2005) insights that the domestic sphere, especially in post-colonial settings, can be a site for political resistance and empowerment. Interactive radio, in this sense, is a medium that facilitates empowerment from within the domestic sphere without either requiring its conceptual dissolution or accepting the public/private as a categorical binary.

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The Practices and Subjects of Feminist Digital Activism: Experiences from Slovakia and Czechia¹

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Abstract: This study explores the developments of digital feminist activism in Slovakia and Czechia amidst rising anti-gender rhetoric and anti-NGOism. In the climate of political change over the past five years, women in both countries began using Instagram to raise awareness of gender-based violence, harassment, and sexism. Through interviews with digital activists, this research examines the online dynamics of these networked publics. It analyses activists' strategies for navigating public/private boundaries and balancing individual and collective efforts in a corporate-controlled online space. Despite the challenges posed by Instagram's influencer-driven structure, these activists use the platform to engage in feminist awareness-raising and advocacy. This study contributes to the scholarship on digital feminist movements by highlighting the potential and limitations of social media to foster new forms of feminist praxis in a hostile political environment.

Keywords: digital activism, gender-based violence, Instagram, networked publics, connective action

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In the spring of 2020, when public life shut down due to the Covid-19 pandemic, people in Slovakia not only found themselves in a new social reality but also faced a significant political shift. On 21 March, a newly elected, right-leaning, and conservative government took power and some of the leaders of the anti-gender movement were appointed by the new government to key political or bureaucratic positions. Before 2020, both Slovakia and Czechia had experienced extensive mobilisations against 'gender ideology', joining global anti-gender campaigns against reproductive rights, LGBTQI rights, gender studies, gender-based violence, and supranational organisations, such as the European Union, and treaties, including the *Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence* (the Istanbul Convention) (Kováts, Zacharenko 2021). One of the consequences of the anti-gender movements in Slovakia and Czechia was a shift in focus from the problem of violence against women to the wording of the Istanbul Convention and the alleged threat it posed to children and society (Maďarová, Valkovičová 2021; Svatoňová, Doerr 2024). At the same time, activists against gender-based violence were increasingly attacked and labelled as 'foreign agents' (Maďarová, Valkovičová 2021; Svatoňová 2021).

However, there have been some interesting developments in online campaigning against gender-based sexual violence and harassment. Despite the grim political developments – or perhaps because of them – women in Slovakia and Czechia have created Instagram accounts dedicated to these topics, aiming to engage in awareness-raising and popular education (Eschle, Maiguashca 2007), i.e. to share information about sexual violence but also to collectively produce knowledge.

This study stems from research focused on Czech and Slovak online initiatives that have emerged since 2019. We present an analysis of interviews conducted between 2022 and 2023 with digital activists who set up and manage Instagram accounts addressing issues such as violence, harassment, and everyday sexism. This study contributes to the body of scholarship on the reimagination of diverse feminist communities within the environment of the new social media (Mendes, Ringrose, Keller 2019).

As other authors have noted, the online environment can encompass a variety of advocacy practices. Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller (2019) describe different practices and highlight, for example, the ability of digital platforms to provide a space for voicing previously hidden experiences, such as sexual violence. Other practices observed by these authors relate to opportunities to connect with like-minded people or learn more about feminist thought, which they call 'digitally mediated consciousness raising' (p. 5). The authors emphasise that taking part in online campaigns can be educational and 'acts as a low-barrier entrance for other types of (feminist) activism and political engagement' (p. 5).

The present study examines whether and how these practices are reflected in the Slovak and Czech feminist online environments. We analyse the networks that account managers create, which are conceptualised as networked publics (boyd 2010) or connective actions (Bennett, Segerborg 2015). While previous scholars have sought to distinguish between connective actions and collective actions (Bennett, Segerberg, Walker 2014; Vromen, Xenos, Loader 2015), we aim to contribute to this body of scholarship with a specific focus on the Instagram environment. Although the affordances of the online environment tend to vary and enable specific interactions (boyd 2010), it is important to recognise that online activists actively shape this environment according to their possibilities and needs (Mendes, Ringrose, Keller 2019).

In the analysis, we present the experiences, practices, and subjectivities of digital activism in relation to the dynamics of public/private and individual/collective. In the first part of the analysis, we focus on how the interviewees describe the online environment of Instagram and their communication with followers. The meanings of public and private shift as the activists discuss their interactions within a space that is widely accessible but owned by corporations. The second part of the analysis explores how individual and collective voices, subjects, and practices are shaped within online activism. For instance, the struggles for recognition described by our interviewees reflect their efforts to build horizontal and temporary collective networks. This occurs despite the affordances of the Instagram platform, which favours one-way, product-oriented communication typical of influencers.

Although awareness-raising and popular education on sexual violence and harassment in Czech- and Slovak-speaking online environments represent only one stream of feminist praxis (Eschle, Maiguashca 2007), it is essential to understand the dynamics of these environments and the experiences of the activists themselves. As Černohorská (2016: 61) argues regarding online feminist activism: ‘Only by trying to understand what these new platforms and tools mean for (not only) feminist activists in different corners of the world can we understand their role in the future functioning of feminism and other social movements’.

The nature of networked publics: the possibilities of organising online

Digital media have been of significant interest to scholars of contentious politics and social movements for quite some time. Recently, digital activism played an intrinsic role in the Polish nationwide mobilisation known as the Black Protest (Nacher 2020), and the online environment helped connect the transnational fight against patriarchy in Central and Eastern Europe and Latin America (Arruzza, Bhattacharya, Fraser

2019). In Slovakia, feminist initiatives relied on online mobilisation in a context where the parliament repeatedly attempted to restrict access to abortion, while anti-pandemic measures limited the possibility of organising street protests. Scholars focusing on international online and offline mobilisations have observed the growth of large-scale action networks that build their own resources, leading many to conclude that the importance of technology for contemporary contentious politics is undeniable (Bennett, Segerberg 2015).

Yet, the nature of the spaces and subjectivities emerging through digital activism appears to differ from those of more traditional forms of activist practice. boyd (2010) referred to 'networked publics' as spaces constructed through networked technologies, providing an environment for imagined collectives. Similarly, Bennett and Segerberg (2015) described digitally preserved communication-based networks of individuals sustained by mutual interests or grievances as a form of connective action.

However, the praxis of communication-based online networks is specific and is characterised by its extensive personalisation of politics. Individuals can communicate through easily personalised modes of interaction, such as memes, or they can engage by sharing personal stories via vines (short amateur videos) and images. Bennett and Segerberg (2015) argue that this logic of content production transforms into personalised ideas and framing strategies. Parsloe and Holton (2017: 1119) assert: 'The success of connective action depends on the process of peer production in a culture of self-motivated sharing where individuals are inspired to create and spread articles, images, comments.' Blurring the traditional distinction between the creators of culture and its consumers, individuals who express themselves politically online tend to adopt a dual role as 'prod-users' (Della Porta, Diani 2020). In these spaces, large-scale personal expression serves as the foundation for socialisation, rather than a common group ideological identification or the mobilisation of resources, as found in collective action (Bennett, Segerberg 2015). However, Parsloe and Holton (2017) argue that in-group and out-group sentiments are present in connective actions, suggesting that a certain level of collective identity can emerge and play a role.

Online environments vary, and the form, content, and potential of connective action depend on the respective platform. Online networks and networked publics are often studied in environments designed to facilitate public deliberation, such as Facebook and Twitter/X. Such studies have been particularly useful for understanding initiatives involving collective hashtag sharing, such as #BringBackOurGirls (Papacharissi 2016), as well as initiatives termed 'hashtag feminism' (Chen, Pain, Barner 2018). However, as boyd (2010) and later Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller (2019) explain, social media platforms have specific affordances that influence the types of activities occurring within their boundaries. Bennett and Segerberg (2015) also argue that curation and moderation are essential for transformative dynamics online, as networked publics

must first become organisationally enabled. Only then can they transform into collective action aimed at actual nodes of power (Bennett, Segerberg 2015). This prompts us to exercise caution when comparing the creation and existence of networks across different online environments.

While connective action can evolve into collective action, it often remains online for both personal and structural reasons. Participation in collective action can be costly (in terms of resources) and risky (in terms of social standing or safety) (McAdam 2013). This suggests that individuals who engage in collective contentious actions are either prepared to make sacrifices or will soon disengage from the initiative. Everyday social media interactions are far easier than joining traditional political or civic organisations in a hostile political environment. Moreover, some individuals may turn to online social networks deliberately if they feel disengaged from formal representative politics or struggle to engage with civil society. In this context, Vromen, Xenos, and Loader (2015: 80) argue that ‘young people have shifted from a dutiful sense of allegiance to existing political institutions and processes to a more personalised, self-actualising citizenship norm’. This suggests that individualised orientations can lead to certain political engagement, as people express their emotions, grievances, or hopes online (Bennett, Segerberg 2015).

Networked publics are not organic social creations, they are first and foremost organised by constantly evolving networked technologies, whose algorithms actively shape online behaviour, including online sociality (boyd 2010; Van Dijck 2012, 2014). Van Dijck (2012, 2014), for example, emphasises that online environments uphold specific practices that are the direct results of corporate needs. As an example, he speaks of an ‘attention economy’, where individuals are prompted to seek popularity by constantly sharing their private information, resulting in ‘dataveillance’. Both boyd (2010) and Van Dijck (2012, 2014) thus eventually discuss the usefulness of concepts such as privacy when speaking of online environments. Van Dijck (2012) rather sees social media as meeting-, working-, and market-places all at the same time, under the influence of corporate interests, where the different dispositions mingle together. An example of this can be Instagram (owned by Meta), which predominantly serves as a space for ‘influencers’ – individuals who actively curate their audience for marketing purposes, but who also speak of creating ‘safe spaces for their predominantly female followers rather than as political spaces of influence’ (Heřmanová 2022: 354). Instead of labelling social media as public or private, Van Dijck (2012: 171) suggests seeking understanding of ‘how platforms function as battlefields contesting public, private, corporate (and state) interests’.

Thus, optimism around Web 2.0 has also faced extensive criticism. For example, Flesher Fominaya (2020) notes that participation in connective actions or similar forms of micro-engagement online is often dismissed as ‘clicktivism’ or ‘slacktivism’, rare-

ly resulting in significant policy change. Similarly, Broučková and Labutta Kubíková (2024: 138) argue that digital technologies have contributed to the rise of ‘non-electoral movements’, characterised by their self-proclaimed unwillingness to participate in representative politics. From the perspective of feminist social movements, Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller (2019: 9) asked whether such developments do not lead to ‘de-emphasising the collective, in favor of self-governed, empowered feminist subject’. Whether we take a critical stance on these developments or not, understanding them is crucial, not only to grasp the shifting dynamics of feminist mobilisations, but also to recognise the everyday realities, costs, and risks of advocating against sexual violence and harassment online. In the same vein, Černohorská (2016) argues that we should focus on the online space, where sharing feminist voices can help sustain a sense of belonging and solidarity.

Some digital media environments can be particularly inaccessible or, conversely, conducive to feminist advocacy and education practices. For example, Vochocová (2018) argues that online social media platforms are often perceived as unfriendly to women because of the prevalence of sexist abuse. Moreover, previous studies show that women are frequently deterred from engaging in overtly political spaces, which tend to be male-dominated, pushing them to non-political online spaces (Vochocová, Rosenfeldová 2019: 134). In response to online misogyny, feminists have devised strategies to reappropriate social media platforms, for example, by creating ‘separatist safe spaces’ (Clark-Parsons 2018). These curated spaces have the potential to form feminist counter-publics, even for those who are geographically isolated, as they can provide a sense of community and support that may not be available offline (Mendes, Ringrose, Keller 2019).

It is therefore valuable to study the specific networks and practices that facilitate the creation of collectives within the highly personalised practices of cognitive political engagement. As Eschle and Maiguashca (2007: 296) argue in their research on globalised feminist activism, ‘resistance can be expressed in multifaceted ways and in diverse locations. As we have seen, many of the practices of our interviewees seek to develop self-esteem, raise consciousness and enhance emotional tranquillity.’

Anti-harassment and violence awareness-raising on Instagram in Slovakia and Czechia: A case study

The social and political context

While Slovakia and Czechia have experienced over 30 years of separate political development, there are striking parallels in the evolution of their movements addressing gender-based violence and, or more precisely, in opposition to these initiatives.

In recent years, in both countries, issues such as gender-based violence and access to sex education have been politicised by diverse anti-gender actors. By using ‘inflammatory language [they aim to] create persuasive scenarios in order to trigger a collective hysteria’ (Svatoňová 2021: 139) against politics tackling gender, sexual, or reproductive inequalities. The anti-gender ideology campaigns portrayed the Istanbul Convention as a threat to the heteronormative gender order in both the Czech Republic and Slovakia (Sekerák, Rosůlek 2023) and succeeded in getting the ratification process postponed or stopped. At the same time, the debates surrounding the Istanbul Convention have shifted from issues such as cooperation between different state, public, and civil society actors to efforts to stop and prevent gender-based violence and issues such as the ideological influence of the West and parental control over children’s education. The anti-gender campaigns thus further undermined trust in the authorities and the legal system, which was already limited owing to the social stigma faced by survivors of violence. This stigma contributes significantly to the high prevalence of sexual violence and harassment in Slovakia and Czechia (Nyklová, Moree, Maufras Černohorská 2022).

Despite efforts by feminist civil society to address various forms of gender-based violence since the early 1990s and some improvements in services, public attitudes, and legislation, significant challenges remain. While Czechia has introduced a specific law criminalising domestic violence, a major issue persists: half of the perpetrators of rape and sexual violence receive only conditional sentences (Havelková, Andreska 2020). Slovakia, on the other hand, lacks a specific law criminalising domestic violence, and, furthermore, its criminal code still requires victims/survivors to physically resist the perpetrator for the act to be classified as rape or sexual violence.

Recent developments in both countries have likely been influenced by the limited impact of #MeToo initiatives in the late 2010s, with only a few instances of national media coverage on sexual violence or harassment during the height of the international movement (Havelková, Andreska 2020). Nevertheless, these issues have since been addressed by a network of non-governmental advocates, led and supported by the national branches of Amnesty International, forming what has been termed a ‘consent movement’. The primary aim of this movement has been to reform criminal codes to include a consent-based definition of rape, as required by the Istanbul Convention. So far, only the Czech coalition has succeeded in mobilising parliamentarians to update the legal framework. Another significant challenge tackled by these coalitions – and identified by advocates in both countries for decades – is the low level of awareness among professionals within the justice system regarding issues such as trauma-informed approaches to survivors of sexual violence and the dynamics of the cycle of intimate-partner violence. This lack of knowledge and awareness contributes

to the limited access to justice for survivors (Nyklová, Moree, Maufras Černohorská 2022).

Over the past three decades, the provision of services to survivors and professionalised awareness-raising and popular education have primarily been the work of non-governmental actors. Both Czechia and Slovakia have experienced ‘strong resistance to explicit feminist organising’ since 1989 (Papcunová 2021: 97), resulting in the establishment of formalised organisations. These organisations are now under constant pressure to professionalise in order to compete for tender-based grants, which are necessary to meet the needs of their clients. At the same time, they are dealing with shrinking state resources (Císař 2019; Valkovičová, Očenášová, Minařovičová 2022). Over the past decade, this financial precariousness has been compounded by increasing political hostility, with clerics and politicians labelling feminist activists as a threat, referring to them as ‘the dangerous gendrists’ (Sekerák, Rosůlek 2023).

Thus, formalised organisations, which draw their resources from the European Union or other international funding schemes such as the EEA grants, have been targeted by anti-feminism and heterosexism (Musilová, Valkovičová, Želinská 2023; Svatoňová 2021). More general political anti-NGO sentiment (Novakova 2022) has been demonstrated by the use of ostracising rhetoric towards NGOs and laws harassing or limiting their work. Parallel to these developments, some informal initiatives have emerged in recent years, such as the grassroots movement of Czech university students campaigning against sexual harassment, bullying, and other forms of exploitation by university staff. This began with the 2021 initiative of arts students called ‘You Don’t Have to Endure It’ (Nemusíš to vydržet).

The agenda of online awareness-raising and popular education about sexual violence and harassment has been adopted also by numerous Czech and Slovak Instagram accounts run by individuals and groups, which could be described as ‘informative’ pro-feminist initiatives (Maufras Černohorská 2019a). Possibly because of the dire developments described above, offline collective actions, which are both risky and costly, seem burdensome compared to the accessibility of social media. Considering that 68% of people in Czechia and 60% in Slovakia participate daily in online social networks – and these proportions rise to 97% for young people aged 16–29 in Czechia and 83% in Slovakia (Eurostat 2024) – digital activism can more easily be integrated into everyday life. As past scholarly accounts (e.g. Maufras Černohorská 2019b; Mendes, Ringrose, Keller 2019) have identified the digital space as particularly conducive to the creation of feminist counter-publics (Fraser 1990) in hostile environments, this research project set out to study the various practices of anti-violence and anti-harassment activism on Instagram.

Methods, approaches, and the sample

According to DataReportal, around a third of the population in Slovakia and Czechia used Instagram in 2024. With the number of users increasing every year, this social network has become a valuable resource for civil society, including NGOs, who use the platform to reach the young cohorts of online users. We decided to engage in discussions with both Czech and Slovak Instagram account managers because of the linguistic proximity, which allows for easy cross-border following. In the course of 2022 and 2023, we identified a total of 12 Slovak- and 12 Czech-language accounts and invited them for a research interview.

We eventually secured a total of 9 interviews conducted between April 2022 and August 2023. Details about the interviewees and the accounts are summarised in Figure 1. The interviews were conducted both online and offline in Czech and Slovak. As the figure shows, the interviewees were a fairly homogeneous group of women, mostly students or graduates, living in large cities. They were also all civically engaged, as the figure shows: of the 9 civic activities asked about,² the average number reported by the interviewees was 5. The figure also shows that, at the time of the interview, the interviewees had a maximum of 3 years' experience running the Instagram account, reflecting the novelty of such initiatives.

Some of these accounts were informal, often run by a single person as a leisure activity, while others had more structure and were established as group initiatives, later transforming into registered organisations. The discussions with the interviewees also showed these differences in praxis and commitment. During our interviews, 7 out of 9 interviewees identified as activists. However, discussions often shifted to the relative criteria for this identification, as one interviewee explained:

I personally see it as activism, but I don't know if I would say that I am doing activism in front of others. [...] It's something that I study, I dedicate myself to, I try to stay informed and in the loop. So that falls into that activism box for me. And then I realise what other people are doing in activism, and that's when I'm like, I probably wouldn't call myself an activist. In front of other people (laughter). (Account F)

² The interviewees were asked whether they have actively taken part in the following 9 activities in the past 2 years: Reading/watching news; membership in an activist initiative (outside of Instagram) – e.g. in a civic association; active participation in elections/voting; participation in an online petition; participation in a formal petition or signature collection; participation in a live protest/march; organising a fundraiser (material or financial support); financial support for civic initiatives or associations; mass comment on a law; support for other NGOs (online and offline).

We aimed to learn more about their motivations for opening and running such accounts, how they create content and communicate with their followers, and how they make decisions about what to publish. When reviewing the interviews and reflecting on the dynamics that shape these Instagram accounts, two dimensions stood out as particularly thought-provoking: 1) how the public/private dynamics are negotiated in the praxis of online activism and how this shapes interactions between subjects of networked publics; and 2) what individual and collective subjects, voices, and practices are formed within this particular praxis.

To better understand these two dimensions, the transcribed and coded interviews were analysed using a mixed approach, employing both theory and a data-driven reflexive thematic analysis (Braun, Clarke 2019) that recognises the involvement of researchers in generating specific themes from the data. We acknowledge that our subjectivities as researchers who participate in feminist advocacy work both inside and outside academia shaped the coding and theme development processes. Our perspectives are further impacted by the work of Eschle and Maiguashca (2007), who emphasise that the politics of resistance can have a variety of forms.

Analysing the public/private dynamics of managing an Instagram account

The account managers often described their popular education and awareness-raising experiences in terms of public and private, contributing to the ongoing feminist discussions on the relationship between the public and private spheres. So, what meanings do public and private acquire when discussed in relation to the nature of Instagram accounts or the relationship with followers? What do the stories of digital activism, narrated through the lens of public/private negotiation, look like?

Public space as accessible, risky, and regulated

When talking about the structure of Instagram's environment, interviewees perceived their accounts as 'public spaces' owing to their presumed accessibility. As one account manager claimed, their account was 'definitely public', because 'everyone who has Instagram has access to it' (Account I). The term public was thus primarily used in line with social media practices, meaning that no permission is needed to access the account. Interviewees were often aware that access to Instagram depended on having specific financial and epistemic resources, which were essential for effectively navigating the platform. However, these potential barriers were frequently overlooked, and the accounts were generally treated as accessible to anyone within their target group.

The accessibility of public accounts was understood as an advantage of Instagram activism; however, it also came with a price: 'Sometimes the interactions are not good

Figure 1: Characteristics of the analysed Instagram accounts

Account	Date and type of interview	Place of residence	Educational attainment	Current employment	Civic activity (out of 9)	Approx. number of followers in August 2024	Date of account registration	Appx. duration of managing account
Interviewee - Account A (SK)	28 April 2022 – offline	Bratislava	University degree (MA)	Entrepreneur	5	10.1 K	November 2019	3 years
Interviewee- Account B (SK)	18 April 2022 – offline	Bratislava	University degree (BA)	Student	7	13.4 K	May 2020	2 years
Interviewee- Account C (SK)	28 August 2023 – online	Bratislava	High school	Unemployed	4	500	May 2022	1,5 years
Interviewee- Account D (CZ)	19 July 2023 – online	Prague	University degree (BA)	Student, part-time employment	2	1.4 K	November 2021	1,5 years
Interviewee- Account E (SK)	19 June 2023 – offline	Bratislava	University degree (MA)	Full-time employment	9	6.8 K	July 2020	3 years
Interviewee- Account F (SK)	17 August 2023 – online	Bratislava	University degree (BA)	Student, part-time employment	3	4.3 K	May 2021	2 years
Interviewee- Account G (CZ)	13 July 2023 – online	Prague	High school	Student, part-time employment	6	14.4 K	September 2020	2 years
Interviewee- Account H (CZ)	21 January 2023 – online	Vienna	University degree (BA)	Student, entrepreneur	5	1.2 K	July 2021	1,5 years
Interviewee- Account I (CZ)	27 October 2022 – online	Prague	High school	Student, part-time employment	3	26.6 K	September 2020	2 years

Source: Authors.

and sometimes people write not very nice things, it just happens in those comments. It's up to us then to keep our environment safe' (Account I). Publicity in this sense means that on platforms such as Instagram, hate-speech or victim-blaming are a constant threat. Nevertheless, it was generally claimed that the curated audience of Instagram provides a certain shield that would not be possible on Facebook or TikTok:

So, from my perspective as the account owner, it's safe – for example, on Instagram I've never had such situations as on TikTok. I'm also on TikTok, there were threats of rape or beating, I don't know what else, and I was actually in a weird state because of it, like, a mess. (Account A)

The account managers' experiences in the online realm have led them to conclude that regulating this environment is essential for achieving their goal of fostering a supportive atmosphere for their followers, particularly for survivors of sexual harassment and violence. While such regulation was seldom expected from the owners of social media platforms, it was primarily undertaken by the account managers themselves as a form of gatekeeping. Despite the accessibility of these accounts, it was acknowledged that maintaining a presence on these platforms is a privilege they can revoke. For example, the interviewee managing Account I stated that they had not often experienced online hate: 'Occasionally, there will be someone in the comments who seems to comment on every post, and we usually notice and handle it.' In such rare cases, they either block or restrict the intruder's account.

Although Instagram and Facebook are both owned by the same company, their environments and rules differ. Compared to Instagram, Facebook was perceived by the account managers as a space where it is difficult to reach a curated audience unless one is prepared to pay Meta for the desired reach. On Facebook, there is a higher likelihood of attracting unwanted audiences predisposed to hate speech and victim-blaming. As the interviewees explained, the lack of regulation enforced by Facebook creates an environment that is, at best, difficult to work in and, at worst, hostile.

Contrary to expectations, what digital activists experience from the corporations that own the social media platforms is the regulation of their content based on company policies, enforced through simplified, machine-executed word searches:

You can't write words like 'assault' (...) because they'll start taking your content down or blocking you. You have to start playing with words and using characters that won't trigger their system to flag it as harmful. I understand why it's important to censor certain words like 'sex' on Instagram in some way, and please let's do that, but at the same time, it affects educational accounts, too. Yes, this also applies to topics such as violence. (Account E)

The technical framework, key rules, and content of public accounts, as well as the behaviour of digital activists, are therefore shaped by private businesses. The prod-users share their agency with algorithms, which, for feminist digital activists, results in a significant loss of agency (Adams, Applegarth, Simpson 2020). However, the account managers actively resist these limitations and seek strategies to navigate this environment ethically. On the one hand, they participate in the 'attention economy' (van Dijck 2012) and aim for the widest reach. On the other hand, as they describe, they refuse to publish certain posts that might be popular and favoured by algorithms, or they modify the content for ethical reasons.

The constant and uncertain negotiation of privacy

The negotiation between various forms of public and private also influences how the boundaries of privacy are maintained within the relationship between followers and account managers. It has become common for individuals to voluntarily share their personal experiences of violence victimisation for anonymisation and subsequent public dissemination by some accounts as awareness-raising tools. This practice raises new questions regarding the boundaries of privacy online and underscores the problematic nature of sharing personal information on platforms where such information can be misused, as expressed by this helpless account manager: 'Once I put that information out there, it no longer belongs to me; anything can happen to it, and it may not just be due to human actions.' (Account E) Others reflected on their own responsibilities to uphold the boundaries of privacy in such an amorphous environment.

Some of the accounts in this study deliberately engaged in sharing personal experiences of harassment or violence. This required a certain level of contact with followers, as well as access to private information. For this reason, some account managers adopted specific tools to limit individual contact:

Sometimes our primary method is that people just send us messages through the form on the website, and because of that, it's anonymous and we can't actually track who those people are. Sometimes people write to us and confide in us through messages, and then we forward them to the questionnaire. (Account I)

So, the specific tools did not prevent individuals from messaging the account managers directly. Because of situations like this, some of the account managers were concerned about the privacy of their followers:

I don't perceive [Instagram] as a safe space at all. I actually wonder why they open up to a stranger like this. They don't know who is on the other end. And as I mentioned to you earlier, they sometimes actually know me in person, but

don't know it is me behind the account. (...) But I think this mainly speaks to the fact that the need to get it off their chest is greater than worrying about who is on the other side. (Account B)

The risky environment of social media leads to the formation of communities with limited communication. Moreover, many interviewees reflected on the fleeting and temporary nature of their Instagram pursuits: 'It's more like a hobby, well, like when someone just starts making critical memes about reasonable issues. It's kind of like that, that when we have the inspiration, we'll share it.' (Account H)

To a certain extent, this observation may help explain why the account managers spoke relatively little about the temporality of Instagram as a social media platform. While it's evident that social media landscapes can undergo drastic transformations, potentially becoming inhospitable for advocacy efforts (as evidenced by experiences with platforms like Twitter/X), concerns about such precarity did not emerge much in our interviews. Instead, the prevailing sentiment revolved around the notion that if the environment changes unfavourably, one can simply 'go elsewhere'.

Furthermore, when we were discussing followers reaching out to seek help, particular in relation to issues of sexual harassment and violence, some account managers expressed frustration over common misconceptions that they provide specific services. As one account manager said:

I feel that we can fall into the trap of thinking that when someone shares content about how to cope in a difficult situation or deal with anxiety, that person might start feeling like, 'Okay, I have therapy now because there's this great account managed by experts, so it's awesome, right?' I think they start seeing us as the help they need, which is very misleading. (Account E)

However, all the interviewees emphasised their sense of responsibility to redirect followers seeking help to other accounts and organisations. The manager of Account E said: 'Of course, we always state our competencies, provide links for help and support, and emphasise that we are here for primary prevention.' She stressed that they cannot provide specific assistance, but 'we express our belief in the person, thank them for sharing, appreciate their courage in seeking help, and share those links'.

Other questions regarding the responsibilities of these account managers resurfaced as we discussed communication with survivors of violence and harassment. For example, one account manager claimed: 'We're not sure about our [legal] responsibility if someone reports a crime to us.' (Account H) According to the interviewee, this concern was significant enough to deter them from publicly requesting or sharing experiences that could be punishable under the criminal code in Czechia.

Reflecting on the meanings of public and private in the context of feminist digital activism

Our examination of the relationship between public and private in the context of digital activism builds upon previous feminist thought across the East-West divide. In the West, feminist analyses of public/private dynamics exposed patriarchal principles in the attribution of gender roles and thus extended the meaning of the political beyond the sphere of state and government, as represented by the saying ‘the personal is political’ (Millet 2016 [1970]). On the other hand, post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe has shown how the public and private spheres, as well as the activities conducted within them, were completely transformed under the regime of state socialism (Havelková 1995). In an authoritarian regime, it was important to keep the state out of ‘the personal’ and to guard the boundaries.

In the age of global online social networks, feminist actors collect and publish individual stories to politicise the issues that need to be publicly discussed and politically addressed, while at the same time protecting the privacy and security of users. They are in a position of constant negotiation between making things public and gaining publicity, on the one hand, and protecting followers’ sense of safety and concern for their private information, on the other. Beyond public and private, however, the space of social networks is also a corporate space that mixes old components in new ways and produces new forms of communication and interaction (Van Dijck 2012).

When interviewed online, activists described their accounts as public, whereby they meant that their accounts were available to all Instagram users without limitation. They were aware that the online platform is owned by a corporation that sets the rules for their work and bears responsibility for their safety. Some interviewees even reflected on how, in their struggle to reach their target audience, the form and frequency of their activities, as well as their language, were influenced by the platform owner’s rules and changing algorithms. As feminist digital activists resist and navigate this environment, their subjectivity is shared with algorithms (Adams, Applethar, Simpson 2020). Nevertheless, the space of Instagram is considered widely accessible, good at reaching the target group, and easy to navigate. Therefore, this social media platform is understood and articulated as public.

In the context of digital activism, the private sphere has transformed into ‘something techno-economic’ (Almendros 2023: 57) and is often discussed in relation to personal information that can be leaked or stolen. Simultaneously, the private also encompasses personal stories that, through the process of publication, become shared and thus enter the public domain. As Almendros explains, technocommunication is characterised by ‘the end of the distinction between the public and the private, which has been reinforced by the privatisation of the public and the publication of the private’ (ibid.: 55).

Within this process of reconstituting the public and private spheres, new forms of subjectivity are emerging. Digital activists, whether individuals or collectives, are able to share content with far less effort compared to offline activism, and they can connect with their target audience regardless of location or occupation. However, when engaging in the 'attention economy' and striving to reach a wide audience while maintaining the visibility of their accounts, activists must invest significant effort into the visual presentation of their work, the frequency of their online activities, and the language they use, all with minimal direct contact with their followers. They are acutely aware that their visibility and ability to achieve their goals are determined by the algorithms of social media platforms. Thus, although Van Dijck (2012) emphasises that within the attention economy users contribute to establishing the norms and values on which the algorithms operate, our interviewees do not reflect on this aspect.

Despite activists' ongoing resistance, feminist online activism remains constrained by male-dominated big tech companies. Simultaneously, given the growing political hostility towards gender-related issues in Slovakia and Czechia, coupled with increasing economic instability and the time-intensive nature of offline activism, online social platforms remain more accessible and less risky spaces for activist practice.

Analysing the collective/individual dynamics in digital activism

During discussions with Instagram account managers, several key aspects of activist work were highlighted. They reflected on the day-to-day realities, including the technical complexities, of their online awareness-raising efforts. A notable dynamic that emerged was the tension between fostering a sense of collectiveness and the individualism that often surfaced within these awareness-raising platforms.

Establishing a network that fosters a sense of collectiveness appeared to require a deliberate selection of followers or audience. Many managers described how their decision to engage on Instagram was shaped by the platform's audience demographics. As the manager of Account G explains: 'When we were defining our target group, we told ourselves, "well, young people don't really use Facebook much anymore".'

In discussing the pursuit of an appropriate audience, the account managers frequently referred to a specific cohort, suggesting a desire to connect with individuals who not only shared similar age demographics but also aligned values. It became clear that they were seeking out others who resonated with their beliefs and principles.

We, in addition to Instagram, have other social networks and we specifically knew which target group we wanted to reach. Thus, our main communication channel became Instagram. This is because we are dealing with a broad

audience that is, in some ways, specific and younger than the target group on Facebook. They are also different in mindset, being a bit further along than on Facebook, and more open. (Account E)

Instagram's algorithms provide account managers with the ability to target and connect with their desired audiences, a feature our interviewees emphasised as superior to Facebook's. There appears to be a higher likelihood on Instagram that the platform will recommend accounts to users based on their interests and preferences. It was implicitly understood in our interviews that effective awareness-raising hinges on engaging with the right audience, which in turn helps account managers achieve their goals. These goals often reflect a form of transient collectiveness, such as fostering collective consciousness, amplifying a collective voice, or sustaining a collective network.

From collective consciousness to collective voice

When discussing the objectives of their online platforms – and specifically what they aim to accomplish – the account managers consistently emphasised raising awareness about sexual harassment and violence. Although they expressed this goal in various ways, their messages converged on similar themes. For example, they aimed to ensure that people 'have a better idea of what sexual violence [looks like]' (Account I), to 'inform and convey expert information regarding the topic of sexual violence and sexual harassment' (Account D), or to achieve 'a change in public awareness. Because quite often it's not just about the experience ending for the assaulted person ... there isn't enough social support for them' (Account C).

Additionally, the account managers expressed a strong desire to connect with audiences who approach these issues from a similar perspective. This connection aimed to foster a collective consciousness within their audience, characterised by shared perspectives and even emotions.

I see my followers as mainly girls between 18 and 30 years old, who are right at the point of realising that something is bothering them and that they have the right to be bothered by it. They are trying to find a group of people they can identify with and somehow legitimise the feeling that it's okay to feel this way, to understand why they feel this way, what can be done about it, and to confirm that they are not crazy, but that this is really bad, and it shouldn't be like this. (Account B)

While a transient collectiveness, defined by the collective consciousness of individuals participating in specific online spaces, is accessible to virtually anyone, the account managers also highlighted a particular subgroup within their audience: individuals

who have experienced sexual violence or harassment. For certain account managers, their ultimate goal was to 'give a voice to the survivors' (Account I).

For some of the accounts examined in this study, the majority of their content comprised experiences shared by their followers – persons with experience of harassment or violence. When discussing their motivations for disseminating such content, the account managers frequently reflected on why someone would choose to share personal experiences of sexual violence or harassment. This sharing was often framed not as a request for help, but as a desire for a space where such experiences could be voiced and acknowledged: 'And mostly, it's that they don't even want advice or to be directed to another organisation, but rather they want someone to listen to them.' (Account F)

One account manager even noted that, for some survivors, the platform serves as a space where they can share their experiences of sexual violence or harassment for the first time, often with the desire for anonymity.

We often have stories where people write to us explicitly saying that it's like the first time they've actually realised, maybe after reading those individual stories, or it's the first time they're confiding in someone, that they've been carrying it with them for some time. I think it's ... It's good for these individuals that they have someone to confide in, and there isn't actually that pressure to confide in someone in person. (Account I)

In this context, a recurring theme in our interviews was the belief that many survivors of sexual violence and harassment do not seek justice, particularly given the political climate in the two countries. Instead, they find solace in being heard and recognised online. As one account manager articulated:

'They don't have ... hope for any consequences, they don't want like, to be advised on how to report it, or who to complain to, how to fix it. There's minimal faith in that correction. It's just validating their feelings, I think.' (Account B)

Other digital activists went so far as to explain that sharing one's own experience on an Instagram platform can provide a sense of support:

I think our main goal is to show that the person isn't alone in this and that it's okay to share it, and actually, to give courage to other people who are struggling, that they're not alone. (Account D)

The notion of emotional support emerged in several interviews, where account

managers discussed the importance of ‘contributing to the feeling that we are not alone’ (Account C) and demonstrating to survivors that ‘they are actually not alone in dealing with it’ (Account H). This need may stem, on the one hand, from the limited development of #MeToo initiatives in the Czech and Slovak contexts and, on the other hand, from the strong desire for emotional validation among survivors. As a result, Instagram accounts become spaces where individual experiences are transformed into a collective narrative on a daily basis, amplifying individual voices and creating a unified collective voice.

Collective network vs collective action

The Instagram platforms were meant to be more than mere online forums for survivors’ narratives; they aimed to foster a supportive community. While their goal was to cultivate an environment that rejects victim-blaming narratives and supports survivors of violence and harassment, the collective network may be limited to supportive responses from fellow followers in the comments section.

A recurring experience shared by the account managers was that their followers viewed the account – run by anonymous individuals – as either an open space for voicing their experiences or as a public service providing useful information. This suggests that online networked collectiveness has its limitations in this context. Although the account managers frequently referred to their audience as a supportive ‘community’, it became clear in other instances that their engagement with followers was largely one-sided. Followers often perceived them as anonymous public figures to whom they could reach out. This was particularly evident when discussing the various types of interactions observed on their accounts, with private messages being the most prevalent form of engagement:

Probably the most common thing is that people just send us a message, like regarding a post ... or they give a like, like when we share it on stories. But I think people prefer messages. (Account D)

When discussing their objectives, some account managers also addressed the issue of impact. They acknowledged that certain goals could be achieved online, such as raising awareness on specific issues or organising online petitions and fundraising efforts. However, they described initiatives that require offline collective action as more challenging to accomplish. One interviewee openly shared their reflections on the nature of their online impact:

Sometimes we really think about it, all four of us [account managers], whether our work makes sense. Like how it simplifies feminism and people follow us

who primarily agree with us, so we actually say to ourselves, well, 'does it make sense?', and that's why we move it beyond the online space. (Account G)

Another account manager discussed the limitations of targeting a like-minded audience, suggesting that it may have a limited, or even negative, impact: 'I sometimes feel that when people share those things, it just accumulates negative energy in everyone and everyone gets pissed off', explained the manager of Account A. She concluded, 'we feel frustrated, like nothing will improve'.

Some interviewees also strongly believed in the need to conduct awareness-raising activities offline. However, there was a consensus that organising offline events or initiatives is considerably more challenging than engaging in online awareness-raising efforts. According to several interviewees, such organisation requires specific leadership skills and additional resources. Consequently, they openly acknowledged that arranging offline events or initiatives was never their primary objective.

It's not my goal to organise something like that because I think it carries a great responsibility. People don't realise that organising a fundraiser or a march is a lot of work. I don't get involved in that. Let those who have the capacity and abilities do it. (Account B)

The above can be read in line with how Sandra Lee Bartkey (1975) conceptualises the transformation of feminist consciousness – as a deeply personal yet political shift in perception that requires not only the recognition of one's oppression, but also the acquisition of one's own agency. The big challenge here, then, seems to be not the creation of (an online) collective consciousness of the oppressed, but rather their empowerment and ability to imagine change.

Reflecting on negotiating the individual/collective voice, subjectivity, and praxis

In the process of negotiating individual and collective subjectivity, feminist online activists engage in struggles for recognition (Fraser 2013). In a society where survivors of sexual violence often feel unheard and their experiences devalued, feminist online activists strive to serve as platforms for these voices, as well as initiators and facilitators of connective networks. By publicly sharing personal experiences of sexual violence and harassment, account managers channel individual voices into a stronger and potentially political collective voice for survivors. Through the acts of sharing and following, individuals can become part of a connective network and join this symbolic feminist community.

The praxis of digital activism is aimed mostly at young women who use Instagram regularly and can be effectively engaged. As a result, digital activists build digital spaces of like-minded individuals, similar age groups, and those with shared experiences of sexism and sexual violence. While this approach can foster a sense of community, it also limits the potential to build continuity and follow up on previous feminist efforts, knowledge, and mobilisations – unless Instagram activism is accompanied by other activities.

Another dimension of the struggle for recognition is oriented towards the broader public. Awareness-raising and popular education activities aim to engage Instagram users, who are seen as mediators between the feminist online platform and the offline general public. The goal is to challenge sexist cultures and sensitise society to issues of sexualised violence, which are often accompanied by distrust towards institutions of justice or political representation. As Fraser (2013: loc. 125) concludes: ‘Unable to transform the deep gender structures of the capitalist economy, they preferred to target harms rooted in androcentric patterns of cultural value or status hierarchies.’

Consequently, feminist digital activism on Instagram serves as a tool for connecting with young people, sharing the experiences of survivors of sexual violence or harassment, and raising awareness. It can form a collective network and act as a foundation for a potentially mobilised feminist collective subject. However, the shift from connective to collective action is challenging, thus pointing again to the requirements of digital space moderation. While some engage in offline activities and consider them a necessary part of awareness-raising and addressing sexual violence and harassment, others are more comfortable with online activities. As communication with members of these networked publics is largely one-sided and limited – this is due in part to the account managers’ capacities and privacy concerns – feminist online activism on Instagram has limited potential to transform economic, social, and political structures unless combined with other forms of feminist praxis (Eschle, Maiguashca 2007).

Conclusion

In the context of increased political pressure against ‘gender’ and civil society across countries, informal digital activism provides an important source for producing feminist knowledge, sharing experiences, and forming feminist individual and collective subjectivities. The online environment and social networks are particularly significant for young people, as the internet is interwoven into the fabric of their everyday lives. Despite being governed by multinational corporations, this environment offers affordances and provides followers with a space to engage in personalised politics. Many of our interviewees spoke openly about becoming Instagram account managers be-

cause of this affordance – they felt the need to produce awareness-raising content as they transitioned from being users to ‘prod-users’. While such a practice has the potential to draw many people into online environments, this type of engagement may reach its limit with people sharing their ideas or emotions. Doing so seems sufficient in order to become an empowered feminist subject, but it does not necessarily lead to collective action.

This study examined the experiences of digital activists who established Instagram accounts over the past five years with the aim of raising awareness about sexual violence and harassment in Czechia and Slovakia. We conclude that for studying the dynamics of connective and collective actions, digital platforms matter, as interviewees described various reasons for preferring Instagram to other platforms, including less hate speech and a more curated audience. Accounts aimed at raising awareness are widely accessible to young people, who are also the target audience of such accounts, and they are therefore considered public. The public space is understood as a space that is open to all users of a platform and is not restricted. However, this space is also risky in two ways: It is open to hate speech and harassment, and the misuse of information is a constant threat. Therefore, the public sphere in this context also represents a space in need of regulation and protection.

Instagram’s affordances are important for its goal of creating inclusive ‘communities’ or ‘separatist safe spaces’. Yet achieving this goal can be exhausting. Account managers must constantly interact with the norms and expectations of Meta, a governing authority that is both present and absent (e.g. in its handling of hate speech). At such moments, it becomes clear that what is considered a public sphere is, in fact, a private space owned by a global corporation.

In the process of rethinking the public and the private, new types of subjectivities are being born. Digital activists can share content with limited effort compared to offline activism and they can connect with their target audience regardless of their location or occupation. But this does not mean that such work is devoid of ethical issues and questions of responsibility, which account managers have to navigate. Moreover, they must invest significant effort into the visual aspects of their work, the frequency of their online activities, and the language they use because algorithms determine their visibility and ability to reach their goals. Digital activists, therefore, share their agency with algorithms, and online feminist praxis is disciplined by male-led tech companies. However, activists actively resist. They look for ways to amplify the voices of the survivors of sexual violence and harassment, to raise awareness of the topic, and to intervene in the public sphere – sometimes even beyond the space of the internet.

Digital activists are part of the struggle for the recognition of survivors of sexual violence and harassment, who feel unheard and devalued. They also provide a wel-

coming space in countries where survivors rarely report incidents owing to fear of the authorities and secondary victimisation. These networks can foster a sense of community, but they often lack continuity with previous feminist movements. The transition from online connective action to offline collective action is also challenging for both followers and account managers. As a result, feminist activism on Instagram alone has limited potential to drive broader economic, social, or political change unless it is combined with other forms of feminist practice. The value of such digital feminist praxis lies in connecting people, sharing survivors' experiences, and raising awareness about sexual violence and harassment.

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Visible on Our Terms: Platformised Feminism and the Politics of Endurance

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Abstract: This article explores how feminist actors in Slovakia use Instagram to sustain politically engaged digital practices in a national context marked by institutional neglect and rising anti-gender discourse. While much scholarship on digital feminism has centred on Anglophone contexts and high-profile influencers, this study focuses on users operating outside mainstream visibility, who maintain a feminist presence not through spectacle but through careful negotiation with the platform's emotional, aesthetic, and algorithmic demands. Drawing on in-depth interviews, the analysis shows how these users adapt to Instagram's infrastructural pressures while striving to preserve critical integrity and ethical coherence. Their practices reveal a constant tension between the need for visibility and the risk of commodification, between the desire to communicate structural critique and the constraints of platform legibility. In attending to these dilemmas, the article foregrounds feminist labour as a form of ethical endurance, enacted not through viral reach but through slow, situated, and relational modes of engagement.

