Gender Equality as an Idea and Practice
A Case Study of an Office at the United Nations Headquarters

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ABSTRACT

Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, is one of the United Nations (UN) core objectives. However, the UN has been struggling with achieving gender balance in its own organisation, despite numerous attempts. Men have been in numerical dominance at the UN since inception, especially on senior positions. This case study takes place just months after the System-wide strategy for gender parity was launched by Secretary-General Guterres. It captures the initial reactions through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with five women working in one UN body at the UN Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. Through these stories and experiences, this thesis aims to analyse the UN as a gendered organisation, focusing on organisational structure and culture. I argue that gendered processes of the organisational structure and culture preserve the male-dominance by having including effects on men and excluding effects on women. In this thesis I use gendered processes (Acker 1992), combined with post-structural policy analysis (Bacchi 2009) and complex systems theory (Ramalingam 2013), as analytical tools to show how equality is constructed and understood as an idea and in practice.

*Keywords: Organisation, gender equality, organisational structures, organisational cultures, the United Nations, gendered processes, complex systems theory, policy analysis.*
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I sneak into Salle du Conseil, the Council Chamber, through heavy bronze doors. The room is empty. Soft, carpeted floor mutes the sounds from my footsteps as if I wasn’t here either. I’ve come to see the famous murals by the Spanish artist José Maria Sert, one of the gems at the United Nations Headquarters. Grand murals emerge on the walls as warm sunlight floods through the open curtains. The progress of humankind. Dramatic scenes in shades of grey and gold, painted in oil. Each scene tells a story. Scene one, the steam locomotive. Scene two, President Abraham Lincoln emancipating the slaves. Western technology and the celebration of the heroic act of a white man. A Western, patriarchal grand narrative is presented before me. But it’s not intended for me. Scene three, the horrors of war. Male soldiers in the centre, women in the periphery. Scene four, women are rescued by male soldiers as cannons go off. One woman stands alone above the cannons, lifting a baby child up towards the sky. Her role is to carry hope in the innocent child, and to direct attention to the ceiling, to the future. I look up and see five giants, representing five continents. They rise up above the scenes of the progress of humankind, or frankly the progress of white Western men. They rise up and join hands in unity. A union of white men.
Chapter I

Introduction
INTRODUCTION: *WHAT WE ARE OR WHAT WE DO*, CONFLICTING NARRATIVES OF GENDER EQUALITY AT THE UNITED NATIONS

Organizations are one arena in which widely disseminated cultural images of gender are invented and reproduced (Acker 1990:140).

Organisations are inherently gendered (Acker 1990; 1992; 2012). This thesis focuses specifically on the United Nations (UN) and how gender equality is constructed through the organisational culture, structure and on a policy level. The UN stands out from other organisations as it is charged with values such as peace, human rights, and gender equality, being an advocate for these values on a global arena. At the same time the UN is an organisation with a long history of not living up to these values internally. At this moment in time, the UN is standing on the edge, once again having formulated a quest of becoming an organisation, which leads the global development agenda (UN General Assembly 2015) towards gender equality by example. In 2017 a System-wide strategy on gender parity (UN 2017) was released reaffirming the goal of gender balance within the UN system. This thesis builds on an interview case study conducted at the UN Headquarters of Geneva, just months after the release of the Strategy paper (UN 2017). I set out to interview five women to capture the initial reactions.

Gender relations, ideas of gender and gender equality, which are formed in organisations, have implications on a societal level (Holgersson et al. 2011). Studying gender and gender equality in organisations is important to understand gendered structures in our societies. In this endeavour, the organisation of the UN is a particularly interesting case as it is a workplace for individuals from the whole world. If studying the construction of gender relations and gender equality in organisations helps us understand these processes on a societal level, studying the UN micro cosmos of individuals from all corners of the world might help us understand gendered structures on an intersectional level.
Separating result from process

The UN has a long history of being an advocate for gender equality in the field\(^1\). Much attention has been directed at the impact the UN has on human rights of women and girls all over the world, and rightfully so. The UN’s work in the field is guided by the global development agenda, currently articulated in the Sustainable Development Goals (UN General Assembly 2015), successor to the Millennium Development Goals (UN General Assembly 2000). One of the organisation’s goals is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls before 2030 (UN General Assembly 2015).

Meanwhile gender equality within the UN organisation has been lagging behind and gender equality often is viewed solely as a result of the work of the UN and not as an internal process. I argue that process and result are connected through complex interlinkages and cannot be viewed as isolated from each other. While acknowledging the legacy of the UN’s achievements towards gender equality on a global level, I draw my attention to the internal processes of the UN in an attempt to complete the picture. The focus of my research and this thesis is to critically explore organisational processes, which form and construct gender equality as an idea and practice within the UN organisation. Turning now to the history of how the idea of gender equality as an internal process has emerged within the UN over the course of its history.

\(^1\) The use of the term the field is problematic as it positions the UN outside of the field. It creates a dichotomy between the UN as an organization, and the rest of the world, as the UN deals with the field but is not part of it. I use the term in this thesis, while I acknowledge that the distinction is not clear-cut.
THE GENEAOLOGY OF THE IDEA OF A GENDER EQUAL UN

The underrepresentation of women in the UN system has been evident since the inception of the organisation and was first reported in the 1950’s (Defeis 2001). In 1970 the UN General Assembly took the first careful steps to change by adopting a resolution (UN General Assembly 1970) in which they expressed hope, yet not formally demanding, that the UN system would lead by example and employ women on all levels. Three years later, not a single woman held one of the higher positions at the UN, and a colloquium of senior UN officials was commissioned to study the processes of hiring, retaining and promoting women (Haynes 2008). The colloquium showed how UN policies favoured men, that higher qualifications were required from female staff, than from their male counterparts and it revealed an organisational culture characterised by stereotypes about women and which jobs they were less suitable for, such as jobs in science or finance, or jobs requiring a strong field presence (Szalai 1973; Haynes 2008). Women were not expected to be able to bring their husband and family to the field, which was acknowledged as an important factor hampering their retention and promotion. Furthermore, the colloquium recognized that the role of the civil servant was very different from the social role of the woman (Haynes 2008). They refuted the idea that women left the UN because of family reasons, they left “…when they realized that the glass ceiling prevented their career development” (Haynes 2008:195).

In 1974 the objective of achieving gender balance within the UN organisation by the year of 1980 was introduced (Defeis 2001). This resulted in more Western women entering the UN and a fair representation of women in the lower levels of the organisation, while the top managerial level continued to be heavily male dominated (Haynes 2008). In 1990 women held only seven per cent of the D-level positions and the General Assembly introduced a

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2 UN staffs are divided into different staff categories. Starting from the top of the hierarchy, categories relevant for this thesis are: (i) the Secretary-General, currently Antonio Guterres; (ii) Deputy Secretary-General; (iii)
new goal. Learning from previous failures, they placed emphasis on women in managerial positions, on increasing representation of women from developing countries, and they suggested a more modest ambition. By 1995, thirty-five per cent of UN staff and twenty-five per cent of top managerial positions (D1 level and above) would be female (UN General Assembly 1990). The fifty-fifty target was reintroduced in 1997. This time the target was to be met by 2000 (UN General Assembly 1997). As it was not, the UN assessed why and once again concluded that men kept being un-proportionally promoted to women (Haynes 2008).

In 2007 women who held P1 positions or higher, with contracts of one year or more, made up only thirty-eight per cent (UN General Assembly 2008), and the increase of women in the organisation had been negligible the past two years. A UN report (UN General Assembly 2008) evaluating the reasons for this stagnation presented following challenges “...inadequate accountability, monitoring and enforcement mechanisms; lack of special measures for gender equality; /.../ weak implementation of flexible work arrangements; and higher attrition rates for women as compared to men” (UN General Assembly 2008:1). In 2008 the informal organisational culture was pointed out as a factor constraining women’s advancements (UN 2008; Defeis 2011).

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) was formed in 2010 with a mission partly to monitor the status on women within the UN system (Defeis 2010). This was a milestone, according to Defeis (2011:40), who suggested that the next important step perhaps would be to appoint a woman to the highest post, the Secretary-General. In 2016 UN Women showed that the correlation between seniority and the percentage of men was still prevalent in the organisation (UN Women 2016). The percentage of men increased with each level of the hierarchy, starting with thirty-

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3 Developing countries, a term used by the UN, deserves critique for many reasons. First, use of this terminology constructs a false and polarizing idea of countries as either developed or developing. Second, it entails a normative idea that developing countries should become developed, following the models of currently developed countries. Third, it utterly fails to reflect the current complex reality in which countries are facing great variations of economic, social and environmental challenges, and where the bulk of the world’s countries are not on the two ends of a scale, but rather somewhere in the middle. Four, the terminology brings colonial connotations as developed countries are associated with rational, modern and civilized values as opposed to developing countries, which are associated with backwards looking, uncivil and traditional values.
nine percentages at level P1 going up to seventy-three percentages on the top level (UG). In September 2017 the then newly appointed Secretary-General Antonio Guterres launched a System-wide strategy on gender parity (UN 2017). Once again reinforcing the aim to achieve gender balance within the UN system this time the due date was set to “...well before 2030” (UN 2017:2). The Strategy paper (UN 2017) rightly acknowledges that it is not the first initiative within the UN to reach the goal of equal representation of women and men. It is rather a two-decades-old commitment, which yet is to be fulfilled.
RESEARCH SCOPE: AIM AND DELIMITATIONS

The aim of my thesis is to show how gender equality is constructed and understood, as an idea and in practice, within the UN entity in which my research took place (referred to hereafter as the Office). In doing so I am guided by following three research questions:

- How is gender equality constructed on a policy level by the System-wide strategy on gender parity (UN 2017)?
- How can the organisational structure be understood in terms of gendered processes, and what are the implications of the processes of recruitment, retention, and promotion on gender equality?
- How is gender equality constructed through organisation cultural aspects such as norms, ideals and gender relations?

Using the UN as a case study, my focus is on an operation at the Headquarters, not in the field. The result of my qualitative research is intimately connected to a specific time and place (Haraway 1988) and I do not claim that the result is either significant for the entire UN nor replicable in other contexts. However, the result of my research gives one an in-depth picture of how gender equality is understood within one particular context of the UN. I pay special interest to the System-wide strategy on gender parity (UN 2017), however this is not study gender equality work in organisations specifically, as I analyse gender equality as an idea and in practice in a business as usual scenario. The result of my research builds on the women’s experiences. Men can also be placed at disadvantage or limited by gendered processes and an uneven power distribution. However, this topic is beyond the scope of my research. While exploring topics such as e.g. parental leave policies and practises or cultural values, I do not set out to give an exhaustive mapping of all existing types of parental leave policies and practises or cultural values at the Office. The scope of my research is to analyse structural and cultural expressions pointed out by the interviewees.
THESIS OUTLINE

The personal stories and experiences of women working in the organisation are central in answering my research questions. Before proceeding to the analytical chapter of this thesis, I first introduce my research design, which led me to these very stories. Thereafter I present my theoretical framework and the analytical tools I employ. Following the theoretical framework, I discuss previous research of the UN and gender equality from a critical perspective. These parts make up the introductory chapter to my research.

I start the analytical chapter of my research with a brief presentation of the Office and the interviewees. The analytical part of this thesis is then presented in three main parts, following my three research questions. In the first part I analyse the System-wide strategy on gender parity (UN 2017). Thereafter I explore how seemingly gender neutral aspects of the organisational structure, such as recruitment, retention, and promotion essentially are gendered processes, which have including and excluding consequences. In the third and last part of the analytical chapter I analyse how the organisational culture, norms, ideals, and gender relations, shape and construct gender equality as an idea and in practice at the Office.

I end this thesis with a chapter concluding my main findings. In the conclusions, I return to and answer my research questions.
RESEARCH DESIGN

Organisations can be described in many different ways. Depending on who asks the questions and who gets to answer a different picture will appear (Holgersson et al. 2011:17). Following the feminist tradition of contextualising knowledge production (Haraway 1988; Lykke 2010:4; Koobak 2014:103) and to understand where this particular piece of research comes from, I start this section by reflecting on following questions, who asks the questions? and, who gets to answer? Secondly, I describe the steps in which the research was carried out. Lastly, I reflect on the ethics of conducting research.

Who asks the questions and who gets to answer?

Who asks the questions? I am a feminist researcher from a cross-disciplinary academic background, grounded in development studies and gender studies. I come from a Western, specifically Swedish academic tradition. The dominating language in the research field, Gender and organisations, is English, and research builds predominantly on case studies carried out in an Anglo saxon context, which characterises the development of the field (Holgersson et al. 2011:19). There are many misconceptions about feminist researchers, and I want to set these aside from the start. While conducting research on organisations from a feminist perspective, I acknowledge that not everything that happens in an organisation is a question of sex or gender. However, my starting point is an understanding that the structural power imbalances that consequently favour masculinity, whiteness, heterosexuality and able-bodiedness in society at large are reflected and re-produced in organisations. I view organisations as complex systems (Ramalingam 2013), and as social constructions (Martin 2003; Holgersson et al. 2011:18) where processes of doing gender, negotiation and constructing the idea of gender equality are on-going. The aim of my research is to advance the feminist agenda by understanding and dismantling asymmetrical power structures in complex organisations. In this thesis I do so by conducting a case study and interviewing women, all working within one UN entity, the Office, at the UN Headquarters of Geneva.
Who gets to answer? In this research project I have chosen to interview women to understand the complexities of their everyday work experiences. Men are the norm in a male dominated organisations and interviewing both women and men, runs a risk of confirming this norm. By focusing exclusively on women I aspire to show how women relate to their work on their terms, not how they relate to men or the norm (Holgersson et al. 2011:161). This said, I acknowledge that there is a large variation within the group *women*, and I hope to show this in this thesis. Women are never one thing and *women* are not a homogenous group. Other aspects than gender and sex shape our identities and women have different experiences depending on their ethnicity, sexuality and gender expression, to give just a few examples. There are no such a thing as *universal values* that are shared by all women. Nor is there a superior female perspective on organisations, gender or gender equality. All women do not share the same experiences. However they have the experience of being a women working in a male dominated organisation in common.

**Conducting interviews**

To better understand women’s ideas and experiences of gender equality, I conducted interviews with female staffers at the Office. The interviews took a semi-structured and conversational form (Punch 2005:169, Bryman 2012:471). I came in contact with the interviewees, using the *snowball sampling method* (Bryman 2012:202), as one interviewee put me in contact with the next one. The interviews were recorded, with the consent of the women, and were later transcribed by me. Over the course of one to two hours, the interviewees answered open-ended questions and spoke freely on following the four topics: the interviewees definition of a gender equal organisation, the interviewees view on the Office in relation to their definition of a gender equal organisation, the interviewees view on the Office’s main challenges in the endeavour to become a gender equal organisation, and lastly, resistance towards gender equality, as an idea and in practice, within the Office. I had prepared myself with strategies of how to establish rapport and how to get the interviewees to open up, on what after all can be considered sensitive topics, while being recorded. However, I was welcomed and met by enthusiasm and the women shared their time and their personal stories with me in more generous ways than I could have hoped for. The five interviews resulted in ninety-seven pages of transcripts, a rich narrative reflecting this particular time
and space – each conversation a moment between two women, sitting in an office building at the UN Headquarters, a day in late December 2017, in Geneva, Switzerland.

