

# Strategies of inclusion: The importance of diversifying gender

Vivian A. Lagesen

Knut H. Sørensen

Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU)





## Research on ICT and gender at the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies of Culture, NTNU

- Longstanding interest in technology and gender; ICT and gender in particular. Examples:
  - Hege Nordli's dissertation on computer enthusiasm among women
  - Helen Jøsok Gansmo's dissertation on gender and ICT issues in Norwegian educational policymaking, the implementation of gender and ICT policies in schools, and how young people react to the underlying ideas of these policies
  - My own dissertation on young women studying computer science in Norway and Malaysia, their motives and perception of gender and ICT issues, and the efforts to recruit young women to computer science.
  - Participation in a large EU study of inclusion of women into ICT, based on 48 case studies in five countries.



## A digital gender divide?

- Or a matter of time? Diffusion?
- US: bridging the gender gap in internet use
- Europe: a different situation
  - Little reduction in the gender gap between 2003 and 2006



## How to measure inclusion?

- What are relevant and valid indicators?
- Pragmatically, four broad categories of statistical information:
  - Access to and use of the internet
  - Computer skills
  - Higher education graduates in computing
  - The ICT workforce



**Table 1:  
Percentage of  
population with a  
high level of  
computer skills,  
according to sex  
and age, 2006**

Country	Age 16 - 24		Age 25 - 54		Age 55 - 74	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Germany	59	29	42	21	16	4
Ireland	24	24	26	18	6	3
Italy	39	25	28	13	7	1
Netherlands	20	4	14	3	4	1
Norway	69	38	53	30	18	12
UK	51	35	40	22	18	6
EU (25 countries)	47	29	33	17	11	3



# Women graduates in computing

## Percentage of women graduates in law, life sciences and computing, tertiary level, 2004

Country	Computing	Law	Life sciences
Australia	27	57	57
Germany	16	49	58
Ireland	34	64	64
Italy	23	59	68
Korea	34	38	52
Netherlands	9	62	59
Norway	18	51	60
UK (2003)	26	59	65
US	27	50	60

Source: OECD



## A persistent digital gender gap!

- Available statistics does not support a disappearing digital gender gap
- A common interpretation: women are victims of a diverse set of exclusion processes or deficits
- How, then, remedy this situation? What do we mean by gender inclusion in the information society?



## **How to understand 'the woman problem' in the information society?**

- The information society and gender are both 'moving targets'
- The gender binary is a common perspective, but is highly problematic
- Political and empirical objections
  - Stereotypes appear to essentialize
  - Reinforce and/or justify inequalities
- How, then, to tackle this problem of representation of gender on a policy level?



## Different strategies

### Category politics (Bacchi)

- Social groups defined by different characteristics
- Interventional strategy rectify processes that put women at a disadvantage
- Gender mainstreaming
  - Concerned with mechanism that produce unwanted differences between men and women
  - Claims to work from the 'inside'



## Category politics: Women-centred spaces

- 'For women' strategies
- Cases from the SIGIS project
  - 'Women only' training
  - Women's networks
  - Women's websites
- Questions:
  - Under what conditions are 'for women' strategies an effective means of inclusion?
  - Is it possible to overcome some of the weaknesses of category politics?



## Women-only ICT training: A stepping stone to inclusion

- Two cases of Women only ICT training, one in the Netherland and one in Edinburgh, UK.
  - Both were designed and targeted on particular groups of women: unemployed and/or disadvantaged for various reasons (lone parenting, race/ethnicity, age, disability, etc.)
  - Both relatively successful
- ‘Women’ is understood as a sub-category of women, and the package of measures are tailored toward their particular needs
- Especially effective in building confidence and self-esteem



## Women's spaces on the Internet: A virtual room of one's own?

- Three types of digital inclusion facilitated by websites:
  - Self-inclusion: women were motivated to log on because it had content of interest to them (ex: web-based magazines did target 'the modern woman' and also tried to link her to technology and ICTS)
  - Assisted self-learning: inclusion work done by the magazine to assist acquisition of ICT skills, provision of information, creating opportunities for women to become more familiar with internet
  - Socially embedded learning; inclusion through opportunities for social interaction on the net, e.g. discussion fora
- Also intended for sub-categories of women



## Networks for women in ICT: A safe haven from men?

- Built on explicit feminist politics
  - Fight gender discrimination
  - Empower women in their careers
- Targeted toward a very specific sub-category of women: those who work in ICT roles
- Strong motivation for these women to join
- Strong cases of community building



## Conclusions

- Many of these initiatives were successful
- None of them had women-in-general as a target group, but rather addressed particular groups of women
- Women-centred spaces was, implicitly, informed by a more **diverse** conception of gender
- Thus, category politics must be made **specific**, without mobilising unhelpful gender stereotypes