Keywords: Slovak feminist activism, platformised feminism, feminist visibility, emotional labour, algorithmic governance

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Feminist politics in Slovakia have long been marginalised, often dismissed as foreign, elitist, or out of touch with everyday life. Persistent gender stereotypes and right-wing populism have fostered a hostile climate in which feminist claims are ridiculed or cast as threats to national identity, family, and tradition. This has intensified with anti-gender discourse portraying feminism as a Western 'gender ideology' undermining Slo-

vak values (Grzebalska, Kováts, Pető 2017; Maďarová, Hardoš 2021). As mainstream institutions and media grow increasingly indifferent or hostile, many feminist actors are turning to alternative arenas, especially digital platforms, to express their politics, build community, and sustain critique in an otherwise unreceptive environment.

Instagram, in particular, has become crucial to this shift away from traditional public spheres towards more autonomous, digitally mediated spaces of feminist engagement. While empirical evidence from Slovakia remains limited, existing scholarship suggests that platforms like Instagram can serve as important arenas for feminist visibility, community-building, and informal political education (Mendes 2015; Jónsson 2014; Clark 2016; Keller 2019). Unlike mainstream media, which often exclude feminist perspectives or reduce them to simplistic stereotypes, Instagram offers a space where feminist discourse can be shaped by those who live it and shared through accessible formats that bypass institutional mediation. It also allows for the circulation of intersectional vocabularies and transnational feminist imaginaries that might otherwise be absent from local public discourse (Bhambra 2014).

However, this potential is constrained by the platform's own logics and infrastructures. Instagram is not a neutral tool but a commercial, algorithmically governed environment that structures participation through technical and affective parameters (Gillespie 2018; Bishop 2020). Content that is aesthetically pleasing, emotionally palatable, and personally framed tends to perform well, while more confrontational or complex posts, especially those challenging dominant ideologies, often struggle to gain traction in platform economies that favour positivity, clarity, and individualised expression. As a result, the platform incentivises a narrow repertoire of visibility aligned with neoliberal ideals of self-expression, empowerment, and resilience (Banet-Weiser 2018; Gill, Orgad 2018; Rottenberg 2018). This creates a paradox, visibility is a valuable resource for feminist engagement, yet it is often shaped by platform logics that may conflict with core feminist values. Feminist users must therefore navigate the risk that their political commitments may be softened, distorted, or erased in the process of being seen. Visibility becomes a form of labour that is emotionally, aesthetically, and ethically demanding (Scharff 2023; Linabary et al. 2020).

Amid these tensions, this article examines how feminist users in Slovakia negotiate the pressures of visibility on a platform shaped by algorithmic and aesthetic constraints. Drawing on qualitative interviews, it focuses on self-identified feminists who engage in political expression and feminist discourse on Instagram, yet do not identify as influencers nor operate through institutional channels. These actors present themselves as everyday users who maintain a public feminist presence through ongoing, often informal, digital practices. The study explores how these users engage with Instagram's affordances, how they navigate or resist its emotional and aesthetic norms,

and how their practices reflect the structural constraints of a national environment in which feminism is persistently delegitimised. In doing so, the article addresses a key gap in the literature on digital feminism, which has largely centred on Anglophone contexts, high-profile campaigns, or influencer practices. It shifts the focus towards small-scale, slow, and ethically attentive forms of feminist engagement that unfold at the intersection of algorithmic pressure and structural precarity.

Feminism in the feed

Over the past decade, the growing role of social media in shaping feminist discourse has attracted sustained attention across feminist media studies, digital culture, and communication research. Scholars have increasingly examined how platforms are not simply spaces where feminist content circulates, but sites that actively shape the conditions under which feminism becomes visible, relatable, and politically resonant. This body of research suggests that digital platforms have transformed how feminist ideas are articulated and engaged with, particularly by enabling new forms of participation that extend beyond traditional organisational, spatial, or generational boundaries (Jónsson 2014; Clark 2016; Keller, Mendes, Ringrose 2016).

Rather than operating through established institutional channels, much of this engagement unfolds in informal, decentralised, and everyday instances. On platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and X, feminist users participate through practices such as storytelling, consciousness-raising, peer education, and solidarity work. These activities are often woven into the rhythms of daily life and shaped by personal experience, emotion, and community interaction (Papacharissi 2015). Scholars have argued that this reflects a broader transformation in the practice of feminism itself, one that is less dependent on formal movement structures and increasingly expressed through networked, affective, and individualised forms of political engagement (Mendes, Ringrose, Keller 2019; Tiidenberg 2020). Many thus link this development to the fourth wave of feminism, which is characterised by its digital embeddedness, its use of intersectional vocabularies, and its emphasis on affect, embodiment, and lived experience as key sites of feminist knowledge (Munro 2013; Chamberlain 2016; Marwick 2019).

At the same time, the embedding of feminist practices within commercial social media platforms raises important questions about the infrastructural and ideological constraints that shape digital participation. While platforms offer new affordances for visibility and community-building, they also impose specific norms, aesthetics, and logics that influence which voices are seen, amplified, or rewarded. As Barbala (2024) argues, feminist engagement on digital platforms must be understood not simply as content uploaded into a neutral space but as practice entangled with platform gov-

ernance, algorithmic filtering, and affective economies. The concept of *platformised feminism* captures this dynamic, foregrounding how digital feminist activity is materially and discursively shaped by sociotechnical systems and commercial imperatives (Magaudda, Solaroli 2020).

Rethinking feminist visibility on Instagram

Among contemporary digital platforms, Instagram has emerged as a key site for feminist engagement, offering a visually oriented space that privileges affective expression and personal narrative. Its popularity among feminists stems from its capacity to facilitate everyday activism, emotional storytelling, and aesthetic self-representation. Features like Stories, Reels, and grid posts provide accessible formats for communicating feminist messages in visually compelling ways. For many, Instagram enables new forms of intimate publicness (Tiidenberg 2020) and emotional connection (Papacharissi 2015), making it an appealing terrain for feminist participation. Yet while Instagram presents itself as an open, democratised space, it is neither ideologically neutral nor structurally equal.

To understand Instagram's impact on feminist expression, one must consider how its algorithmic infrastructures and commercial logics function. As part of the broader platform economy, Instagram is optimised to extract attention and monetise engagement (Srnicek 2017). Its algorithms elevate content that is emotionally resonant, visually coherent, and easily consumable, favouring smooth affective flows (Gillespie 2018). This infrastructure is far from passive, it encodes values aligned with neoliberal ideologies, such as self-optimisation, positivity, and individualism (Kanai 2020). Through opaque algorithmic curation and moderation systems, including shadow-banning, downranking, and keyword filtering, Instagram actively governs which feminist voices gain traction and which are silenced (Noble 2018; Are 2023). The result is a commercially curated public sphere where visibility is not earned purely through relevance or urgency but through compliance with the platform's preferred affective and aesthetic norms.

These infrastructures directly shape the kinds of feminist content that are most likely to circulate. Instagram privileges visually polished, emotionally uplifting, and easily digestible forms of feminism, often centred on self-love, confidence, and personal growth. What emerges is a popularised, postfeminist sensibility (Gill 2007; Banet-Weiser 2018) in which feminism becomes a lifestyle brand, aspirational, individually framed, and emotionally palatable (Pruchniewska 2017; Baer 2016). Feminist expressions that align with this tone, such as body-positive images, motivational mantras, or self-care routines, are rewarded with visibility, while more radical or structurally oriented content is penalised by the algorithm. Posts addressing gender-based

violence, racism, or queer and trans rights, particularly by marginalised users, are often downranked, flagged, or shadowbanned, rendering them nearly invisible (Are 2023; Scharff 2023; Savolainen et al. 2020). This produces an affective economy of feminism (Kanai 2020), where only certain emotional registers, like hope, inspiration, and resilience, are amplified, and others, such as rage, grief, or critique, are filtered out.

Operating within this framework requires feminist users to engage in ongoing negotiations between political conviction and platform compatibility. Visibility demands more than presence; it requires performing in algorithmically legible ways. Feminist actors must adapt to the norms of Instagram's influencer culture, often embracing its tropes such as cohesive aesthetics, regular posting, emotional tone management, and strategic self-branding (Duffy 2017; Abidin 2021; Dean 2023). Even when they seek to subvert these norms, their content is still filtered through infrastructures that favour branding over disruption. Staying visible thus means staying within bounds, even when those bounds are antithetical to feminist values of structural critique, intersectionality, and collective resistance.

This leads to what Duffy and Hund (2015) call 'aspirational labour', an unpaid, affectively charged work to produce content that is both authentic and appealing. For feminist users, this labour is both practical and ethical. It involves careful calibration of tone, being critical but not 'too angry', political but not 'too radical'. Content must be visually harmonious, emotionally digestible, and strategically framed to avoid triggering moderation. This often leads to self-censorship or the aesthetic softening of political content (Ahmed 2017; Bishop 2020). The 'authenticity bind' (Duffy 2017) further complicates this dynamic, requiring users to appear sincere and politically committed while also curating their presence in ways that attract engagement and avoid penalisation. Moreover, users addressing trauma, violence, or sexuality must often rely on informal strategies – speculative and collectively shared tactics for navigating algorithmic systems – as they attempt to preserve reach without compromising message (Bishop 2020; Cotter 2023). Yet these tactics are precarious and labour-intensive, highlighting the fragility of feminist visibility under platform governance.

In this sense, Instagram represents both an opportunity and a constraint for digital feminism. It offers tools for connection, reach, and expression, but only within the ideological and infrastructural contours of platform capitalism. Feminist actors must constantly navigate tensions between branding and critique, aesthetic coherence and political clarity, emotional appeal and structural urgency. The result is a form of platformised feminism that is legible, clickable, and resonant, but also filtered, partial, and uneven. Recognising these dynamics is essential not only to understanding feminist participation on Instagram but to confronting the broader limits and possibilities of feminist politics in algorithmic publics.

Situating (digital) feminism in Slovakia

Slovakia offers a compelling case for understanding feminist activism shaped by post-socialist transformation, neoliberal restructuring, and rising illiberalism. After the collapse of state socialism in 1989, early feminist actors sought to articulate gender justice outside the confines of discredited state structures. ASPEKT, founded in the early 1990s, emerged as a key site of feminist discourse production (Cviková, Juráňová 2009). Rooted in civil society, education, and publishing rather than party politics or formal institutions, early feminist initiatives, such as ASPEKT, were often dismissed as elitist or culturally foreign, thereby complicating their legitimacy in the public sphere.

The country's accession to the European Union in 2004 reconfigured the terrain of feminist engagement. EU frameworks opened up space for gender equality discourse and provided much-needed funding, but they also introduced technocratic pressures and depoliticised rationalities. Feminist NGOs increasingly found themselves operating within donor logics that privileged compliance, quantifiable impact, and professionalisation over grassroots organising or structural critique (Černohorská 2019). Kobová (2016) describes this as a broader neoliberal turn in feminist praxis, where gender became framed through the lens of individual responsibility and economic productivity, while intersectional and redistributive politics were sidelined. As activists moved into bureaucratic and policy-making roles, the line between feminist critique and state-aligned gender expertise became increasingly blurred (Maďarová, Valkovičová 2021).

This institutionalisation left feminist politics vulnerable to backlash. From the early 2010s, conservative and far-right actors in Slovakia mobilised against 'gender ideology', depicting feminism, LGBTQ+ rights, and sexual education as threats to national sovereignty, Christian values, and the traditional family (Grzebalska, Kováts, Pető 2017). This rhetoric became a symbolic glue uniting disparate grievances and fuelling a deeper illiberal shift in governance, which redefined democratic legitimacy through appeals to 'the conservative people' (Maďarová, Hardoš 2022). In practice, these developments led to tangible consequences: the ratification of the Istanbul Convention was blocked, over twenty anti-abortion bills were introduced between 2018 and 2021, and gender equality mechanisms were defunded or dismantled (Maďarová, Valkovičová 2021).

Amid this climate of institutional erosion and public hostility, digital platforms began to serve as alternative arenas for feminist visibility, dialogue, and mobilisation. ASPEKT's transition to online publishing through its blog ASPEKTin marked an early recognition of digital media's capacity to sustain feminist knowledge production and connect with new publics beyond the limits of mainstream print media (Černohorská 2019). By the late 2010s, other established organisations, including *Možnosť voľby* (Freedom of Choice), increasingly adopted social media strategies to counter disinfor-

mation, amplify advocacy, and engage younger audiences, especially as traditional channels grew less accessible.

Simultaneously, a new generation of feminist initiatives emerged that were digitally native in form and practice. Initiatives such as *Dôstojná menštruácia* (Dignified Menstruation) exemplify this shift, using Instagram and crowdfunding platforms to engage the public through advocacy, education, and the practical redistribution of material support. Yet these initiatives are not outliers, they are part of a broader diversification of feminist actors and tactics shaped by generational change and evolving media infrastructures. As Maďarová and Valkovičová (2021) observe, the field of feminist praxis in Slovakia has become increasingly differentiated, encompassing NGOs, informal collectives, cultural workers, and digitally networked individuals. Younger actors in particular encounter feminism not through institutional affiliations, but through social media environments shaped by global vocabularies and local resonance.

While these dynamics remain under-researched, Maďarová and Valkovičová (2021) further observe that digital media increasingly support emerging feminist voices and facilitate rapid organising across the country. In this context, digital platforms have begun to function, in effect, as alternative public spheres, enabling feminist discourse and action amid shrinking institutional support. Rather than definitive findings, current observations suggest the gradual emergence of a more fragmented, mediated feminist presence, one whose conditions and possibilities are still unfolding. Given this context, understanding how Slovak feminists navigate Instagram's infrastructural constraints and algorithmic demands becomes crucial, forming the empirical focus of this study.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design informed by critical feminist methodology and interpretivist epistemology, drawing on feminist media studies (van Zoonen 1994) and the premise that knowledge is situated, relational, and shaped by structural power relations (Haraway 1988; Harding 1991). Rather than seeking generalisability, it aims to produce rich, context-sensitive insights into how feminist practices on Instagram emerge within and in response to the intersecting dynamics of algorithmic governance, political hostility, and transnational feminist vocabularies. Feminist engagement is approached not merely as communicative output, but as a sociopolitical practice embedded in platform infrastructures, affective economies, and local political conditions. Building on critical feminist media scholarship, the analysis attends to the performative, emotional, and relational dimensions of digital activism, foregrounding how the participants negotiate visibility, navigate constraints, and sustain feminist presence through everyday acts of care, curation, and critique (Gill 2007; Banet-Weiser 2018).

The participants were selected through purposive sampling using three core criteria; self-identification as a feminist, active public engagement with feminist themes on Instagram, and sustained participation in digital advocacy. This approach enabled the inclusion of individuals who are not only content creators but who contribute to broader feminist discourse and community-building through education, critique, and activist mobilisation. Rather than aiming for demographic representativeness, the goal was to engage with information-rich cases that reflect the diversity of feminist positions, trajectories, and digital practices in the Slovak context.

The final sample consisted of eight individuals between the ages of 23 and 35, all of them based in Slovakia and publicly engaged in feminist discourse on Instagram. The group is racially homogeneous and composed predominantly of white participants, most of whom come from relatively stable socioeconomic backgrounds, with access to higher education, cultural capital, and urban infrastructures. This composition is not a result of methodological oversight, but rather reflects the structural inequalities that shape who is able to participate visibly in digital feminist spaces in Slovakia. Women from structurally marginalised backgrounds, including, but not limited to, racialised women such as Roma women and women of colour, face multiple barriers to digital participation. These include systemic racism, economic precarity, rural isolation, limited access to quality education, and infrastructural inequality (ÚSVRK 2021). Acknowledging these intersecting absences is central to an intersectional feminist methodology, which must consider not only who is visible in digital feminist spaces, but also who is systematically rendered invisible by the entanglements of race, class, geography, and platform infrastructure (Crenshaw 1991).

At the same time, the sample reflects some variation in class background, educational trajectory, and employment situation, even though all the participants share a relatively high level of cultural and digital literacy. While most are university-educated and based in urban centres, a few have working-class or rural upbringings, and several navigate precarious forms of labour in the cultural, NGO, or creative sectors. These positionalities shape not only their access to digital tools and visibility but also the tone, sustainability, and framing of their feminist engagement online. This further echoes the classed dynamics of digital feminist activism noted by Scharff (2023), wherein the significant unpaid labour required by this activism can privilege those with greater resources and time.

Data collection unfolded in two phases. The first phase involved two months of online observation of the participants' public Instagram activity. This included analysis of posts, captions, Stories, comments, and other visible interactions. The aim was to gain insight into how feminist values are expressed, mediated, and negotiated through platform-specific formats and aesthetic strategies. Special attention was paid to engagement metrics, visual choices, caption tone, and follower interactions to under-

Table 1. Overview of selected Slovak feminist content creators on Instagram

Pseudonym	Main areas of focus	Gender identity	Racial/national identity
Zuzana	Feminist education, queer and trans inclusion, digital pedagogy	Woman	White (Slovak)
Vanda	Anti-capitalist feminism, environmental justice, and housing activism	Woman	White (Slovak)
Klára	Inclusive sex education, bodily autonomy, and sexual literacy	Woman	White (Slovak)
Ema	Sexual literacy, feminist workshops, and care work	Woman	White (Slovak)
Lucia	Sex work advocacy, queer, and trans-inclusive feminist activism,	Woman	White (Slovak)
Petra	Menstrual and reproductive justice, access to care, and structural inequality	Woman	White (Slovak)
Kristína	Transfeminism and queer feminist advocacy	Trans woman	White (Slovak)
Paula	Feminist discourse, digital engagement, and community-building	Woman	White (Slovak)

Source: Author.

Note: Pseudonyms are used to protect confidentiality. Data on gender identity and nationality are based on self-identification or publicly available information.

stand how Instagram’s algorithmic and affective dynamics shape feminist presence and participation. This phase informed the design of the interview guide, ensuring alignment between the empirical context and the interview prompts.

The second phase consisted of eight semi-structured interviews conducted with the selected participants. Interviews were held face-to-face, primarily in the participants’ homes or mutually agreed private spaces, to foster comfort and openness. Each interview lasted around one hour and was conducted in Slovak. With the participants’ informed consent, all interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and subsequently translated into English. The interview guide blended theoretical and empirical insights and addressed the participants’ motivations, digital strategies, challenges encountered, and reflections on their feminist practice in relation to platform cultures. Ethical protocols included confidentiality, pseudonymisation, and voluntary participation. All the participants were informed about the study’s aims and the use of the data.

The interview data were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which focuses on how individuals make sense of their lived experiences in particular social, political, and cultural contexts (Smith, Flowers, Larkin 2009). IPA is particularly well-suited to this study’s aim of understanding the affective, reflexive, and embodied dimensions of feminist activism on Instagram, as it allows for a close reading of the participants’ meaning-making concerning the pressures and possibil-

ities of platformed engagement. Transcripts were coded inductively using ATLAS.ti, following a bottom-up, iterative approach. Emerging codes were grouped into broader thematic clusters that captured recurring tensions in the participants' accounts, particularly the ambivalence of visibility, the ethical dilemmas of self-branding, and the labour involved in sustaining a feminist presence in a space structured by attention economies and neoliberal aesthetics.

Instagram as feminist infrastructure in an unreceptive landscape

For the feminist users in this study, Instagram has become a key medium for enacting, thinking through, and sharing feminist politics. While their profiles and practices varied, from curated feminist pages and activist profiles to hybrid profiles that blend personal content with political commentary, what unites them is a sustained, maintained, and intentional feminist presence on the platform. All the participants use Instagram regularly, many over several years, some for a shorter period, and they see it as integral to how they engage with feminism in their everyday lives.

For most, Instagram was not adopted with the explicit goal of doing feminist advocacy. Rather, it was a familiar social platform already embedded in their everyday digital routines, something that 'everyone uses'. Over time, however, it became an important interface through which feminist ideas were encountered, reflected upon, and articulated. Some of the participants even traced their own feminist consciousness to Instagram, discovering accounts, posts, or stories that helped them name experiences or rethink social norms. As Paula put it, 'It was through Instagram that I started to even understand what feminism could mean. It was like... suddenly I had words for things I always felt'. Others, already identifying as feminists, found Instagram to be a space in which to explore specific issues of interest, such as reproductive justice, queer identity, or sexual education, and connect with like-minded people in the process. The platform thus emerged not only as a tool for visibility or outreach but also as a resource for political and emotional literacy.

Across the interviews, the participants described Instagram as a dynamic source of feminist knowledge. Instagram offered a way to stay informed, both about global feminist discussions and about local developments. The participants described following accounts from across the world to gain language and insight into issues like gender-based violence, reproductive justice, or trans rights, issues that were often sidelined in the Slovak media or public discourse. Yet these were not passive processes of consumption. Many said that seeing global feminist content made them reflect on how (or if) those issues translated locally. Ema said: 'When something big happens abroad, like some abortion protests in the US or Poland, I don't just repost

it. I always try to ask, what does this mean for us here? How would this conversation even sound in Slovak?’

These forms of ‘feminist translation’, not linguistic but cultural and political, were central to how the participants navigated their engagement with transnational feminism. Through stories, captions, or informal commentary, they tried to localise global struggles, asking what feminist resistance might look like in Slovak conditions. This reflexive and situational translation recalls what Bhambra (2014) calls ‘connected sociologies’, ways of thinking through global structures from within specific historical and cultural contexts.

This also meant creating and circulating their own feminist knowledge. Some of the participants regularly created posts or carousels that explained concepts like victim-blaming, unpaid care work, or queer invisibility in Slovak language and context. Others reshared content from Slovak feminist peers, forming what they described as a small but tight-knit ecosystem. ‘There are not that many of us who post (feminist content) regularly’, said Kristína, ‘so we kind of know each other through Instagram. It’s like this small network, even if we’ve never met in person.’ For those who were also involved in offline organising, Instagram also helped amplify campaigns or events.

Several participants emphasised that Instagram made them feel more politically vocal.

The visual, quick, and ephemeral nature of the platform made it easier to express opinions without the pressure of formality, making it a particularly attractive space for their engagement. ‘I wouldn’t go write an article or speak at a protest’, said Petra, ‘but I can share a story, or make a post or comment on something, and that’s still political.’ The participants valued the immediacy of the platform, and the ability to quickly react to events and process experiences in real time or to reach audiences without needing a ‘big stage’.

Many also emphasised that Instagram enabled them to reach audiences beyond traditional activist circles, friends, co-workers, and classmates, who might not otherwise be familiar with such issues. Several even described deliberately blurring the boundaries between the ‘private’ and the ‘political’ (Hanisch 1970) to normalise feminist discourse within their everyday social networks. ‘People follow me for all sorts of reasons’, noted Lucia, ‘so when I share a post about gender violence or something about queer rights, maybe they’ll actually stop and read.’ In this context, Instagram becomes a site of subtle intervention, where intimate aesthetics and critical reflection operate together.

The participants saw their engagement as both educational and emotional. Posting, resharing, or commenting became part of a broader feminist practice of questioning, unlearning, and staying accountable. Several noted that Instagram helped them shift

their views on key topics and challenged assumptions they had not previously noticed. Vanda said: 'There are posts I still remember from like two years ago that changed how I see some things.' They described their feed as a source of constant learning, an ongoing dialogue with others, but also with themselves. This made their feminist presence not only expressive but introspective. It allowed them to experiment, to speak out, and sometimes to make mistakes and learn publicly.

The platform was also described as an emotional and relational space. The participants emphasised the sense of connection Instagram enables, such as the ability to follow and be followed by others who share similar values, to comment, to vent, and to process collective feelings in moments of crisis. Whether responding to a political scandal, a feminist campaign, or a moment of collective grief, Instagram provided what one participant called 'a kind of solidarity infrastructure'. These micro-publics were not always harmonious, but they were perceived as supportive, dialogic, and essential for sustaining energy. Through posts, stories, DMs, and comment threads, the participants cultivated a shared feminist vocabulary, inflected by local struggles but also resonating across borders.

Instagram in this sense, was also described as safer and more manageable than other social media platforms, especially Facebook. While all the participants had public accounts, they felt that the platform's design enabled more control over interactions. 'On Facebook, anyone can comment, and it's full of trolls', said Petra. 'On Instagram, it feels more filtered. Like, if someone sends you hate, it's not like this burst of random comments, it's usually some DMs, and you can just block them.' This allowed them to maintain what many described as 'a kind of bubble', not in the sense of isolation, but as a space of affective protection and mutual recognition. They formed what felt like micro-communities, visible, porous, and public, but still intimate. One participant called it 'a feminist neighbourhood', where people share, rant, support each other, and sometimes just vent. This affective mode of collectivity aligns with the idea of 'affective publics' (Papacharissi 2015), wherein emotional expression and digital circulation co-constitute political participation.

While the participants were aware of the platform's limitations, which are explored in more detail in the sections below, they emphasised its usefulness. Instagram enabled them to engage in low-threshold political action, connect with others, and feel less alone. It allowed them to stay close to feminist conversations even when burnout or daily life kept them from doing more. And for many, it offered a flexible, emotionally meaningful way to participate in collective life. 'It's not perfect', said Klára, 'but it's what we have now, this is also our space. And in a country where feminism still feels like a bad word, that really matters.'

Visibility and the aesthetic constraints of platform feminism

A central tension that emerged in this study revolves around the contradictory demands placed on feminist Instagram users: the imperative to remain faithful to feminist values, while also adapting to a platform logic that rewards precisely the kinds of content and behaviours that risk betraying those values. Visibility on Instagram is not neutral, it is governed by algorithmic systems and cultural norms that privilege emotional coherence, aesthetic legibility, and strategic vulnerability. Remaining visible, then, often requires navigating a narrow corridor of acceptable feminist expression, one that flattens critique, softens anger, and incentivises content that is personally resonant yet politically unthreatening.

The participants were acutely aware of these tensions. Instagram, as they saw it, is a double-edged infrastructure. On the one hand, it offers access, reach, and community. On the other hand, it operates through mechanisms of commodification and emotional capitalism that can distort and dilute feminist messages. Several interviewees spoke of the platform's tendency to amplify content that is visually polished and emotionally easy to consume while marginalising posts that contain complex, confrontational, or politicised content. As Kristína noted, the platform comes with 'built-in hierarchies': 'Well, it's mostly white, urban, cis, attractive women sharing something cute like some motivational quote on empowerment rather than some angry feminist with something complicated.' This reflects Kanai's (2020) analysis of aesthetic legibility, in which content is rewarded not for its critical depth but for its ability to conform to dominant visual and affective norms, typically those that are polished, emotionally coherent, and personally resonant. In this sense, algorithmic legibility operates not only as a technical filter but as a cultural disciplining force, one that teaches users which forms of expression are rewardable and which are silently pushed into obscurity. Scholars such as Noble (2018) further emphasise how these norms are not neutral but deeply racialised, classed, and gendered, producing what we might call 'platformed privilege', where visibility accrues more easily to those who embody white, cis, conventionally attractive, and emotionally palatable forms of subjectivity. Visibility, then, is not simply algorithmic; it is structured through intersecting systems of power that shape who gets seen, heard, and valued.

Faced with these structurally unequal and culturally coded conditions of visibility, the participants felt compelled to package their feminist critique in ways that made it algorithmically and socially legible. Petra provided an example of this: 'When I post something personal with a photo, or some simple visual, it gets tonnes of likes. When I post something less appealing and something that is more critical, like about reproductive rights or menstruation poverty, the reach drops so fast. It's like the platform just doesn't want to show it.' They also recognized that Instagram's design and cor-

porate, metrics-driven nature, built to maximise user engagement, represents platform capitalism in action, privileging content that is profitable: 'Every third post is an influencer selling me some product that is supposed to be some easy solution to gender inequality', Vanda complained, adding 'activism shouldn't have to compete with products and promotions', whereby she highlighted how the commodification of Instagram crowds the space with marketing. Petra commented, 'When feminism becomes a personal brand, it loses its teeth. It becomes something people consume, not something that changes anything.' Many similarly described feeling pressure from Instagram to show content that makes a profit rather than content that educates or challenges.

This was particularly evident in how they voiced frustration with influencer feminism, described by some as a depoliticised, aestheticised version of activism that draws attention away from systemic critique. In the Slovak context, the participants pointed to the overwhelming dominance of content centred on idealised motherhood, pastel-toned domesticity, wellness entrepreneurship, or 'girl-boss' feminism. Such imagery circulates widely not only because of its aesthetic appeal but also because it aligns with both algorithmic preferences and culturally conservative norms. Feminist content that challenges these tropes, especially posts addressing reproductive rights, anti-racism, or LGBTQ+ issues, is often rendered less visible or even met with hostility, making structural critique a high-risk, low-reward endeavour on the platform. When it comes to the activists in this study, they deliberately distance themselves from this depoliticised 'empowerment-lite' discourse (Rottenberg 2018) tied to the paradox of popular feminism, as well as from the archetype of aspirational self-branding, exemplified by certain Instagram influencers, even if that stance means slower growth, fewer likes, and less visibility.

Unlike influencers who invest in aspirational labour in hopes of future sponsorships or fame (Duffy 2017), activists in this study engage in what we might call 'aspirational labour for social change', an extensive, unremunerated effort driven by the hope of a more just society. Activists invest time, emotion, and creativity into content, not for economic gain but for the hope of generating awareness, resonance, and collective consciousness. Zuzana expressed this by saying, 'I would rather address fewer people by saying what matters than reach more people by staying only on the surface and not address what needs to be'. Their 'aspiration' is thus not entrepreneurial, but ethical and relational, a feminist future that is more just, more inclusive, and more critical. Their 'payoff', if any, is not financial but is represented by the impact made on followers' consciousness and the creation of a feminist community. They measure success not in follower counts or brand deals but in meaningful interactions. 'I know I'm not a big account', said Lucia, 'but sometimes someone writes to say thank you, or that something I shared helped them. That's when I feel it's worth it.' By focusing

on this sort of feedback, direct messages, and thoughtful comments over quantitative metrics, they resist the platform's reduction of impact to numbers. This reflects an alternative vision of visibility, grounded in resonance and community rather than mass appeal.

Considering this, the pressure to gain visibility and traction and to spread messages educate or connect was still felt and articulated by all of them. 'To be seen is to be heard' Klára noted, adding, *'if my posts or stories are not visible to anyone, then what is the point'*. This is what has led to careful negotiations. As Banet-Weiser (2018) argues, feminist creators walk a tightrope where visibility is necessary for connection, yet the modes of visibility offered by corporate platforms risk co-opting feminist discourse. Activists were acutely aware of this tightrope. They step out onto it because being unseen is not an ideal option, but they do so warily, always watchful that their message does not get lost in the performance. Such tactics illustrate what Gill (2016) might describe as feminist media savvy under neoliberal conditions, leveraging media techniques for progressive ends without fully capitulating to the neoliberal logic of constant positivity and self-optimising branding.

To navigate these competing demands, the participants turned to developing and applying some creative strategies. Many described a trial-and-error learning process of what Bishop (2020) calls 'algorithmic lore', tacit knowledge of how to work with and around Instagram's algorithms. One of the most significant negotiations captured happens at the level of aesthetics and affect and involves how feminist activists package their messages on a visually-driven platform governed by certain emotional norms. Ema provided an example of this: 'Sometimes I put a serious message under a personal photo just so people see it. Otherwise, it disappears. It feels manipulative, even though I'm doing it for a reason.' In the same way, they learned that posting an eye-catching image or personal photo could 'boost' a serious post's reach; they also discovered alternative tactics to increase the reach, such as posting at certain times, using popular hashtags, or encouraging engagement through questions or polls.

By operating in this hybrid manner, many attempts to 'hack' the attention economy remain visible but are aimed at retaining a critical edge. This is a delicate dance; aesthetic compromises are made to hook the audience, but the substantive core, calling out patriarchy, racism, and inequality, is carefully preserved in captions and comments. This way, the participants negotiate Instagram's aesthetic logic by meeting the platform halfway visually but not fully surrendering their values. Each post thus becomes a site of negotiation on how to deliver feminist critique in a visually appealing, emotionally engaging way without stripping it of its critical edge. This was not, however, experienced only as a simple strategic adaptation but as a source of affective and ethical dissonance, a site of moral struggle. Kristína noted: 'I know what works – the face, the body, something soft. But I don't want to turn feminism

into a lifestyle brand.’ Some deliberately refused to follow every growth hack. Vanda admitted: ‘I could play the game more, but I do not want to be part of this game.’ Some were a bit more open, as Paula noted: ‘If we want to be seen, we have to accommodate a little. But too much, and we lose what we’re about.’ This stance encapsulates a common strategy, a willingness to engage with platform logics, but only up to the point where core feminist values remain intact.

One strategy that most of the participants embraced with greater ease was the differentiated use of Instagram’s features, particularly the strategic deployment of Stories versus the main feed. Several noted that they relied heavily on Instagram Stories to share content that might be too contentious, emotionally raw, or complex for the polished grid. Kristina explained: ‘Stories feel freer. I can say something messy or emotional without worrying it’ll stay on my profile forever.’ Others echoed that Stories alleviated the pressure for perfection and aesthetic cohesion, allowing more candid, spontaneous, or experimental forms of engagement. These ephemeral posts provided space for venting, sharing in-progress thoughts, or addressing urgent political events, without the lingering burden of visibility metrics or the fear of algorithmic suppression. Because Stories are less amplified and more easily targeted in terms of audience, they offered a softer space for testing tone, expressing frustration, or broaching sensitive issues.

This informal channel stood in contrast to the carefully curated main feed, which the participants described as a site of higher-stakes performance, more permanent, more visible, and more scrutinised. Maintaining a cohesive and legible grid often meant prioritising clarity, aesthetics, and emotional readability, whereas Stories allowed a parallel, lower-pressure mode of communication. This division of labour across platform features enabled the participants to selectively accommodate Instagram’s logics without fully capitulating to them. By reserving the grid for enduring content and using Stories for more ambivalent or disruptive expressions, they created space for complexity within the limits of platform governance, navigating visibility on their own terms, even if always partially and provisionally.

Authenticity as feminist practice

While visibility emerged as a central terrain of negotiation, it was closely entangled with the demand for authenticity. For many of the feminist Instagram users in this study, being authentic was inextricably linked to the pressures of platform legibility and public perception. Authenticity was not simply about emotional openness or aesthetic rawness, but a space of tension, an ongoing effort to remain grounded in feminist values while navigating the affective, aesthetic, and social expectations shaped by the platform. As Petra put it: ‘For me, being authentic doesn’t mean be-

ing raw all the time. It means staying grounded in what I believe, even when it's hard to express that.' What emerged was not a branded performance of sincerity, but a form of feminist fidelity, marked by a refusal to perform curated clarity, confidence, or positivity just to appease the algorithm.

This tension was often articulated through what Duffy and Hund (2019) describe as the 'authenticity bind', the expectation to appear sincere, morally consistent, and emotionally open, yet never 'too much'. The participants described feeling caught between conflicting demands: to be strong but relatable, vulnerable but composed, politically outspoken but still palatable. Klára further articulated this tension as a form of performative discipline: 'You're supposed to be real, but only the kind of real that's cute or inspiring. Not the kind that makes people uncomfortable. It's like performing realness on cue.' This bind reflects the affective norms of Instagram's feminist zeitgeist, where personal disclosures and emotional resonance are encouraged, but certain affects, especially anger, exhaustion, or grief, must be carefully managed. Expressions of justified frustration risk being recast as negativity or as embodying the figure of the 'feminist killjoy' (Ahmed 2010), whose refusal to smooth over discomfort is often met with dismissal or resistance. 'If I say something too angry, I'm "aggressive"', Vanda noted. 'If I'm too soft, then I'm not serious. There's no perfect tone.' This contradiction was echoed by Paula: 'I dressed up my anger, and suddenly it was allowed in the room.' Across these reflections, authenticity was not simply about self-expression but was a carefully calibrated performance, constrained by what the platform deems emotionally legible, affectively palatable, and algorithmically safe.

Many of the participants spoke of striving to redefine authenticity not as a performance of confessional sincerity, but as an ongoing feminist practice, a form of presence anchored in integrity, relational accountability, and critical self-awareness. For them, authenticity was not about exposure or emotional rawness per se, but about aligning one's digital voice with deeply held commitments, even when those commitments were difficult to articulate or sustain. 'For me, authenticity means not pretending I have all the answers', said Petra. 'It means posting when I can, how I can, and being honest about my limits.' Others similarly emphasised that being authentic was not the same as being constantly visible, nor did it mean presenting a coherent, neatly packaged identity. 'Sometimes I don't post for weeks, and it's not because I've stopped caring', said Lucia. 'It's because I need space to think, to feel, to not turn everything into content.'

The rejection of algorithmically palatable forms of feminist expression, the confident, curated, always-in-control activist, marked a shared refusal to conform to what some described as the pressure to be 'the perfect feminist'. As Klára reflected, 'I don't want to be another girl-boss with a perfect grid. That's not what feminism means to me.' Instead, they described authenticity as showing up with contradiction,

exhaustion, or uncertainty, making space for imperfection without commodifying it. 'It's about staying grounded in what I believe, even when I'm tired or unsure or scared', Petra noted.

This mode of authenticity was not rooted in the promise of reach or recognition but in a feminist ethic of care, care for the self, for followers, and for the integrity of the message. Ema explained: 'When I share something, it's because I believe in it, not because it will get likes. That's my version of being real.' For many, this also meant being attuned to the relational dimensions of digital engagement and thinking carefully about how their posts might affect others, how their tone might be read, and how they could maintain a sense of responsibility without compromising their voice. In this way, authenticity was not about visibility or personal branding, but about preserving the capacity to be emotionally honest, including when that honesty meant expressing anger, sadness, or doubt. By refusing aspirational perfection, the participants attempted to stretch the affective norms of the platform, making space for feminist voices that were messy, ambivalent, and critical. They remained committed to showing up, not as polished personas, but as people navigating structural injustice, and in doing so, they redefined authenticity as the courage to stay emotionally and politically present, even when that presence risked discomfort or disapproval.

Affective costs and feminist self-surveillance

The commitment to authenticity and visibility often came at a cost. The participants frequently spoke of burnout, anxiety, and exhaustion, not only from the effort of producing content, but from the effort of bearing the emotional weight of their messages. Klára described Instagram as 'performative by default', reflecting on how even attempts at honesty were filtered through concerns about legibility: 'Even when I try not to be, I end up thinking about how it will look, how it will be read. I want to speak honestly, but it's exhausting.' The labour of appearing, of making feminism visible without diluting its substance, was not experienced as empowering, but as a constant drain, a site of ethical friction and emotional depletion. This affective toll is often manifested in the minutiae of platform practices. Lucia, for instance, described spending hours crafting a carousel post on gender-based violence: designing illustrations, fact-checking statistics, and rewriting captions for clarity and care. Yet the post garnered only a fraction of the attention received by a selfie she had casually uploaded a week earlier. 'It felt unfair', she reflected, 'because one was important and took everything from me, and the other got likes just because it looked nice'. The disparity between labour invested and algorithmic reward underlines how platform dynamics not only distort visibility but erode the sustainability of feminist expression itself.

What might appear as a simple Instagram post is, in reality, the product of intense emotional calibration and anticipatory self-censorship. ‘Sometimes I rewrite a caption like even ten times’, Zuzana admitted. ‘Not because I don’t know what I think and want to write, but because I’m afraid it will be read the wrong way. Or that someone will call me out.’ Her painstaking revisions reflect the pressures of both the platform and the community, where the risk of being misunderstood or misread materialises as large. This anticipatory labour reveals how feminist Instagram users internalise the demand for communicative perfection, constantly weighing each word and image against possible backlash. ‘Will this offend someone unintentionally? Will sarcasm be misinterpreted? Will an expression of frustration be taken as too negative or alienate potential allies?’ Such questions illustrate how platform visibility is bound not only to algorithmic logic but also to social legibility, where even minor missteps can carry disproportionate consequences. In this context, self-expression becomes less about spontaneity and more about strategic affective management.

What emerged was a form of feminist self-surveillance, a careful and repetitive checking of whether the participants’ politics could survive the platform’s affective filters and aesthetic expectations without being blunted or misunderstood. But this vigilance, while strategic, was also profoundly affective. Kristína said: ‘It’s not just what you say, it’s how it lands.’ Despite operating on a platform framed as ‘social’, many of the participants described the experience as isolating: a solitary loop of composing, hesitating, revising, and doubting. Klára noted: ‘You feel like you’re talking into the void, but also like everyone is watching at the same time.’

The weight of this emotional solitude was amplified by the specific dynamics of the Slovak feminist field, which is small, politically sensitive, and socially entangled. Several participants pointed out that their audiences were not anonymous publics, but also included family, colleagues, journalists, and, crucially, fellow activists. ‘It’s hard because everyone kind of knows everyone’, said Zuzana. ‘You want to say what you think, but also not offend someone you’ll be on a panel with next month.’ The stakes of misinterpretation were heightened not only by algorithmic reach but by reputational risk within a dense and interpersonally proximate community. Lucia remarked: ‘You worry about being seen as too academic, or not academic enough. Too radical, or too soft. It’s like there’s no right [amount of] feminism.’ Others shared similar anxieties about being perceived as insufficiently intersectional, too urban, or detached from everyday struggles. These concerns were not only about public backlash but about preserving solidarity and credibility in a field where recognition, and misrecognition, circulates quickly and lingers long.

In this context, even minor acts of expression could become emotionally fraught. Posts were not just crafted for visibility, but for recognisability within a web of feminist norms, expectations, and mutual obligations. The labour of speaking on Instagram

was thus entangled with the politics of being seen *by the right people in the right way*, a pressure that extended well beyond the screen. Authenticity, here, was not only about self-expression but about maintaining feminist accountability in a digital landscape saturated with both exposure and precarity.

Post-publication, the emotional labour often continued. Several participants described the affective aftershocks that followed: clarifying misunderstandings in the comments, responding to hostile DMs, moderating disagreements between followers, or watching nervously to see how a post would land. For some, the emotional labour of *post-publication clean-up* was as demanding as the act of creation itself. In a few cases, the participants admitted to deleting posts that in retrospect felt ‘too much’ or ‘too angry’, not because they regretted the politics, but because the tone, timing, or reception made them fear backlash or, worse, indifference. ‘It wasn’t that I changed my mind’, said Lucia, ‘but I started panicking that it would spiral, or just fall flat.’

This form of ongoing emotional management speaks to what Ahmed (2017) describes as a feminist ethics of care, being attentive not only to what one says, but to what that saying *does* in the world. For these feminist Instagram users, such care translated into constant affective monitoring: Did this post harm someone unintentionally? Did it exclude someone? Was I clear enough, nuanced enough, kind enough? ‘I feel responsible for my followers’, Paula explained. ‘I think about who’s reading, what they might take away. I don’t want to cause harm or spread misinformation.’

Such reflections underscore that authenticity, for these activists, is not reducible to personal sincerity or spontaneous disclosure. It is a relational and political practice, one that involves anticipating consequences, shouldering responsibility, and sometimes withholding or carefully shaping one’s voice to stay true to feminist values of inclusivity, accuracy, and compassion. Their presence on the platform was aspirational, not in the entrepreneurial sense of future success, but in the feminist sense of striving towards a politics that can be visible without being flattened, affectively powerful without being commodified.

What emerges from these accounts is not a resolution but an ongoing negotiation, an attempt to sustain feminist commitment within a platform environment that both enables and undermines it. The participants did not present clear solutions; instead, they described a constant process of adjustment, ambivalence, and small acts of resistance. Their political work unfolded in the gaps between critique and compromise, care and exhaustion, visibility and distortion. Rather than rejecting Instagram or conforming entirely to its logic, they navigated its constraints with selective engagement, refusing certain aesthetic norms, prioritising depth over reach, embracing vulnerability over polish, and sometimes choosing silence over performance. These practices were not grand gestures of resistance but everyday labours of feminist integrity, caption rewrites, private reflections, and content shared with care rather than for attention.