Analysing the material

The process of identifying themes began already during the interviews and in the process of transcribing. I employed techniques described by Ryan and Bernard (2003), while analysing my transcripts, paying specific attention to repetitions, local terms, similarities and differences, as well as theory-related material (Ryan & Bernard 2003) as I highlighted each quote, which touched upon the pillars of my theoretical framework, gendered processes (Acker 1990; 1992; 2012), complex systems theory (Weaver 1948; Seddon 2010; Ramalingam 2013), and policy analysis (Bacchi 2009; Bacchi & Eveline 2010). Extracting each quote and clustering these through mind mapping, I finally established themes and concepts for my analysis. I developed the research question and refined my theoretical framework through the very dynamic process of writing this thesis.

Research ethics

It was important for me not to conduct research on the interviewees, to extract knowledge using it for my own purpose. While guided by my topics, the interviewee’s interests steered our conversations. One interview ended up having a strong focus on the system-wide structures of the UN while another evolved around how to balance the role of being a professional civil servant and taking care of responsibilities in private life. This approach resulted in material showing great variation and multiple dimensions of gender equality. The UN is an organisation where women are at disadvantage when it comes to career opportunities (UN 2017) and it is also an organisation, which has failed to prove that it values and protects whistle-blowers. While the interviewees are not whistle-blowers, I take the responsibility seriously to use their confidence and stories wisely and to protect their integrity. This is why all answers are masked from any personal information and I do not use the names of the interviewees. I simply refer to them as Interviewee 1-5. Only I have access to the original recordings and the transcripts from the interviews and I do not reveal the name of the specific UN agency of where the research took place (Swedish Research Council 2011).
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Organisations are social constructs (Holgersson et al. 2011:239). Grounded in social constructionist theory, my starting position is an understanding that organisations are constructed by people and constantly in the making. To understand how gender equality is constructed and understood as an idea and in practice within the Office, I use a theoretical framework consisting of three pillars. Gendered processes, the first pillar, draws on analytical tools initially presented by Acker (1990; 1992; 2012) in the 1990’s and further developed in the 2010’s. Understanding organisations through gendered processes sheds light on the significance of sex and gender in organisations (Acker 1990; 1992; 2012). Equality cannot only be understood through gendered process as these coexist and intersect with other processes of exclusion (Benschop & Verloo 2011; Acker 2012). This is why I apply an intersectional understanding of Ackers (1990; 1992; 2012) gendered processes. The second pillar, complex systems theory, enriches the understanding of how gender equality is constructed and reconstructed through gendered processes. Viewing gender inequality as a complex problem (Weaver 1948), and organisations as complex systems (Ramalingam 2013), feeds into the feminist research tradition of stressing the importance of context, captured by amongst others Haraway (1988) in her concept of situated knowledges. Complex systems theory provides tools to analyse the implications of time and space and make up the second pillar of my theoretical framework. Lastly, the third pillar of my theoretical framework is post-structural policy analysis, a method introduced by Bacchi (2009; Bacchi & Eveline 2010). Bacchi’s (2009; Bacchi & Eveline 2010) method resonates with Ackers (1990; 1992; 2012) gendered processes as it builds on an understanding that policies are not merely addressing a problem that already exists, but rather policies are political interventions in the sense that they construct the problem they seek to address (Bacchi 2009; Bacchi & Eveline 2010), i.e. policies are a gendered processes. The three pillars of my theoretical framework, gendered processes (Acker 1990; 1992; 2012), complex systems theory and post-structural policy analysis (Bacchi 2009; Bacchi & Eveline 2010) are presented in greater detail below.
Gendered processes

Organisations are never gender neutral (Acker 1990; 1992; 2012; Ely & Meyerson 2000; Martin 2003; Persson 2011; 2012). In her article, *From Sex Roles to Gendered Institutions*, Acker (1992) argues that gender neutral organisations are an ideology rather than a reality, which builds on the false idea that gender does not play any role of significance in an organisation. Even though feminist scholars started to explore the implications and importance of gender in organisations in the 1960’s (Acker 2012), organisations were largely considered to be gender neutral until the mid 1990’s by researchers in the field of organisational research (Acker 1992; Alvesson & Billing 1999:19), and the ideology persist in organisations until this day. The gendered institution is a term underlining that gender constantly is a factor in the “...processes, practices, images and ideologies, and distribution of power” (Acker 1992:567) in institutions. Acker (1992) presented four gendered processes that together construct the gendered institution. These gendered processes make up the first pillar of my theoretical framework and are set out below.

Acker’s (1992) gendered processes build a process-oriented understanding of gender, first introduced by West and Zimmerman (1987) in their article Doing gender. Doing gender is a critique of essentialist understandings of gender (West & Zimmerman 1987; Holgersson et al. 2011) and in an organisational context it refers to how common ideas and values connected to *being a woman*/femininity or *being a man*/masculinity are established communicated and constructed, through e.g. organisational culture and structures (Acker 1992; Holgersson et al. 2011:238).

While gender constantly is a factor in organisations, it is not enough to understand power dynamics and processes of segregation (Crenshaw 1989; 1995; Acker 2012), and Acker (2012) expanded the understanding of the gendered processes by including the intersections of gender, race and class-making processes. Intersectionality was originally coined by Crenshaw in a quest “…to develop a Black feminist criticism” (1989:138) towards feminist theories and anti-racist politics. Crenshaw (1989; 1995) argues that discrimination cannot be understood through an analysis of single categories, such as gender, as the narrative of women as a gendered category, is based on white, middle-class women’s experiences. While Acker (2012) includes race and class in her developed analysis of gendered processes, I use intersectionality as an analytical tool to understand how organisation processes have
including and excluding effects beyond the categories of *woman* and *man*, without using class and race as a specific starting point. In this thesis I use both the terms *sex* and *gender*, as I seek to understand processes of doing gender, how gendered processes construct and reconstruct gender inequality, and how organisational processes have sex segregating effects. My focus is not on the *women* or *men* in the organisation.

The first gendered process presented by Acker (1992) is overt decisions and procedures. These set the standards and norms of how individuals approach their work and each other, and provides the formal regulatory framework of the organisation (Acker 1992:568). I hereafter refer to this analytical tool as the *organisational structure*. Structures create patterns, which can be described and sometimes measured in numbers (Holgersson et al. 2011). This makes the first gendered process perhaps the most tangible. *Gender structures* is a term used to describe types of sex segregation in organisations, such as vertical and horizontal sex segregation. Vertical sex segregation refers to the number of women and men on different organisational levels and horizontal segregation aims to describe the degree of sex segregation within tasks, professions and positions (Alvesson & Billing 1999). Identifying gender structures is a tool to understand the significance of sex and gender in organisations (Holgersson et al. 2011:238). Studies show that eighty-five to ninety per cent of top positions in organisations in Western, post-industrial societies are currently occupied by men, that women are overrepresented in low-income occupations, and that men are offered more and better opportunities (Alvesson & Billing 1999). These sex segregations cannot be explained by the individual’s free will or different skills sets, but are all expressions of gender structures (Alvesson & Billing 1999:61; Gregory & Milner 2009). Organisational structures are constantly constructed, re-constructed and changed through on-going processes, in which sex and gender is embedded (Acker 1992). I use organisational structure as an analytical tool to understand how processes of recruitment, retention and promotions “...control, segregate, exclude, and construct hierarchies based on gender” (Acker 1992:568).

The second gendered process introduced by Acker (1992) is the construction of images, symbols and ideologies, hereafter referred to as the *organisational culture*. The organisational culture is subtle and intangible in its nature, yet it affects everyday thoughts and actions of individuals in organisations (Alvesson & Billing 1999:113; Holgersson et al. 2011:239). It has been described as shared meaning making, as it is constructed and shared by a group of people (as opposed to the ideas of single individuals) and it operates on the
level of conception, as ideas and beliefs exist in our minds (as opposed to actions) (Alvesson & Billing 1999). Organisational culture has also been described as the non-rational, value charged, emotional and partly unconscious dimension of social life (Alvesson & Billing 1999:113), however it provides predictability to meaning making, thinking and values (Alvesson & Billing 1999:118). An organisation can have parallel or multiple cultures. The organisational culture governs ideas and conceptions of women, femininity, men, masculinity and sexuality. Sexuality in an organisational context can be understood as sexual actions or sexual harassment, but also interpretations of sexuality from a social-norms perspective such as the heteronorm (Alvesson & Billing 1999). Cultural norms are both including and excluding, as the norm determines \textit{what or who} is the deviation from the norm (Kanter 1977; Holgersson et al. 2011). I use organisational culture as an analytical tool to explore what ideals are held high in the Office, what is considered the norm, who is considered a minority or token (Kanter 1977), what constitutes an ideal worker (Acker 2012), how resistance is expressed or manifested and what role sexuality plays in the Office.

The two gendered processes of organisational structure and culture are tightly connected. One example of this is how the gender structures and the numerical dominance of men in senior management, puts the minority group \textit{women in senior management} in the position of tokens. Kanter (1977) explains how social dynamics and behaviours of tokens can be understood as a result of being in a minority position, rather than from \textit{being a woman}. The effects of a token position, of a gendered structure, thus have implications on a cultural level.

The two other gendered processes presented by Acker (1992) are the process of interaction and internal processes. These two analytical tools go beyond the scope of my research and not a part of my theoretical framework.

\textbf{Complex systems theory}

\textit{[T]he processes creating and maintaining sex segregation are complex and vary with time and place} (Acker 1992:566).

Kanter argues that too often organisations and processes are studied “...as if they exist in a vacuum” (1976:415), and calls for an understanding of organisations as systems. To further understand gendered organisations as complex systems, and to underline the implications of
context and gender equality as a complex problem, I use complex systems theory as an analytical tool. Complex systems theory is the second pillar of my theoretical framework.

Intersectional and gendered processes and processes of doing gender are complex (West & Zimmerman 1987; Crenshaw 1989; Acker 1990; 2012; Benschop & Verloo 2011; Holgersson et al. 2011). Weaver (1948) first introduced complexity as an analytical tool to understand problems with many variables that have erratic or completely unknown behaviour, in what today is considered one of the founding texts of complexity theory (Ramalingam 2013). Gender equality, or achieving gender equality is a complex problem as it deals “…with a sizable number of factors which are interrelated into an organic whole” (Weaver 1947:5).

Organisations are complex systems (Kanter 1976; Ramalingam 2013). A few characteristics of complex systems are the concepts of networked organisations, interconnectedness, systematic learning and adaptive strategies (Ramalingam 2013). Networked organisations explains how one organisation does not function isolated from it’s surrounding environment (Ramalingam 2013). On the contrary, organisations are interconnected to multiple actors, processes and phenomenon in a complex network. Systematic learning aims to describe how these interconnected actors constantly learn from and adapt to their circumstances and each other, and that organisations evolve over time together (Ramalingam 2013). Adaptive strategies imply that change in complex systems is a non-linear process, which neither can be controlled nor predicted (Weaver 1948; Ramalingam 2013). It is not possible to foresee all consequences of an intervention, and this has implications on change and change management (Benschop & Verloo 2011; Ramalingam 2013).

The opposite of a complex problem is a simple problem. A simple problem has few variables, which can be isolated and their behaviour can be predicted and planned for (Weaver 1948; Ramalingam 2013). Dealing with simple problems is best done through linear problem solving or simple problem solving. However, when dealing with complex problems and complex systems, understanding contexts is crucial and a complex systems approach, or so called systems thinking approach is needed (Ramalingam 2013). I use complex systems theory, as an analytical tool to explore how gender equality is constructed and understood as a complex idea and in practice, in a complex system.
Post-structural policy analysis

The third and last pillar of my theoretical framework is post-structural policy analysis, an analytical tool introduced by Bacchi (2009; Bacchi & Eveline 2010) and it is based on the question what is the problem represented to be?

Bacchi’s (2009; Bacchi & Eveline 2010) method of post-structural policy analysis builds on the understanding that policies are not neutral in the sense that they simply address a problem that already exists out there. On the contrary, Bacchi (2009; Bacchi & Eveline 2010) argues that policies should be seen as political interventions as they shapes the discourse by defining what is seen as a problem and what is not. This approach challenges the common understanding of policies as reactive and that policies are composed with the aim to solve a problem. Bacchi (2009; Bacchi & Eveline 2010) argues that policies are instrumental in shaping our understanding of the problem by constructing it, and that this has implications on social interactions and organisations. Policymaking is a gendered process (Acker 1992).

The post-structural policy analysis aims to show how a particular policy constructs the problem. The method consists of six questions of which I use three. The first one being what is the problem represented to be? After having analysed the policy’s representation of the problem, underlying assumptions that characterise this problem, become visible. I answer following question what presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem? by looking at actions proposed in the Strategy paper (UN 2017). Lastly, I answer the question, what is left unproblematic in this problem representation? and identify gaps in how the Strategy (UN 2017) represents the problem (Bacchi 2009; Bacchi & Eveline 2010).

Accordingly, my theoretical framework builds on three pillars, gendered processes (Acker 1992), complex systems theory (Weaver 1948, Ramalingam 2013) and post-structural policy analysis (Bacchi 2009; Bacchi & Eveline 2010). The second two are complementary to gendered processes, and serve to deepen my analysis of the Office as a gendered institution. Turning now to previous research on gender equality and the UN.
PREVIOUS RESEARCH - THE UN FROM A CRITICAL AND GENDERED PERSPECTIVE

A lot of research has been conducted focusing on the UN and gender equality. However, the bulk of this research focuses on the result of the organisation, on what the UN delivers in the field to “...achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” (UN General Assembly 2015:14). The result of the organisation and the processes behind cannot be seen as isolated from each other. Process and result are connected. With such a powerful objective to guide the organisation results in the field, why is so little attention paid to gender equality related to the internal processes of the UN?

UN Women, responsible for monitoring the status of women in the UN system, monitors and shares system-wide statistics in their report Status of Women in the United Nation system (UN Women 2016). Alongside reports from the UN, journalists have set out to critically examine organisational processes from a gender perspective. Other than reports coming from the UN or from media, empirical research is scarce regarding gender equality within the UN system. The internal organisation of the UN has been neglected and there is a gap when it comes to research on gender equality and gendered processes within the UN organisation. Understanding the internal processes is vital to understand the organisation, and this is where my research comes in.