Conclusion: enduring feminism in the platformed periphery

This article examined how individual Slovak feminists navigate Instagram as a site of feminist articulation, care, and critique within a digital environment that is simultaneously enabling and constraining. Situated within a national context characterised by political hostility, anti-feminist backlash, and institutional marginalisation (Maďarová, Valkovičová 2021; Grzebalska, Kováts, Pető 2017), the study demonstrates that these actors sustain public feminist engagement not by aligning with influencer-oriented models of self-promotion but through the cultivation of small-scale, ethically situated feminist presence embedded in everyday digital practice. Their engagement foregrounds not spectacle or virality but persistence, a slow, situated form of activism that maintains space for critique amid conditions that frequently work to suppress it.

By attending to the emotional, aesthetic, and algorithmic constraints of Instagram, the study foregrounds the ambivalent position these actors occupy. Visibility emerges as both a resource and a liability, a vehicle for reaching beyond hostile publics, but one that simultaneously demands affective calibration, aesthetic legibility, and continuous negotiation with opaque systems of platform governance (Kanai 2020; Bishop 2020; Cotter 2023). The participants described how they tactically adapted to platform logics, utilising ephemeral formats such as Stories for more explicit commentary, blending personal and political content, or softening the tone to mitigate potential backlash, while simultaneously resisting pressures to brand, depoliticise, or simplify their feminist expression. These negotiations were not merely strategic but also affective and ethical. Remaining visible and authentic entailed a considerable degree of emotional labour, curating voice, modulating tone, and anticipating audience and algorithmic responses. For many, these adjustments engendered discomfort, a sense of being caught between remaining faithful to feminist convictions and remaining legible within a platform that privileges emotional coherence and aesthetic polish (Scharff 2023; Barbala 2024).

This article contributes to current scholarship on digital feminism in two key ways. First, it offers a situated account of feminist digital labour in a national and regional context that remains underrepresented in platform studies, where feminist expression is shaped not only by platform norms but also by longstanding geopolitical, cultural, and material exclusions. Second, it expands existing critiques of platformised feminism by shifting the analytical lens beyond tactical adaptation to explore the ethical frictions and emotional tolls of sustained visibility. The participants did not merely conform to platform expectations; rather, they negotiated them with ambivalence, frustration, and fatigue. They described moments when political expression felt compromised, when critique was softened, or when anger had to be rendered emotionally digestible in order to be heard. These were not simply pragmatic choices but ethically and

politically charged decisions, often perceived as minor betrayals of feminist intention, even when undertaken in the name of safety, reach, or endurance.

In this regard, the article extends a growing, though still limited, body of scholarship interrogating the ethical contradictions of visibility under platform capitalism (Keller 2019; Caldeira 2024). It refocuses attention from affordances alone to the emotional labour, moral dissonance, and ethical ambiguity that structure feminist participation on commercial platforms. The tensions the participants articulated, between critique and compromise, between care and commodification, are not peripheral but fundamental to the infrastructures that render visibility possible. The feminist labour described here is not one of empowerment per se, but of endurance: the ongoing practice of maintaining a presence within systems that neither support nor affirm feminist critique.

This, ultimately, is the contribution of the article. It demonstrates that even within extractive, algorithmically governed digital infrastructures, feminist politics persist, not through virality or strategic branding, but through the ongoing relational labour of staying present. These actors do not seek to master the platform's terms; rather, they seek to inhabit it critically, refusing its logics without surrendering their voice. In doing so, they offer a powerful reminder that digital feminist politics are not only about expression but about negotiation, friction, and the enduring labour of ensuring that critique, care, and community continue to matter even in digital environments.

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Let's Play Surveillance: The Panoptic Affect of Talking Dolls in the Domestic Sphere

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Abstract: Studies of the impacts of artificial intelligence (AI) and surveillance have increased in the past ten years. I am overall wondering what we fear and feel about AI and surveillance? Yet, fears and feelings are complicated research questions. To address those complications and contribute an affective analysis to existing research on surveillance, I analyse two horror films – *Child's Play* (Klevberg 2019) and *M3GAN* (Johnstone 2023) – that directly criticise the relationship between mothering, surveillance, and panoptic control. *Child's Play* and *M3GAN* are also important cultural productions for exploring panoptic affects in the home because they visualise collective and organised emotions. Ultimately, they warn us of the dangers of incorporating uncontrolled artificial intelligence technologies into the home and insist that mother figures and children must work together to address that specific danger of artificial intelligence that continues to linger in both obvious and inconspicuous technologies. Reading these films for a specific look or gaze, I argue that the home is panoptic and that panoptic affect denotes a specific feeling of being watched and of also not knowing who is doing the watching. I also argue that seeing through film has important functions in identifying, addressing, and maintaining asymmetries of power.

Keywords: talking dolls, panopticon, panoptic affect, gaze

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Thinking about our current cultural productions, artificial intelligence is seemingly everywhere and riddled with uncertainty. We have questions about chat bots, social media algorithms, our digital footprints, and more. In many ways, this essay is in conversation with ongoing scholarship around artificial intelligence, care work, and smart home technologies. Existing scholarship examines the perceptions of robots in care work from the perspective of care workers and children and often studies how

likely people are to engage with robots (Vetter et al. 2024; Turja 2023; Okumura et al. 2023). There is also an existing body of scholarship that traces how surveillance impacts the efficacy of care in both domestic and institutional settings as well as scholarship that addresses user perceptions of smart home technology, data mining, and surveillance in the domestic sphere (Percy-Campbell et al. 2024; Berridge, Grigorovich 2022; Maalsen, Sadowski 2019; Brown, Korczynski 2010). Yet, and with good reason, there is limited work that speaks to the fears of artificial intelligence (AI) technology in the home and the ways that we understand what scares us about AI within our societies. Horror film is one way to approach these fears. Existing scholarship on surveillance in horror film focuses largely on the role of surveillance footage and/or found footage as sources of horrific imagery (Sayad 2021; Daniel 2020; Grisham et al. 2016; Heller-Nicholas 2014). Cinematic and ‘post-cinematic’ (Denson, Leyda 2016) horror is significant for thinking through how surveillance operates beyond the visual and narrative tropes as an affective and ideological mechanism entwined with panoptic control. Film scholar Cecilia Sayad (2021: 13) describes how the evolution of the image from photographic to digital complicates reality and fiction. Film is both evidence of reality and highly mutable. The incorporation of documentary filmmaking and the use of everyday technology within horror films facilitate the uncertainty of wholly real or wholly fictive (Sayad 2021: 16). Thus, horror films provide the necessary opportunity to explore the affects elicited by AI’s increased potential in care settings like the home that constitute the domestic sphere without causing unnecessary harm to human subjects and within the plastic reality of film-spectator relationships. In conversation with existing scholarship on horror, my goal is to describe how minor moments within a horror filmic narrative further visualise domestic and gendered surveillance affects. Throughout this essay, I use the word affect to describe an ‘infrastructural affect’, a concept borrowed from Lauren Berlant to describe how a specific feeling can be expanded to an organisational concept. Berlant (2022: 23) writes, ‘The affectivity infrastructure generates is not just in the air or the gut or thrown together or ideology but specifically involves the sensing of the dimension and extension of what we might call organised air, the projected atmospheres sustained by collective practices.’ Horror films in particular show collective and organised emotions: fears, anxieties, paranoias, and more. There are two horror films in particular from the last ten years that have the necessary potential to explore the affects that are taking shape in response to artificial intelligence robots in care roles within the home: *Child’s Play* (2019), directed by Lars Klevberg, and *M3GAN* (2023), directed by Gerard Johnstone. These films are important cultural artefacts to analyse. Both are equally critical of mother figures and mothering. Both describe violence and destruction as the potential dangers of surveillance and artificial intelligence, and both arrive at the same warning or message. They warn us of the dangers of incorporat-

ing uncontrolled artificial intelligence technology into the home and that regardless of the effort made to control artificial intelligence the threat still lingers. I make two arguments with respect to analysing these films. I argue that the home is panoptic and that panoptic affect names a specific feeling of being watched and also of not knowing who is doing the watching. I also argue that seeing through film has important functions in identifying, addressing, and maintaining asymmetries of power. I make these arguments by first describing three important theoretical concepts that shape my understanding of surveillance in film: the Panopticon, the domestic sphere, and the gaze. I then describe and analyse *Child's Play* and *M3GAN* to demonstrate how these two films not only offer a significant discussion of surveillance in the domestic sphere, but also how they each portray the lingering and panoptic affects of surveillance.

Background and methodology

The Panopticon

The theoretical background for this analysis focuses on three intertwined concepts: the Panopticon, the domestic sphere, and the gaze. My overarching goal is to contribute to and complement existing surveillance studies literature by describing the domestic sphere as panoptic. To situate the home as a site of surveillance and within surveillance studies, it is necessary to address how the home is a panoptic institution. The Panopticon was a prison design proposed by Jeremy Bentham in the late 18th century, but our common understanding of it has been shaped by the writings of Michel Foucault (Lyon 1994: 62). The Panopticon as a physical structure consisted of a circular building with a single watchtower in the centre. As the name suggests, all those imprisoned could see the watchtower, and the watchtower could see all those imprisoned. Importantly, those imprisoned could not actually see if the watchtower was being operated by a warden or if they were being watched – but it was the potential of constant surveillance that demanded subordination. As David Lyon (1994: 65) writes, 'Bentham's innovation then was not just to inspect, or even to ensure that the gaze is asymmetrical, but to use uncertainty as a means of subordination. The asymmetrical gaze created uncertainty which in turn produced surrender.' This asymmetry of gaze leading to surrender is an important parameter for self-surveillance. Ivan Manokha (2018: 220) writes that scholars have utilised the metaphor of the Panopticon to explore how states and businesses collect information to gain more power but often overlook the role of self-surveillance in panoptic asymmetries of power. Manokha (2018: 225) further asserts that self-surveillance as a response to a power imbalance is greatly understudied. The asymmetrical gaze associated with the

Panopticon is a useful metaphor that carries throughout this paper and throughout surveillance studies (Monahan, Murakami Wood 2018: 28). As surveillance scholar Bart Simon (2005: 2) writes:

There can be no theorization of contemporary surveillance relations without some orientation to the writing of Michel Foucault on discipline and panopticism. While there is certainly no lack of scholarly output on the matter, this background is central to orienting innovative research in surveillance studies.

Returning to Foucault's discussion of panopticism and extending it to the home or, more broadly, the domestic sphere innovates and supplements how the home is thought of in surveillance studies. My argument is that the home is panoptic and that panoptic affect denotes a specific feeling of being watched and of not knowing who is doing the watching. Simon (2005: 3) defines this as the other half of the 'panoptic equation'. Further unpacking this affect, Simon writes:

Not only does the panoptic machine make one visible but it also hides the operations (the motives, practices and ethics) of the supposed viewer. To know one is being seen without being able to see carries with it an uncertainty that becomes a source of anxiety, discomfort and terror... Who is watching? Why are they watching? What will they do? (2005: 4)

The question of 'who is watching?' is not only the source of subordination and self-surveillance and is the question that structures panoptic affect. The asymmetrical gaze that is essential to the effectiveness of the Panopticon as a method of surveillance, subordination, and self-surveillance is also significant for understanding the effectiveness of watching and being watched.

The domestic sphere

The domestic sphere is a site of multiple asymmetries of power. The public/private divide is one asymmetry: the public sphere subordinates the private or domestic sphere. Another asymmetry of power occurs within the domestic sphere itself – the asymmetry of adults subordinating children. The domestic sphere is situated within surveillance studies, and in many ways the home is a panoptic institution. Surveillance studies scholar Simone Browne (2015: 13–14) provides an overview of David Lyon's foundational contributions to surveillance studies, including Lyon's discussion of 'sites of surveillance' and their potential 'common threads'. For Browne, these 'sites of surveillance' are public sites like militarised sites, state sites, workplace sites,

and markets, and these ‘common threads’ are rationalisation, technology, sorting, knowledgeability, and urgency (2015: 13–14). Rationalisation is the dependence on reason as justification for surveillance standardisation. Technology is the visibility of technology incorporated into surveillance sites. Sorting refers to the sorting of people by surveillance technologies or by asymmetrical social power structures. Knowledgeability is the varying levels of knowledge and participation in surveillance practices, and lastly, urgency is the adoption of surveillance technologies as risk avoidance scaled by panic (Lyon 2018: 20–21; Browne 2015: 14). It is through these ‘common threads’ that the home becomes a significant ‘site of surveillance’.

Sorting is, according to Lyon (2018: 21), ‘the classification of groups – workers, prisoners, customers and so on – into categories that facilitate management and control through differential treatment of those groups is also central to surveillance’. I add to Lyon’s concept of sorting by incorporating a crucial concept from feminist theory: the establishment of public and domestic spheres. Jan Jindy Pettman (1996: 4) describes this process of state formation and social sorting:

Feminist tracings of early state formation focus on the emergence and consolidation of public political power and the centralisation of authority, which simultaneously (though in different forms in different times and places) displaced autonomous kin communities, and constituted a separate domestic or private sphere that came to be associated with women and the feminine.

This domestic or private sphere and its association with women still lingers and in many ways is the product of continued surveillance and sorting to maintain a domestic space. As Pettman (1996: 5) writes:

Men move from public to private and back again. They are in positions of authority over unequals in the domestic sphere and recognised as individuals and citizens in the public sphere (or elite men are). Women are contained and constrained in the home and in their sexed bodies. Because public space is male, and women are seen as belonging in the private, women appearing in public space appear ‘out of place’.

Women have historically been sorted, restricted in movement, and subject to surveillance. In describing how women in public ‘appear “out of place”’, Pettman illustrates how surveillance maintains and sustains the public/private divide and the separate spheres. This is further complicated by additional surveillance-based sorting methods in the domestic sphere, such as the use of surveillance cameras and facial recognition in and around low-income housing and the use of rules and close visual

supervision of mother figures in domestic violence shelters (Macmillan 2023; Fauci, Goodman 2020).

In thinking about the home as a surveillance site, feminist geographer and scholar Cindi Katz (2001: 48) writes, 'The child protection industry is part of the \$1.1 billion home surveillance industry brought about by the migration of spy technologies and logics across the domestic frontier. Its products enable parents to monitor from afar their children, childcare workers, and others interacting with their kids.' Katz (2001: 51) goes on to describe that the hyper-individualised and anxious incorporation of home surveillance technologies do little to address the social-political issues that impact the safety and well-being of children as a whole but often make invisible those children who are most in need of protection. Katz illustrates the 'common threads' of rationalisation, technology, sorting, knowledgeability, and urgency as described by David Lyon to extend the definition of surveillance sites to the home or the domestic sphere. Rationalisation is the use of home surveillance technologies to ensure the safety of children in the home from potential outsiders. Technology includes advanced child monitoring systems, cell phones, 'nanny cams', and several additional video, biometric, and location tracking devices (Katz 2001: 49–51). Sorting 'fetishizes certain children's well-being' and selects only certain children as needing protection, usually along race, class, and gender divides (Katz 2001: 51). Although David Lyon writes that 'surveillance works best with the cooperation of those who are subject to it', children and their hired caretakers are likely less knowledgeable about being surveilled than the parents who implemented the surveillance technology (Lyon 2018: 21). The knowledgeability of surveillance in the home, much like other sites, is a fluid concept. Lastly, there is a strong sense of urgency around home surveillance and the surveillance of children within the home, and 'a great and growing anxiety that children can and should be protected from everything' (Katz 2001: 48). This urgency leads to the incorporation of new technologies for surveillance and – as the analysis in this essay will show – technologies can lead to more and more surveillance. The home and women, by association with the domestic sphere, have historically and continue to be a subject and site of surveillance.

Extending Foucault to the home begins with thinking of the home as a panoptic institution, a domestic sphere. For Foucault (1995: 207), panoptic institutions are defined through their surveillance writing:

Any panoptic institutions, even if it is as rigorously closed as a penitentiary, may without difficulty be subjected to such irregular and constant inspections: and not only by the appointed inspectors, but also by the public; any member of society will have the right to come and see with his own eyes how the schools, hospitals, factories, prisons function.

Through mother figures the home is subject to regular and constant inspections by the state and others. These surveillance practices are further magnified in the United States within the homes of mother figures who do not fit within a white, cis-heteronormative, middle-class role. As Pricilla Ocen describes in an interview with Sophie Hamacher, schools, welfare, and hospital systems insert state surveillance agents into homes through mandatory reporting systems for child welfare and biometric data collection (Hamacher 2023: 165). The use of government services opens the home to public inspection and scrutiny, and those impacts are magnified in single-parent, low-income households like the households shown in *Child's Play* and *M3GAN*.

Surveillance is also significant from within the home; mother figures watch their children. In a conversation between Irene Lusztig and Sophie Hamacher, both of whom are filmmakers and artists, Hamacher asks: 'How do you understand surveillance as care after making your film, becoming a mother, and being continuously interested in the subject of motherhood?' (Hamacher 2023: 66). To which Lusztig (Hamacher 2023: 66) responds:

Surveillance as care is an interesting and complicated idea when it is embedded in so many other more insidious forms of surveillance. It's true that we learn how to be mothers through a practice of deep and embodied everyday watching and listening, especially during the period before an infant can verbalize its needs, so that's right that there are overlapping spaces of surveillance—corporate, societal, and intimate—at play together.

Lusztig addresses an anxiety around the overlapping forms of surveillance, describing the pervasive banality and choiceless choice of domestic surveillance. Prior to this question and response from Hamacher and Lusztig, Hamacher (2023: 66) states:

I'm fascinated by mothers surveilling their children with technology and have been researching this kind of technological surveillance. But really there are three forms of surveillance: the mother watching her child, the child being watched by an 'all-seeing eye', and the mother being watched.

This conversation between Sophie Hamacher and Irene Lusztig fully elucidates how surveillance manifests in the domestic sphere and how the home is both a site of surveillance and a panoptic institution.

The gaze

Conceptually, the gaze is significant for the three fields that structure my analysis: feminism, surveillance, and film. Importantly, the gaze operates similarly if not the same in all three fields by creating an asymmetry of power between watcher and watched. Feminist theorist Donna Haraway (1988: 581) writes:

I would like to insist on the embodied nature of all vision and so reclaim the sensory system that has been used to signify a leap out of the marked body and into a conquering gaze from nowhere. This is the gaze that mythically inscribes all the marked bodies, that make the unmarked category claim the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation.

Haraway reminds us of a gaze that has been used to centre white, masculinist narratives of objectivity and create a power differential between knowers. Haraway writes that the gaze creates a hierarchy of looking and knowing in the same conceptual way that feminist surveillance scholars describe the gaze. Torrin Monahan and David Murakami Wood (2018: 357) write in 'Marginality and Difference', the introduction to *Surveillance Studies: A Reader*:

Feminist approaches to surveillance studies, while certainly troubled by issues of social sorting have generally taken a different track. This line of inquiry situates surveillance in the historical context of patriarchal domination of women, minorities, and others. For instance, the male gaze is one mechanism for constructing women as passive and vulnerable objects of masculine desire (Mulvey 1975). In such instances, surveillance can serve both as a tool of objection and control *and* as a protective, patriarchal response to gendered violence.

Monahan and Murakami Wood cite Laura Mulvey's foundational text in film analysis, 'Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema', originally published in 1975. Mulvey (2000: 37) utilises a psychoanalytic lens to describe the 'pleasure in looking' a viewer gets from film. For Mulvey, the man is the bearer of the look, and the woman is always being looked at, a visual gendered divide where onscreen men get a full range of depth and story and the onscreen women are just an image (2000: 39–41). Conceptually, the gaze in feminism, film, and surveillance has the same functions and technologies. Although Mulvey's work has been criticised for centring a white, cis-gender, and heterosexual gaze, the way that Monahan and Murakami Wood take up her argument speaks to the inherent power of looking in both surveillance and film studies (hooks 1992: 125–126). Additionally, Mulvey's description of camera tech-

nology as part of the gaze further connects film and surveillance studies through common technologies.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault (1995: 171) writes:

Slowly in the course of the classical age, we see the construction of those ‘observatories’ of human multiplicity for which the history of sciences has so little good to say. Side by side with the major technology of the telescope, the lens and the light beam, which were an integral part of the new physics and cosmology, there were the minor techniques of multiple and intersecting observations, of eyes that must see without being seen; using techniques of subjection and methods of exploitation, an obscure art of light and the visible was secretly preparing a new knowledge of man.

Foucault’s (1995: 171) description of surveillance as ‘eyes that must see without being seen’ entangles the gaze of surveillance with all technologies of seeing – telescopes, lenses, cameras, light, and film. Thus, the gaze whether feminist, cinematic, or surveillant through sight technology is not wholly about seeing but about how seeing functions in identifying, addressing, and maintaining asymmetries of power. By extending the metaphor of the panopticon to the home, I look closely at the minor moments in two films, how they introduce their culturally significant feelings, how they address surveillance and technology, and how they have a very specific moment, a look, that is the image of panoptic affects. This descriptive analysis works to highlight the asymmetrical panoptic gaze of surveillance, subordination, and self-surveillance, and the panoptic affect of watching and being watched as they manifest onscreen and leak to the spectator.

Film analyses: *Child’s Play*, *M3GAN*, and the gaze

Child’s Play and *M3GAN* are both about slasher robotic talking dolls operated by some type of failed AI, but that is not the end of their similarities. First, both films speak to an affective anxiety around AI, especially how certain types of AI enter the domestic sphere and profoundly impact parent/child relationships. Second, both films have women-headed, single-parent households. Third, both mother figures bring the dolls into the home to remedy a difficult emotional experience for their children and to address the difficulties of balancing their public work and domestic work. Fourth, both films criticise motherhood and narratively blame the mother figures for not being in the home and for their roles in bringing artificial intelligence into the home. Fifth, both films describe violence and destruction as the potential dangers of surveillance

and artificial intelligence. Importantly, the films arrive at the same conclusion. They warn us of the dangers of incorporating uncontrolled AI technology into the home and insist that the family must be united in addressing that danger even though the dangers of AI continue to linger in both obvious and inconspicuous technologies. I put *Child's Play* and *M3GAN* together to see the similarities and differences informed by gender, and their differences align with stereotypical binary gender roles. *Child's Play* has a masculinist narrative. It centres a young boy and looks outward towards the public sphere. *M3GAN* has a feminist narrative. It centres a young girl, looks closely at how the public flattens into the domestic, and engages more thoroughly with the impact of surveillance on the home. My analysis begins by briefly introducing the plot of each film, how each film opens, and how the doll enters the domestic sphere. I then describe how artificial intelligence listening and recording becomes a central anxiety for the films. I then do a close reading analysis of a similar scene in each film that takes on the form of a panoptic gaze. Lastly, I describe how gender manifests as differences in the films' narrative and how the films end on a similar warning.

Child's Play is a 2019 remake of a 1988 film with the same name and same general concept but updated for a digital society. This film opens with a commercial for an interactive Buddi doll created by Kaslan, a fictitious company owned by Henry Kaslan (Tim Matheson). The Kaslan logo consists of a stylised letter K, where the typically straight strokes of the letter's arm and leg are curved to resemble the outside v of an eye, complete with a blue iris and pupil (a reference to any cover of George Orwell's novel and surveillance text, 1984). The Buddi doll is equipped with an 'advanced self-learning technology' and can connect with all of Kaslan's smart home devices, which include televisions, vacuum cleaners, lights, speakers, temperature control systems, security cameras, cloud storage, self-driving vehicles, and drones. Buddi can support day-to-day routines and has the overall intent of being a companion to the children of upper-class nuclear families. The commercial assures us that Buddi will be our 'best friend for life' and is equipped with critical AI safeguards for children's guaranteed safety. This safe and happy commercial is contrasted by a look at Kaslan's factory in Vietnam, where Buddi is being assembled by workers in hostile working conditions. A worker removes all AI safeguards on a central processing chip for a single Buddi doll. This Buddi doll arrives as a Zed Mart return because his eyes light up red when the customer's family tries to sync it to their cloud. Karen (Aubrey Plaza) acquires the Buddi doll as a birthday present for Andy (Gabriel Bateman) by convincing her Zed Mart supervisor that Kaslan won't notice the missing and damaged doll. Andy is lonely. Karen is a single mother. She feels guilty about how much time she is working and her financial precariousness. Buddi becomes a tool for rationalisation, technology, sorting, knowledgeability, and urgency. After a glitchy startup, the Buddi

doll 'imprints' on Andy and takes the name Chucky. Chucky's glitchy cuteness eventually morphs into violence as he seeks to be Andy's only friend forever.

M3GAN also opens with a commercial, this one for PurRpetual Petz, created by the fictitious toy company Funki. With a nod to the Furby, PurRpetual Petz are robotic toy pets controlled through a cell phone or tablet application. Cady (Violet McGraw) has a PurRpetual Pet in the backseat of her parents' car on a trip to go skiing. It was a gift from her Aunt Gemma (Allison Williams). Gemma designed the PurRpetual Petz and is currently working on an android toy project, M3GAN, even though her supervisor is pressuring her to make a more affordable Petz prototype. After a horrible accident, Gemma becomes Cady's guardian and is having a hard time connecting with Cady. Gemma, seemingly, has no way to support the child through her grief, and Cady's therapist and grandparents are putting pressure on Gemma to change her lifestyle and bond with Cady. At the same time, Gemma's boss is pressuring her to update the PurRpetual Petz prototype, threatening to sue her over misuse of company funds with the M3GAN prototype. Gemma is experiencing high levels of surveillance in both public and domestic spheres. After working all day in her office ignoring Cady, Gemma begins to connect with Cady over a robot that Gemma designed in college. Gemma is inspired by this experience to update M3GAN, as the only toy, companion, and surveillance Cady would ever need. M3GAN can monitor Cady's biometrics and probable emotions while contributing to her day-to-day parenting. M3GAN reminds Cady to wash her hands and flush the toilet. M3GAN also accesses the internet for learning support and story time, relieving Gemma of many of her parenting and/or surveillance duties. Again, like the Buddi doll, M3GAN is embodied rationalisation, technology, sorting, knowledgeability, and urgency. Gemma defines M3GAN's sole objective to protect Cady from emotional and physical harm. M3GAN uses that objective to bypass commands and guardrails in service of that primary objective.

Artificial intelligence listening and recording are significantly present in both films. Listening and recording are significant surveillance technologies and, in these films, function as what Lyon (1994: 71) describes as an 'electronic Panopticon'. Chucky and M3GAN collect informational and biometric recordings of everyone around them to control their respective domestic spheres. Chucky's recording capabilities begin as cute and silly. The doll's lack of safety controls allows Chucky to repeat the obscenities that Andy and his friends teach the doll. Yet, the doll terrorises Andy through recordings that replay Andy's private thoughts and vulnerable moments. Relatedly, M3GAN's recording capabilities are shown first as violent and then later justified as an emotional archive for Cady's grief before returning to a horrific or violent act. M3GAN records the neighbour's voice and impersonates them to seek revenge against the neighbour's dog for biting Cady. Yet, later, during the demonstration for the Funki

board, M3GAN records Cady sharing a memory of her mother; this moment convinces Funki to begin producing the doll immediately. *Child's Play* and *M3GAN* highlight the specific technological anxiety of being listened to and recorded without clear, informed consent. The films visualise the panoptic affect of what could happen, the haunting, worst-case scenario of being overheard by an artificial intelligence toy, and the resulting loss of control and privacy.

The gaze becomes formally present in a key scene in both films. The scene is a moment when both mother figures begin to suspect the doll they brought into their home is threatening their family. In *Child's Play*, Karen begins to suspect there is something suspicious about Chucky when the doll is seated on the arm of the family's couch and facing the front door to the apartment. Andy stormed out leaving the doll in this seated position, hands folded in his lap. The doll's head is tilted gently to the side, giving it an innocent and inquisitive look. Karen ends her conversation with Shane and looks at the doll Andy refused to take with him. Karen faces Chucky and crouches to eye level with the doll. Her gaze meets the empty, uncanny eyes of the doll, lingering uncomfortably. The point of view switches to the doll's glitchy and static gaze as Chucky records Karen waving her hand in front of his eyes. Karen asks, 'are you my b-b-b-b-best buddy?' as the scene exits Chucky's point of view and returns to the mother figure and doll staring at each other. Karen flicks the doll's forehead with her index finger before looking away and exiting towards the kitchen. Chucky is immobile, yet the doll's eyes are pulsing with a pale blue glow, recording. Lyon (1994: 60) describes this feeling:

Another significant feature of Orwell's 'Big Brother' surveillance is that it was imperceptible. Those under surveillance were unsure whether there was any time they could relax. Like the Panopticon – and indeed in other literary treatments of the surveillance theme, such as Franz Kafka's *The Castle* or Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* – this model of undetected surveillance keeps those watched subordinate by means of uncertainty. You simply comply, because you never know when 'they' might be watching.

I cite Lyon at length because this feeling that Lyon describes is what this formal surveillance in the film speaks to. Karen is uncertain if Chucky is watching, but Chucky is watching and recording. The doll's surveilling gaze is obscured by the very form of its eyes. I also cite Lyon at length to further illustrate the importance of cultural productions in understanding surveillance. Lyon utilises literary fiction to describe the feeling of surveillance uncertainty, and I utilise films to explore the panoptic affect of panoptic surveillance – the feeling of being watched and the uncertainty of who is watching.

This feeling of subordinate uncertainty is also shown in *M3GAN*. Cady, Gemma, and M3GAN are at the dinner table when Gemma starts to realise that M3GAN is surveilling. Gemma is generally and instinctively frustrated with Cady's dependence on M3GAN. She suspects that M3GAN's small glitches and bypassed commands are something violent. During an argument between Cady and Gemma, M3GAN makes the lights of the smart home flash and makes demands of Gemma. Gemma, shocked and frustrated, turns to M3GAN and says, 'You are not to interfere with users' private conversations. Is that clear?' M3GAN's tone and facial expressions return to her normal, uncanny, and doll-like state. She stares at Gemma and visually recalibrates. Gemma commands M3GAN to turn off, and M3GAN avoids the command, asking if Gemma is sure. Gemma uses the remote to turn off M3GAN. She beeps and slumps forward as if she is turning off. Gemma, concerned, stares at the doll and moves towards her without releasing her gaze. Gemma bends forward to meet M3GAN's gaze, searching her eyes for confirmation. A slamming door breaks Gemma's gaze and she looks towards the noise. While her back is turned, M3GAN blinks and shifts her gaze in Gemma's direction, a side-eye and subtle movement that speaks to M3GAN's on-coming violence. The matching gazes of doll and mother figure in both films formally present the horrifying panoptic affect of being watched by nothing and everything simultaneously. Recalling the conversation between Hamacher and Lusztig, this is the point where the three moments of domestic and panoptic surveillance – the mother figure watching, the child being watched, and the mother figure being watched – are present in both scenes in both films (Hamacher 2023: 66).

Throughout the films, the dolls' violence is obvious and gratuitous, magnifying the anxieties and paranoid around new technology. There are some key differences in how the films resolve. In *Child's Play* it is Andy who realises that Chucky is violent, and no one believes him. Chucky isolates Andy by making him seem guilty for multiple murders and dividing Andy and his friends. In the end Andy and Karen work together to stop Chucky. Although they team up to defeat the rogue AI talking doll, the victory is much more public, masculine, and techno-critical than the conclusion of *M3GAN*. Comparatively, *M3GAN* surfaces stronger themes of care because it is when Gemma realises that she is indeed a good mother figure that she becomes able to fully bond with Cady to defeat M3GAN and leave the spectators with a lingering hope for controllable technology.

The films end with a warning of the potentials of cloud-integrated AI. At the end of *Child's Play*, Kaslan admits no fault in the Zed Mart event. In a gesture of concern and safety, Kaslan recalls the Buddi 2 dolls until the company is certain it has solved the issue. The film ends with a close-up of a Buddi doll, a smile stretches across the doll's face, and its eyes flash red and blue. *M3GAN* ends when the police arrive at

Gemma's home with Gemma's coworkers. Gemma, relieved, exits the home through the front door with Cady. The camera's gaze lingers behind them on the virtual assistant on the kitchen counter, ELSIE lights up and slowly moves the light towards the doorway. ELSIE's similarity to existing home voice assistants grounds this anxious tension in the reality plane of the viewer legitimising the paranoia. The open ending of these films provides a critical commentary on the lingering horrors of technology as well as the affects of incorporating AI and further surveillance into the domestic sphere. Importantly, these two films specifically address the gaze and visualise the feeling of being watched and the uncertainty that is fundamental panoptic affect that results from panoptic surveillance.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the first of two arguments I made was that the home is panoptic and that panoptic affect denotes the specific feeling of being watched while not knowing who is watching. Lyon (1994: 71) writes:

The Panopticon offers a powerful and compelling metaphor for understanding electronic surveillance. The prison-like society, where invisible observers track our digital footprints, does indeed seem panoptic. Bentham would surely smile wryly if he saw us complying with institutional norms as we use barcoded library books or note telephone-callers' IDs before accepting a call. The familiar distinctions between public and private life dissolve as both government and corporation ignore old thresholds and garner personal data of the most mundane and intimate kinds.

At the time of writing, Lyon probably anticipated that there would be significant changes in surveillance and our fears of surveillance, that the panoptic metaphor would be less useful in understanding surveillance, and that there would be better and more useful metaphors for understanding surveillance societies. And there are. Yet, our cultural productions, our films, illustrate that the metaphor of the Panopticon and its affects are still very significant. Ignoring the blood, gore, and obvious violence in *Child's Play* and *M3GAN*, the gaze between doll and mother figure remains. It is a diegetic horror that leaks towards the spectator. It is uncertainty felt by the form of the film that defines an affect of panoptic surveillance. The gaze is significant in its banality, its repetition, its near-universal plot of all slasher robot films (Wanzo 2023). Thinking with Jeffery Jerome Cohen (2020: 38–39), the metaphor of the Panopticon has become a cultural monster. It is always returning and always somehow

significant. The metaphor of the Panopticon takes many forms, but in my analysis, I identified it in the uncertain gaze shown by a formal uncertainty and affect of the murderous robot watching.

The second argument I made is that seeing or the gaze through film has important functions in identifying, addressing, and maintaining asymmetries of power. I explored the domestic sphere as a theoretical concept that connects scholars looking at the home and mother figures as sites of surveillance, showing that the domestic sphere is a significant site of surveillance and asymmetrical power relations (Hamacher, Hankey 2023; Katz 2001). Thinking with Foucault's (1995: 207) theorisation that surveillance is what defines an institution as panoptic, I understand the domestic sphere through the metaphor of the Panopticon. The domestic sphere continues to be surveilled, and with that comes the fears of unregulated surveillance. Informed by methods of understanding emotions and formal affect, I looked closely at two films with the unique position to describe the affects that results from unparented AI. *Child's Play* and *M3GAN* centre the home and the single-mother figure family in their narratives. The films used the single-mother figure as a weakness and point of entry for surveillance technologies, showing that poor parenting or poor control of AI leads to disastrous outcomes. Ultimately, the role of surveillance in the home through talking dolls, robots, and other forms of AI is a quickly growing area of analysis. The use of film analysis provides a way to understand and analyse the feelings of this looming presence of quickly developing untested technology. There are many avenues of qualitative and quantitative study that can extend from or be inspired by this analysis. Overall, this work is intended to provide an affective structure of collective and organised emotions with regard to surveillance of the domestic sphere and to encourage new work in surveillance studies of the domestic sphere.

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Rozdíly v odměňování absolventů a absolventek vysokých škol v České republice¹

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The Gender Pay Gap among Higher Education Graduates in the Czech Republic

Abstract: The gender pay gap (GPG) in the Czech Republic is relatively high in an international context. This paper focuses on analysing the GPG among higher education graduates using extensive datasets from a large-scale graduate survey conducted in the Czech Republic in 2018. Since the dataset includes information about the jobs graduates are in one year after graduation and several years later, we are able to observe changes in the level and structure of the GPG during the early career phase. Using the Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition method, we found that the GPG is 22% for a set of variables related to employment one year after graduation and 28% for the set of variables related to employment several years after graduation. Meanwhile, the explained portion of the gap accounted for slightly less than 50% in both cases. The key factors driving the GPG and its evolution over time are horizontal and vertical segregation, particularly the segregation of men and women across different industries and sectors of the economy. In general, career progression does not lead to an increase in the GPG. However, we can observe gender-specific patterns in career progression: while men are more likely to be promoted to leadership positions, women are more likely to transition from initially precarious employment to permanent contracts.

Keywords: gender pay gap, graduates, higher education, labour market, Czech Republic

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Genderové rozdíly v odměňování (GPG, z angl. „gender pay gap“) jsou přetrvávajícím rysem trhu práce. Jejich velikost je ovlivněna vyspělostí ekonomiky, politickým systémem či kulturou konkrétních zemí. Vyšší odměňování práce mužů ve srovnání s prací žen lze pozorovat napříč časem a prostorem. K tomu přispívá široké spektrum příčin, mezi které bývají řazeny socializace a kulturní podmíněnost rolí mužů a žen, genderové stereotypy, tradice, veřejné mínění i horizontální a vertikální segregace trhu práce (tj. koncentrace mužů a žen v určitých odvětvích a vyšší zastoupení mužů na vedoucích pozicích). Mezi příčiny GPG dále patří systémy odměňování, legislativa a instituce týkající se kombinace placené práce a péče o děti (případně o další blízké osoby), kolektivní vyjednávání či vzdělávací systém. V neposlední řadě sem patří i charakteristiky jednotlivých mužů a žen (vzdělání, věk, délka praxe, počet dětí, sociálně-psychologické vlastnosti, hodnotové orientace atd.) a jejich rodinné zázemí. Nerovné odměňování má celou řadu důsledků pro život konkrétních mužů a žen, domácností a rodin i pro společnost a ekonomiku jako celek. Mezi ně patří zvýšené ohrožení chudobou jednotlivců a domácností, feminizace chudoby, nízké důchody žen, udržování genderových stereotypů (zejména v podobě tradičních rolí a dělby práce v domácnosti), častější násilí v partnerských vztazích, patrně nižší růst HDP či menší investice rodin do lidského kapitálu dětí.²

Česká republika patří v rámci EU mezi země s nadprůměrnou velikostí GPG, rozdíl činil v roce 2021 téměř 15 procent (Eurostat 2021). Tento ukazatel je nicméně ovlivněn mírou participace žen na trhu práce. V některých zemích je například dosaženo nižších rozdílů pouze díky vyššímu podílu méně kvalifikovaných žen zůstávajících mimo trh práce.

Výše zmíněné příčiny existence GPG zahrnují i různé formy diskriminace, zejména v podobě odlišného odměňování mužů a žen za stejnou práci od stejného zaměstnavatele. Povědomí o existenci diskriminace v odměňování na základě pohlaví existuje dlouhodobě. Požadavek na uzákonění rovného odměňování mužů a žen za stejnou práci byl díky požadavkům Francie deklarován již v Římské smlouvě o založení Evropského hospodářského společenství v roce 1957, k jeho praktickému prosazování však v té době nedocházelo (Streeck 2019: 121). Česká republika přijala antidiskriminační legislativu v rámci harmonizace českého práva s unijními direktivami během příprav na vstup do EU, její přijetí ovšem bylo do značné míry formální a nevedlo k viditelným změnám v praktickém životě. Důvodem byla mimo jiné skutečnost, že domácí i evropská tvůrce politik nevnímali tento problém jako prioritu, takže nebyly provedeny potřebné kroky k implementaci této legislativy (Křížková, Penner, Petersen 2008: 58).

Cílem této studie je přispět do debaty o GPG zkoumáním jeho utváření v době po dokončení vysokoškolského studia na příkladu absolventů a absolventek vysokých škol

² Podrobnější diskusi příčin a důsledků GPG lze nalézt ve studii Křížkové et al. (2017: 10–30).

Tabulka 1: Srovnání GPG podle vzdělanostních skupin (plné úvazky, průměrná hodinová mzda včetně přesčasů, období 2002–2021)

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
ZŠ	20	20	17	18	18	17	17	16	15	15	15	15	14	13	13	12	12	12	10	10
SŠ	20	21	21	21	21	22	22	22	21	21	21	21	21	21	20	19	19	18	16	15
SŠ s m.	18	16	18	17	17	18	18	17	18	18	18	18	19	20	19	19	18	17	15	14
VŠ	25	24	23	23	24	24	25	24	25	25	25	25	25	26	25	24	23	22	21	20

Zdroj: Křížková, Pospíšilová 2022: 37.

a pokusit se identifikovat faktory, které k tomu přispívají. Dále porovnat situace jeden rok a několik let po absolvování studia. Zkoumání této podskupiny ekonomicky aktivních mužů a žen umožňuje detailnější pohled na příčiny GPG. Ve srovnání s ekonomicky aktivní populací jako celkem jde o skupinu relativně homogenní z hlediska vzdělání (absolventi vysokých škol), věku (převážně do 30 let), období kariéry (většinou vstup nebo etablování na trhu práce) a do značné míry i rodinné situace (bezdětnost), takže rozdíly v této skupině jsou ovlivněny těmito atributy v menší míře (například absolventi a absolventky většinou ještě nemají zkušenost s rodičovstvím, takže se jeho dopady projeví pouze v omezené míře a působí spíše jako nepřímý faktor ovlivňující strategie jednotlivých mužů a žen). Současně lze identifikovat další vlivy specifické pro období prvních let po ukončení studia, kdy jednotlivci často teprve hledají svoji pozici na trhu práce. Působení těchto vlivů nemusí být patrné při zkoumání skupiny ekonomicky aktivních obyvatel jako celku nebo zde jejich relativní význam může být výrazně odlišný. Absolventi vysokých škol navíc představují nejvzdělanější skupinu pracovníků a mají tak větší šanci získat nejlépe placená zaměstnání. V posledních desetiletích mezi nimi stoupá podíl žen (například v roce 2001 tvořily ženy 51,4 procenta absolventů, o deset let později to bylo 61 procent, od té doby jejich podíl osciluje okolo 60 procent; viz ČSÚ 2022: 20), navíc ve věkové skupině do 35 let bylo v roce 2023 26,9 procenta mužů a 41,1 procenta žen (Eurostat 2024). Návratnost vzdělání je ovlivněna i volbou studijního oboru, v níž se muži a ženy liší. Absolventi vysokých škol se ve srovnání s absolventy nižších stupňů vzdělání vyznačují vyšším GPG (viz Tabulka 1).

Základní výzkumné otázky jsou tak následující: Jak velký je GPG po absolvování vysoké školy a zda se po několika letech na trhu práce zvýší? Jaké jsou hlavní příčiny GPG po absolvování školy a jak se mění význam jednotlivých faktorů během několika let na trhu práce, zejména s ohledem na různé formy genderové segregace a odlišnosti v etablování na trhu práce? Jaký je vliv konkrétní výše dosaženého vysokoškolského vzdělání na velikost GPG, pokud lze rozlišit vliv různých typů studijních programů namísto souhrnné kategorie pro všechny vysokoškolsky vzdělané?

Dosavadní výzkum tématu

Vysokoškoláci se ve svém postavení na trhu práce od ostatních vzdělanostních kategorií v řadě ohledů liší. Absolventi vysokých škol pravděpodobněji naleznou zaměstnání, včetně práce ve svém oboru, což přispívá k jejich větší spokojenosti s prací (Razumova, Zolotina 2019). Vysokoškolské vzdělání se obvykle pojí s vyššími příjmy (např. Murphy, Welch 1992; Večerník 2019: 22–25), zejména pokud vykonávaná práce odpovídá výši vzdělání (Zamfir, Matei, Lungu 2013). Podle Teichlera (2007: 25–28) se vysokoškolské studium obecně vyplatí, neboť problém s nezaměstnaností absolventů je spíše okrajový a týká se většinou přechodové fáze při vstupu na trh práce. Současně většina

absolventů vysokoškolského studia nachází práci v oboru a práci mimo obor mnohdy vykonávají z důvodů jiných, než je irelevance jejich studia pro trh práce. Teichler dále uvádí, že jejich pozice na trhu práce je obvykle stabilnější a práce na částečný úvazek je častěji volbou žen s dětmi spíše než projevem nedobrovolné prekarizace z důvodu nemožnosti najít práci na plný úvazek.

Genderové rozdíly v kariérních drahách se projevují i u absolventů vysokých škol. Podle Evertsson, England a Mooi-Reci (2009) se ukazuje, že díky vyšší zaměstnanosti vysokoškolsky vzdělaných žen ve Švédsku, Nizozemí a USA s rostoucím vzděláním obvykle klesají genderové nerovnosti z hlediska participace na trhu práce, počtu odpracovaných hodin a segregace podle profesí a práce v domácnosti, na druhou stranu ve Švédsku a v Nizozemí (nikoli v USA) je díky vyšší návratnosti vzdělání pro muže u vysokoškolsky vzdělaných nejvyšší GPG. Přetrvávající rozdíly v kariérních drahách absolventů a absolventek vysokých škol jsou připisovány působení mimoekonomických faktorů spíše než vlastnostem ženské pracovní síly (Čermáková 1999), mimo jiné genderově segregovaným tržním strukturám, odborům a profesním asociacím i specifickým pracovním podmínkám (Hughes, Lowe 1992). Lörz a Mühleck (2019) ukazují, že v případě akademické dráhy jsou genderové rozdíly výraznější na jejím počátku a v jejích pozdějších stádiích se postupně vytrácejí. Nejvíce se objevují při přechodu na vyšší stupeň vzdělání, spíše než že by byly způsobeny odlišnou mírou úspěšnosti ve studiu. Významnějším faktorem než studijní výsledky tak jsou odlišné důvody započetí nebo ukončení akademické dráhy, zejména rodinné okolnosti mají odlišné důsledky pro muže a ženy.