In this section I present previous research focusing on the internal processes of the UN, from a critical gender perspective. I start by giving an overview of the gendered context in which the UN was founded. Secondly, I highlight previous research on sexual harassment within the UN system. Lastly I turn to sexual abuse of civilians by UN staff in peacekeeping, of which repeated reports have tarnished the reputation of the UN as an advocate for women's rights.
The UN was founded by white Western men

The UN was founded in 1945 (UN 2018b), a time when heads of states by and large were men. Sweden, the country where I am born and one, which often is presented as a frontrunner in terms of gender equality, had not yet had a single woman in a governmental position by this time (Holgersson et al. 2011). Men from Western and Northern states were driving forces in the creation of the UN and this reflected on the organisation, its rules and staff selection processes (Haynes 2008). The UN Charter (1945) is the backbone of the UN and it regulates e.g. the purpose and principles of the UN, membership, the UN organisation and its mission. Right from the first paragraph it is clear that the UN sets out to promote equal rights of women and men (UN 1945). From inception, one of the goals for the UN has been to build an international organisation reflecting the diversity of the people of the world (Haynes 2008) as articulated in article 101:

> The paramount consideration in the employment of the staff and in the determination of the conditions of service shall be the necessity of securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity. Due regard shall be paid to the importance of recruiting the staff on as wide a geographical basis as possible (UN 1945).

As the number of member countries grew, diversity at the top did not. The top positions of the UN were still held by white men, with very few exceptions (Haynes 2008). Article 8 of the UN Charter (1945) declares that women and men are equally eligible to participate in the UN organs, without restrictions. Yet women are underrepresented within the organisation, specifically at the higher positions (UN 2017). Chapter XV of the UN Charter (1945) determines how the secretariat is run and how staff is appointed, however, it does not contain any formulation regarding gender balance. The UN Charter (1945) is not gender neutral in its appearance as it categorically refers to the chief administrative officer of the organisation i.e the Secretary-General as he. As of today, no woman has yet held the position of Secretary-General (Defeis 2011) and the UN organisation is one where men occupy the majority of higher positions and have disproportionate access to power and resources (UN 2017; Haynes 2008).
Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is a problem within the organisation and multiple women have allegedly been fired due to raising claims of sexual harassment (Haynes 2008). The typical case is a woman being refused promotion or being terminated after having come forward with accusations of sexual harassment. Meanwhile the organisation claims that there is no connection between the accusation and the termination, and the accused, often a senior male colleague, blocks investigations by claiming immunity (Haynes 2008; Defeis 2011). In the case of the United States, visa for the staff is related to their employment. Coming forwards with sexual harassment accusations, a female UN staffer who is also a non US citizen does not only risk her job, but also risks being deported as a consequence of the job loss (Haynes 2008). Sexual harassment cases are handled confidentially by each UN entity, which is why there are no overall statistics of such cases (Defeis 2011) and the process in itself is opaque (Haynes 2008:211). According to the UN regulations (UN 1945; UN General Assembly 1946), UN staff have immunity to prosecution in state courts, thus victims of sexual harassment have to rely on the internal processes of the UN to solve allegations of sexual harassment. This internal system of justice has been criticised for failing to be transparent, straightforward and efficient, consequently the UN has been accused of mishandling allegations of sexual harassment (Defeis 2011).

Sexual abuse by peace-keeping staff

One area of research concerning gender and the UN and gender focuses specifically on peacekeeping (Persson 2011; Higate 2007). Peacekeeping is a male dominated operation; with only three per cent of UN peacekeepers being women (UN 2017). Previous research deals with gendered power relations, gendered practices and sexual exploitation by UN peacekeeping staff. Male peacekeeping staff of the UN have been repeatedly charged with sexual abuse of local adult women and minors, rape, exchanging food for sex, and systemically exploiting local women and girls for the production of pornographic films (Defeis 2011; Higate 2007). Sexual exploitation of local women and minors by male peacekeeping staff has reportedly led to the spread of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV, assaulted women being stigmatized and labeled as prostitutes by their local
communities, and “...tens of thousands of “peacekeeper babies”” (Higate 2007:100). Despite this, punishment is rare and the consequences for sexual abuse are negligible (Higate 2007).

The first reports on sexual abuse came in the 1990’s from Bosnia, Herzegovina and Kosovo, and were followed by reports from Mozambique, Cambodia, East Timor and Liberia (Defeis 2011). It was not until 2004, when allegations of abuse emerged again, this time in the Democratic Republic of Congo, that these were met by public responses from high level UN officials (Defeis 2011). An outraged Kofi Annan, Secretary-General at the time, called for a zero tolerance policy (UN 2004; Defeis 2011). It has been pointed out that the UN are limited in terms of counteracting sexual exploitation by the their need of resources and to uphold diplomatic relations (Higate 2007). The UN is dependent on the goodwill of troop contributing countries and in no position to demand troops with gender sensitivity training or with gender balance (Higate 2007). The efforts to prevent sexual abuse by UN staff proved to have failed when new allegations of systematic abuse came in 2007 from Southern Sudan (Defeis 2011). Ban Ki-moon, newly appointed Secretary-General at the time, reaffirmed the zero tolerance strategy, however later that year reports of sexual exploitation or abuse of children, some as young as ten years, came from Haiti (UN Secretary-General 2007; Defeis 2011). Between January and June in 2010, forty-five allegations of sexual assaults and abuse by UN staff came in (Defeis 2011). Even though actions, such as training and disciplinary measures have been taken, sexual abuse by UN staff persists and is continuity reported (Higate 2007; Defeis 2011). I now proceed to the second and analytical chapter of this thesis.
Chapter II

Analysis
INTRODUCTION

This analytical chapter consists of three main parts: System-wide strategy on gender parity, Organisational structure and gendered processes, and lastly, Organisational culture and gendered processes. Each part is divided into sections.

In the first part I analyse the Strategy paper (UN 2017) using two different analytical tools. I start with a post-structural policy analysis (Bacchi 2009; Bacchi & Eveline 2010:117), to explore how the Strategy (UN 2017) shapes the understanding of gender equality at the Office. In the second section I employ a complex systems theory perspective (Weaver 1948; Ramalingam 2013), to analyse the implications of equality as a complex problem and the Office as a complex system.

Secondly, I explore how gendered processes of the organisational structure constructs gender equality in the Office context. I do so in four sections. I start by discussing vertical and horizontal sex segregation within the Office. Then I proceed to analyse the recruitment process from a gendered lens. In the third section I discuss retention and analyse how parental policies work discriminatory towards different genders. Lastly, I analyse the implications of gender in the process of promotion.

In the third and last part of this of this analytical chapter, I analyse how the gender equality discourse and experience are shaped by the organisational culture at the Office. This I do in five sections. I begin by exploring the manager’s role in shaping the interviewees experiences of gender equality. Norms, which characterise the organisational culture are then analysed. I then proceed to explore stereotypes of women as an expression of the organisational culture face at the Office. Thereafter I explore gender relations and how women/femininity and men/masculinity are constructed as two dichotomies. In the last section I introduce and analyse what I call a culture of resistance towards gender equality within the Office. Before proceeding to the first part, I present the Office, and the five interviewees through their definitions of a gender equality workplace.
Presenting the Office

The UN is a complex and multifaceted organisation. The context in which the interviewees all work is an office of an intergovernmental UN body located at the UN Headquarters of Geneva, Switzerland. The top-position of the Office, the Secretary-General\(^4\), is a man. A woman has never held the position. The Office appointed its first woman Deputy Secretary-General earlier the same year as the interviews took place. The Office is divided into divisionsspecialising in one of the core operations and each division is organised in smaller branches. Three out of five positions as Chiefs of division (referred to as Directors by the interviewees) are men. Only one Chief of division is a woman, and she also temporarily fills one vacant position as Chiefs of division. Out of Heads of branches, twenty per cent are women and eighty per cent are men. The Office as a whole can be considered to have a gender balance (Holgersson et al. 2011). However, men are in numerical dominance in the top positions and thus have disproportional access to power, resources and influence, which is symptomatic for the UN system as a whole (UN 2017).

Secretary-General Guterres launched a System-wide strategy on gender parity (UN 2017) in September 2017. This Strategy (UN 2017) re-states the goal of equal representation of women and men on all levels across the whole UN system, and emphasizes that equal geographical representation must go hand in hand with gender parity. Secretary-General Guterres pledged to reach this goal “...well before 2030” (UN 2017:2), and each entity is responsible to make sure that their organisation meets the target by employing temporary special measures and developing specific implementation plans before December 2017 (UN 2017). The interviews took place in December 2017, some three months after the Strategy (UN 2017) was launched and during the very time when entities were expected to develop implementation plans.

\(^4\) The Secretary-General of the Office is a USG, the third highest position within the UN, generally officially appointed by the General Assembly, after the recommendation of the Secretary-General.
Presenting the interviewees

The women participating in this research project come from African, Asian and European countries. They are all employed within the P category, the staff category for professionals working as civil servants. Their range of seniority is spread across different levels of the P category and two of the interviewees are working on a P2 level, one on P3 level and two on a P4 level, being the most senior. The interviewees all have around ten or more years of UN experience, and their time at the Office varies from six months to more than seven years. During the interviews several ideas of what gender equality is became evident and it is clear that the organisation hold many different interpretations of what gender equality is. I asked the interviewees to describe a gender equal organisation and their definitions are presented below.

Interviewee 1 has noted that many view gender equality as the number of women in higher positions, but she has always thought of gender equality as making sure that women are not limited in what they do. Gender equality is more than a theory, she says and explains that as long as women are the ones who have children, and are inclined to be the ones who also take care of them, the focus must be to create career development that does not harm women who also are taking care of their families. She has never seen any mistreatment towards her female colleagues in her immediate team. However, Interviewee 1 points out that many aspects of the UN system as work against women, such as policies and procedures linked to sick leave during pregnancy, maternity leave and replacement of a staffers on maternity leave.

Interviewee 2 does not see gender inequality in the case of pay gaps between women and men at the UN, because salary is systematically calculated based on the position one holds and one's years of experience rather than negotiated individually. She views gender equality as different skills being valued more equally, as lesser bias and as similar opportunities. Adding that she doesn’t know if is possible that opportunities are the same for women and men, but at least more equal. Currently she is one of the exceptions of the organisation who works part time, eighty per cent. Interviewee 2 has noticed that even if it is technically an option, working part time is not valued by the organisation, and she thinks that this is a result of an unconscious bias in management.
Interviewee 3 defines a gender equal organisation as one where women and men have equal opportunities, are treated the same and fair, and where there is no discrimination or assumptions made about women. She has noticed a difference in how the private life choices of her male and female colleagues have different implications on their professional role. Men’s lifestyle choices are never questioned, she says, whereas women's are. Interviewee 3 argues that women are limited in their professional roles by assumptions and stereotypes based on their private life.

Interviewee 4 views gender equality as very complex. Sometimes it is treated as gender parity only, which she is not a big fan of, simply because she does not think that gender parity is the most pressing issue. Focusing on the numbers is good, but in her opinion retention is much more important, as the reason to why the UN doesn't have parity is because they don't retain women. She argues that it is vital to create an organisational environment that takes woman's needs into account because often a woman’s career cannot be reconciled with other priorities in her life, and there have been points in her career when she has not been sure whether she could continue. Interviewee 4 explains that when applying for a new position within the UN (which often is synonymous with a geographical move), she considers the safety and quality of life for her young child, the distance to her parents being their primary caretaker, but also potential opportunities for her partner.

Interviewee 5 pictures a gender equal organisation as complete equality in terms of remuneration, opportunities, representation, treatment and absence of all forms of discrimination. She would like to see more women in leadership positions, as the ones she attributes her growth and professional career to within the UN, are all women. The transparent pay scales make equal pay a lesser issue at the UN, according to her. However, a change in culture, mind-set and a lot more flexibility is needed to give women a level playing field. As a disproportionate childcare burden lies with women, they are negatively affected by the strong culture of presentism, as she calls it, a culture where one is supposed to be present at the Office 100% of the time. I now turn to the first out of three main parts of this analytical chapter – System-wide strategy for gender parity.
PART ONE: SYSTEM-WIDE STRATEGY ON GENDER PARITY

Post-structural policy analysis

Following Bacchi’s (2009; Bacchi & Eveline 2010) proposition that policies are not neutral in the sense that they simply address a problem that exists out there, I argue that the System-wide strategy on gender parity (UN 2017) should be understood as a political intervention in the sense that it shapes the gender equality discourse by defining what is seen as a problem and what is not. In following section, I first critically analyse the System-wide strategy on gender parity (UN 2017) starting with the question, what is the problem represented to be? (Bacchi 2009; Bacchi & Eveline 2010). Thereafter I analyse what underlying assumptions the Strategy (UN 2017) builds on, and lastly I highlight aspects that are not considered parts of the problem by the Strategy paper (UN 2017).

What is the problem represented to be in the System-wide strategy on gender parity (UN 2017)? The strategy paper (UN 2017) clearly defines the problem as underrepresentation of women throughout the UN system. Furthermore the Strategy paper (UN 2017) stresses that the problem, is most prominent in the leadership, in senior management and in the field, particularly in conflict-affected settings and in peace operations.

What are the underlying assumptions? According to the Strategy paper (UN 2017), the problem is due to “...a lack of sustained political will and accountability, absence of accompanying measures and enabling conditions for real reform, and resistance at different moments from key stakeholders” (UN 2017:2). The Strategy (UN 2017) presents sixty-five proposed actions. Eight of these fall under the section Mission settings and beyond the scope of my research. The remaining fifty-seven proposed actions are presented in the Strategy paper’s (UN 2017) thematic sections on: (a) targets and monitoring, (b) leadership and accountability, (c) recruitment, retention, progression and talent management, (d) senior
appointments, (e) creating an enabling environment, and lastly, (f) implementation plan (UN 2017). Each proposed action reveals a particular representation of the problem.

Proposed actions under section (a) target and monitoring, (b) leadership and accountability, and (f) implementation plan, all suggest that a lack of clear targets, effective monitoring, clarity in management’s responsibilities and clear consequences if responsibilities are not met, are characteristics of the problem. The assumption being that part of the solution is found in the organisational structure, the enforcement and management of this structure. Responsibly setting up and monitoring clear targets can achieve equal numbers of women and men.

The underlying assumption in proposed actions under section (c) recruitment, retention, progression and talent management, is that an unconscious gender bias in these particular processes contribute to the problem. The Strategy (UN 2017) acknowledges a bias in the workplace in general, and in job design, job descriptions and vacancy announcements in particular. It is assumed, for example, that the current system where staff are only eligible to apply for one grade above their current (a P2 can apply for a P3 position, but not for a P4) is part of the problem. Interviewees 1 and 5 would welcome a change, as they believe it will allow for more internal growth. Interviewee 1 argues that a change is only fair as individuals external to the UN system can apply for positions at any level, whereas she, who’s currently temporarily working on the level of a P3, but has an official post as a P2, cannot apply for posts on a P4-level. “Even if I fulfil all the criteria, I cannot apply”, she says and adds that despite such a change in policy, which would not require additional resources, she is sceptical to whether it will be implemented. When it comes to recruitment, retention and progression, the problem is again represented as a characteristic of the organisational structure. However, when it comes to talent management, the perspective changes and the underlying problem is represented as a characteristic of the group women. Following two proposed actions are in this respect exceptions to the rest of the Strategy paper (UN 2017):

Each entity to implement a system for mentoring female staff by both women and men, involving staff from all categories with a mentor being more senior (UN 2017:15).

Secretary General to propose a talent management pilot initiative of 50 staff across the UN system, with a focus on women at the P1-P3 level from the global south. /.../ Staff to be chosen from across the UN system /.../ would be provided opportunities and experiences which would provide them with the right skills for tomorrow’s leadership (UN 2017:15).
These two proposed actions contain an underlying assumption that the groups women, and women from the Global South in particular, lack opportunities, experiences and the right skills. The Strategy (UN 2017) seems to assume that opportunities and experience needs to be specifically provided to women from the Global South as opposed to the group men from the Global South or women from the Global North. These assumptions are examples of the discourse of the inadequate women as it is the women, specifically from the Global South in this case, who appear to be inadequate as they are, thus in need of mentoring, opportunities and skills. The discourse of the inadequate women effectively neglects all the competences and capacities, which these women de facto possess. Furthermore this approach risks to confirm and enhance perceived sex differences and to spark resistance from men who view these actions as unfair advantages (Ely & Meyerson 2000). This approach of fixing the women has shown to have limited or even negative impacts on gender equality (Ely & Meyerson 2000). During the interview, Interviewee 4 recognized that special efforts needs to be taken in order to achieve a diversity of women:

*Her* I think geographical representation is important. If you look into the numbers, you have women predominantly from Western countries. Of course. No surprise. So maybe they should do an effort, recruiting women from developing countries, women from poor countries, you know. And not the same usual suspects. I mean, I don’t have anything against these nationalities, but obviously the UN is predominantly white, Western, you know. [The Office] is a bit of an exception. Because you do have a lot of African nationalities here.

*Me* Also when you look at the women in the organisation?

*Her* Yeah. At least you will see them here, African women. It’s not the case for all organisations. No, no. It’s not the case. In some there might be none.

Interviewee 4 recognizes that women, and especially women who are not white and Western are underrepresented in the organisation. However, her focus is on the recruitment process and efforts, thereby representing the problem as a characteristic of the organisational structure.

When it comes to (d) senior appointments, the problem is represented to be lack of a fully merit based selection process. The underlying assumption being that if merit was a stronger factor in the selection process, more women would be selected to senior positions. The Strategy paper (UN 2017) addresses the merit-based argument, meaning that the overrepresentation of men would be due to men being more qualified, and points out that women on the contrary have shown to be more successful in tests used in the UN application
and selection process. The *problem* is represented to be gender bias in the selection process and the assessment tools, again characteristics of the organisational structure.

Section (e) *creating an enabling environment*, implies that the *problem* also lies in the lack of an enabling and inclusive organisational culture. Interestingly enough this representation of the *problem* is addressed with a structural measure – a guideline of good practice. Recommended actions show an underlying assumption that the *problem* is partly due to insufficiently applied flexible work arrangements, spousal employment visas, spousal employment, different policies for maternal and paternal leave, the absence of on-site childcare facilities, and the exclusion of same-sex spouses/partners in policies.

To sum up, the System-wide strategy on gender parity (UN 2017) identifies the organisational structure, culture, management and women as characteristics of the *problem*. The vast majority of proposed actions target the organisational structure. The Strategy paper (UN 2017) approaches the topic of organisational culture in broad formulations, such as “institutional environment for inclusion” (UN 2017:3), “supportive architecture” (UN 2017:9), and “an inclusive working environment” (UN 2017:10), without going into detail on what this means. The leadership is considered a part of the problem, and the Strategy calls for “gender-responsive and people-centred leadership” (UN 2017:26), without defining what this type of leadership implies in contrast to previous leadership.

What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? *Men* as a group are not targeted by the Strategy (UN 2017), as the problem is represented to be the *underrepresentation of women*, not the *overrepresentation of men*. Benschop and Verloo call for a development of gender equality strategies and argue for an inclusion of “…all stakeholders, not only particular categories of women” (2011:287). The *problem* is not presumed to be a characteristic of the group *male managers*, who could be assumed to uphold the excluding organisational structures and cultures. Thus the *blame* of this representation of the *problem* falls on the system, the organisation and its structures.

Gender equality is represented to be an equal amount of individuals from the categories of *women* and *men* and it doesn’t acknowledge any other options nor discuss transgender, non-binary or gender fluidity in any shape or form. Gender is consistently framed as binary throughout the Strategy (UN 2017). Consequently the policy reinforces and reproduces a cis-bias, which also is addressed by interviewee 5, as she explains how LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay,
transgender, queer, + meaning other sexualities such as asexual and pansexual) is not a part of the current gender equality discourse at the UN:

Let’s not even talk about transgender and related issues. I mean that’s… Let’s talk in the 22nd century in the UN. We’re really talking about an initial conversation on mainstreaming gender. Yeah, we can wait to the 22nd century, but why [laughter]? I mean, when we are talking about excluded groups, it’s ‘women’. But there are so many others. So make it an inclusive discussion. And why not do it right now?

The Strategy (UN 2017) does not problematize the categories of women and men, nor does it address diversity within the groups, with the exception of the sub-group women from the Global South. Women from the Global South, women and men are represented as homogenous groups.

The Strategy (UN 2017) states that policies and measures regarding beneficiaries are to be “...applied equally to opposite and same-sex spouses/partners” (UN 2017:20), acknowledging, still with a cis-normative perspective, that staff are of different sexualities. Sexuality or the heteronorm is not elaborated on further as an element of a potential power structure or bias relevant to the representation of the problem. However, the interviewees argue that there could be a reason to do so. Interviewee 3 points out that:

[7]The UN is one of the more discriminatory places, because we are so many nations coming in as one. You know, not accepting people of certain sexual orientation or, it’s not necessarily as accepting as if you were in a Western country where those things are seen more as the norm. There is definitely more resistance to that.

Interviewee 5 expresses similar concerns, when asked if she knows of any colleague being openly gay at the Office, she replies:

You know, that’s interesting. That’s a really good question. Okay, so, I’m relatively new, but, I do not know a single gay person in the organisation. And one of the things I’ve noticed is that people do have a lot of their family, you know, photos, have you noticed? It’s really a thing. So… and it seems to me that it’s more the heterosexual, nuclear family that’s… I do not know a single gay person, I don’t know a single transsexual, not at all here at [the Office], no. And I think that one or two people that I do think are… they keep… and I know them personally as well. And when I meet them with other UN people, they keep that part of their life very separate. Even on a social level with work people. So even when we go for drinks, it’s not… So it must be something that you don’t feel comfortable being or saying, right? So people don’t seem to share. But they do share if

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5 Policies and measures regarding beneficiaries deal with e.g. life insurance and final payments in the event of death in service.
they’ve got like families and everything. That’s okay to share. If you’ve got slightly different personal life, that’s probably not something you feel comfortable…

The heteronorm that these two interviewees point at will be elaborated on further in part three, Organisational culture and gendered processes.

The Strategy from a complex system theoretical perspective

The Strategy is only on gender parity. But it’s wider than just getting more women on top positions. Equality also comes from the culture of the organisation, tackling perceptions, like the perception of assistants as women’s jobs. And tackling biases, even our management has biases that they need to deal with, how they say things and communicate. All that has to be worked with as well. It’s wider than just parity. It’s not about parity.

As Interviewee 3 argues in the quote above, gender equality is a complex problem (Weaver 1947). However, the System-wide strategy on gender parity (UN 2017), represents gender equality as a quantitative, a numerical problem. This is not an unusual approach. Sundin and Göranson (2006) showed a tendency in gender equality initiatives, and how organisations predominantly targeted gender equality as a quantitative problem, rather than focusing on improving the conditions of women (Sundin & Göranson 2006). The interviewees note that gender equality, as a quantitative problem is much easier to address. “It’s too hard to look at the whole thing, and [the Office managers] don’t really know how to go about it, I guess”. Interviewee 4 says that “…it is easier to say ‘ensure that every shortlist has a woman’, it doesn't mean anything. You need to have in place more than just the parity-thing so you ensure that this is not the only tool you are using”. The interviewees point out that acknowledging the complexity of the problem poses new challenges for the Office management. To develop the analysis of the implications of the Strategy’s (UN 2017) representation of the problem, I use complex systems theory as an analytical tool. I start by problematizing the Strategy’s (UN 2017) sensitivity to gender equality as a complex problem. Then I proceed to analyse implications of the Office as a complex system and explore the consequences of interconnectedness and complex networks. Lastly, I discuss potential risks, which can emerge if the complexity of the problem is neglected during the implementation of the Strategy (UN 2017).

The Strategy’s (UN 2017) representation of the problem is an example of a simple problem solving approach. The nature of a problem is crucial when designing the solution. A simple problem solving approach is advantageous when dealing with a problem with few and
predictable variables, in an isolated environment (Weaver 1947). This approach together with the **top-down approach** and the **command and control approach**, are all characteristic of traditional management philosophy (Seddon 2010; Ramalingam 2013). The Strategy paper (UN 2017) is an expression of a traditional management philosophy. Interviewee 5 explains:

> We keep talking about silos. And yeah, we cannot implement this in a silo. It will never succeed. And that is the biggest challenge UN faces. Doing things in a little… Because it’s manageable, right? Doing little things with clear indicators, it’s the one thing you have under your control. But the real world is far more complex. So our system has to be equally complex. Those indicators of numbers are woefully inadequate. So, there needs to be a more integrated approach.

As she notes, the complex problem of achieving gender equality, requires new methods and met by a complex system. **Systems thinking** is a management philosophy that builds on an understanding of organisations as complex systems and it is informed by complex systems theory. Two central ideas of complex systems theory are **interconnectedness** and **networked organisations** (Ramalingam 2013). Every system is connected to other actors and phenomenon in a complex network. Change anywhere in this network will have effects on the system, as the actors constantly adapt to each other and their context. In the case of the Office, this implies that actors outside the Office context influence the equality discourse at the Office. One of the perhaps most obvious example is how the Strategy papers’ (UN 2017) representation of the **problem**, shapes the views of gender equality within the Office (Bacchi 2009; Bacchi & Eveline 2010). The gender equality discourse at the Office, is interconnected to the rest of the UN system and Interviewee 1, for example, argues that the gender inequality problems within the Office are solely due to UN system-wide structures. Interviewee 4 stresses that the Office cannot be taken out of its context, and adds “…if something is going to happen, it is going to happen on a [UN] global level, and [the Office] will be receiving this and adapt it to its own needs”.

The idea and practice of gender equality at Office emerges over time, and this is all but a linear, predictable or controllable process. Interviewee 5 expresses this, as she says:

> I don’t know what the next few years will look like; in terms of how the reform [on gender parity] is gonna play out, how the member state’s [reactions] will be. So much can change, that it’s not to be taken for granted that it’s going to be implemented without any hiccups. But the world has changed. And it just looks really wrong for the UN not to practice what it preaches. And we are seeing such strong signals being sent out by governments and leaders, by the private sector. I mean, the world is changing. So, I don’t know how much room there is to not do what we are supposed to do, in terms of [gender] parity.
Interviewee 5’s examples of member states’ governments, leaders and private sector, are all actors influencing how gender equality is perceived at the Office.

The System-wide strategy on gender parity (UN 2017) proposes that entities, which fail to show progress towards their goals by December 2019, will have their authority to recruit and select personnel lifted to a central HR function for one year. This is a new element in contrast to previous gender parity initiatives within the UN. Interviewee 2 acknowledges that it sends a positive signal, however, she has doubts “…I don’t know if it’s a real threat, or an empty threat. We will see. But clearly, [Secretary-General Guterres] has expressed it, which of course is a first step”. Interviewee 5 calls this a very strong push from the top “[a]nd that is unparalleled. I’ve never seen that in the last ten years in the UN. Even though everyone has talked about it. So this is real”. However, even she has her doubts, regarding if these consequences will be enforced:

I think there might be some lobbying in the run-up to that deadline. And perhaps if certain organisations have great links and political weight, they can influence discussions in New York [the world Headquarter of the UN] and put pressure on it not to happen. And that is very much a possibility. I think that certain organisations could take that back door. And we’ve seen it happen before, for other issues, so it’s not so outlandish to think it. Three years is a long time. Three, four years, things could change dramatically by then. And if sufficient political weight is thrown around…

Again, Interviewee 5 exemplifies the mechanisms of interconnected complex networks, and how they evolve over time in an unpredictable process. Clear support and engagement from the leadership is acknowledged as one of the key factors of success for gender equality work in organisations (Holgersson et al. 2011:204). However, this support has to be characterised by systems thinking, as it acknowledges that a system, which is not linear in its mark-up, cannot be controlled in a linear way. Trying to do so, by top-down management might have negative consequences, according to Interviewee 5:

Of course, I mean, even the private sector is struggling with [gender parity]. You look at company boards, they’re still very uneven, but I think that there is something organic happening in those companies. And here it’s not organic. You know, this came from New York, the gender parity strategy. It’s not bought in by the staff or the … There is no drive.

Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock (2013) propose principles that can guide development policy and practice in a complex environment. They argue that learning and re-designing the solution has to be an on-going process specific to its context, and learning needs to be characterised by experimentation (Andrews, Pritchett & Woolcock 2013). These principles are designed to counteract negative effects of traditional management (Ramalingam 2013).
One specific effect that Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock (2013) have identified is *isomorphic mimicry*. This tongue twisting term has a simple explanation. It means that organisations adopt a shape, which looks like what the strategy wants, while the shape might be ill matched with the context of the organisation, they do so in order to gain legitimacy and support from the top (Andrews, Pritchett & Woolcock 2013). Isomorphic mimicry is as a systematic problem that occurs in the wake of interventions based on reproduction of context blind best practice, close monitoring on targets and compliance, and being driven from the top down (Ramalingam 2013).

In the case of the Office, an example of isomorphic mimicry could be to hire external women to senior positions, in order to be able to report progress of the targets, without necessarily removing any discriminatory or excluding processes of the organisational structure or culture. Thus, the organisation achieves (or at least shows progress towards) the target of gender parity according to the Strategy (UN 2017), receiving praise from the UN leadership, but does so without making any substantive changes towards gender equality. Interviewee 5 expresses that there are signs of isomorphic mimicry at the Office:

> It is a number focused discussion. Because messages from the top matter and [the Office management] are really focused on the recruitments of more women. You know, so it’s very much focused on the process and the numbers. But where culture is concerned, beyond recruitment, it’s a too broad discussion and it’s not on the radar. It’s not on the radar. And it’s really unfortunate.