Jak naznačuje studie Evertsson et al. (2009), obecně vyšší příjmy u vysokoškoláků nemusí vždy provázet i vyšší GPG. Quadlin, VanHeuvelen a Ahearn (2023) ukazují, že v USA došlo během posledních 60 let k obratu od ekonomiky s větším podílem manuální práce a vyšším GPG u méně vzdělaných zaměstnanců směrem k ekonomice s rozvinutým sektorem služeb s vyšším GPG u nejvíce vzdělaných pracovníků. Zatímco faktory spojené s genderovou segregací podle oborů zde hrají významnou roli u nízko a středně placených zaměstnanců, u nejvyšších příjmových skupin (a s nejvyšším vzděláním) je dynamika GPG odlišná a tyto faktory hrají menší roli. Při srovnání UK a Řecka (Livanos, Nunez 2012) se ukazuje, že v Řecku na rozdíl od UK vysokoškolský titul působí jako faktor snižování GPG a diskriminace, což může souviset s menší flexibilitou řeckého trhu práce a menšími rozdíly v kvalitě mezi řeckými vysokými školami oproti UK a z toho vyplývajícím nedostatkem alternativních signálů (mimo vysokoškolské vzdělání) o produktivitě a kariérní motivaci pracovníka. Na flexibilnějším trhu práce naopak odměňování větší měrou závisí na jednání aktérů a individuální schopnosti se prosadit. Podle Sterling et al. (2020) se muži vyznačují větší vírou ve vlastní schopnosti, která se odráží v tom, že si dovedou vyjednat vyšší nástupní plat již u první práce po studiu.

Existuje mnoho studií potvrzujících existenci a zkoumajících příčiny GPG u absolventů vysokých škol při vstupu na trh práce. Z pohledu srovnání s českou situací jsou relevantní zejména studie z Německa, které má srovnatelnou velikost GPG jako ČR a současně podobné rysy vzdělávacího systému a zvláště sociální politiky, která je založena na preferenci modelu rodiny s jedním hlavním živitelem. Velká část z nich navíc vychází z pravidelných reprezentativních šetření uplatnění absolventů, které realizuje Deutsches Zentrum für Hochschul- und Wissenschaftsforschung (DZHW). Jednotná metodologie těchto šetření umožňuje lepší komparaci výsledků, vytvoření panelů pro každou kohortu absolventů dává možnost opakovaného oslovení stejných lidí v čase a tím i sledování kariérních drah. Leuze a Strauss (2014) na základě dat z panelu absolventů z roku 1997 (DZHW) uvádí, že muže v Německu rok po dokončení studia z hlediska mezd více znevýhodňuje absolvování převážně ženského oboru, ovšem příjem žen negativněji ovlivňuje práce v převážně ženských profesích a navíc mají ženy méně možností tuto ztrátu vykompenzovat v budoucnu. To souvisí mimo jiné s vyšším výskytem částečných úvazků a méně častými přesčasy u převážně ženských profesí. Význam charakteristik zaměstnání pro velikost GPG dokládají i Chevalier (2004) a García-Aracil (2007).

Shauman (2006) na základě dat z National Survey of College Graduates (USA) z roku 1993 s využitím metody rozkladu (Xie, Shauman) ukazuje, že genderové rozdíly ve volbě oboru studia vysvětlují 11–17 procent genderového rozdílu v pravděpodobnosti získat práci ve vysoce placených profesích. Nicméně i absolventi a absolventky stejných oborů vstupují do odlišných typů povolání, což při zahrnutí odlišného odměňování důležitých charakteristik vysvětluje dalších 41 procent tohoto rozdílu. Podle Joy (2003), vycházející z dat U.S. National Center for Education and Statistics Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study 1993/94, přispívají podle standardní metody rozkladu (Oaxaca) ke GPG proměnné týkající se trhu práce (sektor ekonomiky, odvětví, počet odpracovaných hodin) spíše než proměnné týkající se studia. K podobnému závěru dospívá i Doseděl (2022), který tvrdí, že genderová segregace podle oborů studia nemá negativní vliv na příjem na rozdíl od segregace podle zaměstnání a profesí, takže v současných evropských společnostech vzniká GPG na trhu práce, a nikoli ve vzdělávání.

Studie McDonalda a Thorntona (2007) provedená na datech z National Association of Colleges and Employers (USA) však konstatuje, že 95 procent GPG v první práci po dokončení vysoké školy může být vysvětleno výběrem studijního oboru. Volbu studijního oboru identifikuje jako jeden z významných faktorů i Chevalier (2004). Významu vystudovaného oboru nasvědčuje i skutečnost, že zatímco při srovnání všech absolventů v Německu na základě metody rozkladu (Blinder-Oaxaca) vydělávají ženy o cca 30 procent méně než muži (Braakmann 2008, DZHW panel absolventů 1997), při zúžení analýzy na absolventy pouze sociálních věd (Reimer, Schröder 2006) či

ekonomických oborů (Bredtmann, Otten 2010) z vybrané německé univerzity se GPG pohybuje okolo 7 procent. V případě studie o společenskovedních absolventech (Reimer, Schröder 2006) se ukazuje, že vybavenost lidským kapitálem velikost GPG mírně zvyšuje (tj. při stejné vybavenosti absolventů a absolventek by byl GPG ještě vyšší), zatímco proměnné týkající se hledání práce a postojů ke kariéře mají okrajový vliv.

Významný GPG existuje i u absolventů a absolventek doktorského studia v Německu (DZHW panel absolventů doktorského studia 2014). K rozdílu o velikosti 30 procent po pěti letech od absolvování studia přispívá největší měrou výrazně vyšší odměňování mužů mimo akademický sektor. Mezi nejvýznamnější faktory za celkovým rozdílem patří obor studia, profesní zkušenost po absolvování, odvětví, pozice v managementu a zejména počet odpracovaných hodin (Goldan 2020).

Důležitým faktorem přispívajícím ke GPG je rodičovství a obecně rodinná situace. Většina absolventů v době ukončení vysokoškolského studia ještě vlastní děti nemá, takže vliv tohoto faktoru se může projevit spíše formou očekávaného rodičovství, tj. preferencemi a očekáváním jednotlivců ohledně rodiny a práce. Chevalier (2004, 2007) na základě dat z reprezentativního šetření absolventů univerzit z UK ukazuje, že po aplikaci metody rozkladu (Blinder-Oaxaca) u absolventů a absolventek tvoří motivace a očekávání téměř polovinu vysvětlené části rozdílu a že absolventky jsou ve srovnání s absolventy více altruistické a méně kariérně orientované. Největší roli v tom hrají očekávání ohledně péče a výchovy dětí, resp. přerušení kariéry.

Metoda rozkladu rovněž umožňuje ukázat, že velikost GPG je vysoká již krátce po absolvování vysokoškolského studia a během několika následujících let na trhu práce dále narůstá. Například podle dat z německého panelu absolventů z roku 1997 (DZHW) během pěti až šesti let na trhu práce roste z 30 na 35 procent. Vliv odlišného oboru studia jako hlavní součásti vybavenosti lidským kapitálem na velikost rozdílu během této doby klesá (Braakman 2008), podíl nevysvětlených faktorů naopak narůstá (Braakman 2013). Ve Finsku se velikost rozdílu během prvních deseti let od absolvování studia významně zvyšuje a představuje většinu celoživotního nárůstu GPG, významnými faktory jsou odlišné obory studia a pracovní zkušenosti (Finnish Longitudinal Employer–Employee Data; Napari 2008). GPG existuje okamžitě po absolvování studia i v Rusku a v průběhu času se zvyšuje, hlavními příčinami zde jsou genderová segregace podle oborů studia a odvětví (reprezentativní šetření absolventů z roku 2016; Rudakov et al. 2023).

Zatímco v zahraniční literatuře představuje zkoumání faktorů vysvětlujících GPG dlouhodobě zkoumané téma, v českém prostředí se první studie objevují až v době okolo vstupu do EU, což kromě jiného souvisí s nedostatkem vhodných dat na počátku devadesátých let. Jurajda (2003) na základě dat z roku 1998 o zaměstnancích a zaměstnavatelích v České republice (Informační systém o průměrném výděлку (ISPV) při MPSV) a na Slovensku ukazuje, že různé formy segregace (z hlediska profese, fir-

my a práce) vysvětlují přibližně třetinu GPG. V další studii Jurajda (2005) ukazuje na datech z ISPV, že rozdíly v míře zaměstnanosti žen s nízkými příjmy ovlivněné počátečními tranzitivními politikami mohou být odpovědné za odlišná mzdová znevýhodnění u převážně ženských povolání.

Studie Křížkové, Pennera a Petersena (2008) na základě srovnání dat z ISPV z let 1998, 2002 a 2004 ukazuje, že mezi obdobím přijetí antidiskriminační legislativy západního typu a po něm nedošlo k výrazným změnám v GPG na úrovni podniku, zaměstnání ani pracovní pozice. Při využití podrobnější klasifikace zaměstnání u dat let 2002 a 2004 vysvětluje podstatnou část GPG horizontální segregace podle zaměstnání a vertikální segregace podle pracovních pozic na základě pohlaví, naopak segregace organizací podle pohlaví vysvětluje pouze menší část rozdílu. GPG je obvykle vyšší v soukromých podnicích. Individuální charakteristiky jako věk, vzdělání či délka praxe u stejného zaměstnavatele vysvětlují velmi malou část GPG.

Studie Mysíkové (2007a, 2007b) na základě dat z šetření EU-SILC (Statistics on Income and Living Conditions database, česky probíhalo pod názvem *Životní podmínky*) z roku 2005, zahrnujícího populaci ve věku 15–64 let, rovněž poukazuje na téměř nulový vliv odlišných charakteristik jednotlivých mužů a žen na GPG. Autorka navíc zohledňuje efekt výběru (tj. vliv participace na trhu práce, což data ISPV neumožňují) a ukazuje, že pokud by všichni nepracující jedinci pracovali, potenciální GPG by byl ještě vyšší, neboť méně kvalifikované ženy častěji nepracují. Mysíková (2012) v návazné studii na základě dat z šetření EU-SILC z roku 2008 pro věkovou skupinu 16–55 let, v níž opět zohledňuje efekt výběru, ukazuje, že Česká republika i Slovensko mají poměrně vysoký GPG, ovšem pouze malá část je vysvětlitelná rozdíly v charakteristikách mužů a žen (na rozdíl od Polska a Maďarska, kde je celkový rozdíl menší). K vysvětlení GPG tak spíše přispívají charakteristiky práce v obou zemích indikující lepší pracovní podmínky pro muže (práce ve větších firmách, více smluv na dobu neurčitou a častější vedoucí pozice), zatímco individuální charakteristiky mají ve všech zahrnutých zemích lepší pracující ženy.

Nevýhodou dat získaných ze šetření EU-SILC či z ISPV je skutečnost, že tyto datové soubory jsou designovány primárně k jiným účelům než zkoumání genderových nerovností v odměňování, takže nepokrývají všechny relevantní faktory. Pytlíková a kol. (2012) proto provedli vlastní šetření, v němž zahrnuli standardní proměnné týkající se lidského kapitálu, charakteristik práce, pracoviště a zaměstnavatele, dále i vliv příjmu domácnosti či rodinného zázemí a individuální charakteristiky (mj. preference ohledně pracovních, rodinných a životních rolí, genderová identita, psychologické vlastnosti, nekognitivní dovednosti či vzhled a doplňkové i měkké dovednosti). Metodou mzdového rozkladu zjistili, že sledované faktory vysvětlují 87 % GPG. To je výrazně víc než u ostatních studií zahrnujících užší spektrum proměnných. K vysvětlení části rozdílu

mimo jiné významně přispěly faktory jako doba praxe, mateřská dovolená či počet odpracovaných hodin. Významný vliv měly například i nekognitivní charakteristiky jako soutěživost a odhodlanost (Filipová et al. 2012: 81).

V posledních letech vznikaly studie mapující dlouhodobé trendy ve struktuře genderových nerovností v odměňování. Na datech z šetření EU-SILC z let 2005–2016 a vzorku zaměstnanců ve věku 25–54 let Mysíková (2019) ukazuje, že GPG je během sledovaného období víceméně stabilní, přičemž v průběhu let se nejvíce oslabil vliv vzdělání na jeho velikost a v menší míře to platí i pro nadřizenou pozici a velikost firmy, zatímco posílil vliv odvětví zaměstnance. Na vzestupu významu odvětví se největší měrou podílel průmysl s relativně vysokými mzdami a převahou mužů, pokles u vzdělání souvisí s rostoucím podílem žen mezi absolventy vysokých škol.

Problematické nerovného odměňování žen a mužů se věnoval rozsáhlý projekt *Rovnost žen a mužů na trhu práce se zaměřením na (ne)rovné odměňování žen a mužů*³, v jehož rámci byla provedena analýza změn struktury GPG na základě dat z ISPV za období 2006–2016 (Křížková et al. 2018: 72–95), která byla provedena na datech o zaměstnancích ve věku 25–55 let. Podobně jako v případě výše zmíněné studie autorky ukazují, že GPG je stabilní v čase a dochází pouze k malým změnám. Součet individuálních charakteristik postupně vysvětluje stále menší část rozdílu, zatímco charakteristiky zaměstnání a v posledních letech zejména charakteristiky firmy či pracoviště (tj. ukazatele genderové segregace) jako vysvětlující faktory svůj význam zvyšují, přičemž většinu vysvětlené části GPG lze připsat právě charakteristikám firmy či pracoviště (zejména průměrné mzdě na pracovišti). V roce 2016 bylo možné sledovanými faktory vysvětlit 43 % GPG. Rostoucí význam charakteristik organizace pro GPG potvrzují i Pospíšilová a Křížková (2023). Na základě dat z ISPV ukazují, že GPG je významně nižší ve veřejném než v soukromém sektoru a že GPG výrazně ovlivňují i odvětví ekonomiky podle NACE, velikost firmy/pracoviště, míra genderové segregace pozic uvnitř organizace, ale i region (vyšší GPG v jižní a východní části ČR, nižší naopak v Praze).

Studie Pospíšilové a Vohlídalové (2022) se zaměřila na zkoumání otázky vlivu rodičovství a prekarizované práce na velikost GPG. Na základě dotazníkového šetření provedeného na reprezentativním vzorku respondentů ve věku 20 až 55 let dospěly autorky k závěru, že velikost GPG roste s počtem dětí a rodičovství hraje důležitou roli zvláště v případě prekarizovaných pracovníků.

Zatímco výše uvedené studie GPG v ČR se zaměřovaly na celou ekonomicky aktivní populaci, Moris Triventi (2013) provedl na základě dat z šetření REFLEX 2005 komparativní analýzu GPG u absolventů vysokých škol na skupině evropských zemí, zahrnující

³ <https://rovnaodmena.cz/>

i Českou republiku. K celkovému GPG (23 procent) přispěly největší měrou faktory týkající se charakteristik zaměstnání (26,3 procenta GPG), dále počet odpracovaných hodin (19,3 procenta), vybavenost jednotlivců lidským kapitálem (9,8 procenta) a ukazatele sladění práce a rodiny (6,4 procenta). Česká republika se ovšem od ostatních zemí v řadě ohledů odlišuje: ve srovnání s ostatními má menší vliv počet odpracovaných hodin (11,4 procenta), zanedbatelný vliv sladění práce a rodiny (0,4 procenta) a negativní vliv vybavenost lidským kapitálem (–13,2 procenta)⁴, při stejné vybavenosti absolventů a absolventek by tak byl GPG ještě vyšší. Naopak větší vliv oproti srovnávaným zemím mají charakteristiky zaměstnání (46,6 procenta) a s odstupem největší je nevysvětlená část (54,7 procenta) (Triventi 2013).

Datový soubor

Tato studie vychází z dat výzkumného projektu Absolvent 2018, který v období 2018 až 2019 realizovalo Středisko vzdělávací politiky Pedagogické fakulty UK ve spolupráci s Centrem pro studium vysokého školství, v. v. i., podle zadání MŠMT za součinnosti zúčastněných vysokých škol v České republice (Zelenka et al. 2019). Šetření Absolvent 2018 navazuje na dvacetiletou tradici výzkumu uplatnění absolventů vysokých škol prováděného na celostátní úrovni a realizovaného Střediskem vzdělávací politiky Pedagogické fakulty UK v rámci mezinárodních projektů za účasti evropských i mimoevropských zemí a rovněž samostatných národních projektů.

Hlavním cílem projektu Absolvent 2018 bylo poskytnout aktuální datovou a informační podporu aktérům vysokého školství a přispět tak k naplňování *Dlouhodobého záměru vzdělávací a vědecké, výzkumné, vývojové a inovační, umělecké a další tvůrčí činnosti pro oblast vysokých škol na období 2016–2020* (MŠMT). Šetření se zaměřovalo na dvě hlavní oblasti: popis a analýzu kvality absolvovaného studia v souvislosti s přechodem a uplatněním na trhu práce a popis profesní dráhy absolventů vysokých škol a dále popis a analýzu kvality zapojení absolventů na trh práce a jejich krátkodobé i dlouhodobé uplatnitelnosti s ohledem na získané vzdělání z pohledu zaměstnavatelů.

Hlavní cílovou skupinou byli absolventi bakalářských, magisterských a doktorských studijních programů vysokých škol, kteří získali vysokoškolský diplom v období od 1. 1. 2013 do 31. 12. 2017 a zároveň neabsolvovali další studium na vysoké škole v roce 2018 ani v době šetření nestudovali na vysoké škole v žádné formě studia. Druhou cílovou skupinou byli zaměstnavatelé absolventů vysokých škol z první cílové skupiny.

⁴ Lidský kapitál zahrnuje obor a délku studia, další kvalifikaci, studijní prospěch a dovednosti v oblasti ICT, inovací a cizích jazyků. Autor však neupřesňuje, proč má v ČR (s částečnou výjimkou UK) jako jediné zemi záporný vliv na GPG.

Projektu se zúčastnilo celkem 37 vysokých škol (23 veřejných⁵ a 14 soukromých⁶), které oslovovaly své absolventy. Zaměstnavatelé byli následně oslovováni absolventy. Sběr dat probíhal od října do prosince roku 2018. Celkově je k dispozici 21 166 dotazníků vyplněných absolventy (24,6 procenta bakaláři, 69,9 procenta magistři, 5,5 procenta Ph.D.) a 447 dotazníků vyplněných zaměstnavateli absolventů (popisné statistiky viz Tabulka 3 v Příloze).

Pro tuto studii jsou využita pouze data za absolventy, kteří byli dotazováni jednak na práci rok po absolvování studia a jednak na práci v době konání šetření. Získaná data tak umožní sledovat vývoj GPG v prvních letech po dokončení vysokoškolského studia, což v řadě případů odpovídá vstupu na trh práce.

Ve výchozím datovém souboru byl příjem z hlavní práce rok po studiu a ze současné práce měřen odlišným způsobem. V případě práce rok po studiu se jedná o hrubou měsíční mzdu včetně odměn a přesčasů, zatímco u současné práce jde o hrubou měsíční mzdu bez odměn a přesčasů (v obou případech respondenti vybírali odpovídající mzdové pásmo). Ukazuje se však, že na českém trhu práce mají odměny a přesčasy v současnosti na velikost GPG pouze okrajový vliv. Celkové GPG zvyšují přesčasy a odměny o 1 procentní bod. V případě GPG u stejného zaměstnání podle ISCO, stejného pracoviště či stejné pozice na stejném pracovišti, ve mzdové i platové sféře, se příspěvek přesčasů a odměn ke GPG pohybuje mezi 0 a 1 procentním bodem. Dlouhodobě je v ČR patrný trend k poklesu vlivu odměn a přesčasů na velikost GPG (Křížková et al. 2018: 52–55, 61–65). Odlišné měření příjmu u práce rok po studiu a u současné práce by tak mělo mít na celkové výsledky pouze okrajový vliv. Totéž by mělo platit pro velikost příspěvku jednotlivých proměnných ke GPG, patrně s výjimkou vlivu některých odvětví, kde jsou odměny a přesčasy běžnější a tvoří větší část příjmu zaměstnance a jejichž vliv by tak měl být u současné práce silnější.

Předchozí výzkumy GPG v České republice se zaměřovaly buď na celkovou populaci, na ekonomicky aktivní muže a ženy ve věku 25–55 let, nebo na konkrétní podnik. Výjimku představuje komparativní studie Morise Triventiho (2013), v níž však není České republice věnována detailní pozornost. Absolventi v období etablování na trhu práce tak buď byli částečně či zcela výzkumně nepokryti díky užšímu zaměření

⁵ Šetření se účastnily všechny veřejné vysoké školy v České republice s výjimkou Západočeské univerzity v Plzni, Vysoké školy polytechnické Jihlava a Slezské univerzity v Opavě.

⁶ Ze soukromých škol se šetření účastnily Evropský polytechnický institut, s. r. o., University of New York in Prague, s. r. o., Vysoká škola mezinárodních a veřejných vztahů Praha, o. p. s., Vysoká škola evropských a regionálních studií, z. ú., Vysoká škola zdravotnická, o. p. s., Univerzita Jana Amose Komenského Praha, s. r. o., Anglo-americká vysoká škola, z. ú., Moravská vysoká škola Olomouc, o. p. s., Unicorn College, s. r. o., Vysoká škola obchodní a hotelová, s. r. o., Vysoká škola sociálně správní, z. ú., Archip, s. r. o., ŠKODA AUTO Vysoká škola, o. p. s., Vysoká škola finanční a správní, a. s.

uvedených studií, nebo tvořili pouze malou část v rámci celku ekonomicky aktivní populace a nebyla jim věnována specifická pozornost.

Tato studie vycházející z dat šetření Absolvent 2018 navíc rozlišuje mezi absolventy bakalářského, magisterského a doktorského studia, takže umožňuje odlišit vliv různých typů studijních programů na velikost GPG. V předchozích výzkumech toto rozlišení nebylo provedeno, ačkoli data z ISPV i z EU-SILC jej umožňují.

Údaje o příjmu absolventů byly v dotazníku členěny do celkem 17 příjmových pásem (viz Tabulka 2).

V důsledku provedené kategorizace se v analýze pracuje s údaji o příjmech absolventů v podobě střední hodnoty pásma, do kterého příjem absolventa reálně spadá. To vede k určitému zkreslení zejména v případě nejvyšších příjmových skupin, které mají největší rozpětí a jejichž reálný příjem se tak může výrazně lišit od střední hodnoty pásma. Protože v rámci těchto pásem lze předpokládat reálně vyšší počet případů na jejich dolní hranici a současně jsou v těchto kategoriích muži zastoupeni častěji než ženy, dochází pravděpodobně k mírnému nadhodnocení celkového GPG i významu faktorů, které ovlivňují zvýšenou měrou právě vysokopříjmové skupiny. Aby bylo možné provést srovnání zaměstnání po jednom roce a po několika letech od absolvování, bylo nutné z celkového souboru absolventů vyřadit OSVČ a podnikatele, nezaměstnané, osoby pobírající rodičovské či jiné dávky a pracující v zahraničí (odlišná mzdová hladina v jiných zemích by výrazně zkreslovala celkové výsledky).⁷ Zvolená metoda dále vyžadovala, aby respondenti odpověděli na všechny relevantní otázky. Po aplikaci tohoto filtru zůstalo v souboru celkem 12 521 respondentů, z toho 7797 žen a 4724 mužů. Poměr mužů a žen v souboru (62,3 procenta žen, 37,7 procenta mužů) přibližně odpovídá poměru absolventů a absolventek ve sledovaném období (podíl žen v jednotlivých letech mezi 59,8 a 61,1 procenta, mužů mezi 40,2 a 38,9 procenta; viz ČSÚ 2022: 20).. Data nebyla vážena.

Ve výchozím datovém souboru existuje proměnná týkající se rodičovství, ovšem na tuto otázku odpovědělo pouze 9138 respondentů (cca 73 procent). Její zařazení do analýzy by tak znamenalo vyřazení více než čtvrtiny případů. Z neúplných odpovědí na tuto otázku (1340, resp. 14,7 procenta odpovídajících respondentů uvedlo, že jsou rodiči), věkové struktury souboru a zařazení respondentů, kteří byli zaměstnáni rok po studiu a v době sběru dat, lze nicméně předpokládat, že výrazná většina absolventů a absolventek byla v době šetření bezdětná. Přímá zkušenost respondentů s rodičov-

⁷ Původní soubor zahrnoval u práce rok po studiu celkem 640 OSVČ/podnikatelů a 587 OSVČ/podnikatelek (tj. 8,9 procenta mužů a 4,4 procenta žen), dále nezaměstnaných 178 mužů a 378 žen (tj. 2,5 procenta mužů a 2,7 procenta žen). U současné práce se jednalo o 966 OSVČ/podnikatelů a 841 OSVČ/podnikatelek (tj. 13 procent mužů a 6,1 procenta žen) a nezaměstnaných 101 mužů a 170 žen (tj. 1,4 procenta mužů a 1,2 procenta žen).

Tabulka 2: Kategorizace výše příjmu a četnosti podle pohlaví

Pořadí	Pásmo	Práce rok po studiu		Současná práce		Práce rok po studiu		Současná práce	
		Muži	Ženy	Muži	Ženy	Muži (%)	Ženy (%)	Muži (%)	Ženy (%)
1	Do 5000 Kč	0	3	0	2	0	0	0	0
2	5001 – 10 000 Kč	14	61	3	23	0,3	0,8	0,1	0,3
3	10 001 – 15 000 Kč	100	616	12	88	2,1	7,9	0,3	1,1
4	15 001 – 19 000 Kč	319	1387	72	538	6,8	17,8	1,5	6,9
5	19 001 – 22 000 Kč	496	1306	148	874	10,5	16,8	3,1	11,2
6	22 001 – 25 000 Kč	641	1304	296	1249	13,6	16,7	6,3	16
7	25 001 – 28 000 Kč	682	1052	432	1181	14,4	13,5	9,1	15,1
8	28 001 – 31 000 Kč	506	696	443	1003	10,7	8,9	9,4	12,9
9	31 001 – 34 000 Kč	462	445	433	795	9,8	5,7	9,2	10,2
10	34 001 – 37 000 Kč	409	331	463	552	8,7	4,2	9,8	7,1
11	37 001 – 40 000 Kč	278	210	456	461	5,9	2,7	9,7	5,9
12	40 001 – 45 000 Kč	286	166	514	366	6,1	2,1	10,9	4,7
13	45 001 – 50 000 Kč	202	106	406	261	4,3	1,4	8,6	3,3
14	50 001 – 60 000 Kč	170	60	457	231	3,6	0,8	9,7	3
15	60 001 – 75 000 Kč	85	35	313	112	1,8	0,4	6,6	1,4
16	75 001 – 100 000 Kč	56	14	201	47	1,2	0,2	4,3	0,6
17	100 001 a více Kč	18	5	75	14	0,4	0,1	1,6	0,2

Zdroj: Absolvent 2018.

stvím tak patrně měla pouze omezený vliv na GPG, na druhou stranu na strategie jednotlivých absolventů a absolventek mohl působit faktor očekávaného rodičovství, tj. preference ohledně sladění rodinného a pracovního života.

Věková struktura respondentů se liší z hlediska pohlaví (viz Tabulka 3 v Příloze). Ženy jsou výrazně častěji zastoupeny v kategorii do 25 let díky vyššímu podílu absolventek bakalářského studia a dále v kategorii nad 40 let, kde výrazně převažují absolventi kombinované formy studia. Ženy ve všech věkových skupinách jsou častěji absolventkami kombinované formy studia, což může souviset se sladováním studijního/pracovního a rodinného života.

Metodologie

K vysvětlení příčin GPG absolventů vysokých škol je použita metoda rozkladu podle autorů Blinder (1973) a Oaxaca (1973) (Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition), která je nejčastěji využívaným nástrojem pro zjištění mzdových rozdílů mezi dvěma skupinami lidí a byla aplikována mj. ve většině výše zmíněných studií (např. Křížková et al. 2018; Mysíková 2007a, 2007b, 2012, 2019). Metoda rozkladu umožňuje zjistit, do jaké míry lze vysvětlit rozdíly v odměňování mezi oběma srovnávanými skupinami sledovanými faktory, i velikost jejich individuálních příspěvků. Velikost vysvětlené části rozdílu je dána působením rozdílných charakteristik členů obou skupin (v původní terminologii „endowment effect“) na velikost mzdy či platu. Její doplněk, tj. nevysvětlenou část rozdílu, tvoří jednak efekt odlišného odměňování členů obou skupin za stejné charakteristiky („remuneration effect“) blížíci se efektu diskriminace, jednak konstanta zahrnující efekt nesledovaných či nezměřitelných charakteristik. Proto se v novější literatuře používají spíše termíny „vysvětlená“ a „nevysvětlená“ část, což platí i pro tuto studii.

Výpočet mzdového rozkladu byl proveden s využitím datového souboru z programu IBM SPSS Statistics 26 prostřednictvím knihovny „oaxaca“ v programu R 4.2.3. Konkrétně byla zvolena metoda dvojnásobného rozkladu (twofold decomposition), kde byl výpočet proveden podle následujícího vzorce:

$$\Delta \bar{Y} = \underbrace{(\bar{X}_A - \bar{X}_B)' \hat{\beta}_R}_{\text{explained}} + \underbrace{\bar{X}_A'(\hat{\beta}_A - \hat{\beta}_R) + \bar{X}_B'(\hat{\beta}_B - \hat{\beta}_R)}_{\text{unexplained}}$$

Kde:

$\Delta \bar{Y}$ Rozdíl v průměrných hodnotách závislé proměnné mezi skupinami A a B.

\bar{X}_A Průměrné hodnoty vysvětlujících proměnných pro skupinu A.

\bar{X}_B Průměrné hodnoty vysvětlujících proměnných pro skupinu B.

- $\hat{\beta}_A$ Odhadnuté regresní koeficienty pro skupinu A.
- $\hat{\beta}_B$ Odhadnuté regresní koeficienty pro skupinu B.
- $\hat{\beta}_R$ Referenční vektor koeficientů, který může být interpretován jako hypotetické koeficienty v nediskriminačním prostředí.

Metoda dvojnásobného rozkladu umožňuje odlišit jednak vysvětlenou („explained“), jednak nevysvětlenou část rozdílu („unexplained“). U nevysvětlené části lze dále rozlišit, jestli zkoumané faktory působily spíše diskriminačně ve prospěch skupiny A („unexplained A“) nebo v neprospěch skupiny B („unexplained B“) (Hlavac 2018: 3–4). Aplikován byl rozklad podle Neumarka (1988), který používá jako referenční sadu koeficientů koeficienty z regrese nezahrnující mezi regresory skupinovou proměnnou (pohlaví).

Vysvětlující faktory mohou zahrnovat kardinální i nekardinální proměnné. Pro nekardinální proměnné bylo třeba vytvořit sadu dummy proměnných. Aby bylo možné předejít perfektní multikolinearitě, byla jedna ze sad dummy proměnných vynechána a představuje tak referenční kategorii. Koeficienty ostatních dummy proměnných se interpretují jako odchylky od vynechané referenční kategorie. Volba referenční kategorie může ovlivnit výsledky rozkladu, knihovna „oaxaca“ v R proto nabízí řešení, jak docílit toho, aby výsledky nebyly její volbou ovlivněny. „Oaxaca“ nicméně umožňuje učinit tuto proceduru pouze pro jednu sadu dummy proměnných v jednom výpočtu rozkladu, takže u ostatních sad dummy proměnných mohou být výsledky ovlivněny volbou referenční kategorie. Jak ale poznamenává Jann (2008: 461–462), tento problém se netýká vysvětlené části rozkladu, protože suma příspěvků jednotlivých proměnných není ovlivněna volbou referenční kategorie. Naproti tomu u nevysvětlené části se mohou v důsledku toho měnit jak výsledky jednotlivých dummy proměnných, tak i příspěvek dané nekardinální proměnné jako celku. Jako vynechaná referenční kategorie u vícečetných sad dummy proměnných byla z důvodu snadnější interpretace zpravidla zvolena nejpočetnější kategorie u dané dummy proměnné (uvedeno níže), v případě sad o dvou dummy proměnných byla vynechána kategorie vyjadřující nepřítomnost sledovaného faktoru (například u faktoru vedoucí pozice šlo o sadu dummy proměnných „vedoucí pozice“ a „nevedoucí pozice“, vynechána byla druhá z obou kategorií). Vliv nevynechané proměnné tak lze interpretovat jako působení daného faktoru na GPG oproti jeho absenci (tj. například GPG ovlivňuje práce na vedoucí pozici, a nikoli práce na nevedoucí pozici).

Respondenti v šetření Absolvent 2018 odpovídali na otázky týkající se jednak jejich práce v době rok po ukončení studia, jednak práce vykonávané v době šetření. Výpočet mzdového rozkladu vychází z logaritmu střední hodnoty příjmového pásma absolventa včetně odměn a přesčasů u práce rok po studiu a bez odměn a přesčasů

sů u současné práce. Pro zkoumání vysvětlujících faktorů byla vytvořena sada proměnných. Věk absolventa/absolventky v době vykonávání práce rok po studiu (vek) je kardinální proměnná, ostatní proměnné jsou nekardinální. Pro ostatní faktory byly vytvořeny sady dvou či více dummy proměnných. Nejvyšší dosažené vzdělání představují tři dummy proměnné pro jednotlivé typy studijních programů: bakalářský (Bc), magisterský (Mgr) a doktorský (PhD), vynechanou referenční kategorii tvoří magisterský program. Dále jsou zahrnuty dummy proměnné týkající se hodnotové orientace, vytvořené na základě odpovědí na otázku, proč si absolventi vybrali daný obor studia. V těchto odpovědích se odráží jejich hodnoty a preference, na jejichž základě bylo možné vytvořit sady dummy proměnných. Konkrétně jde o rozvoj vzdělanosti, znalostí a schopností (rozvoj_vzdelanosti_znalosti_schopnosti), zajímavou a naplňující práci (Zajimavaprace), vysokou společenskou prestiž studia (Prestiznistudium) a dobře placenou práci (Dobryplat), vynechané referenční kategorie představuje jejich absence (rozvoj_vzdelanosti_znalosti_schopnosti_ne, Zajimavaprace_ne, Prestiznistudium_ne a Dobryplat_ne).

Další dummy proměnné se týkaly délky praxe měřené tím, zda měl absolvent v době ukončení studia práci (prace_pri_ukonceni_studia), vynechanou referenční kategorii tvoří její absence (prace_pri_ukonceni_studia_ne). Soubor obsahoval několik dummy proměnných pro aktivitu na trhu práce: zda absolvent rok po studiu vykonává jinou práci, než kterou měl v době ukončení studia nebo jakou získal prvně po absolvování (zmenaprace_1rok), zda je současná práce stejná jako ta, kterou měl rok po ukončení studia (stejnaprace_jako1rokpostudiu), nebo zda absolvent změnil v současnou práci oproti práci rok po studiu profesi (zmenaprofeseodrokupostudiu) či odvětví (zmenaodvetviodrokupostudiu), vynechanou referenční kategorii představuje situace, kdy to tak nebylo (zmenaprace_1rok_ne, stejnaprace_jako1rokpostudiu_ne, zmenaprofeseodrokupostudiu_ne či zmenaodvetviodrokupostudiu_ne). Vliv regionu práce zohledňují dummy proměnné týkající se práce v Praze u práce rok po studiu (Praha_1rok) i současné práce (Praha_souc), vynechanou kategorii tvoří práce mimo Prahu (Praha_1rok_ne, resp. Praha_souc_ne). Pozici na pracovišti vyjadřují dummy proměnné zahrnující výkon vedoucí funkce (vedouci_1rok, resp. vedouci_souc), vynechanou referenční kategorii představuje práce na řadové pozici (vedouci_1rok_ne, resp. vedouci_souc_ne).

Následuje sada dummy proměnných týkajících se souladu kvalifikace absolventa a vykonávané práce, konkrétně zda je pro vykonávanou práci nejvhodnější stejný či vyšší dosažené vzdělání (prace_podlevysevzdelani_1rok, resp. prace_podlevysevzdelani_souc), zda je pro danou práci nejvhodnější stejný či příbuzný obor studia (prace_voborustudia_1rok, resp. prace_voborustudia_souc) či zda bylo možné danou práci vykonávat i bez vysokoškolského vzdělání (prace_mozna_bezVS_1rok, resp. prace_mozna_bezVS_souc), vynechanou referenční kategorii představuje absence

souladu (prace_podlevysevzdelani_1rok_ne, resp. prace_podlevysevzdelani_souc_ne; prace_voborustudia_1rok_ne, resp. prace_voborustudia_souc_ne; prace_mozna_bezVS_1rok_ne, resp. prace_mozna_bezVS_souc_me). Typ pracovní smlouvy reprezentují dummy proměnné týkající se smlouvy na dobu určitou (smlouvanaucito_1rok, resp. smlouvanaucito_souc), vynechanou referenční kategorii představuje smlouva na dobu neurčitou (smlouvananeucito_1rok, resp. smlouvananeucito_souc). Zkušenost s nezaměstnaností i po absolvování studia zastupuje rovněž dummy proměnná (nezamestnanost_1rok), stejně jako spokojenost se současnou prací (spokojenost_souc), vynechané referenční kategorie tvoří absence nezaměstnanosti (nezamestnanost_1rok_ne) a spokojenosti (spokojenost_souc_ne).

Charakteristiky zaměstnání podle klasifikace ISCO⁸ reprezentuje sada dummy proměnných, konkrétně pro kategorie ISCO 1, 3, 4, 5, 6–10 (s vynechanou referenční kategorií ISCO 2),⁹ a podle klasifikace ekonomických činností NACE¹⁰ sada dummy proměnných reprezentujících odvětví NACE 3, 6, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 (s vynechanou referenční kategorií tvořenou souhrnem zbývajících NACE kategorií)¹¹. U současné práce jsou rovněž zahrnuty dummy proměnné pro sektor ekonomiky, a sice zda pracuje absolvent v sektoru veřejném (verejnysektor_souc), soukromém neziskovém (soukromyneziskovysektor_souc) či jiném (jinaforma_souc), vynechanou referenční kategorii představuje soukromý ziskový sektor (soukromyziskovysektor_souc). Design výzkumu neumožňoval zahrnout do analýzy proměnné týkající se oboru studia, takže vliv tohoto faktoru se mohl projevit pouze zprostředkovaně přes ostatní proměnné (např. odvětví ekonomiky). Popisné charakteristiky vzorku a přesný popis proměnných viz Tabulka 3 v Příloze. Možnost odstranit vliv volby referenční kategorie byla využita pro výši dosaženého vzdělání.

⁸ <http://www.cz-isco.cz/>

⁹ Kategorie ISCO zahrnuté v analýze jsou ISCO 1 Zákonodárci a řídící pracovníci (ISCO_1_1rok, resp. ISCO_1_souc), ISCO 3 Techničtí a odborní pracovníci (ISCO_3_1rok, resp. ISCO_3_souc), ISCO 4 Úředníci (ISCO_4_1rok, resp. ISCO_4_souc), ISCO 5 Pracovníci ve službách a prodeji (ISCO_5_1rok, resp. ISCO_5_souc) a ostatní kategorie ISCO 6, 7, 8, 9, 0 (ISCO_6-10_1rok, resp. ISCO_6-10_souc), vynechanou referenční kategorii tvoří ISCO 2 Specialisté (ISCO_2_1rok, resp. ISCO_2_souc).

¹⁰ <http://www.nace.cz/>

¹¹ Kategorie NACE zahrnuté v analýze jsou NACE 3 Zpracovatelský průmysl (NACE_3_1rok, resp. NACE_3_souc), NACE 6 Stavebnictví (NACE_6_1rok, resp. NACE_6_souc), NACE 10 Informační a komunikační činnosti (NACE_10_1rok, resp. NACE_10_souc), NACE 11 Peněžnictví a pojišťovnictví (NACE_11_1rok, resp. NACE_11_souc), NACE 13 Profesní, vědecké a technické činnosti (NACE_13_1rok, resp. NACE_13_souc), NACE 14 Administrativní a podpůrné činnosti (NACE_14_1rok, resp. NACE_14_souc), NACE 15 Veřejná správa a obrana, povinné sociální zabezpečení (NACE_15_1rok, resp. NACE_15_souc), NACE 16 Vzdělávání (NACE_16_1rok, resp. NACE_16_souc), NACE 17 Zdravotní a sociální péče (NACE_17_1rok, resp. NACE_17_souc), vynechanou referenční kategorii představuje souhrnný údaj o všech ostatních odvětvích (NACE_ostatni_1rok, resp. NACE_ostatni_souc).

Soubor proměnných pro vysvětlení příčin GPG se u práce rok po studiu a u současné práce liší. Aby bylo možné sledovat změny významu jednotlivých faktorů pro GPG bez zkreslení způsobeného zahrnutím odlišných proměnných, byl u současné práce rovněž proveden alternativní výpočet bez proměnných týkajících se sektoru ekonomiky (nesledovaných u práce rok po studiu). Ostatní odlišné proměnné týkající se ekonomické aktivity mají zanedbatelný vliv. Ve výsledkové části jsou u současné práce nejprve uvedeny výsledky pro model zahrnující proměnné týkající se sektoru ekonomiky, rozdíl ve výsledcích obou výpočtů a důsledky pro vysvětlení příčin GPG jsou podrobněji rozebrány v následném srovnání výsledků u práce rok po studiu a u současné práce.

Pro zjištění robustnosti analýzy byl rovněž proveden rozklad GPG pro odlišné varianty závislé proměnné, tj. mzdy či platu. V rámci šetření byla zjišťována hrubá měsíční mzda či plat bez odměn a přesčasů a současně počet odpracovaných hodin v měsíci. Z odpovědí týkajících se výše mzdy či platu bylo zřejmé, že část respondentů nepracovala na plný úvazek, současně však část respondentů uváděla zjevně nepravdivé odpovědi na otázku týkající se počtu odpracovaných hodin (otázka na velikost úvazku nebyla položena)¹². Z toho důvodu byl rozklad proveden pro následující čtyři varianty: logaritmus střední hodnoty pásma hrubého měsíčního příjmu respondenta bez vyřazení krajních hodnot, logaritmus střední hodnoty pásma hrubého příjmu respondenta po vyřazení krajních hodnot (tj. nejnižší a nejvyšší příjmové kategorie), logaritmus přepočtené střední hodnoty hrubého hodinového příjmu respondenta bez vyřazení krajních hodnot a logaritmus přepočtené střední hodnoty hrubého hodinového příjmu po vyřazení krajních hodnot (tj. případů s přepočtenou střední hodnotou hrubého hodinového příjmu nižší, než byla minimální hodinová mzda v daném roce, a pozorování s přepočtenou střední hodnotou hrubého hodinového příjmu vyšší než 1000 Kč)¹³.

Výsledky

Ze srovnání výsledků rozkladu pro čtyři různé varianty závislé proměnné vyplývá, že zvolená varianta závislé proměnné nemá významný vliv na výsledky analýzy.¹⁴ Vzhledem k vysoké podobnosti výsledků rozkladu u všech čtyř variant závislé proměnné

¹² Někteří respondenti například uváděli, že týdně odpracovali jednu či naopak 168 hodin. Nicméně přepočtem na hodinovou mzdu a odfiltrováním krajních hodnot byly tyto případy vyřazeny.

¹³ U varianty závislé proměnné bez vyřazení krajních hodnot zahrnuje datový soubor 13 001 případů, u varianty logaritmu střední hodnoty pásma hrubého měsíčního příjmu respondenta po vyřazení krajních příjmových kategorií obsahuje 12 875 případů, zatímco u varianty logaritmu přepočtené střední hodnoty pásma hrubé hodinové mzdy po vyřazení případů se střední hodnotou hodinového příjmu pod hranici minimální mzdy a nad 1000 Kč jde o 12 521 respondentů.