Interviewee 3 confirms that she thinks the target will be met, because managers are accountable to deliver on these. Furthermore she points out that the Strategy (UN 2017) does not give incentives to managers to work on an enabling environment, or to understand under lying factors as to why women at lower levels don’t move upwards in the organisation. The interviewees are already seeing signs of isomorphic mimicry, as efforts are focused on correcting the numbers rather than on understanding the complexity and the contextual implications of the problem. But Interviewee 5 argues that, “…our concern is a cultural change that allows women to stay on and grow from P2, P3, P4, P5. But within three years, that’s not happening. What’s happening is that we’re going to have a lot of external hires at the D2, D1, even P5 level”.

The Strategy paper (UN 2017) shows an understanding of gender equality as going beyond gender parity. It recognises that targets are only indicators for change, which cannot
be achieved without a wider transformation of the organisation. Even so, message from the top matters and the Strategy recommends that:

> [Managers at all levels who meet their targets and/or demonstrate good practice in support of gender equality and parity should be profiled on entity intranets, gender-related websites, at town hall meetings, and through an annual Secretary General Gender Award as well as any other available means (UN 2017:11).]

Interviewee 3 acknowledges the management’s good intentions while expressing her concerns regarding the lack of attention paid to the specific context of the Office:

> [The managers of the Office] do want to do it, and to do it well. But I don’t know. I think right now they are all men working on [the Office specific strategy]. Not enough trying to listen to the opinions or involving women at all. Because right now the top management is all male, like mostly male. And people working on the Office strategy are all men. There is no women involved in that, in that discussion at all. They haven’t sought out the opinions of women. They haven’t involved the gender focal points. They haven’t done any… It would be nice to have the opportunity to talk about the gender parity strategy, and what it means. Like to have focus groups or something like that. But none of that has been done. So it does land the question to ‘do they know how to go about doing it?’ You know? ‘Can they do it without women?’

It is important to point out that a traditional management is not upheld with bad intentions. While the leadership who uphold traditional management principles might do so unknowingly, the responsibility to adopt new principles for how work is organised, nevertheless lies with the leadership of an organisation.

“Organizational change is complex” (Benschop & Verloo 2011:285) and one cannot intervene in a complex system and expect only one effect as “[t]here are always numerous responses to any intervention - only some of which can be predicted” (Ramalingam 2013:394). Interventions to solve the problem as it is represented in the Strategy (UN 2017) will have effects other than exclusively advancing gender parity. Interviewees 3, 4 and 5 are raising concerns that recruiting women, external to the Office to meet the target, might be associated with risks of stigmatizing women and fuel resistance (resistance will be dealt with in part three: organisational culture and gendered processes). Interviewee 3 explains:

> Since I’ve been in the UN, it’ll be ten years next year, it has always been … There’s always that, sometimes you get a job… If you get promoted instead of a male colleague, it’s often ‘oh, it’s because you are a woman’. Like that’s the standard line. It’s often, ‘you were chosen because you were a women, not necessary because you were competent’. And I think that has always been there, now it will be maybe a bit more.

Mis-recruitment is seen as a risk, if women are picked as tokens (Kanter 1977), whose purpose is to rapidly advance the statistics, in contrast to being carefully chosen for the role
based on merits matching a real demand for a specific competence within the Office. Interviewee 5 explains:

Parity and performance have to go hand in hand. Otherwise it will fire back on all women. The once that performed well, will have to be constant… And this is why I think the women I did speak to that were not so excited about the parity strategy… They are very impressive and hard working women. I mean, they’ve worked hard to get where they are, against odds, with family, or whatever, so they feel that something like this puts them, you know, at a disadvantage against… Because it makes them look like they're ‘living of the state’. Think of it as a socialist approach towards economic development, versus a capitalist approach [laughter]. So they feel like, yeah, the perceptions would go down.

As Interviewee 5 notes, miss-recruiting one woman can have negative consequences on all women of the organisation. Given their minority position, women are seen as representatives for their group, rather than individuals (Kanter 1977). Furthermore, if not managed wisely, a large-scale inflow of external individuals to top-positions, regardless of their sex can have negative effects on any organisation. The interviewees point out how potential negative effects might not be seen as a result of the organisations failing capacity to introduce new managers to the Office, but rather reflect badly on the women of the organisation.

**Summary**

In this part, I have analysed the System-wide strategy on Gender Parity (UN 2017) using two different analytical tools. Following Bacchi’s (2009; Bacchi & Eveline 2010) method of post-structural policy analysis, I have shown that the policy paper (UN 2017) represents the problem as underrepresentation of women. The Strategy (UN 2017) proposes specific actions for change, all of which reveal underlying assumptions of the problem. At large, the problem is considered a characteristic of the organisational structure, management, or the organisational culture. However, a few examples reveal assumptions of the problem being a characteristic of the group women and the group women from the Global South. This is an expression of the discourse of the inadequate woman, which is problematic as it steals focus from the excluding processes of the gendered organisation, and from the actual capacities and competence which these women possesses. The Strategy paper (UN 2017) does not go so far as to problematize the role of men in upholding the organisational structure, culture and management. The Strategy (UN 2017) has an impact on gender equality as an idea, but also as practice. It is an example of how gendered process are interlinked with other processes of discrimination, which combined have including an excluding effects. One example of how
the Strategy (UN 2017) does so is by confirming a binary understanding of gender, which is excluding to other gender expressions and genders beyond the binary categories of women and men.

The Strategy (UN 2017) represents and constructs the problem as a quantitative problem. Adding complex systems theory (Weaver 1947; Seddon 2010; Ramalingam 2013) to the analysis, it becomes clear that gender equality is a rather a complex problem (Weaver 1947; Ramalingam 2013). The Strategy (UN 2017) suggests simple problem solving. By adding more women to the equation, the well-defined problem of insufficient representation of women will be solved. Simple problem solving is not sensitive to context. Understanding the Office as a complex system (Ramalingam 2013) is vital as the Office is interconnected and affected by other processes and actors (Ramalingam 2013), such as the UN system, member countries, governments and the private sector. I have argued that efforts to achieve gender equality needs to be guided by systems thinking and context specific, on-going learning and redesigning of the solution, characterised by experimentation (Benschop & Verloo 2011; Andrews, Pritchett & Woolcock 2013). If not, the Office can perhaps meet the target of gender parity according to the Strategy (UN 2017), but fail to alleviate excluding processes of the organisational structure and culture. Lastly, I have argued that all consequences of an intervention cannot be predicted in a complex system (Ramalingam 2013) and I have shed light on potential risks of the Strategy (UN 2017) leading to further stigmatizing of women and to fuelling resistance.
PART TWO: ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE
AND GENDERED PROCESSES

Gendered structures and sex segregation

The vertical sex segregation in the UN system is indisputable (UN Women 2016; UN 2017), with a numerical dominance of men in the top positions. This reflects a traditional power distribution between sexes, with men as superiors and women as subordinates. Horizontal sex segregation, i.e. segregation within tasks, professions and positions (Alvesson & Billing 1999) is not as visible and can thus be harder to detect. Interviewee 5 points out an example of horizontal sex segregation as she describes the unequal distribution of power between positions on the same organisational level, “...in [Secretary-General] Guterres’ cabinet, even though there is parity, the largest portfolios and agencies are with men”.

Statistics on sex segregation, specific for the Office are not publicly available. However, all interviewees argue that the vertical sex segregation at the Office follows the overall trend at the UN, which is that “[a] negative correlation exists between the representation of women and seniority – as grade levels increase, the proportion of women decreases” (UN 2017:5). As Interviewee 3, who has more female than male colleagues in her immediate team puts it, “[t]he managers are men. So that’s, you know, it’s not equal. And often people do say ‘oh [women] are overly represented’ but it’s not in terms of balance of power”. Interviewee 5 also acknowledges the unequal balance of power, as she argues that the very root of the gender inequality problem is a power dynamic that has to change.

According to Holgersson et al. (2011), one explanation to the sex segregation in the labour market of Western countries today is that women were prohibited by different laws to work during the years under which, the labour market was formed. Knowing that the UN was founded by men from Western countries, the bias in the organisation might be traceable to the history of Western organisations.
Returning to Guterres’ cabinet, regardless of horizontal sex segregation, the impact of equal representation cannot be neglected. Interviewee 5 argues that “...having gender parity at a top management level is an important signal to send”, suggesting that gender parity in the leadership is signaling, communicating with the organisation. Interviewee 2 also refers to this intangible way of communicating, when asked about where she sees the Office today in relation to her vision of a gender equal organisation, she replies:

I think that the fact that they started with the senior management is good. Because right now, [the Office] have only one woman which is a director. And of course, if they had two or three, it’s a good sign. It’s always a good sign when you get women in the high levels of the organisation.

Defeis (2011) argues that appointing a female Secretary-General would send a powerful signal. This is an interesting example of how the two gendered processes of structure and culture are tightly connected. A structural aspect, a gender balanced team on a top leadership level, sends subtle signals and communicates through organisation cultural processes. Secretary-General Guterres’ cabinet provides a visual example of a gender structure at the top level, which the organisation has never seen before. With Guterres’ cabinet as a point of reference, the management team of the Office is viewed in a different light by the interviewees.

Recruitment

The process of recruitment is central in achieving equal representation of women and men. The overrepresentation of men is evident already in the number of applicants to senior positions. The male dominance in the applications is a sign that something went wrong, according to Interviewee 4. According to Interviewee 3, efforts to recruit more women have become more formalized during her years at the UN, changing from women are encouraged to apply to having to re-advertise if there is not a certain percentage of women who make the first selection.

This recently happened at the Office. As there were not enough women applying for a vacancy for a senior position, the Office had to re-advertise it. Before doing so, an effort was made to find out how the Office could attract more women applicants. One male staffer talked to a handful of women at the Office asking questions such as “what would stop you from applying at this level?” Interviewee 3 point out that the answer to this question is more
complex than she could articulate in an answer to a direct question. As consequence of this many of the women who were asked gave \textit{flexible working arrangements} as an answer.

It’s very hard, beyond that, to say what really is the problem. Because it’s very hard to put in words. Okay, what is this bias that you face on a day-to-day level? What are some of the perceptions that affect you deeply? Sometimes they are little things that accumulate and that really do have an impact overall. And for men it’s like, ‘okay, so you don’t have any…? It’s just flexible working arrangements?’ And that was exactly the reaction of that colleague, when he went around and said ‘okay, all I got was flexible working arrangements’. And it’s not that. I was, like, trying to tell him, trying to explain a little bit more what it did feel like. But it’s not easy to do; I really struggled to say… how do you feel like you are treated different for being a woman then a man. /.../ There’s all these intangible things that along the road make you, you know, a certain way, or make you deal with things a certain way, see things differently as well, or tend to be more sensitive about some things.

There is not one simple answer to why women do not apply for senior positions, to the same extent as men do. Interviewee 3 is pointing at the complexity of the gender inequality problem. Gender inequality is again, not a simple problem, which is easily defined. It can be understood as an accumulated experience of facing everyday discrimination, stereotypes, biases and micro aggressions, or as an intangible experience, invisible and difficult to quantify (Sue 2010). The complex nature of gender inequality implies that it is affected by countless factors and that it is contextual.

The male colleague’s research resulted in a video posted on the Office’s Twitter account, encouraging women to apply for the senior position at the Office. Interviewee 5 shows me the video during our interview, she thinks it sends a good message to an external audience as it shows an aspiration, and she rhetorically asks, “[w]hy aren’t you trying to attract internal colleagues as well?” In this question Interviewee 5 suggests that a combined approach of recruitment of external women, retention and promotion of internal women is needed to achieve gender parity.

\section*{Retention and parental leave}

While gender parity can be achieved by recruiting women, every interviewee points out that this cannot be the only measure. Interviewee 4 thinks that the Office does not already have gender parity, is partly a problem of retention of women. Interviewee 5 doubts that the Office will be able to hit the targets of the Strategy paper (UN 2017) within the given timeframe, however, she stresses that following the timeline is secondary to stronger investments in growth of existing staff. Interviewee 3 recognizes that the underrepresentation of women in
top positions is not due to a lack of female candidates, “[w]e do have good women, I mean, potential leaders. We do have to nurture that. Right now I don’t think that it happens enough”. The interviewees call for changes in the organisational structure allowing women to stay and grow within the organisation.

Interviewee 1 points out how discriminatory system-wide policies related to parental leave are working against the retention of women. As her formal position is P2, but she is preforms work on the P3 level, she receives Special Post Allowance, also called acting salary. This means that she is paid as a P3 because she is performing work on a P3 level for a temporary period of time, in her case, for almost three years. She is expecting a child and when she goes on maternity leave, her salary will be calculated based on a P2 position during the leave. As women are allowed longer parental leave than men, they are more affected by the reduction of salary in the case they are receiving Special Post Allowance.

Just like the System-wide strategy for gender parity (UN 2017), parental leave policies represent gender as binary, thus contributing to a cis-norm (norms will be elaborated on further in part three: organisational culture and gendered processes) and the exclusion of non-binary and transgender staff. The UN allow for an unequal period of prenatal leave for women and men. Typically, the UN allows four months of maternity leave, and it starts two weeks before the expected due date. Media has reported on how this is problematic for staff who deliver their babies after the expected due date, as the remaining period of maternity leave, after the birth of the child then shrinks (Lieberman 2017). Furthermore, any sick leave during a six week period before expected due date also cuts in to the four months of maternity leave. Interviewee 1 explains, “[y]ou have these four months, but [the UN] take your right to fall sick or to take uncertified sick-leave six weeks before delivery”. And she continues:

Exceptionally [the UN] allow you to work one month until two weeks before delivery, if the doctors say that you are fine to work. So, if the doctor puts you on sick leave, [the UN] take it from the maternity leave. So what is incredible is that this sick leave might not even be related to your maternity.

Flexible working arrangements are not applied consistently throughout the organisation. A pregnant staffer wishing to work from home during the last period of the pregnancy in order to save the maternity leave to after the baby is born, might not be allowed to. If the birth giving staffer uses six weeks of the maternity leave prior to the birthday of the baby, the period to recover after a pregnancy and giving birth, as well as bond with the new born child
is limited to two and a half months. In a scenario where the baby is born later than expected, this leaves even fewer weeks of maternity leave after the birth of the child.

Parental leave practices works discriminatory towards men as well, as paternity leave is typically limited to one month. One month parental leave confirms the heteronorm and the stereotype that men will not have the role as either an equal nor primary caregiver. This is an example of how men also can be placed at disadvantage by gendered processes. Consultants, which makes up some one third of the organisation, do not get parental leave at all (Lieberman 2017).