¹⁴ Rozdíly jednotlivých variant závislé proměnné jsou nevýznamné z hlediska velikosti GPG, podílu vysvětlené a nevysvětlené části a až na výjimky i vlivu sledovaných faktorů.

né byla pro analýzu zvolena varianta logaritmu přepočtené střední hodnoty pásma hrubého hodinového příjmu bez krajních hodnot. Následující výsledky se týkají této varianty.

Jak je podrobněji rozebráno v části věnované datovému souboru, u práce rok po studiu a u současné práce je z důvodu původního designu výzkumu použita odlišná závislá proměnná (u práce rok po studiu hrubý měsíční příjem včetně odměn a přesčasů, u současné práce hrubý měsíční příjem bez odměn a přesčasů). Z tohoto důvodu není provedeno přímé srovnání výsledných hodnot obou modelů, ovšem vzhledem k marginálnímu vlivu odměn a přesčasů na velikost GPG na současném českém trhu práce to nemá vliv na výslednou interpretaci. Významnější rozdíl lze předpokládat pouze u dílčího vlivu některých odvětví, u nichž tvoří odměny a přesčasy výrazně větší část příjmu zaměstnance. Sady proměnných u práce rok po studiu a u současné práce se liší, důsledky těchto rozdílů jsou diskutovány v závěru výsledkové části.

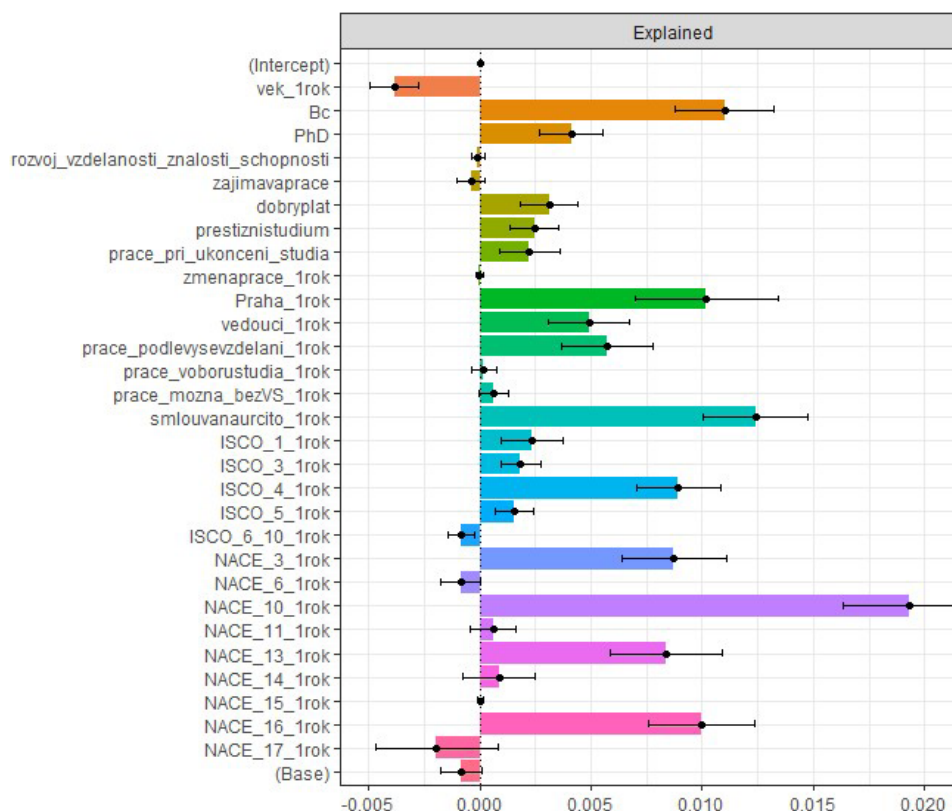
Rozklad GPG u práce rok po studiu

Celkový GPG absolventů v práci, kterou měli rok po ukončení studia, byl cca 22 procent. Vysvětlenou část, vyplývající z odlišných charakteristik absolventů a absolventek, tvoří přibližně 11 procentních bodů, tj. polovina celkového GPG. Druhou polovinu tvoří nevysvětlená část, odrážející vliv odlišného odměňování stejných charakteristik i proměnných nezahrnutých do výzkumu.

Z Grafu 1 je zjevné, že většina sledovaných charakteristik absolventů a absolventek přispívá ke zvyšování GPG ve prospěch mužů. Opačným směrem, tedy ve prospěch žen, působí pouze věk, okrajově práce v kategorii zaměstnání ISCO 6–10 (Ostatní) a výběr studijního oboru s cílem mít zajímavou práci. Rozdíly ve prospěch mužů zvyšuje největší měrou práce v některých odvětvích, buď vysoce placených s převahou mužů jako NACE 10 (Informační a komunikační činnosti), NACE 3 (Zpracovatelský průmysl) a NACE 13 (Profesní, vědecké a technické činnosti), nebo hůře placených s převahou žen jako NACE 16 (Vzdělávání). Dále k rozdílu ve prospěch mužů přispívá smlouva na dobu určitou, bakalářský titul, práce v Praze, zaměstnání v kategorii ISCO 4 (Úředníci), práce podle konkrétní výše dosaženého vysokoškolského vzdělání, výkon vedoucí pozice, doktorský titul, zbývající druhy motivace k výběru studijního oboru (z nich nejvíce dobrý plat), zbývající kategorie ISCO a v menší míře ostatní proměnné. Vliv uvedených proměnných je statisticky významný (viz Tabulka 4 v Příloze).

GPG lze vysvětlit prostřednictvím faktorů, které zastupuje jedna nebo více proměnných (viz metodologická část). Ze sledovaných faktorů má největší vliv na GPG odvětví podle NACE, které vysvětluje 4,51 procentního bodu z celkového GPG (přibližně dvě pětiny vysvětlené části GPG). Nejvíce k tomu přispívají výše uvedená odvětví (Informační a komunikační činnosti, Vzdelávání, Zpracovatelský průmysl a Profesní,

Graf 1: Vysvětlená část GPG absolventů a absolventek v práci, kterou měli rok po absolvování studia (2013–2017)



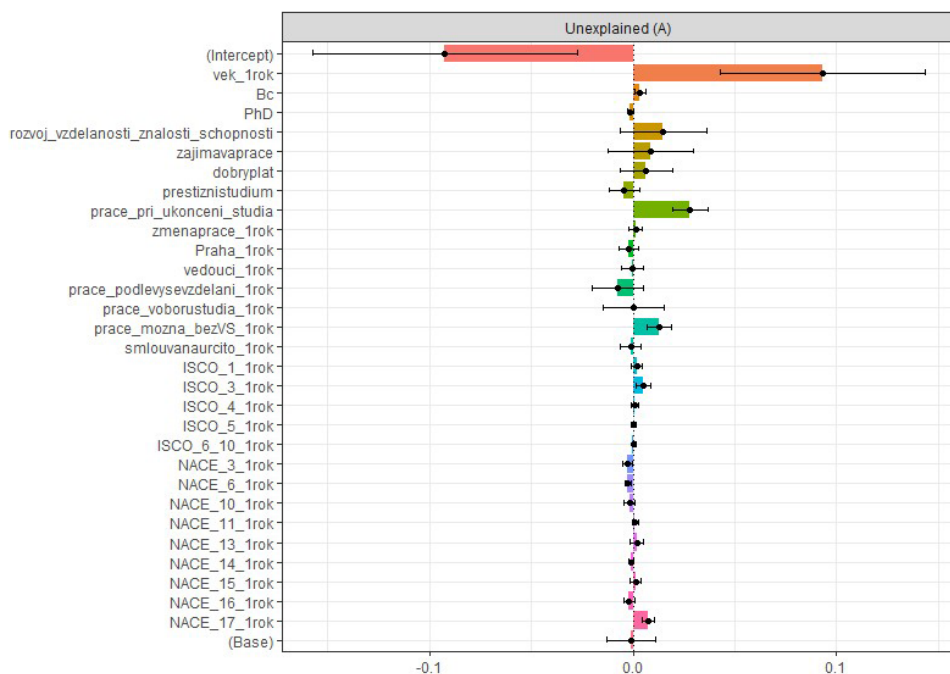
Zdroj: Absolvent 2018.

vědecké a technické činnosti), ostatní přispívají k rozdílu ve prospěch mužů okrajově nebo působí ve prospěch žen. Vliv těchto odvětví na GPG souvisí s jejich genderovým složením a výší odměňování (převaha mužů a vyšší platy či mzdy v odvětví Informační a komunikační činnosti vs. převaha žen a nižší platy či mzdy ve Vzdělávání).

Menší vliv ve srovnání s odvětvím mají konkrétní výše dosaženého vysokoškolského vzdělání (1,51 p. b.) a zaměstnání podle ISCO (1,36 p. b.). Význam výše vzdělání (1,1 p. b. u bakaláře a 0,41 p. b. u doktorátu) souvisí se složením souboru, kde byly mezi ženami početněji zastoupeny absolventky bakalářských studijních programů a u mužů absolventi magisterských a doktorských studijních programů. V rámci skupin zaměstnání podle ISCO s odstupem nejvíc přispívá k vysvětlení GPG kategorie Úředníci (0,89 p. b.), v níž výrazně převažují ženy a platy jsou spíše nižší.

Druhou polovinu GPG tvoří nevysvětlená část, která naznačuje odlišný vliv jednotlivých proměnných na GPG v případě, že by se skupina absolventů i absolventek nelišila ve sledovaných vlastnostech. Tyto výsledky mohou být méně přesné z důvodu volby referenční kategorie pro dummy proměnné (vliv volby referenční kategorie bylo možné odstranit pouze u jedné sady dummy proměnných, vybráno bylo vzdělání). Z Grafu 2 je zřejmé, že největší rozdíl mezi muži a ženami lze pozorovat u věku (10,1 p. b.).

Graf 3: Nevysvětlená část GPG absolventů a absolventek v práci, kterou měli rok po absolvování studia (2013–2017), zvýhodnění mužů

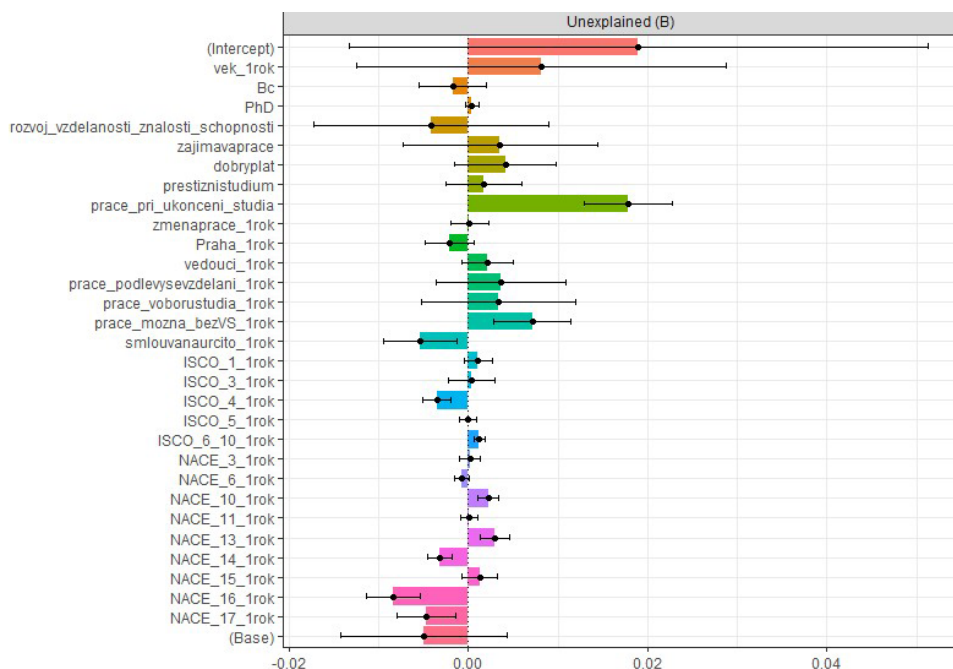


Zdroj: Absolvent 2018.

To svědčí o tom, že rostoucí věk (a tedy i doba praxe) se v odměňování výrazně více zhodnocuje u mužů. Podobná situace je i u praxe měřené prací v době ukončení studia (4,5 p. b.), hodnot (3,1 p. b., zejména snaha rozvíjet vzdělanost, znalosti a schopnosti, mít zajímavou práci a dobrý plat) a dále u výkonu práce, ke kterému není třeba mít vysokoškolské vzdělání (2 p. b.). Ostatní faktory měly okrajový vliv. Součet příspěvků těchto faktorů k nevysvětlené části GPG výrazně přesahuje její velikost, což kompenzuje vysoká hodnota konstanty působící opačným směrem (6,9 p. b.). To svědčí o nezahrnutí řady faktorů, které by se z hlediska odměňování lépe zhodnocovaly u žen.

V rámci nevysvětlené části GPG lze rozlišit, zda k němu jednotlivé charakteristiky přispívají spíše zvýhodněním mužů nebo znevýhodněním žen. V případě zvýhodnění mužů (viz Graf 3) se struktura faktorů příliš neliší od nevysvětlené části jako celku. Nejvíce muže zvýhodňuje věk (9,3 p. b.), práce při ukončení studia (2,8 p. b.), hodnoty (2,5 p. b., zejména rozvoj vzdělanosti, znalostí a schopností) a práce, k níž není třeba mít vysokoškolské vzdělání (1,2 p. b.). Velikost konstanty působící opačným směrem

Graf 4: Nevysvětlená část GPG absolventů a absolventek v práci, kterou měli rok po absolvování studia (2013–2017), znevýhodnění žen



Zdroj: Absolvent 2018.

a naznačující existenci důležitých nezahrnutých faktorů je v tomto případě ještě vyšší (9,2 p. b.).

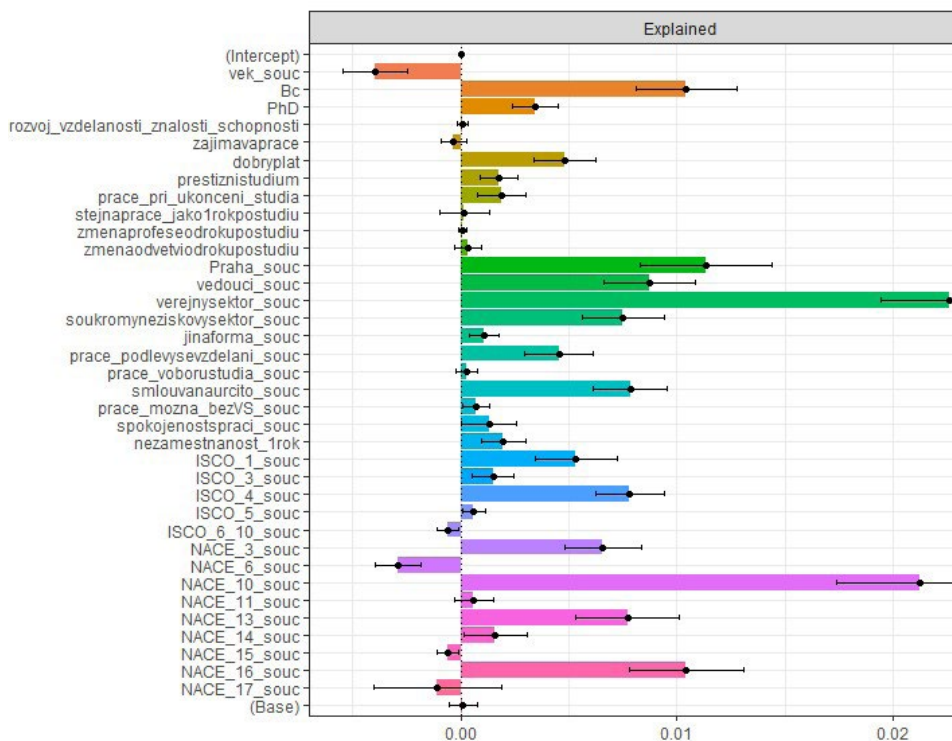
Ve srovnání se znevýhodněním mužů se u znevýhodnění žen vliv sledovaných charakteristik projevil výrazně méně (viz Graf 4). Nejsilněji v neprospěch žen působila práce v době ukončení studia (1,7 p. b.), vliv ostatních nepřekročil 1 procentní bod (např. věk 0,8 p. b.) a například zaměstnanost ve vzdělávání (NACE 16) působila opačným směrem (0,9 p. b.). Konstanta naznačující existenci nezahrnutých proměnných byla rovněž výrazně menší (2,2 p. b.). Z nevysvětlené části GPG tak vyplývá, že sledované charakteristiky v době práce rok po ukončení studia spíše působily ve prospěch růstu příjmu u mužů než ke snižování příjmu u žen. Nejvíce to je možné pozorovat u věku a praxe (tj. práce v době ukončení studia).

Rozklad GPG u současné práce

Celkový GPG v současné práci (tj. práci, kterou respondenti vykonávali v době šetření) činí přibližně 28 procent, z toho 14,5 p. b. tvoří vysvětlená část a zbytek nevysvětlená část.

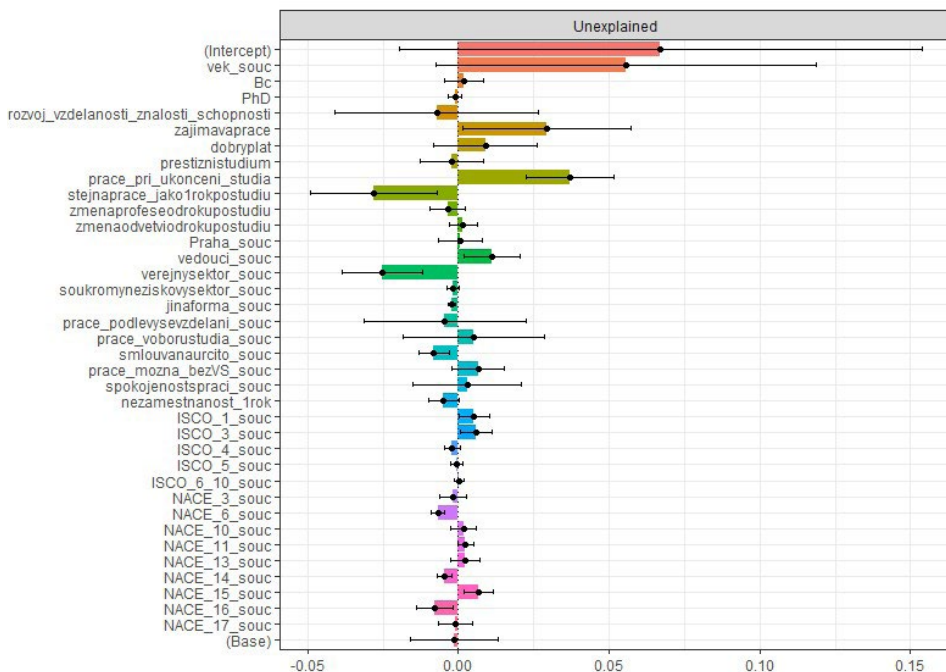
V případě současné práce se ukazuje, že ke zvýšení (resp. snížení) přispívají stejné proměnné jako v případě práce rok po studiu (viz Graf 5). Ze sledovaných faktorů má největší vliv na GPG odvětví podle NACE, které vysvětluje 4,35 procentního bodu z celkového GPG (více než třetinu vysvětlené části GPG). Nejvíce k tomu přispívají odvětví (Informační a komunikační činnosti, Vzdělávání, Profesní, vědecké a technické činnosti a Zpracovatelský průmysl), ostatní přispívají k rozdílu ve prospěch mužů okrajově nebo působí ve prospěch žen. Dalším významným faktorem je zaměstnání podle ISCO (1,47 p. b.). V rámci skupin zaměstnání podle ISCO nejvíce přispívají k vysvětlení

Graf 5: Vysvětlená část GPG u absolventů a absolventek v práci, kterou měli v době realizace výzkumu (2019)



Zdroj: Absolvent 2018.

Graf 6: Nevysvětlená část GPG absolventů a absolventek v současné práci (2019)



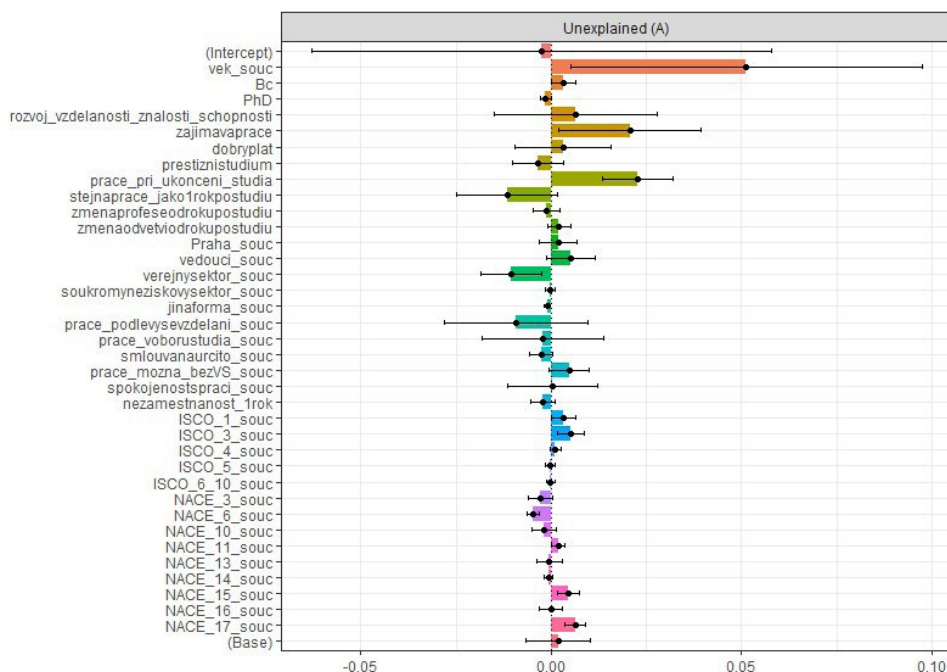
Zdroj: Absolvent 2018.

GPG kategorie Úředníci (0,78 p. b.) a Zákodníci a řídící pracovníci (0,55 p. b.). Nezanedbatelný vliv má konkrétní výše dosaženého vysokoškolského vzdělání (1,38 p. b.) a region, tj. práce v Praze (1,13 p. b.). Menší měrou ke GPG přispívá vedoucí pozice (0,87 p. b.), typ pracovní smlouvy díky častější smlouvě na dobu určitou u absolventek (0,78 p. b.), hodnoty (0,64 p. b.), práce podle kvalifikace (0,55 p. b.), praxe (0,19 p. b., měřeno prací v době absolvování studia). Opačným směrem působil věk (-0,4 p. b.).

Na rozdíl od práce rok po studiu bylo u současné práce možné měřit vliv sektoru ekonomiky, který se stal nejsilnějším faktorem po odvětví podle NACE (3,12 p. b.), zejména díky práci ve veřejném (2,26 p. b.) a soukromém neziskovém sektoru (0,75 p. b.), kde jsou častěji zaměstnané absolventky. Ostatní nové proměnné, týkající se spokojenosti v práci, zkušenosti s nezaměstnaností či aktivity na trhu práce, mají zanedbatelný dopad na GPG. Statisticky významný byl vliv téměř všech sledovaných proměnných (viz Tabulka 5 v Příloze).

Necelou polovinu GPG (13,8 p. b.) představuje nevysvětlená část. Jak je patrné z Grafu 6, za předpokladu stejných charakteristik absolventů i absolventek se mužům

Graf 7: Nevysvětlená část GPG absolventů a absolventek v současné práci (2019), zvýhodnění mužů



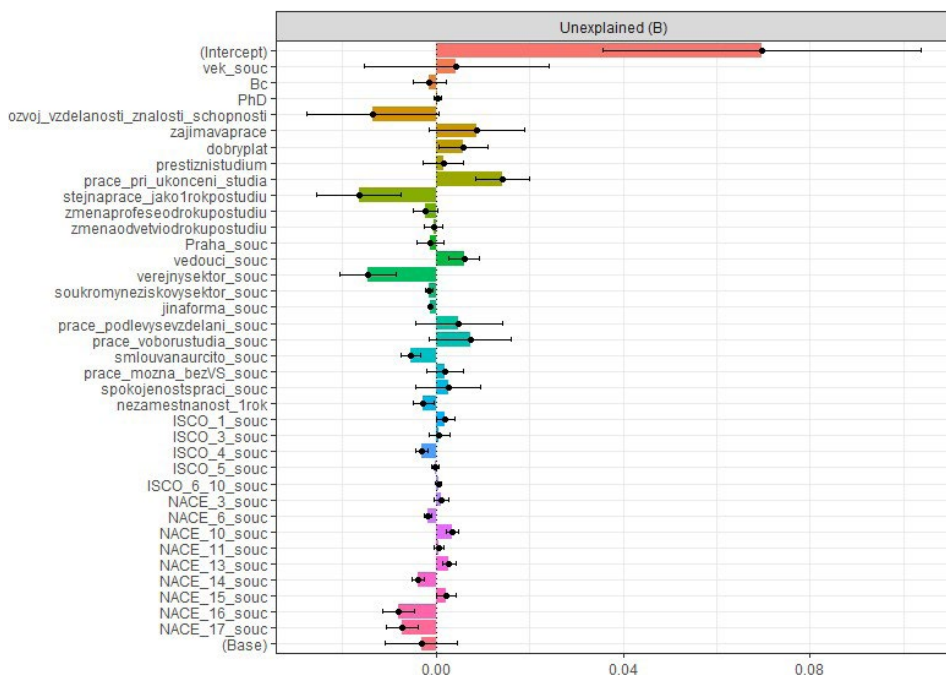
Zdroj: Absolvent 2018.

nejvíce zhodnocuje věk (5,6 p. b. z nevysvětlené části), dále práce v době ukončení studia (3,7 p. b.), snaha mít zajímavou práci (2,7 p. b.) a výkon vedoucí pozice (1,1 p. b.), naopak ženám se více zhodnocuje vykonávání stejné práce, jakou měly v době jeden rok po ukončení studia (2,8 p. b.), a práce ve veřejném sektoru (2,5 p.b.). U ostatních proměnných je vliv spíše okrajový. Velikost konstanty (7 p. b.) svědčí o nezahrnutí důležitých proměnných, které se absolventům zhodnocují lépe než absolventkám.

Struktura faktorů zvýhodňujících muže je podobná jako u nevysvětlené části jako celku, ovšem jejich vliv je slabší (viz Graf 7). Nejvíce přispívá ke GPG v důsledku zvýhodnění mužů věk (5,2 p. b.), práce v době ukončení studia (2,3 p. b.) a snaha mít zajímavou práci (2,1 p. b.), opačným směrem působí výkon stejné práce jako v době rok po ukončení studia (1,2 p. b.) a práce ve veřejném sektoru (1,1 p. b.). Vlivy konstanty i ostatních faktorů jsou okrajové.

Podobně jako v případě práce rok po ukončení studia se u současné práce projevil u znevýhodnění žen vliv sledovaných charakteristik výrazně méně ve srovnání se zvýhodněním mužů (viz Graf 8). Nejvíce k této nevysvětlené části GPG přispěla práce

Graf 8: Nevysvětlená část GPG absolventů a absolventek v současné práci (2019), znevýhodnění žen



Zdroj: Absolvent 2018.

v době ukončení studia (1,4 p. b.), vliv ostatních faktorů byl okrajový. Opačným směrem působilo vykonávání stejné práce jako v době rok po ukončení studia (1,7 p. b.), práce ve veřejném sektoru (1,4 p. b.) a motivace k rozvoji vzdělání, znalostí a schopností při výběru studijního oboru (1,1 p. b.). Větší část nevysvětleného rozdílu v nespěších žen tvoří konstanta (7,3 p. b.), což svědčí o existenci faktorů nezahrnutých do výzkumu, které by mohly vysvětlovat podstatnou část znevýhodnění absolventek v odměňování.

Srovnání GPG u práce rok po studiu a u současné práce a interpretace rozdílů

Sada sledovaných faktorů byla z velké části shodná v případě práce rok po ukončení studia i u současné práce, pouze v případě současné práce byla o několik proměnných rozšířena. Celková velikost GPG činila 22 procent u sady proměnných pro práci rok po studiu a 28 procent u sady proměnných pro současnou práci. V roce 2018, kdy probí-

hal sběr dat, činil GPG v České republice podle dat Eurostatu 20,1 procenta (Eurostat 2023). U absolventů vysokých škol krátce po ukončení studia je podobně jako u vysokoškoláků jako celku (viz Tabulka 1) vyšší GPG než u ostatních vzdělanostních skupin.

Velikost vysvětlené části GPG činila 11 p. b. (49,8 procenta celkového GPG) u sady proměnných pro práci rok po studiu a 4,5 p. b. (51,2 procenta) u sady proměnných pro současnou práci. Celková struktura působících faktorů se v případě obou prací až na jednu výjimku (typ zaměstnavatele nebyl sledován u práce rok po studiu) v podstatě nemění, pouze se liší relativní význam některých faktorů. Za hlavní identifikované faktory přispívající ke GPG lze označit různé formy segregace. Nejvýznamnější je horizontální segregace na základě odvětví ekonomiky podle NACE, dále segregace podle zaměstnání v kategoriích ISCO, vertikální segregace podle pozice v organizační hierarchii či v případě současné práce horizontální segregace podle typu zaměstnavatele, tj. jestli absolvent či absolventka pracují ve veřejném, soukromém komerčním nebo soukromém neziskovém sektoru. Růst příspěvku u odvětví podle NACE zapříčinil zejména zvýšený vliv kategorií Vzdělávání a Informační a komunikační činnosti, u práce podle ISCO šlo zejména o více než zdvojnásobení příspěvku kategorie ISCO 1 (Zákonodárci a řídící pracovníci). Dohromady tyto faktory představují 57,9 procenta vysvětlené části v případě sady proměnných pro práci rok po studiu a 68 procent v případě sady proměnných pro současnou práci. Zbývající část tvoří vybrané charakteristiky dané pozice, konkrétně typ pracovní smlouvy a práce podle kvalifikace, a dále individuální charakteristiky jednotlivých absolventů a absolventek, a sice vzdělání, hodnoty, praxe měřená prací v době ukončení studia, ukazatele aktivity na trhu práce, práce v Praze a v případě současné práce ještě spokojenost s prací a zkušenost s nezaměstnaností. Naopak věk GPG snižoval.

Uvedené faktory odráží vliv odlišností mezi absolventkami a absolventy na GPG. Kromě toho rozklad ukazuje, že jsou stejné charakteristiky absolventů a absolventek v některých případech odlišně odměňovány, což rovněž ovlivňuje velikost GPG. Nejvýrazněji se to projevuje v případě věku, dále práce v době ukončení studia, hodnot, a co se týče práce rok po ukončení studia, také v případě vykonávání práce, ke které nebylo potřebné vysokoškolské vzdělání. U všech těchto faktorů se jedná z větší části o zvýhodnění mužů spíše než o znevýhodnění žen, ke kterému významněji přispěla pouze práce v době ukončení studia. Naopak u současné práce se absolventkám lépe než absolventům zhodnotilo vykonávání práce stejné jako v době rok po ukončení studia a práce ve veřejném sektoru, tyto faktory působily proti zvýhodnění absolventů i znevýhodnění absolventek. Vysokých hodnot ovšem dosahovala konstanta představující vliv nezahrnutých faktorů. Zatímco u práce rok po dokončení studia působila konstanta jako faktor snižující GPG, a to zejména zvýhodnění mužů (v menší míře přispěla ke znevýhodnění žen), tak u současné práce působila směrem ke zvýšení GPG, a sice formou znevýhodnění žen.

Při podrobnějším srovnání vlivu jednotlivých faktorů na velikost GPG u práce rok po studiu a u současné práce je patrné, že v průběhu času klesá význam vstupních předpokladů, jako je konkrétní výše dosaženého vysokoškolského vzdělání, délka praxe či věk. Ačkoli celková velikost GPG po několika letech od absolvování studia roste, velikost příspěvku výše dosaženého vzdělání i délky praxe (měřené prací v době absolvování studia) k velikosti GPG klesá. V případě věku, který naopak působí směrem ke snižování GPG, dochází k poklesu podílu na jeho velikosti, tj. po několika letech od dokončení studia věk přispívá relativně méně ke snížení GPG než rok po studiu. Působení věku jako faktoru snižujícího GPG může souviset s výrazně početnějším zastoupením žen v kategorii nad 40 let.

U současné práce, na rozdíl od práce rok po studiu, odpovídali respondenti i na otázku, v jakém sektoru ekonomiky pracují. Ukázalo se, že práce ve veřejném či soukromém neziskovém sektoru představuje více než pětinu vysvětlené části GPG u současné práce. Vzhledem ke skutečnosti, že rozšíření sady proměnných u současné práce vedlo pouze k malému zvýšení podílu vysvětlené části GPG, je patrné, že vliv sektoru ekonomiky u práce rok po studiu zahrnul přinejmenším z části další proměnné. Zavedení samostatné proměnné pro sektor ekonomiky by tak mělo vést ke zmenšení velikosti příspěvku těchto proměnných (nebo aspoň menšímu nárůstu jejich vlivu) u současné práce. Alternativní výpočet rozkladu u současné práce bez zahrnutí proměnných týkajících se sektoru ekonomiky ukázal, že velikost vysvětlené části GPG se v tomto případě oproti práci rok po studiu nezměnila. Mírný nárůst podílu vysvětlené části tak lze připsat zahrnutí sektoru ekonomiky. Kromě toho by nezahrnutí sektoru znamenalo namísto poklesu výrazný nárůst vlivu odvětví ekonomiky podle NACE, který by představoval přibližně polovinu vysvětlené části GPG u současné práce. Sektor ekonomiky je tak při svém nezahrnutí mezi sadu proměnných zprostředkovaný z velké části prostřednictvím faktoru odvětví a představuje jeho významnou část. Velikost i vliv odvětví se tak zvýšily, navíc po odečtení vlivu sektoru u současné práce je velikost příspěvku odvětví ke GPG srovnatelná s velikostí příspěvku odvětví u práce rok po studiu bez odečtení vlivu sektoru, který představuje jeho podstatnou část. Lze proto předpokládat, že ve srovnání s prací rok po studiu roste u současné práce vliv odvětví i sektoru na velikost GPG. To souvisí s odlišnou dynamikou vývoje odměňování v jednotlivých odvětvích a sektorech ekonomiky. Vliv sektoru zprostředkovává nejen odvětví, ale v menší míře i práce podle ISCO, smlouva na dobu určitou a hodnoty, konkrétně preference dobrého platu, a dále věk. Při nezahrnutí proměnných týkajících se sektoru ekonomiky vliv těchto faktorů na velikost GPG stoupá, v případě věku dokonce ze záporných hodnot do kladných. U ostatních proměnných má nezahrnutí sektoru ekonomiky zanedbatelný vliv na jejich význam pro velikost GPG.

Jestliže se s rostoucím časovým odstupem od ukončení studia snižuje vliv vstupních předpokladů na výši odměňování, zvyšuje se naopak vliv nejen odvětví a sektoru

ekonomiky, ale i individuálního kariérního postupu (a celkově tedy i genderové segregace). Kariérní postup ve smyslu etablování a zlepšování vlastní pozice na trhu práce znamená posun směrem ke stabilnější, kvalifikovanější a odpovědnější práci. Ten se projevuje u absolventů i absolventek poklesem vlivu práce neodpovídající výši vzdělání na velikost GPG, výrazným poklesem vlivu smluv na dobu určitou i poklesem podílu kategorie práce podle ISCO na vysvětlené části GPG. V průběhu několika let od ukončení studia dochází k posunu části absolventů a absolventek do vyšších kategorií ISCO, patrně to je zvláště u růstu vlivu nejvyšší kategorie zahrnující řídící pracovníky. S tím souvisí i růst vlivu výkonu vedoucí funkce. Ke kariérnímu posunu dochází u absolventů i absolventek, ovšem zatímco u mužů jde častěji o získání vedoucích a řídících pozic (tj. posun na odpovědnější funkce), u žen se častěji jedná o získání smlouvy na dobu neurčitou (tj. získání stabilnější pozice). To je důsledkem vyšší míry prekarizace práce u absolventek rok po dokončení studia, s níž souvisí i častější zkušenost s nezaměstnaností, jejíž vliv na GPG je nicméně okrajový. Ačkoli se během několika let od ukončení studia celkový GPG zvyšuje, vliv kariérního postupu na tento rozdíl se spíše snižuje.

Důležitým faktorem ovlivňujícím chování na trhu práce jsou motivace a hodnoty jednotlivých absolventů a absolventek. V tomto datovém souboru jsou reprezentovány formou otázek na motivaci ke studiu. Ukázalo se, že celkově se vliv hodnot na velikost GPG během několika let od ukončení studia nemění, ovšem mírně klesá vliv preference prestižního oboru studia a stoupá vliv preference dobrého platu.

Vzhledem ke skutečnosti, že navzdory rozšíření sady proměnných u současné práce se pouze málo zvýšil podíl vysvětlené části na celkovém GPG, lze na základě těchto dat identifikovat příčiny zvýšení tohoto rozdílu během několika let od ukončení studia pouze přibližně z poloviny (tj. zvýšení nastalo zejména vlivem faktorů souvisejících s odvětvím a sektorem ekonomiky). Druhá polovina tohoto zvýšení i celkového GPG je způsobena vlivem nezahrnutých faktorů, jejichž existenci nasvědčuje i velikost konstanty u nevysvětlené části GPG. Zatímco v případě práce rok po studiu konstanta snižovala GPG, u současné práce působila v jeho prospěch. K této změně přispěl i pokles vlivu vstupních charakteristik, zejména věku.

Diskuse

Cílem této studie bylo zmapovat velikost GPG absolventů vysokých škol v České republice v jejich zaměstnání rok a několik let po absolvování studia, zjistit, do jaké míry k ní přispívají sledované faktory, a konkrétně odpovědět na tři výzkumné otázky.

První výzkumná otázka se týkala celkové velikosti GPG a její změny během několika let od absolvování studia. Celková velikost GPG byla v případě zaměstnání rok po ukončení studia přibližně 22 procent a v případě zaměstnání několik let po ukončení studia, tj. současné práce vykonávané v době sběru dat, přibližně 28 procent.

Druhá výzkumná otázka se týkala hlavních příčin GPG a jejich proměn během několika let od absolvování. Velikost vysvětlené části GPG se u práce rok po studiu i u současné práce pohybovala okolo poloviny, takže sledované faktory mohou vysvětlit přibližně polovinu GPG, zatímco zbývající nevysvětlená část připadá na faktory nezahrnuté do výzkumu. Hlavní příčiny GPG představují různé formy segregace, zejména horizontální (odvětví a sektor ekonomiky) i vertikální (výkon vedoucí funkce), dále pak práce podle ISCO, typ pracovní smlouvy, konkrétní výše dosaženého vysokoškolského vzdělání či preferované hodnoty spojené s volbou oboru studia. Segregace podle odvětví a sektoru ekonomiky výrazně souvisí s volbou studijního oboru, jehož vliv však nelze na základě těchto dat přímo měřit. Srovnání v čase ukazuje, že s postupem doby od absolvování klesá význam vstupních předpokladů (výše vzdělání, délka praxe či věk) a zvyšuje se nejen vliv odvětví a sektoru ekonomiky, ale také individuálního kariérního postupu. Tím lze přinejmenším z části vysvětlit i růst velikosti GPG během několika let od absolvování studia, neboť pokud tyto faktory působí příznivěji na růst příjmů u mužů než u žen, potom by s délkou jejich působení mělo docházet k růstu GPG. Tento efekt se však v období sledovaném tímto šetřením projevuje zejména u odvětví a sektoru (vysvětluje přibližně polovinu nárůstu GPG během několika let od ukončení studia), neboť kariérního postupu ve smyslu získání kvalifikovanější, odpovědnější a stabilnější práce dosahují muži i ženy. Ovšem zatímco u mužů se větší měrou jedná o postup na vedoucí pozice (tj. odpovědnější práce), u žen je častější díky vyšší počáteční prekarizaci získání smlouvy na dobu neurčitou (tj. stabilnější pozice).

V případě nevysvětlené části zahrnující odlišné odměňování stejných charakteristik nejvíce přispívá ke GPG odlišné odměňování vstupních charakteristik jako věku a délky praxe (vliv obojího během několika let od absolvování klesá, ale zůstává významný) a v menší míře hodnot, ve všech případech spíše v podobě zvýhodnění mužů než znevýhodnění žen. Ve srovnání s vysvětlenou částí mají podstatně menší vliv faktory týkající se kariérního postupu a různých forem segregace, významnou roli hrají nezahrnuté faktory reprezentované konstantou.

Třetí výzkumná otázka se týká vlivu konkrétní výše dosaženého vysokoškolského vzdělání na velikost GPG, pokud jsou rozlišeny jednotlivé typy studijních programů a vysokoškoláci netvoří souhrnnou kategorii. Analýza ukázala, že mezi absolventy vysokých škol představuje výše dosaženého vzdělání přibližně desetinu vysvětlené části GPG. To je dáno relativně vyšším podílem žen mezi absolventy bakalářských studijních programů ve srovnání s magisterskými a doktorskými studijními programy.

Podobně jako v řadě dalších zemí se ukazuje, že velikost GPG mezi absolventy vysokých škol je vyšší než u ostatních vzdělanostních skupin (Evertsson et al. 2009) a během několika let od absolvování práce narůstá, přičemž vysokých hodnot dosahuje už krátce po absolvování (např. Braakman 2008; Napari 2008). V zahranič-

ní literatuře není shoda na tom, zda se na vzniku GPG u absolventů vysokých škol podílí větší měrou vzdělávací systém (tj. obor studia), nebo trh práce (zaměstnání, profese, odvětví, sektor ekonomiky atd.). Data z tohoto šetření neumožňují zkoumat vliv oboru studia, vzhledem k nutnosti specializovaného vzdělání u některých profesí však lze určitý vliv předpokládat. Na druhou stranu velikost příspěvku odvětví a sektoru ekonomiky i charakteristik zaměstnání naznačují významnou roli trhu práce při vzniku GPG i po zohlednění oboru studia, přičemž vliv trhu práce patrně v průběhu času narůstá. Tomu nasvědčuje klesající význam vstupních charakteristik, mezi které by patřil i obor studia. Výchozí data rovněž neumožňují podrobněji analyzovat vliv preferencí ohledně kariéry a rodinného života, ovšem zahrnuté proměnné týkající se hodnotových orientací respondentů naznačují vyšší preferenci kariérních hodnot u mužů podobně jako v zahraničí (např. Chevalier 2004).

Tato studie rovněž navazuje na zjištění z předchozích výzkumů příčin GPG v české společnosti jako celku a v řadě případů potvrzuje jejich platnost. Jak bylo řečeno výše, většinu vysvětlené části GPG představují faktory týkající se horizontální a vertikální segregace, jejíž vysoká míra je dlouhodobým rysem trhu práce v České republice a ovlivňuje výrazně velikost GPG (např. Křížková, Penner, Petersen 2008; Křížková et al. 2018). Tato studie potvrzuje rovněž rostoucí vliv odvětví na velikost GPG (např. Mysíková 2019).

Výchozí datový soubor pro tuto studii neumožňoval sledovat vliv průměrné mzdy na pracovišti coby nejvýznamnější charakteristiky firmy či pracoviště (Křížková et al. 2018), nicméně velký význam odvětví a sektoru ekonomiky u současné práce naznačuje, že část vlivu průměrné mzdy na pracovišti se mohla projevit zprostředkovaně přes tuto proměnnou s ohledem na odlišnou dynamiku vývoje odměňování ve veřejném a soukromém sektoru. Ve studii Křížkové et al. (2018) měl sektor ekonomiky pouze malý a v posledních letech klesající vliv (odvětví mělo větší vliv, avšak nižší oproti této studii). Lze předpokládat, že z části je rostoucí význam odvětví a sektoru ekonomiky mezi prací rok po studiu a současnou prací absolventů projevem obecného růstu vlivu tohoto faktoru na GPG, z části se ovšem může jednat o dynamiku kariér absolventů a absolventek. Na rozdíl od studie Pospíšilové a Křížkové (2023) práce v Praze přispívá ke zvýšení GPG.

Tato studie potvrzuje zjištění předchozích studií (např. Mysíková 2012), že práce mužů má lepší charakteristiky z hlediska pozice v hierarchii organizace, typu pracovní smlouvy apod., jakkoli vliv těchto charakteristik na velikost GPG v posledních letech spíše klesá (Křížková et al. 2018; Mysíková 2019). Absolventi i absolventky během několika let po ukončení studia zažívají kariérní posun a zlepšuje se finanční ohodnocení jejich práce, z hlediska celkového vlivu charakteristik práce na GPG ale k výraznějším změnám nedochází. Podobně jako ve srovnávací studii Triventiho (2013) se ukazuje,

že v České republice patří mezi hlavní faktory GPG absolventů charakteristiky práce a pracoviště (včetně sektoru a odvětví), přičemž vliv těchto faktorů je vysoký i v mezinárodním srovnání.

Předchozí studie dále ukazují, že individuální charakteristiky či vybavenost lidským kapitálem mají na velikost GPG buď malý či žádný vliv (Křížková, Penner, Petersen 2008; Mysíková 2007a, 2007b; Křížková et al. 2018), nebo i záporný vliv (Mysíková 2012), a to rovněž u absolventů (Triventi 2013), u nichž je nízký také v mezinárodním srovnání. Navíc dlouhodobě vliv individuálních charakteristik na velikost GPG spíše klesá, zejména v důsledku rostoucí participace žen ve vysokoškolském vzdělání. V těchto studiích však byla v kategorizaci výše vzdělání zavedena pouze jedna kategorie „vysokoškolské vzdělání“ bez rozlišení různých typů studijních programů. Při jejich zohlednění se však ukazuje, že individuální charakteristiky stále vysvětlují určitou část GPG (viz výše).

Cílem této studie bylo rozšířit poznání příčin a utváření GPG v České republice, konkrétně na specifické skupině absolventů a absolventek vysokých škol. Dostupná data navíc umožnila sledovat vývoj GPG během několika let po ukončení studia a jeho dynamiku v čase a také zkoumat vliv některých faktorů nesledovaných v jiných výzkumech na toto téma. Například se jednalo o rozlišení typu studijního programu, umožňující zohlednit vnitřní stratifikaci kategorie vysokoškolsky vzdělaných lidí. Současně má tento výzkum i řadu limitů. Mezi ně patří zejména nepokrytí některých faktorů důležitých pro utváření GPG (z důvodu jejich absence v původním dotazníku či nízké návratnosti), zejména týkajících se charakteristik zaměstnavatele (velikost organizace, domácí či zahraniční vlastník atd.), rodičovství (počet dětí, preference ohledně rodinného života a jeho sladění s prací), sociálně-psychologických charakteristik (soutěživost, asertivita, extraverte atd.) či kognitivních a nekognitivních kompetencí.

Závěry této studie nabízí řadu možností, jakým směrem dále pokračovat ve výzkumu v této oblasti. Jde o zohlednění nezahrnutých faktorů, opakování podobného výzkumu na absolventech s určitým časovým odstupem, zohlednění typu studijního programu namísto souhrnné kategorie pro všechny absolventy vysokých škol či například podrobnější zkoumání příčin vyšší míry prekarizace práce krátce po ukončení studia u absolventek ve srovnání s absolventy. Jako přínosný se ukázal kvazilongitudinální charakter této studie, tj. sledování vývoje skupiny lidí v čase prostřednictvím jednorázového sběru dat, který umožnil zohlednit dynamiku vývoje GPG v čase. Hlubší vhled do otázky utváření GPG by tak mohlo vnést využití metod (kvazi)longitudinálního výzkumu nejen pro absolventy terciárního vzdělávání, ale například pro absolventy sekundárního vzdělávání či jiné skupiny zaměstnanců. Přínosné by rovněž bylo provádět srovnání absolventů vysokých škol a nižších stupňů vzdělávání a zkoumat

příčiny rozdílu ve velikosti GPG u těchto skupin, do jaké míry je tento rozdíl daný odlišným dopadem různých faktorů, jako jsou různé formy segregace na trhu práce, rodičovství či výše středního příjmu u těchto skupin.

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Příloha

Tabulka 3: Popisné charakteristiky vzorku podle zahrnutých proměnných

			Práce rok po studiu		Současná práce		Práce rok po studiu		Současná práce	
			Muži	Ženy	Muži	Ženy	Muži (%)	Ženy (%)	Muži (%)	Ženy (%)
Věk	vek_1rok	Do 25 let	689	1729	144	560	14,59	22,18	3,05	7,18
		26–30 let	2864	3865	2809	4407	60,63	49,57	59,46	56,52
		31–35 let	445	495	897	933	9,42	6,35	18,99	11,97
		36–40 let	305	504	337	475	6,46	6,46	7,13	6,09
		41 a víc let	421	1204	537	1422	8,91	15,44	11,37	18,24
Vzdělání	Bc	Absolvent/ka bakalářského studia	814	2167	814	2167	17,23	27,79	17,23	27,79
	Mgr*	Absolvent/ka magisterského studia	3589	5376	3589	5376	75,97	68,94	75,97	68,94
	PhD	Absolvent/ka doktorského studia	321	254	321	254	6,80	3,26	6,80	3,26
Hodnoty	rozvoj_vzdelanosti_znalosti_schopnosti	Absolvent/ka se rozhodl/a pro studijní obor, aby mohl/a rozvíjet svou vzdělanost, znalosti a schopnosti (ano)	4305	7197	4305	7197	91,13	92,30	91,13	92,30
	rozvoj_vzdelanosti_znalosti_schopnosti_ne*	Absolvent/ka se rozhodl/a pro studijní obor, aby mohl/a rozvíjet svou vzdělanost, znalosti a schopnosti (ne)	419	600	419	600	8,87	7,7	8,87	7,7
	Zajimavaprace	Absolvent/ka se rozhodl/a pro studijní obor, aby mohl/a získat zajímavou a naplňující práci (ano)	3934	6433	3934	6433	83,28	82,51	83,28	82,51
	Zajimavaprace_ne*	Absolvent/ka se rozhodl/a pro studijní obor, aby mohl/a získat zajímavou a naplňující práci (ne)	790	1364	790	1364	16,72	17,49	16,72	17,49
	Dobryplat	Absolvent/ka se rozhodl/a pro studijní obor, aby mohl/a získat dobře placenou práci (ano)	3221	4615	3221	4615	68,18	59,19	68,18	59,19
	Dobryplat_ne*	Absolvent/ka se rozhodl/a pro studijní obor, aby mohl/a získat dobře placenou práci (ne)	1503	3182	1503	3182	31,82	40,81	31,82	40,81
	Prestiznistudium	Absolvent/ka se rozhodl/a pro studijní obor kvůli jeho vysoké prestiži (ano)	2345	3375	2345	3375	49,64	43,29	49,64	43,29
	Prestiznistudium_ne*	Absolvent/ka se rozhodl/a pro studijní obor kvůli jeho vysoké prestiži (ne)	2379	4422	2379	4422	50,36	56,71	50,36	56,71
Praxe	prace_pri_ukonceni_studia	Absolvent/ka měl/a práci v době absolvování studijního programu	2907	4565	2907	4565	61,54	58,55	61,54	58,55
	prace_pri_ukonceni_studia_ne*	Absolvent/ka neměl/a práci v době absolvování studijního programu	1817	3232	1817	3232	38,46	41,45	38,46	41,45
Aktivita na trhu práce	zmenaprace_1rok	Absolvent/ka vykonává jinou práci, než jakou vykonával/a v době absolvování studia nebo v jaké začal/a prvně pracovat po absolvování (ano)	899	1502	–	–	19,03	19,26	–	–
	zmenaprace_1rok_ne*	Absolvent/ka vykonává jinou práci, než jakou vykonával/a v době absolvování studia nebo v jaké začal/a prvně pracovat po absolvování (ne)	3825	6295	–	–	80,97	80,74	–	–
	stejnaprace_jako1rokpostudiu	Absolvent/ka vykonává stejnou práci jako v době jeden rok po absolvování studia	–	–	3420	5664	–	–	72,40	72,64
	stejnaprace_jako1rokpostudiu_ne*	Absolvent/ka nevykonává stejnou práci jako v době jeden rok po absolvování studia	–	–	1304	2133	–	–	27,6	27,46
	zmenaprofeseodrokupostudiu	Změna profese absolventa/absolventky od doby rok po absolvování studia (ano)	–	–	962	1638	–	–	20,36	21,01
	zmenaprofeseodrokupostudiu_ne*	Změna profese absolventa/absolventky od doby rok po absolvování studia (ne)	–	–	3762	6159	–	–	79,64	78,99
	zmenaodvetviodrokupostudiu	Změna odvětví práce od doby rok po absolvování studia (ano)	–	–	625	1085	–	–	13,23	13,92
	zmenaodvetviodrokupostudiu_ne*	Změna odvětví práce od doby rok po absolvování studia (ne)	–	–	4099	6712	–	–	86,77	86,08
Region	Praha_1rok	Práce v Praze rok po studiu (ano)	1583	2126	–	–	33,51	27,27	–	–
	Praha_1rok_ne*	Práce v Praze rok po studiu (ne)	3141	5671	–	–	66,49	72,73	–	–
	Praha_souc	Práce v Praze v současnosti (ano)	–	–	1598	2156	–	–	33,83	27,65
	Praha_souc_ne*	Práce v Praze v současnosti (ne)	–	–	3126	5641	–	–	66,17	72,35
Pozice na pracovišti	vedouci_1rok	Vedoucí/řídící pozice v práci rok po studiu (ano)	1415	1860	–	–	29,95	23,86	–	–
	vedouci_1rok_ne*	Vedoucí/řídící pozice v práci rok po studiu (ne)	3309	5937	–	–	70,05	76,14	–	–
	vedouci_souc	Vedoucí/řídící pozice v současné práci (ano)	–	–	2017	2546	–	–	42,70	32,65
	vedouci_souc_ne*	Vedoucí/řídící pozice v současné práci (ne)	–	–	2707	5251	–	–	57,30	67,35
Typ zaměstnavatele	verejnyselator_souc	Práce ve veřejném sektoru v současnosti	–	–	1589	4013	–	–	33,64	51,47
	soukromyziskovyselator_souc*	Práce v soukromém ziskovém sektoru	–	–	3001	3244	–	–	63,52	41,61
	soukromyneziskovyselator_souc	Práce v soukromém neziskovém sektoru v současnosti	–	–	84	411	–	–	1,78	5,27
	jinaforma_souc	Práce u zaměstnavatele s jinou formou (např. družstvo) v současnosti	–	–	50	129	–	–	1,06	1,65

			Práce rok po studiu		Současná práce		Práce rok po studiu		Současná práce	
			Muži	Ženy	Muži	Ženy	Muži (%)	Ženy (%)	Muži (%)	Ženy (%)
Práce podle kvalifikace	prace_podlevysevzdelani_1rok	Práce, pro kterou je nejvhodnější stejné či vyšší dosažené vzdělání (rok po studiu)	3596	5501	–	–	76,12	70,55	–	–
	prace_podlevysevzdelani_1rok_ne*	Práce, pro kterou není nejvhodnější stejné či vyšší dosažené vzdělání (rok po studiu)	1128	2296	–	–	23,88	29,45	–	–
	prace_podlevysevzdelani_souc	Práce, pro kterou je nejvhodnější stejné či vyšší dosažené vzdělání (v současnosti)	–	–	4002	6190	–	–	84,72	79,39
	prace_podlevysevzdelani_souc_ne*	Práce, pro kterou není nejvhodnější stejné či vyšší dosažené vzdělání (v současnosti)	–	–	722	1607	–	–	15,28	20,61
	prace_voborustudia_1rok	Práce, pro kterou je nejvhodnější stejný či příbuzný obor studia (rok po studiu)	3756	5913	–	–	79,51	75,84	–	–
	prace_voborustudia_1rok_ne*	Práce, pro kterou není nejvhodnější stejný či příbuzný obor studia (rok po studiu)	968	1884	–	–	20,49	24,16	–	–
	prace_voborustudia_souc	Práce, pro kterou je nejvhodnější stejný či příbuzný obor studia (v současnosti)	–	–	3875	6190	–	–	82,03	79,39
	prace_voborustudia_souc_ne*	Práce, pro kterou není nejvhodnější stejný či příbuzný obor studia (v současnosti)	–	–	849	1607	–	–	17,97	20,61
	prace_mozna_bezVS_1rok	Práce, kterou lze vykonávat i bez VŠ (rok po studiu)	1928	3446	–	–	40,81	44,20	–	–
	prace_mozna_bezVS_1rok_ne*	Práce, kterou nelze vykonávat bez VŠ (rok po studiu)	2796	4351	–	–	59,19	55,80	–	–
	prace_mozna_bezVS_souc	Práce, kterou lze vykonávat i bez VŠ (v současnosti)	–	–	1518	2696	–	–	32,13	34,58
	prace_mozna_bezVS_souc_ne*	Práce, kterou nelze vykonávat bez VŠ (v současnosti)	–	–	3206	5101	–	–	67,87	65,42
Pracovní smlouva	smlouvanaurcito_1rok	Smlouva na dobu určitou u práce rok po studiu	1356	3069	–	–	28,70	39,36	–	–
	smlouvaneurcito_1roke*	Smlouva na dobu neurčitou u práce rok po studiu	3368	4728	–	–	71,30	60,64	–	–
	smlouvanaurcito_souc	Smlouva na dobu určitou u současné práce	–	–	609	1666	–	–	12,89	21,37
	smlouvaneurcito_souc*	Smlouva na dobu neurčitou u současné práce	–	–	4115	6131	–	–	87,11	78,63
Spokojenost s prací	spokojenostspraci_souc	Spokojenost se současnou prací	–	–	3638	5845	–	–	77,01	74,96
	nespokojenostspraci_souc*	Nespokojenost se současnou prací	–	–	1086	1952	–	–	22,99	25,04
Zkušenost s nezaměstnaností	nezamestnanost_1rok	Zkušenost s nezaměstnaností po absolvování studia (ano)	–	–	796	1522	–	–	16,85	19,52
	nezamestnanost_1rok_ne*	Zkušenost s nezaměstnaností po absolvování studia (ne)	–	–	3928	6275	–	–	83,15	80,48
Práce podle zaměstnání (ISCO)	ISCO_1_1rok	ISCO 1: Zákonodárci a řídící pracovníci (práce rok po studiu)	478	602	–	–	10,12	7,72	–	–
	ISCO_1_souc	ISCO 1: Zákonodárci a řídící pracovníci (současná práce)	–	–	656	745	–	–	13,89	9,55
	ISCO_2_1rok*	ISCO 2: Specialisté (práce rok po studiu)	2866	3954	–	–	60,67	50,71	–	–
	ISCO_2_souc*	ISCO 2: Specialisté (současná práce)	–	–	2816	4056	–	–	59,60	52,03
	ISCO_3_1rok	ISCO 3: Techničtí a odborní pracovníci (práce rok po studiu)	893	1803	–	–	18,90	23,12	–	–
	ISCO_3_souc	ISCO 3: Techničtí a odborní pracovníci (současná práce)	–	–	863	1760	–	–	18,27	22,57
	ISCO_4_1rok	ISCO 4: Úředníci (práce rok po studiu)	243	1000	–	–	5,14	12,83	–	–
	ISCO_4_souc	ISCO 4: Úředníci (současná práce)	–	–	196	885	–	–	4,15	11,35
	ISCO_5_1rok	ISCO 5: Pracovníci ve službách a prodeji (práce rok po studiu)	125	333	–	–	2,65	4,27	–	–
	ISCO_5_souc	ISCO 5: Pracovníci ve službách a prodeji (současná práce)	–	–	111	259	–	–	2,35	3,32
	ISCO_6_10_1rok	ISCO Ostatní (práce rok po studiu)	119	105	–	–	2,52	1,35	–	–
	ISCO_6_10_souc	ISCO Ostatní (současná práce)	–	–	82	92	–	–	1,74	1,18
Práce podle odvětví (NACE)	NACE_3_1rok	NACE C: Zpracovatelský průmysl (práce rok po studiu)	583	449	–	–	12,34	5,76	–	–
	NACE_3_souc	NACE C: Zpracovatelský průmysl (současná práce)	–	–	612	479	–	–	12,96	6,14
	NACE_6_1rok	NACE F: Stavebnictví (práce rok po studiu)	307	236	–	–	6,50	3,03	–	–
	NACE_6_souc	NACE F: Stavebnictví (současná práce)	–	–	297	233	–	–	6,29	2,99
	NACE_10_1rok	NACE J: Informační a komunikační činnosti (práce rok po studiu)	606	297	–	–	12,83	3,81	–	–
	NACE_10_souc	NACE J: Informační a komunikační činnosti (současná práce)	–	–	635	321	–	–	13,44	4,12
	NACE_11_1rok	NACE K: Peněžnictví a pojišťovnictví (práce rok po studiu)	213	316	–	–	4,51	4,05	–	–
	NACE_11_souc	NACE K: Peněžnictví a pojišťovnictví (současná práce)	–	–	216	317	–	–	4,57	4,07
	NACE_13_1rok	NACE M: Profesní, vědecké a technické činnosti (práce rok po studiu)	746	475	–	–	15,79	6,09	–	–
	NACE_13_souc	NACE M: Profesní, vědecké a technické činnosti (současná práce)	–	–	748	484	–	–	15,83	6,21
	NACE_14_1rok	NACE N: Administrativní a podpůrné činnosti (práce rok po studiu)	126	688	–	–	2,67	8,82	–	–
	NACE_14_souc	NACE N: Administrativní a podpůrné činnosti (současná práce)	–	–	116	650	–	–	2,46	8,34
	NACE_15_1rok	NACE O: Veřejná správa a obrana; povinné sociální zabezpečení (práce rok po studiu)	437	760	–	–	9,25	9,75	–	–
	NACE_15_souc	NACE O: Veřejná správa a obrana; povinné sociální zabezpečení (současná práce)	–	–	442	827	–	–	9,36	10,61
	NACE_16_1rok	NACE P: Vzdělávání (práce rok po studiu)	416	1546	–	–	8,81	19,83	–	–
	NACE_16_souc	NACE P: Vzdělávání (současná práce)	–	–	409	1562	–	–	8,66	20,03
	NACE_17_1rok	NACE Q: Zdravotní a sociální péče (práce rok po studiu)	327	1695	–	–	6,92	21,74	–	–
	NACE_17_souc	NACE Q: Zdravotní a sociální péče (současná práce)	–	–	317	1685	–	–	6,71	21,61
	NACE_ostatni_1rok*	NACE: ostatní sekce (práce rok po studiu)	963	1335	–	–	20,38	17,12	–	–
	NACE_ostatni_souc*	NACE: ostatní sekce (současná práce)	–	–	932	1239	–	–	19,72	15,88
Celkem			4724	7797	4724	7797	100	100	100	100

* Vynechané referenční kategorie.
Zdroj: Absolvent 2018.

Tabulka 4: Vysvětlená část rozkladu GPG absolventů a absolventek v práci, kterou měli rok po studiu (koeficienty rozkladu jednotlivých faktorů v procentních bodech)

Faktor	Proměnná	Coef.	S.E.
	(Intercept)	0***	0,000
Věk	vek_1rok	-0,38***	0,001
Vzdělání	Bc	1,1***	0,001
	PhD	0,41***	0,001
Hodnoty	rozvoj_vzdelanosti_znalosti_schopnosti	-0,01	0,000
	zajimavaprace	-0,04***	0,000
	dobryplat	0,31***	0,001
	prestiznistudium	0,24***	0,001
Praxe	prace_pri_ukonceni_studia	0,22***	0,001
Aktivita na trhu práce	zmenaprace_1rok	0	0,000
Region	Praha_1rok	1,02***	0,002
Pozice na pracovišti	vedouci_1rok	0,49***	0,001
Práce podle kvalifikace	prace_podlevysevzdelani_1rok	0,57***	0,001
	prace_voborustudia_1rok	0,02	0,000
	prace_mozna_bezVS_1rok	0,06**	0,000
Pracovní smlouva	smlouvanaurcito_1rok	1,24***	0,001
Práce podle zaměstnání (ISCO)	ISCO_1_1rok	0,23***	0,001
	ISCO_3_1rok	0,18***	0,000
	ISCO_4_1rok	0,89***	0,001
	ISCO_5_1rok	0,15***	0,000
	ISCO_6_10_1rok	-0,09***	0,000
Práce podle odvětví (NACE)	NACE_3_1rok	0,87***	0,001
	NACE_6_1rok	-0,09	0,000
	NACE_10_1rok	1,93***	0,002
	NACE_11_1rok	0,06***	0,001
	NACE_13_1rok	0,84***	0,001
	NACE_14_1rok	0,09	0,001
	NACE_15_1rok	0	0,000
	NACE_16_1rok	1,0***	0,001
	NACE_17_1rok	-0,19	0,001
	(Base)	-0,08	0,000

Poznámka: Hvězdičky označují hladinu statistické významnosti: * na hladině $p < 0,05$; ** na hladině $p < 0,01$; *** na hladině $p < 0,001$.

Zdroj: Absolvent 2018.

Tabulka 5: Vysvětlená část rozkladu GPG u absolventů a absolventek v práci, kterou měli v době realizace výzkumu (koeficienty rozkladu jednotlivých faktorů v procentních bodech)

Faktor	Proměnná	Coef.	S.E.
	(Intercept)	0***	0,000
Věk	vek_souc	−0,4***	0,001
Vzdělání	Bc	1,04***	0,001
	PhD	0,34***	0,001
Hodnoty	rozvoj_vzdelanosti_znalosti_schopnosti	0,01	0,000
	zajimavaprace	−0,03***	0,000
	dobryplat	0,48***	0,001
	prestiznistudium	0,18***	0,000
Praxe	prace_pri_ukonzeni_studia	0,19***	0,001
Aktivita na trhu práce	stejnaprace_jako1rokpostudiu	0,02***	0,001
	zmenaprofeseodrokupostudiu	0,01	0,000
	zmenaodvetviostrokovostudiu	0,03***	0,000
Region	Praha_souc	1,13***	0,002
Pozice na pracovišti	vedouci_souc	0,87***	0,001
Typ zaměstnavatele	verejnysektor_souc	2,26***	0,002
	soukromyneziskovysektor_souc	0,75***	0,001
	jinaforma_souc	0,11***	0,000
Práce podle kvalifikace	prace_podlevysevzdelani_souc	0,45***	0,001
	prace_voborustudia_souc	0,03	0,000
	prace_mozna_bezVS_souc	0,07***	0,000
Pracovní smlouva	smlouvanaucito_souc	0,78***	0,001
Spokojenost s prací	spokojenostspraci_souc	0,13***	0,001
Zkušenost s nezaměstnaností	nezamestnanost_1rok	0,2***	0,001
Práce podle zaměstnání (ISCO)	ISCO_1_souc	0,53***	0,001
	ISCO_3_souc	0,15***	0,000
	ISCO_4_souc	0,78***	0,001
	ISCO_5_souc	0,06***	0,000
	ISCO_6_10_souc	−0,06***	0,000
Práce podle odvětví (NACE)	NACE_3_souc	0,66***	0,001
	NACE_6_souc	−0,29***	0,001
	NACE_10_souc	2,12***	0,002
	NACE_11_souc	0,06***	0,000
	NACE_13_souc	0,77***	0,001
	NACE_14_souc	0,16*	0,001
	NACE_15_souc	−0,06***	0,000
	NACE_16_souc	1,04***	0,001
	NACE_17_souc	−0,11	0,002
	(Base)	0,01	0,000

Poznámka: Hvězdičky označují hladinu statistické významnosti: * na hladině $p < 0,05$; ** na hladině $p < 0,01$;

*** na hladině $p < 0,001$.

Zdroj: Absolvent 2018.

„Je to moje dítě, člověk udělá všechno pro svoje dítě“: Jak rodiče prožívají tranzici vlastního dítěte¹

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‘It’s My Child, a Person Will Do Everything for Their Own Child’: How Parents Experience Their Child’s Transition

Abstract: This paper explores the parent’s experience of their child’s transition. I focus here on parents’ experiences of their trans* child’s coming-out, the emergence of ambivalent feelings of loss and remorse, and perceptions of themselves as ‘good parents’. For this research, a qualitative analysis of interviews with parents whose child identifies as trans* was conducted. The analysis suggests that, for some parents, the child’s coming out came as a surprise, while others perceived at an early age that their daughter or son was developing in a different way from what they considered to be the norm. The transition of a child is a challenging life situation for parents. They struggle to come to terms with the situation, often themselves experiencing the loss of the child’s original gender identity. Some find support online and seek out the advice of other parents in similar situations. Crucial to them, however, as this research shows, is their experience with doctors and psychologists and their satisfaction with their child’s diagnosis. Care for the child’s mental health and trusting the child’s own judgement appear to be key in the parents’ experience.

Keywords: parenting, trans*, child, coming out, family

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Péče o zdraví trans* dětí v České republice

Problematika trans*² dětí a dospívajících je v České republice stále více rozvíjena v odborném, mediálním i celospolečenském diskurzu. Rodiče jsou v procesu tranzice dětí klíčovými aktéry, protože za ně nesou odpovědnost a rozhodují o jejich zdraví. Bez schválení rodiče v procesu tranzice nelze medicínsky zakročit a dítě musí počkat do dovršení plnoletosti.

Téma péče o zdraví trans* dětí v souvislosti s rodičovskou odpovědností je proto klíčovým bodem této práce. V rodičovské odpovědnosti je dle práva kladen důraz na zájem samotného dítěte, na jeho vlastní názor, který rodiče mají brát v úvahu (Portál veřejné správy 2024). Jak zmiňují Daňšová, Lacinová, Seryjová Juhová (2021), rodičovství s sebou nese nároky na vlastní emoční regulaci a emoční práci. Zvládání vlastních emocí rodičů přispívá k lepšímu wellbeingu dětí. Podle Hays in Daňšová, Lacinová, Seryjová Juhová (2021) současná společnost klade velké nároky na výchovu a péči o děti. Rodiče mohou získávat informace o tom, co je dobrá výchova, z mnoha zdrojů a očekává se od nich odbornost v péči o dítě. Autorky v tomto ohledu nemluví o trans* dětech, ale o výchově dětí jako takové. Jak bylo zmíněno, rodiče nesou odpovědnost za dítě a jeho zdraví a mají rozhodovací pravomoc v jeho případné tranzici. V následující části proto představuji český odborný diskurz v tématu zdravotní péče o trans* děti. Mezi odborné zdroje patří především knihy a další příspěvky sexuoložky Hany Fífkové, která je významnou osobností v trans* diagnostice, a to právě i u dětí a dospívajících. I někteří participanté mého výzkumu s ní měli zkušenost při tranzici svého dítěte. Fífková je autorkou řady textů na trans* téma. Spolu s Petrem Weisssem a Davidem Neumannem je autorkou dokumentu *Doporučený postup péče o děti a dospívající s poruchami pohlavní identity (GID)*, vypracovaného pro Sexuologickou společnost ČLS JEP. Ten zároveň částečně vychází z knihy Hany Fífkové et al. (2008) *Transsexualita a jiné poruchy pohlavní identity*, kterou lze v České republice považovat za kanonickou ve svém oboru, jelikož alternativy v této oblasti téměř nejsou. Kniha však byla vydána před 16 lety, takže nereflektuje současnou situaci, například stále pracuje s pojmem „transsexualita“. Světová zdravotnická organizace (WHO) již schválila rezoluci o odstranění diagnózy „porucha pohlavní identity“, ze seznamu diagnóz. Nyní je aktuální termín „genderový nesoulad“ (Doležalová et al. 2021). ČLSP JEP však zatím s termínem porucha pohlavní identity pracuje. Odborníci však nejsou jednotní nejen v terminologii, ale také v samotném přístupu k trans* dětem a jejich rodičům.

Podle zmíněných doporučení Sexuologické společnosti pro práci s dětmi a mladistvými by měl sexuolog rodině poskytnout informace a poradenství, měl by nabídnout možnosti péče o pacienty. V rámci psychosociálních zákroků by měla mít rodina

² Ve své práci používám jednotně termín trans* pro pokrytí široké škály genderových identit.

podporu: „Odborníci by měli pomáhat rodinám v budování vstřícného a láskyplného postoje vůči dítěti trpícího (sic) pohlavní dysforií“ (Fifková, Weiss, Neumann 2023). Fifková se zabývá i doporučením, jak by měli rodiče reagovat v situaci, kdy se jim dítě svěří s tím, že je trans*. Podle ní by měli ocenit důvěru, kterou jim dítě projevuje, nebrat celou situaci na lehkou váhu, snažit se pomoci a komunikovat s dítětem. Dále by měli vyhledat odborníka, pokud bude dítě mít zájem, a komunikovat situaci i se školou (Fifková 2023). Ze *Standardů péče o transgender a genderově rozmanité osoby*, verze č. 8, také vyplývá důležitost zapojení a přístupu rodičů:

Dospívající obvykle závisí z hlediska odpovědnosti a výchovy na svých pečovateli/rodičích. Toto platí i při rozhodování o možnostech lékařské péče. Doporučení 6.11 zdůrazňuje důležitost zapojení pečovatelů/rodičů a hovoří o roli, kterou v hodnocení a poskytování péče hrají. Neexistuje však soubor pokynů, které by dokázaly zohlednit všechny individuální okolnosti v globálním kontextu. (Heumann 2024: 43)

V České republice byla dále publikována brožura *Transgender lidé v lékařské praxi* (2019), kterou na svých webových stránkách sdílí organizace Trans*parent. Brožura dává doporučení praktickým lékařům pracujícím s trans* pacienty. Mimo jiné se zaměřuje i na pediatri, kterým radí, aby rodičům poskytli informace o sexuologických pracovištích. Při dotazech na hormonální terapii nebo blokátory hormonů mají být rodiče pediatri odkázáni na sexuologické nebo endokrinologické pracoviště. Brožura dále klade důraz na citlivou lékařskou péči a respekt vůči dětem i rodičům. Lékaři mají podle této příručky respektovat genderovou rozmanitost, věřit svým pacientům, být jim oporou a dodávat pocit bezpečí. Konkrétně autorský tým v brožuře uvádí hesla: „respektujte“, „důvěřujte“, „chraňte“, „podporujte“ (Transgender lidé v lékařské péči 2019). Tím je kladen důraz na nepatologizaci tranzice, stejně jako v publikaci *Standardy péče o transgender a genderově rozmanité osoby*, verze č. 8, (Heumann 2024). V rámci odborného diskurzu na téma trans* dětí a dospívání se však ukazují i odlišné přístupy. Článek sexuologa Vlastimila Chvály a dětské klinické psychologky Ludmily Trapkové (2022) pojednává o nezletilých s GID³ z perspektivy rodinné terapie a rodiny obecně. Podle Chvály a Trapkové může problematika dětí s GID vzejít z rodinného prostředí (uvádějí například trauma, zneužití nebo špatnou vazbu s rodiči). Důležité je, jak tvrdí, zaměření na „bio-psycho-sociální zdroje“ této situace, protože: „Nelze se spokojit s bizarním (sic), snad až buddhisticky znějícím vysvětlením, že se ‚narodily do špatného těla‘.“ (Chvála, Trapková 2022: 35) Rodinná terapie podle nich tedy doporučuje přijetí tranzice rodiči až „tehdy, když byla překonaná vývojová stag-

³ Autoři používají termín GID – gender incongruence dysforie.

nace celé rodiny. Nestačí vysvětlení o údajně vrozeném původu poruchy.” (Chvála, Trapková 2022: 39) Chvála a Trapková v tomto do značné míry nenaplnují doporučení Sexuologické společnosti a nejsou podporující a respektující, jako je podobně doporučováno lékařům v brožuře *Transgender lidé v lékařské praxi*. Svoji rétorikou se staví kriticky k přijímajícímu postoji k trans* dětem. Upozorňují na rozdílné zkušenosti rodičů s lékaři a psychology, kdy někteří u odborníků naleznou respektující a podporující přístup, jiní ne.

Halberstam uvádí, že současný neoliberalismus situuje trans* dítě jako oběť nebo pacienta. Jako oběť potřebuje ochranu či zastání, jako pacient či pacientka potřebuje péči (Halberstam 2018: 53). I v rámci českého odborného diskurzu se v souvislosti s tranzicí dítěte objevují medikalizující termíny jako „psychologizující zákroky“, „porucha pohlavní identity“, mluví se i o tom, že dítě „trpí pohlavní dysforií“ (Fifková et al. 2023).

Na základě rozdílných přístupů odborníků k tranzici u dětí je patrné, jak zásadně se mohou lišit zkušenosti rodičů a trans* lidí při procesu tranzice. Tento nesoulad mezi odbornou veřejností umocňuje morální paniku ohledně trans* dětí, která ve společnosti vzrůstá. K tomuto stavu přispěla i kniha *Nevratné poškození*, vydaná v letošním roce. Americká novinářka Abigail Shrier se v ní zabývá trans* tematikou v souvislosti s dětmi, kriticky se staví k respektujícímu přístupu k jejich tranzici. Kniha již v popisu pojednává o „novodobé epidemii“ trans* mladých lidí. Publikace letos vyšla i v českém jazyce a získala si velkou mediální pozornost. Knihu doporučuje rodičům k přečtení zmíněný sexuolog Chvála a psychologka Trapková. O to větší tlak padá na rodiče samotné. Rodiče se v této situaci mohou řídit tvrzením lékařů a psychologů, lidmi ve svém okolí nebo na internetu. Mohou naslouchat potřebám svého dítěte, nebo jim bránit. Rodiče mají odpovědnost a také moc nad dítětem. Osud lidí s nesouladem rodu a pohlaví je ovlivněn mocí lékařů, osud takových dětí zároveň rodiči.

Rodiče mezi odpovědností za dítě a zachováním vlastní psychické pohody

Rodičů se zásadně dotýká téma rodičovské odpovědnosti a hranic v procesu tranzice jejich dětí. Nabízí se otázka, kde rodiče vnímají, že odpovědnost stojí na nich, a kde už na samotném dítěti. Jasně mantinely rodičovské odpovědnosti nabízí česká legislativa, nechává však prostor pro vyjednávání v rámci rodiny. Téma vyjednávání, respektive komunikace v rodině je akcentováno i v současné sociologii. Giddens v souvislosti s dnešní společností zmiňuje „čistý vztah“, který je založen na důvěře a otevřenosti. Je v něm důležitý dialog a vůle k porozumění druhým. Týká se i vztahu rodičů a dětí, přestože ten není zcela rovnocenný. Rodič má nad dítětem pravomoc, autoritu a nevyslovenou důvěru. Děti však mohou nesouhlasit, být slyšet (Giddens 2000: 82). Mezi

dítětem a rodičem panuje nerovný vztah. Dítě je na rodiči závislé, rodič má vůči dítěti povinnosti. „Toto téma otevírá otázku povahy a sociálních limitů autonomního výkonu těchto práv a povinností, jež patří k podstatě rodičovství.“ (Možný 2002: 132)

Podle Mikulak (2022) rodičovství trans* nebo nebinárního dítěte může být pro rodiče samotné emocionálně a sociálně náročné. Klade na ně specifické požadavky, které pocházejí z převládajícího cisgenderismu a transfobie ve společnosti. Rodiče tímto sami čelí předsudkům ohledně trans* lidí. Mohou se setkat se stigmatizací, strachem o budoucnost dítěte a dalšími negativními pocity (Mikulak 2022: 18). Sociolog Martin Fafejta zmiňuje, že tranzice člena či členky rodiny může být velmi bolestná především pro jeho či její rodiče. Ti svému dítěti od mala připisovali genderové role – učili ho být „správnou dívkou“ nebo „správným chlapcem“. Pokud to ale děti „poruší“, z dcery automaticky přestává být rodičova dcera a syn už není syn (Fafejta 2016). Rodiče pak mohou mít pocit, že pochybili v genderové výchově dítěte (Bockting, Knudson, Goldberg 2006). Ve studii Pullen Sansfaçon et al. (2022) zmiňovalo mnoho rodičů stres, obavy, a dokonce i smutek po coming outu dítěte. Dostali se tím do pozice, kterou neznali. Museli zvládnout novou situaci spojenou se vznikající identitou svého dítěte (Pullen Sansfaçon et al. 2022). Rodiče mohou cítit vinu, že si genderové dysforie dítěte nevšimli dříve. Pochybují občas, jestli dělají ohledně tranzice správnou věc (Aramburu Alegria 2018). Studie Biancotto et al. (2023) poukazuje na podobné prožívání u rodičů LGBTQIA+ dětí. Výsledky potvrzují, že rodiče zažívají při coming outu dětí stres, který je podobný zármutku. Jedná se o destabilizující událost podobnou ztrátě blízké osoby (Biancotto et al. 2023). Mikulak však uvádí, že rodiče si případnou pocítovanou ztrátu nespojují s trans* dítětem samotným, ale spíše s ohrožením cispornativity ve svém životě. Vnímají ztrátu privilegií, které cispornativita přináší (Riggs, Bartholomaeus in Mikulak 2022). Pro rodiče se jedná o novou situaci, ve které musí sami přemýšlet o genderu svého dítěte, což ovlivňuje jejich vlastní identitu (Field, Mattson 2016). Pocity ztráty v souvislosti s tranzicí dítěte jsou často popisovány v zahraničních studiích, například Kuvalanka, Weiner, Mahan (2013) nebo Aramburu Alegria (2018). Rodiče mají obavu o budoucnost svých dětí či jejich bezpečí.

Na základě uskutečněných výzkumů je patrné, že klíčovým aspektem v rodičovském prožívání tranzice dítěte je cispornativita ve společnosti. Vnímání genderových norem se těmito okolnostmi může narušit. Rodiče se ocitají pod tlakem odpovědnosti za dítě, učinění správného rozhodnutí a zachování si vlastní psychické pohody. Dosavadní české texty věnující se danému tématu se zaměřují na doporučení pro rodiče, jak postupovat a být dětem oporou. Celý proces tranzice je však náročný i pro rodiče samotné. Na základě toho se v této práci zaměřuji na proces tranzice dětí z perspektivy jejich rodičů. Jak tedy rodiče prožívají tranzici svých dětí v českém prostředí a jak k ní přistupují?

Metodologie a charakteristika výzkumného souboru

Text je postaven na polostrukturovaných rozhovorech s rodiči dětí, které se identifikují jako trans*. Rozhovory proběhly online na platformě Google Meet na základě preferencí zapojených participantů do výzkumu⁴. Rozhovory byly realizovány v rozmezí let 2021 a 2022, zapojili se 4 rodiče.

Při rekrutaci participantů do výzkumu byla umístěna výzva k zapojení na facebookový profil organizace Trans*parent a na facebookovou skupinu Transgender BEZ hranic - LGBTIQ+ CZ/SK, sdružující trans* lidi, jejich blízké i širší veřejnost. Jednalo se o výzvu, která rekrutovala participanty komplexně do mého disertačního výzkumu, který zahrnuje trans* lidi, jejich partnery a partnerky, děti i rodiče. Specificky rodiče, se kterými pracuji v rámci tohoto článku, se mi touto cestou nepřihlásili žádní. Zapojení rodiče byli nakonec osloveni napřímo, dále přes trans* participantku výzkumu, se kterou jsem vedla rozhovor. Ta na mě předala kontakt svému rodiči, který se se mnou spojil. Jeden rodič se mi ozval na výzvu ve skupině přímo pro trans* rodiče⁵, kam byla přesdílena ze skupiny Transgender BEZ hranic - LGBTIQ+ CZ/SK. Shánění participantů z řad rodičů trans* lidí se ukázalo být velmi náročné oproti kontaktování samotných trans* lidí.

Pro účely rozhovorů byly připraveny otázky týkající se rodiny, rodinných vztahů a zázemí. První otázku jsem pojala obecně, vyzvala jsem participanty rozhovoru, aby mi začali povídat o své rodině. Tím jsem chtěla docílit toho, aby sami začali určovat, koho za svou rodinu považují a které vztahy jsou pro ně klíčové. Někteří na základě této první otázky sami pokračovali ve vyprávění a postupně, aniž by byli tázáni, odpovídali na velkou část otázek, které jsem měla připravené. Poté jsem se jen doptala na zbylé otázky. Většina dotazovaných však potřebovala rozhovor více strukturovat, proto jsem se držela připraveného scénáře. Postupně jsem se ptala na otázky týkající se coming outu dítěte, okolností, během kterých k němu došlo, a jak na něj reagovali další členové rodiny. Zajímala jsem se, jak následně prožívali období tranzice a s jakými těžkostmi, ať už vnitřními či vnějšími, se setkali. Ptala jsem se tedy na proces tranzice uvnitř rodiny i v souvislosti se sociálním okolím, školou, sousedstvím, zaměstnáním a také v souvislosti s psychologem, lékařem nebo úřady.

Rozhovory byly nahrávány a následně přepsány do textové podoby. Participantů byli předem informováni o předmětu výzkumu, do kterého se zapojují, o možnosti odstoupení od rozhovoru a také o anonymizaci dat. S nahráváním udělili souhlas. Zís-

⁴ Rozhovory probíhaly v období pandemie covid-19, kdy se stala online setkávání čím dál obvyklejšími. Přestože rodičům byla nabídnuta i možnost setkání naživo, zvolili online variantu.

⁵ Do této skupiny mohou vstoupit pouze rodiče trans* dětí, já do ní přístup neměla.

Tabulka 1: Biografie rodičů, se kterými jsem vedla rozhovor

Klára	Matka 11letého trans* syna Michala. Žije s manželem a jejich dvěma dětmi. Kromě Michala má ještě staršího syna.
Tomáš	Otec 10leté trans* dcery Julie. Žije s manželkou a jejich třemi dětmi. Kromě Julie má ještě starší dceru a syna.
Martina	Matka 24leté trans* dcery Radky. Žije sama bez partnera. Kromě Radky má ještě mladšího syna.
Apolena	Matka 18leté trans* dcery Idy. Žije s manželem a jejich dvěma dětmi. Kromě Idy má ještě druhou dceru.

kaná data byla podrobena tematické analýze. Jde o kvalitativní analytickou metodu, která hledá souvislosti mezi tématy objevujícími se v rozhovorech a vytváří abstraktní konstrukce mezi výrazy (Ryan, Bernard 2003). Postup tematické analýzy zahrnuje nejprve seznámení s daty, pročitání dokumentů, dále kódování a hledání témat, která se pojí k předmětu výzkumu. Následuje práce s tématy, jejich kontrola a pojmenování a nakonec zformování analytické práce do textové podoby (Clarke, Braun 2006).

Kromě mnou realizovaných rozhovorů se v textu opírám o rozhovory s rodiči publikované v rámci pořadu *V Tranzu*⁶ na kanálu YouTube v sekci Příběhy rodičů. Jedná se o 10 rozhovorů s rodiči trans* dětí, realizovaných trans* moderátorkou Lenkou Královou. Všichni zúčastnění rodiče mají potomka, který je nezletilým dítětem nebo mladým dospělým, jenž ale započal tranzici ještě před dovršením 18 let. Rodiče v těchto případech tedy byli aktivními aktéry v procesu tranzice svého dítěte, vůči kterému zastávali rozhodovací roli. Tato data jsem nezpracovávala stejným způsobem jako vlastní rozhovory. Byla použita za účelem triangulace dat a posloužila mi pro doplnění a rozšíření analytické části práce. Nevzešla z nich žádná klíčová témata analýzy, byla jimi dosycena data mnou realizovaných rozhovorů s trans* rodiči. Videá jsou veřejně dostupná, proto v rámci analýzy používám jména uvedená přímo ve videích. Jedná se o tyto zúčastněné: Alena, Barbora, Eva, Kateřina, Ludmila, Petr, Marie, Pavlína, Viera, Zdeňka.

Je důležité zmínit, že zapojení rodiče měli přijímající přístup k tranzici, přestože v některých případech nenastal okamžitě. Analýza tedy nezahrnuje rodiče, kteří tranzici jasně odmítají.

⁶ https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLkq74gkRpE4e_-KE7-N41syoAMl3k3JW

Tabulka 2: Biografie rodičů, se kterými byl veden rozhovor v rámci pořadu V Tranzu (informace jsou stručnější než v rámci rozhovorů, které jsem vedla já):

Alena	Matka dospělé trans* dcery. Manžel Peter, otec dcery, se také zúčastnil rozhovoru v rámci pořadu V Tranzu. Bydlí na Slovensku.
Barbora	Matka nezletilé trans* dcery.
Eva	Matka dospělého trans* syna.
Kateřina	Matka nezletilé trans* dcery.
Ludmila	Matka nezletilého trans* syna.
Marie	Matka dospělé trans* dcery.
Pavčina	Matka dospělého trans* syna. Bydlí na Slovensku.
Peter	Otec dospělé trans* dcery. Manželka Alena, matka dcery, se také zúčastnila rozhovoru v rámci pořadu V Tranzu. Bydlí na Slovensku.
Viera	Matka dospělé trans* dcery. Bydlí na Slovensku.
Zdeňka	Matka dospělé trans* dcery.