There is no system-wide procedure for filling the temporary vacancy of a staffer on parental leave. The replacement of a staffer on parental leave is determined by availability of resources according to Interviewee 1, and she describes how replacements are handled within the Office:

> The fact that even if women are allowed to have four months of maternity leave, the maximum you are going to get replaced, is three months. And, it’s not even sure. Because if one colleague of yours got pregnant before you, then there is no money to replace you. So, as I said, not in my team, but I could imagine that for some higher managers who are men, they could be consciously or unconsciously affected by that idea, that ‘if I have a lot of women in the age from thirty to forty and I’m not gonna get a replacement for full-time, then I’m going to have a problem.’

Interviewee 1 recognizes that this might contribute to a male-bias when recruiting and promoting staff, as men are never expected to take more than one month parental leave, while women are.

**Promotions**

Besides recruiting senior women and retaining women, one measure available for the Office to achieve gender balance on the higher levels of the organisation, is to promote female staffers. Interviewee 4 recalls, “[n]ot now, but like two years ago, we were looking at numbers, and the numbers showed that to move from P2 to P3, it takes a woman on average in UN around seven years and for a man two, I think”. Regardless of the exact number of years, the evident vertical sex segregation suggests that the promotions of women are not utilized to its fullest potential as a measure to achieve gender parity.

Interviewee 2 reflects on why internal female candidates fall behind, and argues that it cannot be because of a lack of work experience:
We see in [the Office] on a lower level, there are a lot of women. At entry level, there are as many women as men. But very quickly, women fall behind. They have slow careers. I think it’s difficult to say ‘it’s because the women, they take extended leave because of the children, so they have less work experience, hence they are less qualified’. I think at the very beginning, that argument doesn’t work. Because almost all [women] work one hundred per cent. Even part time work is eighty per cent, there is no option for less. So that work experience argument, it’s difficult to validate.

Following Interviewee 2’s line of argument, women on a P2 level applying for a P3 level, could rather be assumed to have more experience when they apply, as they in general stay on the P2 level for a longer period than men.

Interviewee 4 views promotions as a sign of appreciation from the organisations:

Who are you going to like more as a boss? Tell me. Me, that every time… ‘Oh, I can’t come today, my [child] is sick’, ‘oh, I need to take [my child] today to the dentist’, ‘I need to take [my child] there and there’. Especially until they get four or five, all the time it’s something. They are sick, they are this or that. So… [sighs]. Who will you prefer? And whom will you promote? I don’t think it’s going to be me.

From her perspective, one reason to why men are promoted to a larger extent than women, is that male performance is appreciated more by the organisation than women’s performance.

Interviewee 5 acknowledges that an internal career within the UN system as a woman comes with difficulties:

It’s just easier to drop out. I know so many women at the P2, P3 levels that I saw when I was very, very junior. And super promising careers. They left because of children, stresses, inability to balance personal and professional life, etcetera. I’m not saying they are not happy, I think they probably are, but I think that the organisation loses out and that’s why… yeah, men fill in the gaps as we go up.

Interviewee 4 confirms that moving upwards as a woman is not straightforward, “[i]f you want to move, you need to develop a thick skin and go. See your path and just go. Go, don’t pay attention. There will be always people trying to say something bad about you”.

The promotion process seems to have a fast-track for men and the interviewees reflect on reasons why. The first two reason deals with the organisational culture. Interviewee 2 believes that male decision makers, due to a “probably unconscious bias”, tend to select other men, and adds that gender parity is vital to eliminate this male-bias. Interviewee 5 points out why it is harder for women to move up, in what she calls a “tediously slow process”, where each stage is “very cumbersome”:

Getting ahead of your colleagues, it’s viewed with a lot of resentment, suspicion. It’s hard. So to go up as a woman… I challenge you to give me one example of a woman who
started at the P2 level and made it to a D1 in [the Office]. But you look around, and if you look at the men, there are examples.

Three of the interviewees point out that one reason behind the male-bias in the promotion process is that the UN lacks a credible performance management system. Interviewee 5 explains:

"If we’re going to support and help women grow, it’s not just any women, right? It has to be high preforming, or well performing women. It really matters what you are bringing, and how much you are investing, and how you’re producing. So we have to think about credible performance metrics. And they don’t exist. [...] Our promotions are not linked on performance. And this is why these appointments are so questionable, because you know, there is no way to say if someone deserved it or not, because it’s based on such loose criteria."

In 2008 UN bodies identified UN Personnel Policies as one of the underlying factors to why women were not promoted at the same rate as men (UN General Assembly 2008). However, ten years later, the problem persists.

One requirement to be eligible for a promotion to a P5 position or higher, is to have made two geographical moves, i.e. having worked within the UN from three or more geographical locations. Interviewee 1 and 4 brings up this requirement and Interviewee 1 argues that this limits women from having a career and rhetorically asks:

"Who does the geographical movements? The husband who has a wife at home, and then she comes with you wherever you go. If I have to tell my husband ‘come with me to Bangkok’, he will say ‘what should I do in Bangkok? I’m never going to get a job in Bangkok’.

Interviewee 4 points out that the lack of spouse-support programs works discriminatorily towards women in the case of the geographical movement:

"My husband is a professional [as in P-level staff]. He had to quit his professional job in his country to support my career. So at least what [the UN] could do is to offer him, you know, a G5 or a G6, just to do something. I think they should give priorities to spouses to UN employees that are professionals, you know. But you don’t get this.

Parent’s costs for childcare in Switzerland are among the most expensive within the OECD countries (Bonoli 2017). In addition to spousal-support programs, a structural measure that would make life easier for female professionals, according to the interviewees, are childcare support programmes. The interviewees suggest a childcare facility at the Headquarters in Geneva, which has been discussed for years, and support with childcare fees."
Summary

In this section I have shown that gendered processes of recruitment, retention and promotion have including effects on men and excluding effects on women. In addition I have showed how characteristic of the organisational structure has implications on the organisational culture and that the categorisation of gendered processes as structural or cultural is not always straightforward. Furthermore I have argued that a combined approach of recruitment, retention and promotion is needed to reach gender balance.

Understanding the organisational structure, policies and practises as gendered processes is vital to attract more female applicants and in the retention of women. I have showed how parental policies, especially combined with an inconsistent application of flexible working arrangements are gendered processes with both excluding and discriminatory consequences for women. In addition, I have argued that the unequal parental leave policies, lead to a male-bias in processes of recruitment and promotion. Women are systematically promoted to a lesser extent than men, and I have shown that this is not because men have more experience. Promotions are gendered processes. Promotions can be viewed as important signs of appreciation, and by doing so it becomes evident that male performance is appreciated and valued higher. Promotions of women are held back by gendered process of the organisational culture and structure. The lack of a performance management system and UN personal policies are two reasons why women are systematically discriminated in the process of promotion. Three other structural measures which are holding back the careers of women in the organisation are: the requirement of geographical moves for senior positions, the lack of spouse support programs and the lack of childcare facilities and support, all of which can be understood as gendered processes.
PART THREE: ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE
AND GENDERED PROCESSES

“It depends on the manager”

The interviewees point to the organisational culture of the Office as one of the key factors to why they are not equal in terms of numbers of women and men. They call for a cultural change and view this as more urgent than parity in numbers, while they note that the culture is not being sufficiently addressed internally, as a potential factor contributing to the gender inequality problem. Different persons experience different sides of the organisational culture, depending on their gender, sexuality, and position in the organisation and cultures can be excluding to some while including of others (Holgersson et al. 2011).

When it comes to the personal experience of gender equality in the workplace, all interviewees point out that the manager one is reporting to plays a large role. As previously argued, UN system-wide policies, rules and regulations, have different implications on the everyday experience of gender equality, as these are interpreted and applied differently. Interviewee 2 points out that even if flexible working arrangements are an option within the UN system, it does not mean that it is viewed as a legitimate working arrangement by colleagues:

> It really depends on your team, your counterpart. But I think it is important if flexible work arrangements are truly an option, then I think it is important that it is also valued. I think there, probably more could be done.

On the same note, Interviewee 4 also refers to flexible working arrangements when exemplifying how the individual manager influences one’s experience of gender equality:

> At least here, they allow you to do the flexible work time arrangements, which is not practised everywhere. And in some duty stations it’s a non-official no. You can’t do it. So, you have it on paper, but your management is against it, so you can’t do it. At least I know that here people... At least you can try to do it.
The different applications of flexible working arrangements are also brought up by Interviewee 1, as she says, “...I think it’s unfair that it really depends on the boss”. The application of flexible working arrangements, brought up by these three interviewees, is one example of how a seemingly static characteristic of the organisational structure, is filtered through the hierarchy and translated to a cultural context, and applied relatively.

When I ask Interviewee 2 about where she sees the Office today, in relation to the goal of being a gender equal organisation, she answers:

I think it depends on the manager. It really differs. It’s more the person than the institution itself. I think that UN has a culture in general that is quite sexist sometimes and a bit macho. There is a generational issue and young women are viewed a certain way - being too aggressive, being a bit of a threat, not appreciated that much. But my experience has been... it depends on the manager. I’ve had really good... I mean, I had a manager from a Scandinavian country and he was great. It didn’t matter whether you were a man or a woman. He was very flexible. What mattered was getting your work done. He was more extreme in that he valued the opinion of women even more than men’s sometimes. He liked having women who were very well organised and had strong opinions. But it really depends on the managers, who they are comfortable working with. I think, I mean, I’ve been in offices where there are men who are just not comfortable working with women, especially young women. So that makes a difference, who it is that you are working with.

As Interviewee 3 notes, the experience of gender equality, which is both personal and contextual, is very much influenced by the manager and the colleagues.

As the experience is so connected to the specific manager, the managers need to invest time and energy to achieve gender equality. Interviewee 4 argues that gender equality is possible to achieve, but it will add on to the manager’s tasks as it necessitates them being sensitive to each employee’s life situation and preferred working conditions:

One thing is when everybody is doing the same thing; you don’t have to deal with everybody personally. But then, for instance you have three women employees, and each of them has a different family situation, you know. One of them is having three young kids, the other one, is having maybe a ill parent at home that she needs to take care of, and the other one is a single mom. So maybe all three need different approaches. And of course I think it’s an additional job for the manager, to take a look at your employees and really get a picture of what’s going on with each of them. And it’s about the manager, how you want to make your relationship with your employees. Because it will take additional time for you. It will take additional effort. But I think if you did it, and you did it well, then it would give you so much back. Because I think women, don’t get me wrong, but I think women, in terms of performance, sometimes they have a much higher performance than men. So I think if she is put in good working conditions, she can produce more sometimes. Very often. But, if she is worn out and you know, things are bad at home. Things are bad everywhere.

As it might be easier for a manager to say no to flexible working arrangements, Interviewee 4 argues that this gender neutral strategy affects women negatively, them still being the main
caregivers. Furthermore she argues that investing time in creating good work conditions on an individual level yields returns, an argument that is supported by the research of Gregory and Milner (2009).

**Norms**

Norms as cultural expressions determine what is considered as good and desirable, as well as what and who are considered the deviator from these norms (Holgersson et al. 2011). In this section I analyse norms at the Office in three steps. First I explore the implications of the male-norm and the token role of women. I proceed by analysing the cis-norm and the heteronorm at the Office, and lastly, I introduce and analyse presentism and the full-time norm.

**The male-norm and the token woman**

An organisation founded, designed and developed by men, where men have the vast majority of the high level positions, and thus control resources and decision making processes, and where a women never has held the highest position (which is true for both the Office and the UN) is an organisation where the male norm is prominent. The male-norm in an organisational culture is characterised by ideas of masculinity and men as higher valued. Women are viewed as deviators from the male norm, which they are compared to and judged by (Holgersson et al. 2011). The male norm is clear at the Office and the UN as a whole.

While men are the norm, women find themselves in the position of a minority at the Office. A woman in a minority position is seen as a representative of the whole group (Kanter 1977; Holgersson et al. 2011). Interviewee 5 shares an experience of when it dawned on her how she was viewed as a token, and a symbol of a minority group representing her country and sex. At the time she was leaving her previous position within UN before coming to the Office:

> When I was leaving my previous job, to come here, the director, he came up to me saying, ‘oh, I’m so sorry we’re losing a woman [with your nationality] from this team’. And I’m like, really? That’s the only reason that you are sorry that I’m leaving? But it was literary that. So now it’s really become about Women, [nationalities], whatever. And you’re like ‘no, but I work too, I produce stuff, not just that’.
As Interviewee 5 highlights, minorities within the group *women* are formed in the intersection between sex and nationality.

It is the privilege of the norm to consider themselves individuals with individual characteristics, and not as a representative of the whole group (Flood & Pease 2005; Holgersson et al. 2011; Case, Iuzzini & Hopkins 2012), while the minority, *women* in this case, are judged by preconceived ideas and stereotypes of women, not by their competence (Kanter 1977; Holgersson et al. 2011). A woman becomes symbolic, a token, of what women are capable of and Kanter (1977) argues that the tokens are “...not acting for themselves alone but carrying the burden of representing their category” (1977:43). Interviewee 4 and 5 exemplify Kanter’s (1977) argument, as they point out that the mistake of recruiting one wrong woman will have negative consequences on all women at the Office. Another implication of being a minority is visibility, which means that as a minority, women are under a higher level of scrutiny than men. The combination of visibility and being seen as symbolic in terms of *female capacity* generates pressure. Interviewee 4 expresses how she is concerned that the pressure from the visibility effect will increase as the System-wide strategy on gender parity (UN 2007) is rolled out, “[i]t’s kind of going to be spot attention on women, and everything they do. They will start looking at everything you do and point your mistakes”.

Women working under the pressure that comes from a token position are pushed by the organisational culture to show a high capacity. However, if women shows a too high level of performance, they become a potential threat to the male norm and are portrayed as aggressive (Kanter 1977; Holgersson et al. 2011), which is the exact term used by Interviewee 3 in her quote in the previous section, describing how competent and capable women can be perceived at the Office.

**The cis-norm and the heteronorm**

The male-norm explains how men are valued higher than other genders by the organisational culture. By adding the intersection of sexual orientation to the analysis, two other norms prevalent at the Office become clear, the cis-norm and the heteronorm. The cis-norm is expressed in the idea of gender as binary, where all individuals fit into the categories of *women* or *man*. The binary categories are used e.g. when collecting and reporting sex segregated data, in the language of the Strategy (UN 2017) and the sustainable development
goals (UN General Assembly 2015), but also through the silence when it comes to transgender. The heteronormative culture is expressed in subtle ways (Holgersson et al. 2011) and Interviewee 5 gives an example of one expression, as she describes how colleagues display photos of their heterosexual partners and families in their offices. Several interviewees point out that they don’t know any colleague at the Office who is openly homosexual, and fear of discrimination is one reason which leads many LGBTQ+ people to mask their identities in the workplace (Creed 2006). The absence and the silences suggest a heteronorm.