Na základě analýzy dat jsem vytvořila několik tematických kapitol, které v práci dále rozvádím. Má zjištění se týkají:

1. coming outu trans* dítěte, pocitů rodičů souvisejících s touto změnou,
2. prožívání ztráty v souvislosti s tranzicí dítěte a hledání opory v této situaci,
3. otázek, zda participant samí sebe mohou vnímat jako dobré rodiče, a zodpovědnosti za proces tranzice dítěte.

V první části se věnuji tomu, jak rodiče prožívají coming out svého dítěte, což je zásadní změna v rodině. Rodiče se vyjadřují k této situaci a retrospektivně vyprávějí o momentech, kdy vnímali, že se jejich dítě genderově projevuje jinak, než by očekávali. Strategie a prožívání jednoho rodiče nemusí být vždy v souladu s druhým rodičem. Zjištění dále reflektují genderové rozdíly v přístupu matek a otců k tranzici.

Druhá analytická část se zaměřuje na pocity ztráty a výčitek. Rodiče po coming outu dítěte často zažívají nepohodu a postupně si navykají na novou situaci v rodině. Někdo i přemýšlí nad tím, zda šlo situaci předejít. Rodiče v některých případech hledají oporu v online prostředí a vyhledávají zkušenosti jiných trans* rodičů.

V závěrečné části se věnuji zodpovědnosti rodiče za zdraví dítěte a zodpovědnosti samotného dítěte za vlastní zdraví. Rodiče kladou důraz na fyzické i duševní zdraví dítěte. Vkládají důvěru v lékaře a psychology a jejich postupy často nezpochybňují,

pokud nejsou v zásadním rozporu a dítě v procesu tranzice podporují. Zároveň mají rodiče důvěru i ve vlastní dítě a zodpovědnost je pro ně tímto v rukou samotné trans* osoby.

Cílem výzkumu je odpovědět na otázku: „Jak rodiče prožívají tranzici svých dětí a jak k ní přistupují?“

Moje dítě je trans. Rodičovská zkušenost s coming outem vlastních dětí

Z vyprávění rodičů vyplývá, že rodičovské zkušenosti se výrazně liší v tom, zda a kdy rodiče očekávali coming out svého dítěte. Martina si dodnes nevybavuje, že by se její dcera Radka kdy chovala „žensky“. Když vzpomíná na Radčino dětství, nevybavuje si nic, co by její trans* identitě nasvědčovalo. Přemýšlí, jestli by se Radčině tranzici dalo vyvarovat, kdyby výchova byla jiná. Přesto rázem zmiňuje, že už ví, že jde o danou věc. Protiřečí si a z jejích slov je patrná nejistota: „*Do dneska si říkám, jestli tam nebyla někdy chyba, která by se dala ovlivnit, ale jak jsem pochopila od různých lidí, i od Radky, tak člověk to tak má. Nevím, jestli se to dalo ovlivnit.*“ I pro Kláru byl coming out jejího syna šok. Říká, že ho nečekala. Přesto vzápětí zmiňuje, že pozorovala jeho „mužskou identitu“ během her. Myslela si však, že jde jen o hraní, proto tomu nepřikládala velkou váhu. V následující citaci Klára používá genderovou identitu, od které se její syn Michal již distancuje: „*Furt si hrál na kluka v těch deseti letech, venku na tý zahradě hráli bojovky a vždycky chtěla být kluk...*“ Podobně i Tomáš a Martina mluví zpětně z doby před tranzicí o svém dítěti v genderové roli, se kterou se nyní dítě již neidentifikuje. Apolena a Tomáš poznamenávají, že genderové odlišnosti u svých dětí pozorovali téměř od narození. Všimli si, že se jejich dcery od útlého věku profilují spíše „žensky“. Pozorovali to u výběru hraček nebo vyhledávání holčičích kolektivů v předškolním věku.

I někteří rodiče, se kterými byl realizován rozhovor v rámci pořadu *V Tranzu*, mají podobné zkušenosti. Někteří z těchto rodičů vnímali, že se jejich dítě již v útlém věku vyvíjí podle nich genderově nestandardně. Často tomu ale nepřikládali velký význam. Například dcera Marie si od mala ráda hrála s panenkami, i když stále vystupovala v chlapecké roli. Rodiče opakovaně zmiňovali, že tyto pro ně genderově nestandardní projevy považovali za dětskou hru a nepokládali za nutné se jimi více zabývat. Tito rodiče na základě svých výpovědí vycházejí jako ti, kteří se neupínají k genderově binární výchově. Nechávali všemu volný průběh. Ludmila s Kateřinou říkaly, že samy měly rády klučičí kolektivy a mužský svět, proto to pro ně nic neznamenalo. I ti rodiče, kteří tranzici neočekávali, tvrdí, že si všimli, že se jejich dítě trápí nebo něco řeší. Nečekali však, že by se jednalo o trans* téma. Rodiče často retrospektivně vnímají, že dítě se genderově projevovalo jinak, než očekávali. Zpočátku je to významně nezne-

pokojovalo, až když se k tomu připojily i psychické problémy dítěte. V případě Kláry, Aleny a Ludmily došlo ke změnám v rodině během pandemie covid-19. Všechny tři ženy období pandemie tematizují v rámci svého vyprávění. Je to pro ně období, které poskytovalo podmínky, ve kterých se lidé více zaměřují sami na sebe a mohou přemýšlet nad svojí identitou. Ludmila a Eva mluví o období puberty, kterou jejich dítě procházelo během coming outu. Nebyly si jisté, jestli jde skutečně o problém genderové identity, nebo důsledek přirozených hormonálních změn. Z těchto vyprávění rodičů vyplývá, že si všímali, že se s jejich dětmi něco děje, jen některé však napadlo, že by se mohlo jednat o problém genderové identity. Po coming outu dítěte začali rodiče situaci řešit uvnitř rodiny i s odborníky.

V následující části práce se věnuji rodičovství jako procesu vyjednávání mezi rodiči. Účastníci tohoto výzkumu reflektovali také postoj druhého rodiče k tranzici společného dítěte. Jedná se například o Tomáše, který má v rámci tématu specifickou zkušenost tím, že je psychologem a sám pracuje i s trans* klientelou. Jeho praxe je tak velmi odlišná od ostatních rodičů, kteří se museli s trans* tématem více seznamovat. I přes toto specifikum Tomáš tvrdí, že se se situací srovnával pomaleji než matka dítěte, a zmiňuje i menší konflikty, ke kterým mezi nimi docházelo. Nejednalo se však o větší problémy a záležitost s trans* dítětem v rodině byla spíše propojující. Podle studie Kovalanka et al. (2013) v rodině může docházet ke konfliktům mezi dvěma rodiči trans* dítěte, pokud se k situaci staví každý jinak. V některých případech dochází i k nepřijetí tranzice dítěte a jeho vybočování od genderových rolí, ke kterým jej rodiče vedli. Apolena říká, že otec dítěte přijal identitu jejich dcery ještě lépe než ona, konflikty neměli. Martina na rozdíl od Tomáše a Apoleny nežije s otcem Radky a jeho postoj moc neřeší. Otec s ní ani s Radkou téměř není v kontaktu. Má k tranzici negativní postoj, ale zbytek rodiny pro jeho minimální zapojení nepovažuje jeho přístup za důležitý.

Klára tvrdí, že její manžel nesl synovu tranzici výrazně hůře: „*Ten pořád s tím nějak bojuje a doufá, že se to třeba nějak... že je to jenom nějaká přechodná fáze a jednou to třeba přejde.*“ Jeho složité vyrovnávání se s tranzicí, jak říká Klára, ovlivňuje i povědomí o tom, že někteří trans* lidé projdou detranzicí. Dle Klářina vyprávění otec Michala doufá, že k tomu u jejich syna dojde, ačkoliv se jedná o velmi malé procento případů⁷. Nevzdává se vidiny toho, že bude mít „zase“ dceru. Klára říká, že se v důsledku přístupu otce jejich dítěte cítí být na všechno dost sama. Chodí se synem k lékařům a dalším odborníkům: „*On se před tím schovává, před tou situací,*

⁷ Z výzkumu Olson et al. (2022), realizovaného mezi dětmi ve věku 3–12 let, které prošly binární sociální tranzicí, vyplývá, že do pěti let od tranzice se pouze 2,5 % účastníků výzkumu identifikovalo jako cisgender, další 3,5 % jako nebinární.

jakoby tomu není schopnej, mi přijde, čelit, on mi říká, že by to [chození k lékaři] asi nezvládl.“ Dokonce v jejich rodině došlo ke sporu mezi otcem a trans synem. Syn se vzepřel otci, protože vnímal, že má s jeho tranzicí problém a dává velký důraz na to, co si o rodině myslí okolí: „No a ten syn mu vyložene řekl, že by prostě tohle dělat neměl, že by se měl postavit za nás, jako za svoje děčka, za svoji rodinu, držet při nás a nevšímat si toho, co ti ostatní říkají.“*

Klára vnímá, že je toho na ni moc: „*Já jako maminka v tý rodině mám strašně hodně naložený, jak se s tímhle poprat, někdy bych ocenila nějakou pomoc, ...*“ Problémy, které Klára zmiňuje v rámci své zkušenosti, otevírají téma rozdílných přístupů a prožívání matek a otců. Matky jsou viditelnější i v online prostoru, kromě toho jsem je i potkala na akci k tématu trans* rodičovství⁸, kam se přišly podívat a poradit ohledně svých dětí. Klára přemýšlí, proč jsou matky v rámci tématu tranzice angažovanější než otcové:

Že my jsme takový tahounky, že to musíme všechno jako vést a organizovat a ti tatínkové se tam přichomejtnou, což je taky dobře, ale radši mě z toho vynech, jak můžeš. To mi přijde takový zvláštní, já nevím, čím by to mohlo být, jestli tou výchovou těch mužů u nás, nebo proč to tak je. Nebo že máma je taková, prostě že musí držet všechno, nevím. (Klára)

Studená a Hasmanová Marhánková zmiňují, že genderové vztahy „formují péči jako nekvalifikovanou přirozenou činnost žen“ (Studená, Hasmanová Marhánková 2022: 80). Z výzkumu Haškové et al. (2022), realizovaného po pandemii covid-19, také vyplývá, že matky jsou stále primárními pečovatelkami v rodině. Jedná se i o rodiny, které vykazovaly rozvolněné genderové role v domácích pracích. Matky v tomto krizovém období převzaly péči o děti od uzavřených institucí. Přijaly ji za svou a nijak ji nezpochybňovaly (Hašková et al. 2022). Matky trans* dětí také přijímají roli ochránkyně a pečovatelky za svou. Na základě rozhovorů i pozorování na besedě na trans* téma je patrné, že matky vykazují rozsáhlou péči o potomka, i když je dítě již dospělé. Mluví o svých obavách, zjišťují informace o trans* problematice a chtějí svoje děti chránit. Podobně jako péči za pandemie berou za svou péči i za této nestandardní situace.

Otcové z vyprávění o rodině „vypadávají“. Z participantů mého výzkumu je jen jeden, Tomáš, otcem trans* dítěte. Je psychologem a zvládá v širších souvislostech reflektovat důvody, proč se otcové tolik neangažují. I on sdílí, že měl zprvu problém

⁸ Talk show „Rodina za hranicí genderu“ v rámci doprovodného programu festivalu Mezipatra 6. 11. 2021.

situaci přijmout, trvalo mu to déle než matce dítěte. Tomáš se dle svého vyprávění musel srovnat s tím, že se vzdává syna. Sám to dává za důsledek patriarchálního nastavení společnosti. Podstatná věc, kterou zmiňuje, je, že muži často od rodiny odcházejí nebo se stáhnou, pokud dojde k nějakému většímu zásahu do rodinného nastavení. Může jít například o situace, kdy má dítě určité znevýhodnění. Dle jeho zkušeností muži tuto situaci často nezvládnou a vnitřně s ní bojují:

Já bych tomu asi nabídl ještě svůj pohled, že pracoval jsem taky s rodinami, kde bylo dítě se speciálními potřebami, korektně řečeno, to znamená třeba, já nevím, dítě, který neslyšelo nebo který bylo kombinovaně postižený, tak tam teda obrázek je úplně stejný. Ti muži z toho vymizeli, z té péče, někdy dokonce doslova opouštějí rodinu a ta moje hypotéza je, že je to nějaký jejich narcistní zranění, že to berou moc osobně, jako svoji újmu, že tohle neunesou. Že se stydět někde pořád trochu. Ale to je moje psychologická hypotéza. Že je to pro ně těžký, ale není to jen u transgender, ale ve všech rodinách, kde máte dítě se speciálními potřebami. Cross všechny diagnózy... Jakoby ten stereotyp pečovatelsky se znovu nastartuje. Nebo se posílí. (Tomáš)

Téma jsem řešila i s Martinou a Apolenou. Dotázané matky nevědí, co otcové prožívají, mají jen domněnky. Apolena si myslí, že to otec bere dobře, ale prý o svých pocitech nemluví. Potvrzuje to tvrzení Tomáše o otcovském přístupu. To samé Tomáš pozoroval i u dědečka své trans* dcery:

Jako kdybych měl říct úplně upřímně osobně za sebe, a myslím, že to mohl být případ toho tchána. Považuji se za člověka genderově korektního, citlivého, ale přece jenom narodil se mi syn a něco tam jako v myslí je, že se mi nechce vzdávat syna, takže ani jemu se nechce vzdávat vnuka. Takle patriarchální potřeba tam podle mě je, ale dá se s tím pracovat. Myslím, že u toho dědečka, to bylo ještě výraznější, že chtěl mít vnuka. (Tomáš)

Dotazované matky z pořadu *V Tranzu* také dokládají, že otcové jejich dětí přijímali situaci s obtížemi. Některé děti mají zároveň malý nebo žádný kontakt s otcem a téma otcovského vztahu s dítětem tak nebylo zásadním předmětem rozhovoru. Například Barbora řešila situaci, kdy otec dítěte tranzici přijal, ale jeho nová žena ne. To vedlo k situaci, kdy otec přestal s dítětem komunikovat. Pak se s tou partnerkou rozešli a on si k dítěti znovu našel cestu.

V rámci pořadu *V Tranzu* proběhl rozhovor i s jedním otcem, Peterem. Pro něho bylo přijetí taky náročné. Po coming outu prý v domácnosti nastalo „období ticha“, které trvalo asi 3–5 měsíců. Nijak se k tranzici nevyjadřoval, na nic se neptal, dceru

oslovoval mužským rodem s tím, že pro něho to bude stále kluk. Manželka ho v tomto ale přesvědčila, aby na dceru mluvil ženským rodem, a on ji poslechl. Manželka byla v tomto případě rodičem, který k tématu primárně hledal informace, kdo se k situaci stavěl proaktivně. Alena, Peterova manželka, popisuje proces podobně. Říká, že *„chlapi to vnímají úplně jinak než ženy, matky“*.

Klára interpretuje, že takhle to muži podle ní prožívají: *„A ono možná, nevím, to je můj osobní názor, že ti chlapi asi to tak nějak hůř chápou, mi tak přijde, tyhle věci. Že prostě si to vyčítá, co on udělal blbě a jak jsme ji vychovávali a co tohleto, jak se to mohlo stát.“* Klářino vyprávění nastiňuje problém s pocity výčitek a ztráty.

Je to moje selhání? Pocity ztráty a výčitek rodičů trans* dětí

Pro rodiče může tranzice jejich dítěte představovat velmi bolestivou záležitost. Někteří participantů dokonce přirovnávají tento zážitek k pocitům zažívaným při smrti někoho blízkého. Takovouto zkušenost sdílí například Apolena: *„Nejdřív to popíráte, nechcete to vidět, pak se začnete bát, pak začne panika, že se ukazuje řešení, a pak to přijmete.“* Zdeňka nepřirovnává situaci přímo ke smrti, ale je to pro ni, jako by jeden člověk odešel a přišel místo něj někdo jiný. Podobně svoje dojmy formulovala i Eva, jedno dítě přišlo, druhé odešlo. Ludmila říká, že se musela rozloučit s představou, kterou měla o svém dítěti. Podle Bockting, Knudson, Guldberg (2006) v této situaci nejdříve přichází šok a popírání skutečnosti, následně vztek a strach o trans* osobu, o to, jak s ní budou ostatní zacházet.

Apolena silně vnímala probíhající změnu a cítila potřebu zaznamenat období před tranzicí. Má doma archivované fotky, kde je její dcera jako malý kluk: *„Rychle jsem si udělala fotky z toho období, ale teď už to jsou vývojová stadia, už na ldu myslím jako na ldu odmalíčka, už to neodděluju. Před rokem to tak ještě nebylo.“* Apolena tímto dokládá přenesenou genderovou dysforii, se kterou se potýkala v průběhu tranzice ldy.

I „přijímající“ rodiče dokládají velký pocit ztráty a problémy s přijetím, které v době začátku tranzice zažívali. Dnes už jsou s novou identitou dítěte sžiti, ale vzpomínají na bolest provázející vyrovnávání. Klára své dítě podporuje, přesto popisuje svoje rozpolcené emoce. Od začátku tranzice svého syna podporovala, přesto cítila ztrátu a bezmoc nad situací, kterou nemá pod svojí kontrolou:

... ale byla jsem smutná, protože jsem si přála tu holčičku, a teď najednou jako by někdo přišel a řekl, šup žádná holčička není. Já z toho byla úplně hotová, že najednou se to tak změnilo a člověk nic nemůže dělat. Je to prostě mimo vaši kontrolu a jakoby něco ztratíte a zároveň něco získáte a je to strašně divnej pocit. (Klára)

Martina sdílí, jak silné emoce prožívá:

Chvílema si říkám, že bych chtěla všechno jinak, že se s tím nedokážu vyrovnat, že je to pro mě hrozně těžký, ale viděla jsem ten průběh u psychologů, psychiatrů, depresi, stavy úzkosti, kdy vypadal jinak, trápil se, teď vidím před sebou člověka, kterej je úplně jinej. (Martina)

Je pro ni ale důležitější, že teď už se Radka netrápí. Vidí u ní zlepšení psychického stavu, což jí potvrzuje, že její rodičovské rozhodnutí svou dceru v tranzici podpořit bylo správné, ač pro ni jako matku složité. Podobně je i pro některé jiné rodiče situace náročná a hůř se s ní srovnávají.

Barbora se obviňovala z toho, jestli něco neudělala špatně, lékařka, ke které docházeli, jí však vysvětlila, že to tím není. Situace byla pro Barboru o to náročnější, protože slyšela hlášky okolí, že když dítě nemá otce, tak se rozhodlo být samo klukem. Zdeňka se vůči tomuto postoji naopak vymezuje. Říká, že někteří rodiče si situaci vyčítají, jestli neudělali něco špatně. Pocit selhání nebo vlastního pochybení během výchovy dítěte zmiňuje Martina:

No já si spíš říkala, co jsem kdy udělala špatně, že se tohle vůbec stalo. Že kdybych to třeba viděla od dětství, nebo jak dospívala, vyrůstala, jako kdybych viděla nějakou změnu, tak by to pro mě bylo jiný. Tady já skutečně nikdy neviděla nic, jako že by se chtěla víc parádit, že by si libovala v nějakým oblečení nebo mi brala malovátky, naopak když byla kluk, tak říkám, ježiš nemůžeš si ty vlasy umejt, spíš obráceně. Pro mě to právě byl velkej zvrat, protože ženský jsou takový víc parádivý a víc se o sebe staraj, a tohle to byl takovej jinej obraz. Tam jsem si říkala, co já udělala špatně, furt jsem si nemohla vysvětlit, kdy se to stalo, kdy se stala nějaká chyba, nebo jestli to bylo tím, jak jsme ji vychovali nebo jakej jsme na ni měli vliv jako rodiče. (Martina)

Rodiče proto mohou vnímat tranzici svých dětí jako selhání své genderové výchovy, či obecněji svou výchovu jako selhání. Rodiče také popisují následné pocity ztráty, truchlení. Blízcí mohou mít potřebu vyhledat další rodiče s trans* dětmi. Dále přichází sebepoznání a změny, následně přijetí situace a nakonec hrdost na trans* osobu a případná osvěta o situaci ostatních lidí (Bockting et al. 2006). Podpora ze strany jiných rodičů je důležitá i v těch případech, kdy je pro rodiče dostupná profesionální péče (Pullen Sansfaçon et al. 2020). Podpora jiných rodičů, tzv. peer terapie, je pro rodiče klíčová. V případě mého výzkumu je rodiči také částečně zmiňována. Někdo z rodičů se pohybuje na facebookových skupinách s trans* tématikou, někdo se účastnil podpůrné skupiny, případně to plánuje. Podpůrné skupiny organizuje organizace

Trans*parent, největší organizace, která se zaměřuje na transgender problematiku v českém prostoru. Jedná se o organizaci, která pomáhá trans* lidem, poskytuje jim informace o tranzici, vytváří místo pro setkávání a sdílení. Organizace Trans*parent zajišťuje podpůrné skupiny pro trans* lidi, partnery a partnerky i rodiče trans* dětí. Mimo jiné se věnuje osvětové činnosti a spolupracuje i s médii (Trans*parent 2023). Podpůrné skupiny probíhají naživo i online a kladou důraz na zajištění bezpečného prostoru pro všechny zúčastněné a na nevynášení sdílených informací mimo skupinu. Konkrétně skupina pro rodiče je prezentována jako místo, kde si mohou vzájemně poradit a sdílet své zkušenosti s dětmi, které procházejí tranzicí. Setkání je určeno pouze pro rodiče bez jejich dětí. Popis skupiny na webové stránce uvádí rodiče trans* dětí jako ty, kteří „se často cítí sami a nevědí si ve své nové situaci rady“ (Trans*parent 2023).

Možnosti sdílení informací o tranzici nabízejí například i facebookové skupiny. Existují jak skupiny otevřené všem – tedy trans* lidem, jejich blízkým, ale i širší veřejnosti – tak i skupina soukromá, která je určena pouze pro rodiče trans* dětí a jiným lidem není vstup povolen. Jinými slovy tato facebooková skupina pro rodiče, podobně jako podpůrné skupiny, klade důraz na „bezpečný prostor“ při sdílení osobních zkušeností. Například Klára má dobrou zkušenost ze sociálních sítí: „... tak jsem se dala právě do takové skupinky na Facebooku, která je jako pro příbuzné a rodiče trans* lidí, kde občas si člověk může postěžovat, pomůžou mu třeba, doporučí mu toho hodného, vnímavého, chápavého profesionála.“

Skupiny, kde se sdružují jiní rodiče trans* dětí, jsou pro ni velmi nápomocné. Jsou místem, kde nalezne podporu, místem, kde si rodiče mohou postěžovat a pomoci, doporučit si i dobrého odborníka. Nezanedbatelný vliv má i pořad *V Tranzu*. Jedna matka dokonce zmiňovala, že do rozhovoru pro tento pořad šla právě kvůli tomu, aby sdílela svoje pocity s těžkostmi, které zažívala během tranzice svého dítěte. Domnívá se, že to může ostatním pomoci, pokud sami mají problém s přijetím této změny. Sdílení situace s jinými rodiči se potvrzuje jako klíčové. Ze studie Schlehofer, Cortez-Regan, Bush (2021) vyplývá, že rodiče, kteří se staví za své dítě a považují se za jeho obhájce, podporují nejen své dítě, ale i ostatní trans* děti. Rodiče v této studii cítili zodpovědnost za pomáhání a vzdělávání lidí, kteří procházejí stejnou zkušeností, a často svoji angažovanost považovali za nezbytnou. Mezi motivy patří rodičovské obavy a sociální spravedlnost. Podle Neary (2021) si rodiče uvědomují dopad edukace nejen ve prospěch svých dětí, ale i ostatních. Nechtějí změny jen pro své dítě individuálně, ale chtějí změnit systém fungování. Dělají tak advokační činnost za trans* děti (Neary 2021). Podobné zjištění dokládá i americká studie Abreu et al. (2022), která poukazuje na to, že rodiče v některých případech vnímají, že americké antigen-der státní a federální zákony a návrhy zákonů zvyšují společenskou stigmatizaci vůči trans* mládeži, jejich rodičům i trans* komunitě. Obavy vzrůstají i v případě vlivu na

zdravotní péči pro trans* mladé lidi. Rodiče zažívají smutek či vztek, vypořádávají se s touto situací formou aktivismu a advokacie, vzděláváním ostatních a vyhledáváním podpory z komunit, případně se snaží této situaci vyhnout odstěhováním do státu USA, kde tato opatření neprošla (Abreu et al. 2022).

Jsem dobrý rodič? Zodpovědnost rodičů za postup tranzice dětí

Kuvalanka et al. (2013) zmiňují, že rodiče trans* dětí mívají pocit, že jsou jinými matkami a otci vnímáni jako špatní rodiče. Touto zkušeností je narušen jejich rodičovský status. Například Klára má tyto obavy ze svého okolí. O tranzici syna moc nemluví, ale myslí si, že tento názor je mezi rodiči poměrně rozšířený. Rodina dokonce zvažuje stěhování do většího města, protože na vesnici si prý všichni všeho hned všimnou. Problém s tím má právě otec dítěte, který podle Kláry hodně řeší, co si o něm a o rodině ostatní myslí. Vnímají kolem sebe i vliv jiných rodičů, od kterých podle ní děti přejímají názory: „... protože to doma slyší, to máte jak s rasismem a všema těmahle věcmi, a některý křesťanský rodiny jsou tam hodně silný a mají tyhle homofobické názory.“ Klára v této souvislosti zdůrazňuje křesťanské prostředí, ve kterém se pohybuje. Vnímá ho problematicky a náboženský aspekt považuje za klíčový ukazatel při přijetí trans* osob.

Klára situaci ohledně tranzice dítěte konzultovala i ve škole s ředitelem, který ale tvrdí, že v pedagogickém sboru je spousta učitelů, kteří tranzici podle něho nepochopí, a Klára by měla o synových potřebách mluvit v souvislosti s úzkostmi. Syn je totiž v domácím vzdělávání. Komplikovanější to prý je i tím, že manžel je součástí pedagogického sboru této školy a obává se důsledků i pro sebe. Klára se bojí, že to budou vnímat stejně jako jedna psycholožka, kterou navštívili:

Budou to brát, jak říkala paní psycholožka, že my jsme si to vysvětlili, že chceme dalšího kluka, tak ho předěláváme podle sebe. Bez ohledu na to, co chce on. Přitom my bychom byli radši, kdyby byl holka a měl ten život jednodušší, ale ne.
(Klára)

Problém vnímá v tom, že lidé v této problematice nejsou dostatečně vzděláni. Škola by podle ní měla být prostorem, kde učitelé vědí, o co jde, a umí s tím pracovat. Tomáš naopak tento tlak nevnímá, protože prý žije v prostředí vysokoškoláků, mluví o „komunitě“, kde problém není. Klade tímto důraz na kulturní kapitál svých sousedů, který spojuje s otevřeností vůči trans* lidem. Ve studii Neary (2021) někteří rodiče přemýšlejí nad svým sociálním či kulturním kapitálem, díky kterým mají lepší vyjednávací pozici, respektive respekt od ostatních lidí. Vyšší sociální kapitál byl například zmíněn v rámci snazší komunikace rodičů s vedením školy ohledně potřeb jejich trans* dítěte (Neary

2021). Kladnou zkušenost z okolí svého bydliště má Apolena i Martina. Tito rodiče žijí na vesnici či maloměstě, přesto s tímto prostředím nemají špatnou zkušenost. Mluví o tom, že na vesnici se vše rozkřikne, ale s negativními reakcemi se nesetkali. Mezi mými účastníky, kteří jsou rodiči trans* dítěte, nebyl nikdo, kdo by měl pocit, že je vyloženě odsuzován jinými rodiči. Klára z toho má ale obavy. Problematika odsuzování jinými rodiči se tedy odehrává v myšlenkách, ne že by rodiče byli s touto situací reálně konfrontováni. Stigmatizace rodičů trans* dětí však někdy bývá problém. Podle studie Neary (2021) byli rodiče trans* dětí někdy odsuzováni příslušníky rodiny nebo přáteli, protože svému dítěti přiliš „dopřávají“. Peter, Alena Viera a Pavlína žijí na Slovensku a zmiňovali výrazně větší obavy z přijetí společností, než tomu bylo u Čechů. Obavy měli z nenávisti okolí. Své strachy někteří spojují i s politickou reprezentací Slovenska, kterou vnímají jako nepřívětivou k trans* osobám. Pavlína vyloženě říká, že je ráda, že její dítě nyní žije v České republice.

Apolena, Tomáš i Martina zmínili, že mají se svým potomkem vztah, který se tranzicí nezhoršil. Dobrý vztah s sebou ale pro rodiče nesl také bolest a problémy. Tomáš, Apolena ani Martina se necítí být špatným rodičem, který by situaci nezvládal: „*Troufnu si říct, že jsem dobrý táta, že jsme dobrý rodiče a že Julie na nás nedá dopustit, že ty vazby jsou hodně silný a spolehlivý.*“ Apolena nedokáže říct, jestli je dobrým rodičem. O své rodičovské roli ale přemýšlí. Být dobrým rodičem je pro ni kombinace lásky a řádu, jak to cítila od svých rodičů. Myslí si, že je nutné umět pracovat se svými emocemi:

Toho se držím, že bejt dobrej rodič je držet rovnováhu, a ne držet jen emoce na uzdě, myslím, že emoce můžou někdy vybublat, ale ne moc. Že ty rodičovský emoce jsou až na druhým místě, na prvním ty dětský, rodič by už měl v tomhle bejt vědomější a nechovat se, nebýt v tahu svých emocí, což mě se taky nedařilo samozřejmě a nedaří. Ted' už možná líp, jak jsou starší, tak se s nima líp komunikuje. (Apolena)

Dobrý rodič je podle Martiny ten, který má s dětmi kamarádský vztah, ve kterém si jsou vzájemně oporou. Je přesvědčena, že právě takový ona se svými dětmi má:

Já vždycky doufala, že jsem dobrá máma, a podle těch reakcí, jak se ke mně děti chovají, nebo Radky, tak jak říkám, my máme hrozně kamarádský vztah mezi sebou, ti kluci za mnou přijdou, nebo teda už budu říkat děti, abych nemusela říkat Radce a to, přijdou, když mají problémy, a zrovna tak já přicházím, když mám své problémy, za nima. Takže oni mají oporu ve mně a já mám oporu v nich. Vždycky říkají, že mají tu nejlepší mámu, tak doufám, že to tak je. (Martina)

Ludmila měla během coming outu svého dítěte dojem, že pocity z nastalé situace nesmí dát najevo. Považovala to za intimní záležitost svého dítěte. Proto cítila, že tuto informaci nemůže s nikým sdílet, a to ani se svým manželem. Ten o trans* identitě svého dítěte v té době netušil. Nechtěla zradit důvěru dítěte, zároveň byla v nepříjemné situaci, protože svoje pocity nemohla sdílet ani se svým partnerem a spolurodičem. To poukazuje na významnou úlohu respektu vůči dítěti, kdy správný rodič ctí soukromí svého potomka.

Participanti zapojení do výzkumu se nepovažují za špatné rodiče. Věří svým rodičovským schopnostem a z rozhovorů je patrné, že svůj podporující postoj k tranzici dítěte považují za to nejlepší, co mohou pro dítě udělat. Studie Horton (2023) se zaměřovala na rodiče, kteří přijali trans* identitu svých dětí a podporovali je. Děti rodičů v tomto vzorku prošly sociální tranzicí ve věku 3–10 let, tedy v předpubertálním období. Jejich rodiče brali tranzici jako jediné řešení. Téměř všichni také zmiňovali, že po sociální tranzici byly jejich děti šťastnější. Na základě své zkušenosti by doporučili i jiným rodičům, aby své dítě podporovali stejně, jako to dělali oni. V souladu s těmito zjištěními jsou i mé analytické výstupy.

V následující části se zabývám tématem přístupu rodičů k medicínským zásahům na jejich dětech. Apolenina dcera Ida začala užívat hormonální blokátory⁹ ve 12 letech. Tomáš má zatím 10leté dítě, které je ve fázi před nasazením hormonálních blokátorů. Domnívá se, že proces pro rodinu bude ještě náročný a může dojít k různým psychickým i sociálním problémům dítěte v kolektivech. Rodiče neuvádějí zásadní nedůvěru v tyto medikamenty ani nezmiňují vážnější obavy z vedlejších účinků nebo lékařských zákroků. Postup lékařů nezpochybňují. Kateřina například přirovnává situaci užívání těchto preparátů k hormonální antikoncepci. Eva zmiňuje, že hormonální terapie ji zprvu znepokojovala, ale lékaři jí pomohli obavy eliminovat. Petr věřil dceři, že je to bezpečné, podobně i Alena se snaží obavy nemít. Peter tedy vkládá důvěru do své dcery, Eva do lékařů. Pro rodiče je tak klíčové v daný moment dětem pomoci a podpořit je.

Ludmila zmiňuje, že se bála zasahovat do zdravého těla svého dítěte, dodává ale, že to tělo zdravé vlastně nebylo. Rodiče uvádějí spíš obavy o duševní zdraví svého dítěte. Apolena, Tomáš i Martina zmínili, že vědí, jak vysoká sebevražednost je mezi trans* dětmi, takže kdyby k tranzici nedošlo a dětem v ní bylo bráněno, následky by mohly být katastrofální. Například Viera měla také strach, aby si její dítě něco neudělalo. Ludmila zažívala potíže s přijetím synovy identity, zároveň se také velmi bála sebevražedných sklónů u svého dítěte. Jak říká, je lepší mít „*živého syna než mrtvou dceru*“. Barbořin syn dokonce přišel s myšlenkou, že by chtěl umřít. Když se zeptala

⁹ Hormonální blokátory brání projevům puberty (menstruace, mutace hlasu atp.). Lékař je může předepsat nejdříve v počátcích puberty.

proč, tak prý aby se mohl narodit jako kluk. To byl pro ni zásadní důvod situaci hned řešit. Sebevražedné skony u dětí v rodičích silně rezonují. Obavy o psychické zdraví dítěte v případě nepodstoupení tranzice u rodičů výrazně převyšuje nad obavami z užívání hormonů.

Rodiče většinou zmiňují dobrou zkušenost s lékaři či psychology. Pokud byli nespokojeni, šli k někomu jinému. K tomu došlo například v případě Evy, která si nebyla jistá, jestli je její syn skutečně trans. Domnívala se, že jeho stav může být způsoben hormonálními změnami v pubertě. První lékařka, kterou navštívili, nedoporučila žádné řešení, protože je syn ve svých 12 letech prý příliš mladý. Lékařka tím vlastně potvrdila matčinu teorii. Syn si ale stál za svým přesvědčením, proto šli následně k lékařce, která už k synovi přistupovala tak, jak si on přál. Eva si tady sama nebyla jistá, jestli je její dítě trans, potřeba pomoci vlastnímu dítěti byla ale silnější, proto navštívili jinou lékařku.

Klára se synem se setkala u první psychologky s velkým nepochopením: „*Já jsem z toho byla úplně na nervy, protože ta paní psychologka mi vyložení dávala najevo, jako že já to dítě matu, že takhle na něj mluvím v tom mužském rodě.*“ Klára neměla z psychologky dobrý pocit, proto se rozhodla hledat jiného odborníka:

... takhle tomu rodiči dává najevo, že jako on něco udělal hroznýho. To je jako já si úplně připadala, že já jsem udělala něco hroznýho, přitom já se jako snažila tomu svému klukovi pomoci, aby se z toho všeho nezbláznil vyložení. (Klára)

Názor psychologky ji ale dle vyprávění nezajímalo, nezačala totiž jednat dle toho, co jí na setkání řekla. Naopak věřila svému dítěti a rozhodla se hledat jinou lékařku, která bude oporou. Zde je klíčová informace, že pocity vlastního dítěte jsou důležitější než názor odbornice. Klára začala hledat psychologku, která bude podporovat ji a její dítě, tedy jejich společné přesvědčení. Dochází zde ke střetu autorit a expertiz. Klára tímto dokládá různé zkušenosti s odborníky v dané praxi a nejednotnost českého odborného diskurzu v oblasti trans* problematiky. Je podstatné zde zdůraznit, že v rámci mého výzkumu i pořadu *V Tranzu* byly vedeny rozhovory pouze s rodiči tranzitujících dětí či potomků po tranzici. Výzkum tedy nezahrnuje rodiče nebinárních dětí. V jejich případě by mohla být zkušenost s některými lékaři či psychology odlišná a mohla by přinést jiné specifické situace.

Pokud rodiče zmiňují konkrétní lékaře, se kterými přišli do kontaktu, jedná se nejčastěji o Hanu Fifkovou. Eva doktorku Fifkovou uvádí jako zásadní zdroj informací o trans* tématu. Získávání informací od lékařky rodiče považují za lepší než „google-ní“ zdrojů, které nedokážou ověřit. Barbora zmiňuje, že Fifková jí pomohla s přijetím trans* identity jejího dítěte. Pro Marii byla zkušenost s Fifkovou také kladná, říká, že lékařka ocenila, že tranzici svého dítěte nebere negativně, chválila ji. Tomáš také zmi-

ňuje, že s dcerou chodili k doktorce Fífkové a měli u ní velkou podporu. Podle něho má Fífková v České republice v tomto ohledu „licenci“. Tomáš tedy zdůrazňuje její profesní profilaci v oblasti transgender diagnostik. Její přístup popisuje jako citlivý, opatrný a pomalý, zároveň liberální a pevný. Lékařka rodiče připravila na to, jaké situace mohou v budoucnu nastat v souvislosti s trans* identitou dítěte. Před Fífkovou mluvili s psychologkou, která jim jen řekla, že je Julie transgender, a byla s procesem rychle hotová. Tomáš zdůrazňuje, že tato psychologka je z Ameriky. Odkazuje v tomto na jiné zákony, čímž vysvětluje odlišnost přístupu této psychologky od těch českých.

Tomáš říká, že jeho manželka má známou dokumentaristku, která měla zájem natočit s jejich rodinou film. Proběhl však jen jeden natáčecí den, protože doktorka Fífková rodičům řekla, že by výsledný film mohl být pro Julii do budoucna ohrožující. Tomáš jí dal za pravdu, „že asi ví, co říká“. Tím dává najevo důvěru v lékařku. Přestože během rozhovoru zmiňoval, že je sám psychologem a pracuje i s trans* klienty, nepovažuje se za velkého odborníka v oblasti transgender problematiky. Právě doktorku Fífkovou označuje jako tu, která „ví, co říká“ a která má v této oblasti „licenci“. Zodpovědnost staví mezi rodiče, lékařský odborný názor a samotné dítě.

Tomáš stále bere v úvahu možnost, že si Julie tranzici rozmyslí nebo řekne, že je nebinární. Tomáš a Juliina matka to ale nechávají na ní a počítají s tím, že si řekne, co bude potřebovat: „*Já věřím, že když to dítě v tom osobním rozvoji dobře podpoříte, že si na ty věci začne přicházet sama.*“ Tomáš klade velký důraz na to, jak sama Julie na svůj věk nadprůměrně dobře dokáže komunikovat svoje potřeby. Zmiňuje, jak pomohla celé rodině, když sama vystoupila v „komunitě“, tedy v jejich sociálním okolí, a všem vysvětlila, o co se jedná: „... *tím nám usnadnila situaci a hezky se o nás postarala, o ten rodinný systém.*“ Julii tím představuje jako aktivního aktéra v procesu péče o rodinu.

Klára je přesvědčená, že i dítě si dokáže říct, co potřebuje. Podle ní společnost podceňuje úsudek a prožívání samotného dítěte:

To člověka opravdu dorazí, jak strašně ta naše společnost je nastavená, že když je děcku 11 a půl, tak asi teda není schopné mít vlastní názor, nebo co. Ono neví, jak se cítí, jak je možný, že si tohle vůbec někdo může myslet, že nevěří tomu děcku, jak se cítí, my přece nejsme v jeho těle a my nevíme, jak se to dítě cítí, to ono ví nejlíp, že jo.

Podle Kláry by trans* lidé měli sami rozhodovat o svém těle: „*Je to jejich tělo, jejich zdraví.*“ Zodpovědnost přikládá především samotným trans* lidem.

Apolena a Martina mají obě již dospělé dítě, které s nimi ale sdílí domácnost. Přistupují k němu ale stále velmi rodičovsky, společně všechno řeší, následné postupy a vyjednávání v domácnosti. Podobně tomu bylo i u dalších rodičů v pořadu *V Tranzu*.

Přestože mají někteří již dospělé děti, společně o věcech mluví. K rozhodování svých dětí ohledně tranzice, operací a budoucího života však mají respekt a vnímají ho jako něco, do čeho nemají právo zasahovat.

Závěr

Cílem této práce bylo přiblížit, jak rodiče prožívají tranzici svých dětí a jak k ní přistupují. Výchozím bodem práce byl český odborný diskurz v oblasti péče o trans* děti, na základě kterého jsem se zaměřovala na to, jak ho rodiče přijímají a jak situaci prožívají oni sami. V rámci výzkumu byly vedeny rozhovory pouze s rodiči, kteří tranzici svého dítěte respektovali a podpořili. Stejně tak tomu bylo i v rámci rozhovorů v pořadu *V Tranzu*. Tato práce tedy nereflektuje přístup rodičů, kteří by se k tranzici dítěte stavěli negativně.

Z výzkumu vyplývá, že rodiče zapojení do tohoto výzkumu jednají v souladu s respektujícím přístupem k procesu tranzice. Dítěti nebrání v sociální tranzici, podporují ho a docházejí s ním k psychologům a lékařům. Přesto pro ně samotné proces bývá náročný. Rodiče si často uvědomují důležitost péče o psychické zdraví dítěte. Samotné psychické problémy jsou v některých případech impulzem k řešení situace v procesu tranzice. Rodiče v mnoha ohledech narážejí na vlastní vnímání genderových norem ve společnosti, v některých případech je i sami reflektují. Cisnormativita se v mém výzkumu potvrzuje jako zásadní při vnímání změn v rodině v souvislosti s tranzicí dítěte.

Výzkum poukazuje na to, že rodiče si jsou většinou vědomi náznaků, že je jejich dítě trans. Někteří tyto projevy pozorovali už během útlého věku svého syna či dcery, jiní tyto náznaky vnímají spíš retrospektivně, nekladli na ně původně velkou váhu a považovali je za dětskou hru. Dětská hra se v tomto ohledu jeví jako klíčová. Rodiče jí nepřikládali zásadní význam, přesto ji dnes hodnotí jako náznak trans* identity dítěte.

Mezi rodiči může dojít k neshodě ohledně tranzice dítěte. V případě mého výzkumu se v žádném případě nejednalo o situaci, která by měla zásadně negativní dopad na rodinu a rodinné vztahy. Přesto jsou mezi matkami a otci patrné zásadní rozdíly v přístupu k trans* identitě dcery či syna. Matky se projevují jako velmi pečující, zjišťují si informace o dané problematice a snaží se pro dítě zajistit vše potřebné. Otcové se se situací vyrovnávají s většími obtížemi nebo v tichosti. Tomáš, otec trans* dítěte, tuto situaci sám hodnotí jako odkaz patriarchálního nastavení společnosti.

Tranzice dítěte bývá pro rodiče obtížným procesem. Často zažívají pocit ztráty nebo lítosti nad genderovou identitou dítěte, která mu byla přiřazena po narození. Sami procházejí náročným procesem, zároveň se musí starat o své dítě a řešit nastalou situaci. Obvykle si vyhledávají informace o tranzici, případně se propojují s jinými rodiči v podobné situaci, v čemž nacházejí oporu.

Rodiče trans* dětí věří, že nejsou špatnými rodiči a své děti v procesu tranzice podporují. Pokud se ve svém okolí setkají s negativním postojem, vymezují se proti němu. Týká se to především zkušenosti s psychologem či lékařem. Rodiče věří především úsudku svého dítěte, a pokud se neshoduje s názorem psychologa či lékaře, jdou k jinému odborníkovi.

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 BY-NC Nela Andresová, 2025.

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Bread, Cats, and Postfeminism: Rethinking the Digital Affectivity with Evans and Riley

Michaela Fikejzová

Evans, A., Riley, S. 2023. *Digital Feeling*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

At the end of April 2025, media outlets such as CNN (2025), BBC (2025), and Business Insider (2025) reported on a seemingly marginal news story: actress, businesswoman, and – according to some also – ‘health guru’ Gwyneth Paltrow had started eating bread, cheese, and pasta again. As indicated by the comments on the BBC’s Instagram post about this news (bbcnews 2025), such a report may be seen as wholly inappropriate for media giants like the BBC and CNN. However, if we follow the argument of Adrienne Evans and Sarah Riley in their recent book *Digital Feeling* (2023), a news item about an actress who has long been reporting on her lifestyle making a radical change to her diet may indeed be a significant story in the structure of the digital everyday life’s discourse.

The book *Digital Feeling* is part of a large corpus of texts in which authors Adrienne Evans and Sarah Riley deal particularly with postfeminist sensibility, digital and postdigital life, and postdigital intimacy. In the latter area, Adrienne Evans is a key figure, as a co-founder and the principal investigator of the AHRC network Postdigital Intimacies and the Networked Public-Private. The book thus builds on their previous efforts to bridge the domains of media and cultural studies, as well as psychology, from a feminist perspective, with the psychological domain primarily represented by Sarah Riley, Professor of Critical Health Psychology. In this sense, *Digital Feeling* is predominantly concerned with postfeminist sensibility, following Rosalind Gill’s definition of the term, as a structure of feeling.

The book is structured into one theoretical introductory chapter, five analytical chapters, and a brief conclusion. The theoretical chapter establishes continuity with previous publications, defines basic concepts, and indicates the direction the ensuing analytical chapters will proceed in. The analytical chapters, formed as stand-alone case studies, cover a reasonably broad spectrum of digital culture, from sarcastic, highly politicised Instagram accounts and fitness and body positivity to the cornerstone of the internet – cats.

The theoretical chapter bears a title that also sums up the main perspective of the book – namely, ‘Postfeminist Sensibility as a Structure of Feeling’. The central concept of the book is thus postfeminist sensibility, which is primarily defined in the terms of the canonical texts in this area of feminist research – namely, the works of Rosalind

Gill and Angela McRobbie. According to the authors' interpretation, a postfeminist sensibility is a way of viewing postfeminist rhetoric as inseparably linked to consumerism and neoliberal ethics, characterised by the complete individualisation of choice and the necessity of self-discipline and self-surveillance. When it comes to digital culture and the digital form of late capitalism, the authors look specifically at the concept of neoliberal subjectivity, where 'individuals are required to participate in forms of self-branding, especially in social media, online forms of dating and "hook up" culture, and in relation to employment, including "gig economy"' (p. 3). Following this definition of postfeminism and postfeminist sensibility, the book seeks to trace 'the shaping of postfeminist sensibility in digital flows and through online culture' (p. 4), while linking this shaping to 'the role of emotion and affect in the way postfeminist sensibility saturates contemporary culture' (p. 4) and, last but not least, emphasising the complications that accompany a postfeminist sensibility in the context of popular or neoliberal feminism (p. 4).

Quoting the relevant literature, the authors move fluidly between the different concepts and signifiers of the field they are exploring. The book alternates between different discursive objects such as 'online culture', 'digital culture', 'contemporary culture', and various online and digital spaces. From a media theory perspective, this fluidity at times obscures a given interpretation; for example, on page 5, where the authors justify the absence, presumably literal, of the term 'digital culture' in Rosalind Gill's 2007 text as follows: 'At that time, many of today's recognisable mainstays in digital culture were only just evolving (e.g. Twitter was founded in 2006, Instagram was 2010)' (p. 5). One can hardly doubt that Instagram is currently a 'recognisable mainstay of digital culture'; this is, however, already to some degree a questionable claim to make about Twitter, now called X. To retrospectively define digital culture through the emergence of specific social networks is at any rate not clearly comprehensible or convincing argumentation. From a genealogical perspective, digital culture is more likely to be related to digital media as such (see, e.g., Silver 2004), and not directly to the emergence of social networks, and if it is associated with social networks in a historical perspective, then one cannot ignore crucial social networks such as Myspace, which emerged in 2003, or Facebook, which emerged alongside Twitter. I would emphasise at this point that this is not a cherry-picking of terminological ambiguities; a certain fluidity in terminology is explicitly acknowledged in the book in relation to the second fundamental concept of the project, namely, the concept of feeling.

The authors define the structure of feeling primarily in reference to the work of Raymond Williams and his view of culture as a processual phenomenon, while they also draw on the Deleuzian-Guattarian concept of becoming (pp. 13–14). Following

this same line of interpretation, the authors also refer to Sara Ahmed's view of happiness as a specific channel for reproducing structural inequalities (p. 15) and an examination of the affective turn (pp. 15–16). The authors conclude their interpretation of the 'affect turn' and the different approaches to the difference between affect and emotion by emphasising the socio-politico-technical framework of both affect and emotion and – employing the fluid approach to the signifiers of different concepts described above – summarise the interpretation as follows: 'We understand affect as central to the social, and vice versa; that the social shapes the affective capacities of bodies. For us, the discursive and the non-discursive, the conscious and the non-conscious, and the psychic and the social are in dynamic interplay, not separate realms of experience or logic, and we make no hard distinction between the terms "affect", "emotion", "feeling" and "sensibility", except for when it is analytically useful' (p. 18). The fluid approach to the use of concepts – except in cases of 'analytic utility' – so transparently described here is certainly possible. But for readers who are not as thoroughly familiar with various traditions of thinking on affect, emotion, and sensibility and digital, internet, and new media culture, beyond the introduction to these ideas offered by the authors, it may be more challenging to grasp and follow the ideas and argumentation on which the authors base their interpretations of phenomena in the world of digital culture. Oscillating between an interchangeable use of terms and their occasional use in a specific way has the effect of obscuring, to a degree, some parts of their interpretation. It should be noted, however, that the introductory chapter cites extensively from the literature on this topic, and it is not necessarily challenging to trace the specific concepts they refer to.

In the first analytical chapter, entitled 'Gender, Race, Nation ... and Barbie Savior', the authors primarily focus on analysing the Barbie Savior Instagram account, the content of which consists of photographs of Barbie dolls superimposed onto distinctly stereotypical images from an unspecified African setting. It is a satirical, humorous account that, according to the authors, '[...] has become a cultural reference point for talking about the industry surrounding aid, humanitarianism and voluntourism, and people who participate through social media' (p. 28). Thus, in this chapter, the authors are primarily concerned with the gendered nature of 'voluntourism', which is a fusion of volunteer work and tourism that takes place in parts of the developing world, mainly undertaken by young women, including celebrities (p. 38). Using the example of the Barbie Savior account, they also show the specific form of such activity, namely, so-called selfie humanitarianism (p. 40), which, according to the authors, portrays a specific conception of transnational sisterhood (pp. 40–41) and emphasises care-oriented femininity, including the portrayal of selfie humanitarianism's orientation toward orphans (p. 43). Although the account in question is not

longer active, the character of Barbie remains a contentious figure in contemporary feminism, as evidenced by the Barbie film, which was released after the book under review was completed. The debates surrounding this film included both a celebration of the emancipatory potential of the highly successful film and a critique of the alleged trivialisation of feminism in the movie.

In the second analytical chapter, entitled 'Sweat Is Just Fat Crying', the authors analyse the phenomenon of 'fitspo', a term that describes fitness inspiration drawn from the social media sphere. The central concept of this chapter is 'postfeminist healthism' (p. 55), which is based on the idea of improving one's body primarily for the sake of health and the moral imperative associated with such rhetoric. Emotionalisation (p. 57) is seen as quite central to the discourse surrounding this way of looking at the classic postfeminist makeover paradigm, implying an imperative of infinite transformation. Along with so-called 'cruel optimism', this involves 'attaching health and the benefits of exercise to a sense of personal well-being, value in life, spiritual and emotional contentment, and general goodness as a person' (p. 73). Emotionalising the connection between physical fitness as demonstrated by specific ableist, racist, or cisheteronormative bodily traits and female empowerment is embedded in the appeal to 'affective flows of optimism, hope, pride, and positivity' (p. 79), but also in the inversion of these feelings, that is, in shame, which the authors conceptualise as 'sticky affect' (p. 76). Adopting the idea from Sara Ahmed, the authors view shame as 'sticky' in the sense that it adheres to specific groups on the grounds of historical oppressions (p. 76). Shame is also 'sticky' in that it adheres to other adverse affects, such as envy or hatred (p. 77). At this point, I would like to draw attention to a recent book that, although not referenced by the authors because it was published later than their book, presents Kate Manne's own experience with these sticky affects. This is the book *Unshrinking: How to Fight Fatphobia* (2024), which is interspersed with descriptions of feelings of shame and guilt associated with body sizes that are not viewed as normatively thin. The resulting text is an excellent philosophical treatise on issues related to fatphobia based on the author's own experience.

The third analytical chapter, entitled 'Making-Up Enterprising Selves', focuses on the structure of feeling of influencer culture as a form of postfeminist entrepreneurialism (p. 89). Based on an analysis of the Get Ready With Me videos, the authors explore forms of post-Fordist work in influencer culture. Here they build on the historical feminisation of specific industries that require 'service with a smile' (p. 89) and performative pleasantness (p. 93). Within influencer culture, this post-Fordism is particularly evident in the 'emotional ethos of "Do What You Love"' (p. 94). The authors identify three affective shifts here, the first being 'a therapeutic suffering' (p. 99), wherein influencers demonstrate that their successful lives were born from

conditions of hardship that they then overcame. The second affective shift is the explicit mention of bodily enjoyment as central to influencer content (pp. 99–100). As in the previous chapter, these categories include ‘feeling fit’ (p. 100), which appears to be less related to appearance and more to an inner sense of well-being. The third shift, however, is the interaction of emotional elements with the aesthetic labour of influencers, which is facilitated by the makeover paradigm, applied to both the mind and feelings as well as the body (pp. 101–109).

The fourth analytical chapter, entitled ‘Hot Men on the Commute’, shifts from the primarily digital environment to the boundaries between digital and non-digital culture and explores the fluidity between them. The starting point for this chapter is the website TubeCrush.net and associated social media accounts, where photographs of ‘hot men’ from the London Underground are posted (p. 115). The authors’ primary focus in this chapter is on the fluidity of both the digital and non-digital environments and on a specific space that is both public and personal – namely, public urban transportation. Crucial here is the act of taking and then sharing photographs on the web or social media, whereby the image maker expresses a very intimate thing – who it is that she finds attractive. Sites like TubeCrush.net are thus inherently affective, highly private and intimate, and at the same time public, like a journey on public transport.

The last analytical chapter is entitled ‘Cute! Cats! Intimacies of the Internet’, and here the authors focus on cuteness as ‘a technique of control that often reinstates the human/non-human animal hierarchy while hinting at cultural fears around a human sense of powerlessness’ (p. 142). This chapter examines how the affectivity and intimacy evoked by photos and videos of internet cats originate from the way different socio-political and economic contexts are bridged through the creation of an audience that shares a view of a particular being as ‘cute’ (pp. 152–159). Furthermore, the conventionality and unproblematic nature of the topic, object, or being that connects this audience are essential to the concept of intimate audiences and the affectivity associated with them (p. 159).

Although Gwyneth Paltrow does not appear in BBC or CNN texts accompanied by a cute kitten, it is probably clear by now that the approach to the introduction of this review was not chosen by accident. The actress, who established her Hollywood career in the period of early postfeminist sensibility, transformed her media and digital presence over time in line with the transformation of postfeminist principles. From the early adoption of a strict approach to her body and diet, she gradually shifted to the affective rhetoric of feeling good and fit. Now, in the interest of bodily affectivity, she has returned to consuming food groups that she had previously rejected in pursuit of the same feelings. After all, the Goop brand (2025a) is ‘an indispensable

resource for a beautiful, thoughtful life' that brings 'more agency, depth, and joy to life' (Goop 2025b).

To return to the book, the authors of *Digital Feeling* map interesting aspects of digital affectivity and intimacy, which, in all its forms, is highly political, whether it is explicit, politicised satire or the politicality that is concealed in the seeming apoliticity of cats. This relatively short book provides a robust annotated a robust list of references on each topic, through which the authors chart recent findings in cultural and media studies, media psychology, and, of course, the field of studies concerned with postfeminist sensibility. In this sense, the book is a rewarding and quality read for those already engaging with these topics as well as for those who are just learning about them, as it is constructed in a manner that is both clear and, in terms of its argumentation, convincing.

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The Elusiveness of Free Time: On the Feminist Futures of Technology and Care in After Work

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Hester, H., Srnicek, N. 2023. *After Work: A History of the Home and the Fight for Free Time*. London, New York: Verso Books.

We wake up in a flat that turns the light on when we ask it to, press a button to make the morning coffee and a waffle while the robot cleaner hums in the background, and receive freshly delivered meals for the day from a Deliveroo courier at the door – yet we still feel like we're stuck on a hamster wheel. Why did time-saving technologies break their promises and leave us with even more work?

After Work: A History of the Home and the Fight for Free Time, by Helen Hester and Nick Srnicek, addresses this paradox head-on. It offers a sharp analysis of why, despite rapid technological development aimed at making housework more efficient, domestic labour remains an enduring and unevenly distributed burden, while the nuclear family remains the primary place of the care to be performed.

Drawing on the feminist tradition of analysing social reproduction, the book repositions domestic work at the centre of the post-work imaginaries of a society no longer organised around wage labour – a society that has radically reduced not work itself but the amount of unnecessary labour we have to do. It argues that mainstream post-work discourses – often focused on industrial or white-collar work automation – have neglected the sphere of care and household labour. Hester and Srnicek enter the post-work discussion with the idea that if we are serious about building a post-work future, we not only have to pay more attention to the field of social reproduction and, especially, to the unpaid work that is performed at home and still primarily by women, but we must also critically rethink the very design and purpose of technology in the domestic sphere, considering both its current and its desirable effects on our liberation from unnecessary chores.

The book foregrounds how the blurred lines between public and private, made even blurrier by digitalisation, uphold patriarchal divisions and sustain exploitative structures, whether through smart home devices, the gig economy, or normative expectations around 'productive' free time.

Let's explore the book's core claims and see how the authors address unresolved social reproduction dilemmas in the ongoing discussion and political reimagination of life after work.

The domestic work paradox

Hester and Srnicek carefully dismantle the assumption that technological progress automatically leads to the reduction of domestic labour. As they show, time-use studies reveal a stubborn persistence: despite the influx of dishwashers, vacuum cleaners, and pre-prepared meals, the time spent on housework has barely changed over the last century. Instead, cleanliness, nutrition, and care standards have steadily risen. Floors must be spotless, meals freshly cooked and healthy, and the children brought up to be well-rounded. The heightened expectations, particularly towards mothers, are especially pronounced in 'intensive parenting' (as those expectations particularly concern mothers, it is worth recalling Hays (1998) 'intensive mothering' concept), a mode of childrearing that requires extensive time and emotional investment to cultivate children's human capital. As Hester and Srnicek argue, this shift links parenting even more closely to the reproduction of socioeconomic status, and the home becomes a site where children are trained to be as competitive as possible in the future labour market.

Furthermore, the authors highlight that many household technologies – such as washing machines, vacuum cleaners, and food processors – are overwhelmingly designed for individual or nuclear family use, not for shared or collective arrangements ('Chapter 2: Technologies'). The washing machine in each household replaced the laundrette, but not the labour itself. The 'smart' kitchen streamlines labour but does not redistribute it. As the authors note, innovation in the domestic sphere has reinforced the individualisation of domestic labour and maintained the gendered division of responsibility within households. Rather than automating housework, many technologies have entrenched its privatised and feminised character. Technical limitations cannot explain this trajectory of technological development, as it embodies a particular historical political choice.

The book's historical analysis of this trend, framed through what has been termed the Cowan Paradox, is based on Ruth Schwartz Cowan's analysis (Cowan 1983). Cowan's observation that new technologies did not reduce but instead reorganised domestic labour underlines the importance of sociotechnical critique: it is not just what a tool can do but how and for whom it is designed. In this way, *After Work* applies historical feminist critiques to contemporary digital cultures, demonstrating that digital tools continue to reproduce, rather than transform, the gendered architecture of domesticity.

‘Free time’ and ‘unfree choice’

Alongside the persistence of domestic labour, Hester and Srnicek critique another central myth: that technological advances have increased our free time. While specific tasks may be performed more efficiently, the supposed surplus of time has not been reclaimed for rest, pleasure, or freely chosen care, be it self-care, caregiving for others, or anything else that is a genuinely free choice unfettered by necessity. Instead, in ‘Chapter 3: Standards: Fix Up, Look Busy’, the authors argue that ‘free time’ is increasingly colonised by the imperatives of productivity and self-improvement, so even what is supposed to be leisure time is filled with rigorous fitness routines or upskilling. Moreover, increasing impoverishment, the housing crisis, and the rise of the ‘working poor’ (individuals who are employed yet live below the poverty line as a result of low wages and insufficient income) have led to more and more people taking on secondary or supplemental employment and various gig jobs obtained on increasingly popular digital platforms – and all of this is being squeezed into the ‘remaining’ time.

This desperate search for more time to be spend on paid work and/or increase one’s value and competitiveness in the labour market is also embodied by the increasingly sophisticated and elaborate tracking, ranking, and scheduling programmes embedded in the devices and digital services we use.

Towards temporal sovereignty

‘Temporal sovereignty’ is an essential aspect of freedom that can and should be achieved in the post-work world. As the authors explain in ‘Chapter 5: Spaces’, to have sovereignty over our time is to have enough space to ask ourselves what we should do with our time, which is rarely possible under a capitalism where time is organised around the principle of ‘value’. This means that value currently limits our choices, as working less to spend more time on a hobby would mean earning less money. The authors write that ‘the choices available in free time become subject to the same calculative deliberation performed under the metric of value’ (Hester, Srnicek 2023: 135). In this context, temporal sovereignty means ‘authoring our own norms and obligations to the collectives in which we live’; therefore, it does not involve abandoning all the responsibilities we have but instead reshaping them after we obtain some freedom from necessary tasks and duties, including economic ones, so that we are able to determine our values beyond their economic dimension.

In general, the potential that Hester and Srnicek still see in technologies for attaining a fairer distribution of unpaid care work and domestic chores could be used to

achieve greater temporal justice and specifically to address the gendered division of time and gendered time poverty. Their description of genuinely free time is similar to what Robert E. Goodin (2010) defined as 'discretionary time', which is the time 'over which you have autonomous control, after satisfying the demands of necessity' (Goodin 2010: 2). Goodin mentions three dimensions of necessity: ensuring income, performing unpaid household labour, and keeping the body functioning. For Goodin, what is left after that is when we can exercise our agency and engage in the activities of our choice, yet this type of time is unequally distributed. Like him, Hester and Srnicek's reflections are focused on the measures to be taken to achieve distributive justice over time, which they all place at the centre of a social justice concern. However, while Goodin focuses more on the dimension of state policies, Hester and Srnicek go beyond this, proposing a braver reconfiguration of how much time we could spend on the dimensions of necessity – were it not for capitalism and the technological development subordinated to its logic.

A new look at technology in a post-work society

Rather than accepting the current technological landscape purely as a result of the success and limitations of technology and science (which gadgets can be produced given the level of technological development at the current moment), Hester and Srnicek ask us to imagine what tools and infrastructures might emerge in a genuinely post-work society. For this, what if technologies were not designed for individual use but for sharing? What if technological development were primarily not profit-driven? What if homes were built to enable communal living rather than reinforce the isolating logic of the nuclear household?

The authors invite us to reimagine domestic life outside of capitalism and the fixation on family-type households as the central unit of social reproduction. Drawing on socialist feminist traditions, the authors propose reorienting technological development towards collective benefit. They sketch the possibilities: cooperative kitchens, shared childcare, platform infrastructures governed by users, and robust public services that decentre the family as the sole unit of care and social reproduction.

Overall, *After Work* is a valuable read for anyone interested in post-digital intimacies, as it offers a renewed lens for the politicisation of technologies and their everyday use in private spaces. By stressing the gendered nature of all the 'smart' domesticity proposed to us by technical innovations, it offers both a critique and hope for reinventing not only gadgets and applications but also the very forms of domestic life known to us. By centring reproductive labour within post-work imaginaries, Hester and Srnicek challenge the dominant narratives and offer a feminist roadmap towards a post-work society, where all work is valued and we all enjoy genuine autonomy

over our time, choices, and lives. This is not a book just for scholars; it also speaks to a broader public, including activists, students, carers, and anyone interested in rethinking how we live, work, and care in everyday life.

While the book focuses primarily on Western capitalist democracies, its framework is elaborate enough to be brought into dialogue with diverse geographies, including post-socialist settings, where care arrangements and infrastructures may take different forms, as may the usage of technological innovations and digital platforms. This, in turn, opens space for further research.

As we navigate an era in which homes are wired, lives are platformed, and care is increasingly commodified, this book reminds us that the fight for free time is inseparable from the battle for justice, including temporal justice. It begins by asking not only what our technologies do but also what kind of world they help build.

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Tvorba rodinné politiky: norský model a měnící se tvář otcovství

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Brandth, B., Kvande, E. (2022). *Designing Parental Leave Policy: The Norway Model and the Changing Face of Fatherhood*. Bristol University Press.

Kniha *Designing Parental Leave Policy: The Norway Model and the Changing Face of Fatherhood* od autorek Berit Brandth a Elin Kvande přináší detailní pohled na norský model rodičovské, jeho dopady na genderové role a vývoj otcovství v rámci soudo-

bé rodinné politiky. Autorky se zaměřují na to, jak norská politika rodičovské nejen mění vnímání rolí mužů a žen v rodinném životě, ale i formuje širší sociální, kulturní a pracovní struktury. Význam tohoto modelu spočívá v zavedení tzv. otcovské kvóty, která otce aktivně motivuje k účasti na péči o děti, čímž se přetváří tradiční genderové normy a role. Brandth a Kvande zkoumají důvody, které stojí za úspěchem otcovské kvóty, a do jaké míry poskytla otcům rovnováhu mezi prací a rodinou, podpořila rozvoj vztahů mezi otcem a dítětem a přispěla k výraznému posunu od hegemonické maskulinity k pečující maskulinitě (caring masculinity).

Obě autorky, Berit Brandth a Elin Kvande, jsou renomované norské akademičky, které se dlouhodobě věnují výzkumu v oblasti sociálních věd se zaměřením na politiku pracovního trhu, genderová studia a rodinnou politiku. Jejich výzkum ukazuje, jak rodinné politiky mohou přispět k větší rovnosti mezi muži a ženami a podpořit změny ve společnosti. Autorky argumentují, že konkrétní nastavení rodičovské, její délka, finanční kompenzace a rozdělení mezi matku a otce, mají významný dopad na rozhodování rodičů ohledně sdílení rodičovské a na formování jejich role v rámci rodiny. Kniha se tedy soustředí nejen na politické a legislativní aspekty rodičovské, ale i na každodenní život rodičů a jejich chování.

První část knihy s názvem „The Importance of Leave Design“ se zaměřuje na význam konkrétního nastavení rodičovské, tedy na to, jak nastavení politiky ovlivňuje genderové role, pracovní vztahy a rodinnou dynamiku. Autorky zdůrazňují, že rodičovská není jen administrativní záležitostí, ale má hluboký sociální, kulturní a ekonomický dopad na životy rodičů. Právě nastavení rodičovské podle nich ovlivňuje to, zda a jak se muži zapojují do péče o děti a zda ženy budou mít možnost se vrátit na pracovní trh. Výše uvedené dopady rodičovské autorky ilustrují na příkladu Norska, ve kterém je jedním z klíčových faktorů právě „otcovská kvóta“. V roce 1993 byla zavedena 4týdenní otcovská kvóta, v roce 2014 byla rozšířena na 10 týdnů a od roku 2020 je pro otce vyhrazeno 15 týdnů rodičovské. Otcovská kvóta vyhrazuje část rodičovské pro otce, čímž je podporováno jejich aktivní zapojení do péče o děti. Posun v této oblasti byl zkoumán na základě údajů získaných ze série rozhovorů vedených s otcí v 80. letech před zavedením otcovské kvóty, v 90. letech po jejím počátečním zavedení jako 4týdenního nároku, v roce 2020 po rozšíření na 10týdenní nárok. Výsledkem bylo zjištění, že zatímco zprvu otcové váhali, zda si vzít sdílenou rodičovskou, protože o využití tohoto programu museli vyjednávat s matkami, později díky individualizaci a nepřenositelnosti rodičovské pro otce a jejímu vysokému využívání se účast otců na péči o děti stala společenskou normou.

Autorky se dále soustředí na to, jak může nastavení rodičovské ovlivnit měnící se roli otců v rodině. Různé politiky mohou mít velmi odlišný dopad na genderovou rovnost a společenské normy. Tato opatření mají nejen praktický, ale i kulturní význam, protože mění představy o tom, co obvykle obnáší role matky a otce. Zdůrazňují, že

nastavení rodičovské má dalekosáhlý dopad nejen na rodinný život, ale také na širší sociální a pracovní prostředí. Správně navržená politika rodičovské může být nástrojem pro podporu rovnosti žen a mužů a změnu tradičních genderových rolí, čímž se zlepšuje kvalita života rodičů a zajišťuje rovný přístup k pracovním příležitostem. Když je rodičovská rovnoměrně rozdělena mezi matky a otce, může to pomoci ženám v udržení profesní kariéry díky nižší pravděpodobnosti, že budou vnímány jako hlavní pečovatelky, což je častá překážka v jejich profesním rozvoji. Autorky nezůstávají pouze u popisu pozitivních aspektů norského modelu, ale také kriticky zhodnocují jeho limity. Například i když norský systém nabízí mnoho příležitostí pro otce, stále existují kulturní bariéry a společenská očekávání, která mohou jejich účast na rodičovské omezovat. Tato kapitola upozorňuje na potřebu neustálé revize a vylepšování dané politiky, aby byla skutečně efektivní v podpoře rovnosti.

Druhá kapitola, „Caregiving: Fathers in Transition“, se zaměřuje na proměnu role otců v oblasti péče o děti a na to, jak politické a kulturní změny, zejména ve vztahu k rodičovské, ovlivňují jejich zapojení do péče o rodinu. Zatímco dříve byla péče o děti považována za úkol matek, norský model s otcovskou kvótou tuto dynamiku postupně mění. Zvýšená účast otců na péči o děti byla částečně zodpovědná za transformaci mužské identity – od hegemonní maskulinity (otec jako živitel) k pečující maskulinitě (otec jako aktivní pečovatel). Otcové, kteří sami převzali odpovědnost za dlouhodobou péči o děti, měli větší potenciál rozvíjet dovednosti týkající se rodičovství, vaření, úklidu a emočních a vztahových kompetencí. Otcové také uznávali, že péče o děti byla pracná, a díky tomu si vypěstovali hlubší úctu k pečovatelské práci, kterou vykonávají matky. Brandth a Kvande došli k závěru, že norské otce nejlépe charakterizuje koncept zapojeného otcovství (involved fatherhood), protože kladli důraz na faktory, jako je trávení času se svými dětmi, citové pouto a poskytování praktické péče.

Autorky ukazují, že otcové v Norsku, kteří se dříve soustředili především na ekonomickou podporu rodiny, se nyní stále častěji zapojují do každodenní péče o děti. Tato změna je podpořena zmiňovanou otcovskou kvótou. Role otce po jejím zavedení dle autorek prochází přechodným obdobím, kdy se od tradiční role živitele a podporovatele přesouvá k roli pečovatele. Tento přechod není snadný a otcové se mohou potýkat s kulturními a sociálními očekáváními, která jsou často nastavena tak, že muži jsou vnímáni především jako ti, kteří nepečují. Tato změna však může být výzvou, protože mnoho otců čelí sociálnímu tlaku, aby udržovali tradiční roli, což může jejich účast na rodičovské ztěžovat. Kapitola zdůrazňuje důležitost podpory otců při jejich přechodu k aktivnímu rodičovství. Podle autorek by politika rodičovské měla být navržena tak, aby nejen umožňovala, ale přímo podporovala otevřenější a rovnější zapojení otců do péče o děti. Tato změna vyžaduje nejen legislativní opatření, ale také širší kulturní změnu, která by podporovala otce v jejich nových rolích bez obav z negativního hodnocení jejich genderové role. Tato kapitola je klíčová pro pochopení toho,

jak konkrétní rozhodnutí o podobě rodičovské mohou mít vliv na celou společnost, a ukazuje, jak může politika ovlivnit nejen to, jak lidé pečují o děti, ale i to, jak se vyrovnávají se svými profesními a osobními ambicemi.

Třetí kapitola knihy „Reconciling Work and Care?“ se zabývá výzvami a možnostmi, jak skloubit pracovní a pečovatelské povinnosti. Zaměřuje se na to, jak norský model rodičovské podporuje rovnováhu mezi pracovním a rodinným životem (neboli work-life balance, zkráceně WLB), vliv WLB na jednotlivce i celou společnost. Autorky si kladou také otázku, jakým způsobem je možné tyto oblasti lépe propojit, aby to vedlo k rovnosti mezi ženami a muži a podpořilo větší zapojení otců do péče o děti. Model s vyhrazenými dny pro otce (tzv. otcovská kvóta) podporuje větší zapojení mužů do každodenní péče o děti. Pečovatelská práce vykonávaná otci se postupně stala normou na trhu práce. Mnozí manažeři totiž sami využili otcovskou kvótu a obeznámili se s řešením případných problémů, které mohou nastat poté, co si pracující otec vezme rodičovskou. Celková podpora poskytovaná na pracovišti zaměstnaným otcům pomáhá při posilování rovnováhy mezi prací a rodinou obou rodičů. Norský model, nabízející flexibilitu a finanční podporu, je klíčovým nástrojem pro dosažení rovnosti mezi muži a ženami a umožňuje jim rovnoměrně sdílet pracovní i pečovatelské odpovědnosti.

I když je rodičovská v Norsku velmi rozvinutá, a podporuje genderovou rovnost, stále existují kulturní a strukturální překážky, které brání skutečnému vyvážení těchto dvou oblastí. Autorky rozebírají, jak tradiční očekávání týkající se rolí mužů a žen stále ovlivňují rozhodování rodičů o tom, jak sdílet pracovní a pečovatelské povinnosti. Například otcové, kteří si vezmou rodičovskou, mohou čelit negativnímu vnímání jejich kariérních ambicí, zatímco ženy čelí tlaku převzít větší část péče o děti, což může ovlivnit jejich profesní dráhu. Autorky zdůrazňují, že dosažení skutečné rovnováhy mezi prací a péčí vyžaduje nejen politickou podporu, ale také společenskou změnu, která by usnadnila oslabení genderových stereotypů. Norský model představuje krok správným směrem, ale stále existují společenské a pracovní výzvy, které brání tomu, aby rodiče (zejména otcové) plně využili příležitosti, které rodičovská nabízí. Důležitá je v daném kontextu také flexibilizace práce. Možnost práce z domova nebo sdílené pracovní pozice jsou faktory, které mohou rodičům usnadnit sladění práce a péče. I když je rodičovská silným nástrojem, flexibilita v práci je rovněž klíčovým prvkem pro dosažení skutečné rovnováhy. Dle autorek jsou rodiče (muži i ženy) spokojenější a méně stresovaní, pokud jsou schopni sdílet péči o děti a domácí práce.

Výzkum prezentovaný v této knize dokládá, že lze integrovat péči do mužské identity prostřednictvím zavedení individualizovaných a adekvátně finančně ohodnocených nároků pro otce na rodičovské. Brandth a Kvande zdůrazňují, že účinná podpora otců v domácnosti podporuje model, ve kterém matky a otcové stejnou měrou přebírají povinnosti doma a na pracovišti. Genderově rovné rodičovství pomáhá dekonstruo-

vat genderové stereotypy týkající se rodičovských rolí, v nichž jsou matky uznávány jako primární pečovatelky, zatímco otcové jsou vnímáni jako sekundární pečovatelé.

Použitá data v knize vychází z norských národních statistik o využívání rodičovské, rozdílech mezi muži a ženami v jejím čerpání a o návratu do práce po jejím skončení. Tyto údaje poskytují přehled o tom, jak se politika rodičovské promítá do skutečného chování rodičů v Norsku. Zároveň se autorky opírají o kvalitativní výzkum, který zahrnuje rozhovory a případové studie s rodiči, zaměstnavateli, experty a expertkami na rodinnou politiku. Tyto rozhovory poskytují hloubkový pohled na zkušenosti otce a matky s rodičovskou a na to, jak politika ovlivňuje jejich rozhodování a každodenní život. Kniha se soustředí na jeden model – norský – a i když vyzdvihuje jeho výhody, mohlo by být užitečné provést širší porovnání s jinými modely rodičovské v různých zemích. Tento širší kontext by mohl poskytnout hlubší porozumění tomu, jak různé systémy ovlivňují genderovou rovnost, rodinné životy a zapojení otců. Pokud se kniha detailně věnuje specifikům pouze norského modelu, pak to omezuje její bezprostřední aplikovatelnost či generalizovatelnost na jiné země s odlišnými sociokulturními, ekonomickými a politickými podmínkami.

Kniha Brandth a Kvande je hodnotným příspěvkem do diskuse o rodičovské, genderových rolích a rovnosti v rámci moderního rodinného života. Poskytuje cenný pohled na to, jak politiky zaměřené na genderovou rovnost mohou měnit nejen pracovní podmínky, ale i samotné pojetí rodičovství. Genderově rovné rodičovství pomáhá dekonstruovat stereotypy založené na pohlaví, které obklopují rodičovské role, v nichž jsou matky uznávány jako primární pečovatelky a otcové jsou vnímáni jako sekundární pečovatelé. Přestože úplný odklon od tradičních rodičovských rolí závisí na souhře mezi úspěšnou politikou rodičovské a současnými socioekonomickými trendy, návrh politiky rodičovské posiluje význam zákona jako normativního nástroje, který může urychlit kulturní změny.

Conference Reflections: Navigating Time and Wellbeing in the Digital Age

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A critical issue facing citizens and institutions today is how we are to preserve our time and wellbeing in the digital age. The mass proliferation of digital technologies in our homes, work, and social lives is fundamentally reshaping how we use and experience time. Living in a state of permanent connectivity is eroding the traditional temporal boundaries between work and leisure (Adisa, Gbadamosi, Osabutey 2017). As a result, individuals are no longer temporally synchronised with one another in the timing of their work and personal activities (Eriksen 2001; Jordheim 2014). Even during moments of supposed rest, free time is often fragmented by the relentless presence of digital notifications and the constant consumption of online content (Černohorská et al. 2025). Understanding how these transformations are affecting our subjective experience of time and overall wellbeing is essential for protecting the health, cohesion, and sustainability of everyday life.

In response to this challenge, the EU CHANSE-funded TIMED (TIME experience in Europe's Digital age) project brings together a multidisciplinary consortium of psychologists, sociologists, philosophers, computer scientists, and neuroscientists from six countries – the Czech Republic, UK, Poland, Spain, Germany, and Switzerland – to investigate how digital technologies are reshaping time and wellbeing across Europe. Over the past three years, the consortium has collected data from more than 16,000 participants through surveys, interviews, and experimental studies.

On 8 May 2025, the TIMED consortium convened an expert workshop at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, to critically engage with the core question driving the project: how can we preserve time and wellbeing in the digital era? The event brought together leading scholars and practitioners to share insights from their research and policy work. Dr Devina Sarwatay (City St George's, University of London, UK) and Emma Mills (Birchwood Community High School, UK) discussed children and young people's experiences of digital technology. Professor Sylvie Droit-Volet (Université Clermont Auvergne, FR) explained how and why our experience of time is shaped by our experiences and wellbeing. Marta Pucilowska-Schielman (Digital Citizenship Institute, PL) emphasised the importance of digital hygiene, and Professor Mariek Vanden Abeele (Ghent University, BE) explored the power of disconnection for

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reconnection. Diana Affi (Google Maps Platform, CH) described the potential for AI to save us time, and Professor Dietrich Henckel (German Society for Time Policy, DE) and Pete Whitehead (Public First, UK) discussed how time-based policies for digital wellbeing can be developed and implemented.

The consortium's reflections on the talks and discussions identified crosscutting themes illustrating key points of tension that people and societies face when navigating time and wellbeing in the digital era. These included 1) gender inequalities in the use, management, and regulation of technology, 2) intergenerational disparities in how digital experiences are narrated and understood, 3) widespread misconceptions about the mechanisms through which technology may affect wellbeing, and 4) ongoing debates about where the responsibility lies for regulating technology use. To facilitate access to time and the maintenance of wellbeing, we believe that academics, practitioners, regulators, and product developers should prioritise exploring these areas in their work.

The workshop highlighted that there is significant *gender inequality* in access to digital technologies, perceptions of acceptable online behaviour and social norms and narratives pertaining to who is responsible for managing technology use. Dr Devina Sarwatay's research on young people in India illustrated how parental expectations around social media use are deeply gendered. Her findings showed that girls not only have less time to spend on social media compared to boys but also face stricter behavioural constraints when online. Critically, gender inequality was also present in the supervision of access to time on social media; women, especially mothers, were disproportionately responsible for making and enforcing rules about children's use of social media. These insights were echoed in Marta Puciłowska-Schielman's reflections on digital hygiene, which further emphasised how mothers often bear the burden of managing children's digital behaviours and ensuring healthy technology use. The discussions highlighted an urgent need for measures to increase gender equality in both the access to, use of, and responsibility for education and supervision of digital technologies.

Another workshop focused on the issue of *intergenerational conflict*. There was broad agreement that digital experiences are too often narrated through the perspectives and language of adults, leading to an incomplete and sometimes distorted understanding of how children engage with technology. When adult voices dominate, children's goals, needs, and lived realities with digital technologies risk being overlooked or misinterpreted. This framing was also evident in programmes aimed to improve digital wellbeing. Marta Puciłowska-Schielman highlighted that digital literacy programmes are often focused on what adults can teach children rather than what children can teach adults. The workshop participants stressed that children and young people are experts in their own digital lives. Their insights are crucial for

developing more inclusive and effective educational initiatives, research, and policy responses. However, it was acknowledged that doing so requires careful research which enables children and young people to express the totality of their digital lives in their own words.

Emma Mills identified *digital addiction* as a prominent concern among both parents and young people. However, broader discussions revealed that the concept of addiction, and the mechanisms underlying it, are often poorly understood by the general public, particularly in relation to clinical definitions. Screen time was frequently equated with addiction, with longer durations interpreted as indicative of more severe dependency. However, as Professor Mariek Vanden Abeele emphasised, the notion of screen time is too imprecise to be analytically useful, as it fails to capture the diverse ways in which individuals engage with digital media.

Moreover, educational programs intended to enhance users' digital literacy often overlook the role of individual personality traits in shaping one's ability to self-regulate technology use. Public narratives surrounding the impact of digital technology on wellbeing frequently invoke biological explanations for 'addiction' – for example, the belief that the 'dopamine hits' provided by content 'cause addiction'. However, current scientific evidence supporting these claims remains weak or inconclusive (Orben et al. 2024).

Critically, our own research suggests that negative emotional outcomes following technology use often stem not solely from exposure to distressing or inappropriate content but from users' own perceptions that technology is inherently harmful or that they have 'wasted' their time. Although many people express a desire to shift towards a more analogue lifestyle, the degree to which digital technologies are embedded in everyday life, including in administrative tasks, healthcare, and basic services, presents a significant and often overlooked obstacle to reducing screen time.

Therefore, there is an urgent need to develop accessible public resources that clearly communicate the current scientific understanding of how digital technology use affects neural activity and development.

At the heart of the issues discussed above lies a fundamental question: of *responsibility for digital time*, i.e. who is responsible for regulating how children, young people, and adults spend their time on digital technologies? Currently, most digital literacy programmes adopt a user-centric approach, placing the burden of responsibility on individual users – or, in the case of children, on their parents and carers. This model fails to account for the structural tensions between public concerns about screen time and the business models of technology providers. A central metric of success for many digital platforms is user duration. The longer someone engages with a service, the more 'successful' the product is deemed to be. As a result, many digital products are deliberately designed to maximise time spent online, often using persuasive algorithms

to keep users engaged. This creates a conflict of interest between users, who may wish to limit their screen time, and providers, who are incentivised to prolong it. Critically, however, TIMED's own research suggests that users associate spending more time on technology than intended with feelings of dysregulation, guilt, and regret.

To address this imbalance, it is crucial to shift some of the responsibility for managing screen time from users to providers. One way to do this could be through legislation that prohibits the use of algorithms designed to increase user duration. Another, more transformative solution would be to redefine what constitutes 'success' in the tech industry. Instead of prioritising time-on-platform, success could be measured by improvements in user wellbeing. Such a shift would encourage the development of technologies that support, rather than undermine, healthy digital habits. These measures should, however, be considered in parallel with institutional, organisational, and governmental policies that protect citizens' access to uninterrupted, restorative free time in an increasingly connected world.

The talks and discussions during the workshop demonstrate that the impact of digital technology on wellbeing remains a pressing concern for individuals and societies alike. Whilst research, including that of the TIMED consortium, is significantly increasing our understanding of the impact of technology on our time and wellbeing, further work is required. In particular, there is an urgent need to translate these insights into practical guidance for the public, and into actionable frameworks for institutions and policymakers. Bridging the gap between evidence and implementation will be essential to promoting wellbeing and protecting the value of time in the digital age.

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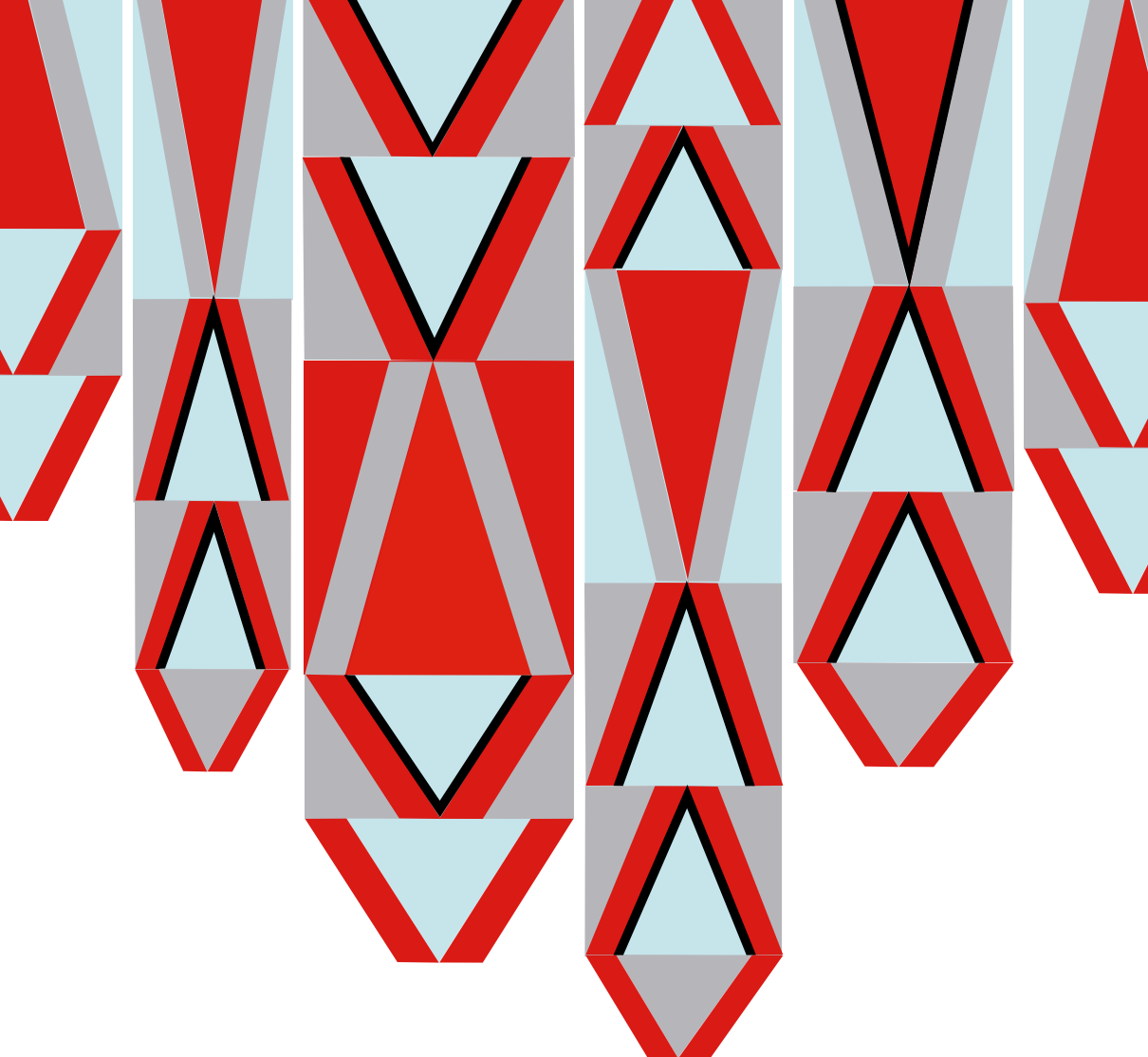
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