The heteronorm has very different implications on women and men at the Office according to the interviewees. Men are not expected to be any less present or available as a result of their choices in their private lives, “[m]en can be single, married, men can have no children. None of that is ever questioned. Your lifestyle choices are never questioned. Where as with women it is”. Having a family with young kids or not, isn’t relevant for the male civil servant, as heteronormative masculinity is not synonymous with caregiving, while it is so with femininity. This has implications for the women working at the Office. The career conditions and the family situation's impact on the careers of women is a form of indirect discrimination against women (Holgersson et al. 2011).

Presentism and the full-time norm

Two norms that characterises the organisation culture at the Office, and which are tightly connected are the full-time norm and, as Interviewee 5 puts it, “...a strong culture of this presentism”. The organisational culture determines which working hours that are the norm. To be present or at least available any hour of the day, is a dominating requirement in many organisations, predominantly in management and career cultures (Holgersson et al. 2011). Working full-time, and putting in extra work during evenings and weekends, is rewarded by the organisational culture according to all the interviewees. As Interviewee 2 puts it, “I think that is the key to success”. Interviewee 2 gives an example of when presentism was both rewarded and contested at the Office:

In one town hall meeting, the director said, ‘thank you to all the colleagues, who put in additional hours, who stayed late to get the report done’. And then one manager, she is a woman, said, ‘and I thank those colleagues who go home at six and also take care of their other responsibilities and come back the next day with a fresh mind’. They are very different views. And I think she is still the exception, or the minority in our organisation. I think that shift, that has not happened. And I’m not sure, if they want it to happen.
While *presentism* is the norm at the Office, flexible working arrangements is considered the deviator. Working hours might appear as a *gender neutral* practice, however, they have very different implications for women and men. Interviewee 2 gives one example of how *presentism* and the fulltime-norm narrow down career opportunities for women. As it is not given that every manager will allow flexible working arrangements, women who need this, do not apply for positions where they know that the manager won't allow it. Interviewee 4 explains how these norms favour men, “[a]t least for me now, it’s very difficult to compete with men, especially with single men. Because of course at some point their performance is better than mine”. She explains how her male colleagues are able to stay overtime, work on urgent projects that needs to be done overnight and still come in the next morning with fresh thoughts and cleared heads, while she is not, due to her responsibilities in her private life.

Interviewee 2 shares her experience from working part time:

> I realise, as I work eighty per cent it is really a double-sided sword. It can easily be interpreted as ‘ah yeah, she is not that ambitious, for her it’s more family.’ If I talk to my friends, they are like ‘ah, you work a very high percentage’. And *[at the Office]* it’s like ‘oh, she’s the one who is not here every day’. So it’s a… I think you need to know what you want; you need to make peace with yourself. Of course there is always a cost, as there are benefits. And you cannot expect that the system values your choice.

As flexible working arrangements are the deviator to the norm, it is less valued.

Meeting hours is a gendered process and a characteristic of the *presentism* norm and it has excluding effects on women, according to the interviewees. Interviewee 2 gives an example:

> I think if you are working in an environment or in an office, where long working hours are appreciated, which is meetings can also take place at six or six thirty, I think for many women, that does not work. And, it’s like ‘oh, if you’re not here, we’ll tell you tomorrow’. No. That’s… You’re not at the table anymore.

Interviewee 4 describes the consequences of meeting hours for her:

> *Her* Sometimes we have meetings 8.30. It’s the biggest challenge you can pose on me. Because this is the drop-of time for my [child] at the kindergarten. So what do you want me to do? I’m always running late. And you’re late, and you look bad. But I’m late because I couldn’t go and drop my [child] off earlier. Because they don’t accept your children at any time you want. They have a specific time when you drop them of. Then I have to run like a crazy, mad woman from the kindergarten, there is no transportation. I have to run, and I’ll still be late like five or ten minutes. So I think, you don’t put meetings knowing that in our team there are [several] professionals with young children. *[The men]* don’t think about it. So It’s just one minor thing you could change.
Me  Maybe I’m very cynical now, and I’m sure it’s very unconscious, but do you think that it can also be used as a conscious measure to keep women out?

Her  Yeah, I mean I really don’t think that this is the ultimate objective. But for sure it’s not being taken into consideration. But remember, that this man have also small kids. They know, what are the drop-of hours and that evenings are also very important. Both important and challenging. But you know, because they don’t do it they think you will be also fine. No, you know, because the argument ‘oh, you want to be equal? Let’s be equal. Why do you want special treatment? Just because you are a woman and you have kids you should not be receiving different treatment. It’s equality right? We’re all equal’. So this is what comes in play. Equality versus equity, right? And gender equity, this is the thing. We are different, we have different responsibilities, and what worked for you doesn’t work for me.

Interviewee 4 is making an interesting point. If meeting hours were gender neutral, then applying the same practice for women and men could be considered gender equality. However, meeting hours are not gender neutral, they are gendered processes, which at large have including effects on men and excluding effects on women (Rutherford 2001; Holgersson et al. 2011; Acker 2012).

Organisations that meet their staff’s need to balance professional lives with their private lives, through i.e. flexible working arrangements and parental leave entitlements, experience “…increased organizational commitment and job satisfaction” (Gregory & Milner 2009). Interviewee 5 argues that the Office needs to leave presentism behind as it is inefficient and ineffective, and she rhetorically asks, “[w]hy aren’t we trying to be a bit more flexible?“ Holgersson et al. (2011) argues that presentism is rewarded by the culture neither because it is effective nor leads to a higher productivity. Being available twenty-four/seven, they argue, is seen as an act of loyalty to the organisation, shown by the staffer, and it is the act of loyalty, which is culturally rewarded (Holgersson et al. 2011). If presentism is a sign of undivided loyalty, the deviation to the norm, flexible working arrangements, bears connotations of disloyalty, as the staff’s loyalty is divided between the organisation and the private life.

As the organisation was first designed with the white, Western male civil servant (Haynes 2008) and his work-life balance in mind, women today participate on men's terms. Presentism and the full-time norm are both components of a masculinity-norm (Borgkvist et al. 2018). The seemingly gender neutral system has a built-in male-normative work-life balance bias; consequently men meet the requirements to a larger extent than women.
Stereotypes

There are some general assumptions people make about women… being difficult to deal with, aggressive even. Things like that do exist in the UN. The terms used are always quite negative. Especially women in senior management positions. It’s always, they are ‘aggressive’ instead of they are ‘confident’, you know, they are ‘arrogant’ instead of they’re ‘able’. On the P4 level, you get that. You are punchy, or you are opinionated, you have a problem with authority if you speak your mind. Where as in a man those qualities are admired. If you’re bold, you have an opinion, it’s usually a thing that’s respected.

Women at the Office face stereotypes in their daily work, according to the interviewees and Interviewee 3 points out that an otherwise similar behaviour between a woman and man is judged differently. She continues to explain how she is met by preconceived ideas because of her being a mother. She says that she is confronted with assumptions of her being the caregiver, not being career oriented, interested in or able to go on field missions. From a heteronormative perspective, the family life of the straight couple is assumed to be more time consuming for the woman than for the man (Holgersson et al. 2011). Her experience is supported by the research of Alvesson and Billing (1999), who argue that the actual priorities of a woman are secondary to preconceived ideas. Meaning that, even if a woman with children has a supportive partner or any other adult who takes care of the household responsibilities, the woman is perceived to have this responsibility herself by her working environment (Alvesson & Billing 1999). Interviewee 3 does not have the opportunity to work from home in her current role. But her husband, also in the UN system, does, which enables him to take more care of their children. Nevertheless, Interviewee 3 points out that she is met by the assumption that she is the primary caregiver, “[b]ut I’m not. Actually, my husband does a lot more than I do and he is… his managers are much more flexible”.

Gender relations

Gender relations are the dualistic constructs that separate women/femininity and men/masculinity into binary categories, where one is defined in relation and contrast to the other (Persson 2011).

Femininities and masculinities are tightly connected to the norm concept, as these ideas and ideals constitute what is accepted and what is not, what is deemed as good and as bad. These gendered ideals govern behaviour and expectations on an organisational level. On an individual level, these gender relations can be understood as on-going processes of doing
gender, where the individual adapts to given norms, negotiates, contests or confirms and embodies these (Martin 2003). Analysing gender relations helps us understand how the cultural norms and ideals interconnect with processes of sex segregation at the Office. Femininities and masculinities are confirmed and reproduced in the process of sex segregation, while the cultural ideals in themselves contribute to the process of sex segregation. An analysis of solely gender is not sufficient to understand the complexities of how inequalities are reproduced (Crenshaw 1989; Acker 2012). In this section I analyse the intersection between gender and nationalities, how women and men experience different organisational cultures and lastly, I analyse the ideal worker.

**Gender and nationalities**

The UN is the first organisation where civil servants are operating on an international, as opposed to a national arena (Haynes 2080). However, the idea of an international civil servant, neutral to any connotations of nationality is an ideal and not a reality, as nationality and gender matters at the UN. The organisation seeks to represent a diversity of nationalities, or geographical distribution, as it is referred to in the UN Charter (1945). Nationalities have different connotations in the organisation cultural context of the UN. As a Swede, I symbolize the values, which the country of my birth publicly advocates, such as democracy, freedom of speech, human rights and gender equality. My personal values, or the fact that I actually come from an immigrant family are secondary to preconceived ideas based on my nationality. Interviewee 5 explains how the intersection between gender and nationalities matters:

I think that there is an advantage if you come from certain nationalities. For example if you are Swedish, it’s a great nationality, man or a woman. If you are [my nationality], it’s also a… [my nationality] woman, it’s a good position to have. [my nationality] man, I’m not sure.

A woman of her non-Western nationality fits into the narrative of the UN. She is a token, a symbol of a success story of progress, development, women's education, empowerment, and advancement of gender equality in a non-Western country. The idea that individuals are valued differently based on assumptions made about their national and cultural background is problematic, which Interviewee 3 and 5 point out.
Earning respect or gaining respect by default

One key difference, at the very core of the constructed dichotomy between women/femininity and men/masculinity, which the interviewees point out, is how women and men are judged differently at the Office. Women and men at the Office experience different cultures as they are judged by different sets of ideals and rules. According to Interviewee 4, her job is not only about performing her tasks and she describes the complexity of her role as a female civil servant. First, she has to be conscious about establishing her working relations on an equal manner, as she puts it, which means that she is always trying to solve any situation where she feels that she is disrespected. In addition, she must not only position herself as a professional with equal, professional working relations, but also as a person as opposed to a woman. Because in some countries and cultures, “[t]hey build their relationships on personal level, so you position yourself as a person”. In doing so, she has to be mindful about her looks as she, being a woman, is not judged solely on how capable she is or on what she does, but also on her appearance. Interviewee 4 also notes that while it is culturally valued to look like a woman her private life as a woman and a mother is not allowed to reflect on her professional role. The professional character she presents herself as must bear no marks from a sleepless night of keeping watch over a child that is being ill, “I need to re-paint myself and come to work and look fine. And be in a meeting like ‘I’m here, I look good’. It’s of course it’s an additional burden on us [women]”. The experience of Interviewee 4 is in line with Kanter’s research on how a token (women in this case) “...typically perform under conditions different from those of dominants” (1977:42). Kanter (1977) also shows in her research how women as tokens, are facing additional pressure, which requires them to invest energy and time to solve, what she refers to as problematic interactions, and continuously establish and maintain working relations on a satisfactory level.

Interviewee 3 gives an example of how women and men are judged differently:

[W]omen often have to earn their position at the table. They have to earn their right to be heard and speak, whereas men get that respect by default. You have to do something bad to lose that respect of your management. Whereas with women, you have to earn the respect. You have to really prove that you’re really good. And expectation on women are much lower. It takes longer for you to be valued than for a man.

Holgersson et al. (2011) argue that women are judged by, what they call, their limited potential i.e. what they have proven that they are capable of in a certain situation. Men on the other hand are judged by, what Holgersson et al. (2011) call, their unlimited potential, i.e.
what they are assumed to be capable of in any given future situation. As women are judged based on what they have proven to be capable of, they need to build up a case of evidence on which they can be judged. This is the mechanism behind how the token is pushed to over-perform, which is symptomatic of the token position (Kanter 1977). When asked if she thinks that gender equality has implications on the organisation's overall performance, Interviewee 4 describes how she is affected by this cultural push to over-perform:

We always have to compete with [the men] and sometimes do the double in order to achieve the same results, in order to get a promotion and have a career. If you feel that your organisation is not supporting gender equality, if you feel the pressure every day, of course. I mean you are already overburdened if you have a family. You are already performing twice as much as men, because you have a full time job at home and a full time job at work. And imagine in this situation, if you don’t feel that your work is appreciated, and they promote men but you were working as hard as they did. Of course it will affect the quality of what I do. At some point I will be like [sighs] ‘I don’t care’. I don’t care anymore.

Ely and Meyerson argue that, “…very often the same processes that create gender inequities also undermine an organization’s effectiveness” (2000:132). Interviewee 4 points at one example of how advancing gender equality can have positive effects on the organisation’s effectiveness.

**Gendering the ideal worker**

Organisations are governed by rules that often appear to be gender neutral while they are not (Ely & Meyerson 2000; Acker 2012). These rules build on an idea of an abstract and gender neutral worker, a worker who is not distracted by obligations other than within their workspace (Acker 1990; 2012). Men are more likely to meet the ideal of an abstract worker as women traditionally have done the unpaid work outside of the workspace, which has allowed men to have no other responsibilities but work (Acker 2012). The women’s experiences of the Office culture resonate with the idea of the ideal worker being a man. Adding an intersectional analysis, it becomes clear by the norms of the Office culture, that the ideal worker is a heterosexual cis-man. Additionally the ideal worker at the Office is a man who is constantly in a physical and mental condition to always be present and produce with a high capacity, an able-bodied man. Having no other obligations than the UN, the ideal worker is ready to change geographical locations at any given moment, allowing him to advance in the hierarchy of the UN.
A culture of resistance

In this section I explore elements of what I have chosen to call a culture of resistance at the Office. Resistance can be understood as a cultural expression, a mechanism to contest the ideas of gender equality. The idea of gender equality questions prevalent norms. As gender equality is constantly constructed and contested, the Office becomes an arena for different forms of resistance (Benschop & Verloo 2011; Benschop & van den Brink 2014). While women’s experiences vary a lot, the discourse of resistance builds on women's common experiences as subordinate to the male norm (Alvesson & Billing 1999). “Resistance comes in many forms and shapes” (Benschop & Verloo 2011:286) and can be directed towards the objective of gender equality, gender equality efforts, or women as a group, particularly women entering higher levels of management (Benschop & van den Brink 2014) or otherwise typically male dominated areas, such as peace keeping. In this section I analyse different expressions of resistance as gendered processes of the Office culture and I do so in four parts. I start with sexual harassment and I look at how sexual harassment claims are handled has implications on a cultural level. I proceed to analyse resistance in two forms, active and passive. Then I analyse where resistance at the Office comes from. Lastly, I analyse resistance from women, building on Kanter’s (1977) research.

Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is a problem at the UN and the organisation does not have a good reputation in handling sexual harassment claims (Defeis 2011). The interviewees have doubts regarding the Office manager’s capacity to handle sexual harassment allegations. Interviewee 3 says, that she would not trust the senior management to make the right decisions or follow through with the right actions if confronted with a case of sexual harassment. In addition, Interviewee 5 is “...feeling pretty cynical” about how claims of sexual harassment would be dealt with at the Office.

Interviewee 3 argues that the UN system places the victims of sexual harassment at a disadvantage, and she explains:

We do have formal procedures, you don’t have to go to your manager, you can go to these other mechanisms. I think they do work. But it’s just that [victims of sexual harassment] are at a disadvantage anyway, because you have to fight the system. To do that you’d have to have the documented evidence, you’d have to have a big case, it’s not something that’s
easy to do. And that might put you off. You think it’s too much effort, or ‘no one is going to believe me’.

Coming forward with sexual harassment allegations has little consequences even when actions are taken and the formal procedures are followed, according to Interviewee 3. Both Interviewee 3 and 5 think that there are many more with experiences of sexual harassment at the Office, than those who come forward. One reason why women who have been victims of sexual harassment choose not to come forward might be that they fear that it will harm their careers. Interviewee 5 thinks that the situation at the Office is better regarding sexual harassment, than her experience of the field, which she, backed up with Haynes (2008) and Defeis (2011) argues has a culture of impunity. However, Interviewee 5 has noticed that some men feel victimized by allegations of sexual harassment; and that there is an understanding amongst some of the men that “…you can get a case on nothing”.

**Active and passive resistance**

Resistance is contextual and it is expressed differently, depending on e.g. the sex and the position of an individual. Holgersson et al. (2011) argues that resistance comes in two forms, active and passive. Active resistance is commonly expressed through counterarguments and by demeaning of the problem. *Gender equality is not compatible with other priorities* is an example of a demeaning argument as it undermines the idea of gender equality (Holgersson et al. 2011). The most common form of passive resistance is silence.

Interviewee 5 identifies examples of passive resistance as she notes that since the launch of the System-wide strategy for gender parity (UN 2017), the Office saw no communication or outreach by top managers. Message from the top matters, and according to her, “[i]t has to be a coherent message coming from the top, and it filters down to the organisation. Because I don’t think the directors feel very strongly about the parity strategy either. At least we don’t hear them”. Passive resistance is most commonly expressed through silence, but can also be expressed through what can be understood as a diversion policy approach, e.g. to create a gender equality plan in order to avoid reprisals, rather than to achieve gender equality (Holgersson et al. 2011). The Strategy (UN 2017) is seen as the driving force behind the current gender equality work within the Office by the interviewees, as opposed to a desire to change the experienced working conditions for women. A specifically motivating factor, is the threat of losing control over the recruitments and if targets are not met, and as Interviewee 5 points out, “...[n]o organisation wants to give that up”. Interviewee 3 notes that, “[f]he
commitment is there because they are accountable at the senior management level”. Several of the interviewees express scepticism over how the implementation is going to be handled within the Office. Interviewee 3 and 5 similarly point out that only men are working with the implementation, and Interviewee 3 is concerned that they do not listen to the women at the Office to learn about the gender inequality problem. She questions if it is possible to implement it without women, “I don’t think they are comprehensive enough. They are a bit narrow on just the target [of gender parity]. I think it’s more that. They are not involving or hearing what the issues are enough to tackle them”. This suggests a diversion policy approach and it is an expression of passive resistance (Holgersson et al. 2011).

Interviewee 2, 3 and 5 point out that male colleagues have expressed, after reading the Strategy paper (UN 2017), that women will now be chosen even though the men are doing a better job, that merit based appointments no longer will have a place, or “…outright saying things like ‘we don’t need it, it’s the best person for the job’”. Holgersson et al. (2011) confirms that women in general advocate for mixed groups as a principle while men view merit as far more important. One reason to this is that men want to preserve the image that they are in the position they are, solely because of their merits (van den Brink & Stubbe 2014). Interviewee 5 describes how geographical representation without gender equality is an argument against female representation, masked by a positive argument for geographical representation:

It is true that when the gender parity strategy came out, a lot of the member states said, ‘yeah, that’s very well, but we believe that it is geographical parity that matters, not gender parity’. My country, being one of the member states, as well, that said that. And it’s because they see this as a Western liberal agenda, as opposed to… They’d much rather have equal representation of men from their country.

These two arguments and expressions of active resistance that the interviewees bring up, gender equality is not compatible with merit, and gender equality is not compatible with geographical representation, can be traced to article 101 of the UN Charter:

The paramount consideration in the employment of the staff and in the determination of the conditions of service shall be the necessity of securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity. Due regard shall be paid to the importance of recruiting the staff on as wide a geographical basis as possible (UN 1945:Article 101).

Using merit and geographical representation as arguments against gender equality, necessitates two assumptions. The first being, women cannot to the same extent as men, meet the “…highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity” (UN 1945:Article 101),
which is an expression of a sexist culture. The second assumption is, women who meet these standards are not as geographically spread as men who do so, hence a “...wide a geographical basis” (UN 1945:Article 101) will not be possible if women are to be recruited. This assumption concerns the intersections of gender and ethnicity, race and nationality and it is an example of a subtle process of inclusion of white Western women, and exclusion of all other women. In 1980, Basu (1989) pointed out that the goal of gender parity did stand in conflict with the goal of geographical representation. In the 1980’s, the countries, which were already overrepresented, had a large pool of qualified candidates, which included women, while countries, which were underrepresented, did not offer up female candidates for senior positions (Basu 1989). Thirty years later, the idea of gender equality as standing in conflict with geographical representation persists in the organisation.

Another example of active resistance in the Office culture is the idea of gender equality as a zero sum game, gender equality is not possible, because providing opportunities of men cannot be combined with providing opportunities for women. If women are promoted or recruited “...men will lose out on those very same posts. Or they will lose out on growth opportunities”, as Interviewee 5 puts it. The view of gender equality as a zero sum game is connected to how the problem of gender inequality is represented in the Strategy paper (UN 2017). The representation of the problem as quantitative and of the goal as equal distribution of posts between the groups women and men, consequently leads to an idea of gender equality, where men have to give up on an already limited amount of power, resources and growth opportunities, to women. The zero-sum idea is only applicable to a scenario where there is a limited amount of resources to spread out on a larger group, in the case of the Strategy paper (UN 2017), senior posts. However, a broader understanding of gender equality would oppose the zero sum idea. Gender equality does not solely build on equal distribution of limited resources. Many resources are unlimited. There are for example enough human rights to go around. Another example is a safe working environment free from sexual harassment. Ensuring this for women and men does not necessitate a trade off. The idea of gender equality as a zero-sum game is an example of active resistance (Holgersson et al. 2011).

Gender parity is a threat to the dominating position of men in the organisation, and the power and privileges that come with being dominants. From an intersectional perspective, presence of LGTBQ+ staff is threatening to the cis-norm and heteronorm (Creed 2006:390),
which are important components of a masculinity culture. Interviewee 3 argues that there is resistance towards LGBTQ+ staff at the Office and Interviewee 5 notes that the equality discourse at the Office and in the Strategy paper evolves around the idea of parity between women and men, as no other gender identities are mentioned. There is a silence when it comes to equality as an idea that concerns other discriminatory processes than those of the gender binary, and the gender binary itself is a form of passive resistance (Holgersson et al. 2011), towards transgender and non-binary individuals.

Where does resistance come from?

Holgersson et al. (2011) argues that male dominated organisations can nurture a masculinity culture, in which also women can work, while not being nurtured, acknowledged or promoted to the same extent as men (Holgersson et al. 2011). An organisation that advocates gender equality can fuel cultural resistance amongst men, as they feel that their control and sense of ownership of the organisation is being threatened (Holgersson et al. 2011; Benschop & van den Brink 2014). Interviewee 3 gives an example:

[A] lot of men are grumbling about the whole strategy [on system-wide gender parity] as well. I mean it’s true that it does put [men] at a disadvantage temporarily, but they don’t seem to think that women have been at a disadvantage so far. So there’s no need… For them it’s seen as ‘[men] are at disadvantage now’. [The women] gonna have all the benefits. But they don’t realise that women are dealing with certain biases and being discriminated upon. I mean, so far, we’ve had lesser career opportunities.

It is the privilege of the norm to be blind about one’s privileges (Flood & Pease 2005; Holgersson et al. 2011; Case, Iuzzini & Hopkins 2012) and resistance can often be grounded in an idea that the organisation already is gender equal. Interviewee 4 says, “[the men] are like ‘oh, but what now? We don’t have any chance to get a promotion?’ Now they are playing the victim”. Interviewee 5 explains:

I already hear comments. ‘Oh, you are a woman, you are gonna go far’, ‘you have it easy now’, ‘you don’t have to worry, because being a woman…’. And I’m like, yes, I’m a woman. I’m very proud of it. But it’s not the only reason why I will grow. So, I don’t want that to be seen as an unfair advantage.

If the organisation is perceived as already gender equal, every effort to promote women is viewed as discriminating towards men. The comment implying that women now, after the launch of the Strategy (UN 2017), are having an unfair advantage, which Interviewee 5 refers to are signs of a masculinity culture at the Office.
Interviewee 5 describes how one of the top managers of the Office was concerned because his male staff were feeling demotivated, and thought their careers were going to end because they were men, after the Strategy paper (UN 2017) came out:

So us women, we rolled our eyes. It’s an emotive issue, right? It doesn’t make you feel a lot of empathy. Because I’m like ‘are you kidding me? Are you really feeling discriminated against? This is not an issue’. So when someone says that, I feel a little outraged, which is possibly not the right emotion for a decent conversation either, but you know. When the few men that we had in our room said ‘no, there’s no issue of discrimination here, it’s about equality, and this is a long time coming, and it is about fifty-fifty’. Then suddenly I noticed that he took that in a different way, as opposed to when we [the women in the room] were getting a little agitated about those comments.

Here, Interviewee 5 gives an example of an expression of a masculinity culture (Holgersson et al. 2011) at the Office. She shows how this culture is constructed, through the man expressing his concerns, and then contested by the women. When the other men in the room address this expression of resistance it seems to have an impact, as opposed to when the women did so. This is an example of how addressing resistance can reconstruct the gender equality narrative. However, it is also an example of how the male-norm is confirmed, as the power to construct/reconstruct the gender equality narrative lies with the men. The construction of narratives through social interactions is a gendered process (Acker 1992; Ely & Meyerson 2000).

Understanding resistance from women

The roles of women in male dominated organisations are peripheral yet they can be significant in upholding the masculinity culture (Kanter 1977; Holgersson et al. 2011). As women are subordinate in a masculinity culture, their presence can be of symbolic value. Women can also be important players in confirming the masculinity culture through supporting men and their ideas, by working against other women, downplaying the importance of sex, or by demonstratively distancing themselves from any gender equality initiative within the organisation (Kanter 1977; Holgersson et al. 2011). Interviewee 3 says, “Women can be the worst critiques of their own sex” and explains that:

There are women who resist as well, who think ‘actually we don’t need it either’, ‘we don’t need special treatment’, ‘I work as hard as the men’. There are women who really take pride... I’ve met women here in the organisation, who would say ‘I will stay every night until eight or nine’, just to show that they are equal and they like that. They don’t want to be treated differently and have flexi arraignments. So there are women who also think ‘you know, we don’t need it’.
Likewise, Interviewee 5 acknowledges that there is a group of women at the Office who are resistant to the System-wide strategy on gender parity (UN 2017):

> Surprisingly I’ve seen women who are resistant to it. So, at least three who told me that they did not agree with the gender strategy because they felt that it was taking away agency from them. They’re like ‘we can do everything, we can do what we are supposed to in the work space, we don’t need a specialised… We work very hard; it’s our work ethic. And we’ve gotten so far in this organisation because of this, and this is just going to create more negativity towards us’. I mean, implying a little bit that it was for the lazy and whatever, that needed flexible hours that needed hand holding, whereas they had made it, you know, through sheer dint of hard work and perseverance.

How can we understand these mechanisms? Women approach their role as a minority in a male dominated organisation in different ways and their approach and perception of gender, changes over time (Pettersson, Persson & Berggren 2008). One strategy employed by women is to stress the similarities with the majority group (men in the case of the Office) by highlighting oneself as an exception to the rest of the minority group, by distancing or even by actively stereotyping other women (Kanter 1977). Women take on this strategy with the aim to detach themselves from the segregation processes, which keep women in minority (Kanter 1977) and to gain access to power and opportunities (Holgersson et al. 2011). This strategy is a result of their token position, not of their sex (Kanter 1977). While this strategy can be successful for single individuals, the success of these women does not open doors for other women. On the contrary, this strategy confirms the male dominance and segregation of sex as these women serve as exceptions to the rule (Holgersson et al. 2011).

Pettersson, Persson and Berggren (2008), show how strategies and approaches of women change over time, in their case study of the Swedish Armed Forces. Women, who set out with an idea of the organisation as gender neutral in the beginning of their careers, changed their perceptions with time, age and ranks, towards as structural understanding of gender (Pettersson, Persson & Berggren 2008). Meaning that their perceptions changed from gender is irrelevant, it’s up to the individual to gender is a factor as the organisational values men/masculinity higher than women/femininity (Pettersson, Persson & Berggren 2008).

**Summary**

In this section I have shown how the organisational culture is constructed and re-constructed by a complex web of processes of exclusion and inclusion.
The problems of how sexual harassment claims are handled are of both cultural and structural nature. While there are established methods to follow in the case of a sexual harassment claim, these procedures are not deemed effective by the interviewees. This problem is magnified by a culture of mishandling sexual harassment, low trustworthiness of management, and demeaning attitudes about the problem (Defeis 2011).

I have shown examples of active and passive resistance (Holgersson et al. 2011) towards gender equality and the Strategy (UN 2017) at the Office. Passive resistance is expressed through absence of internal communication efforts regarding the System-wide strategy on gender parity (UN 2017), and through a diversion policy approach at the Office. Active resistance is expressed through arguments such as ensuring merit and geographical representation would not be compatible with the objective of gender equality, or that men’s access to opportunities cannot be combined with women’s access to opportunities.

Resistance can come from a masculinity culture, and be fueled by gender equality efforts (Holgersson et al. 2011) and I have shown how the Office culture shows examples of a masculinity culture. The presence of women on a senior level threatens the male-norm in the same way as the presence of LGTBQ+ staff threatens the cis-norm and heteronorm. While some men perceive the Office as already gender equal, they view gender equality as discriminating against themselves as it gives women, in their view, an unfair advantage. While addressing resistance can be an opportunity to re-constructs the gender equality narrative, the power to do so lie with the men. This means that the discourse of gender equality can be perceived as evolving on a policy or an idea level, while an actual shift, which allows women to participate on an equal manner in shaping the discourse, is yet to take place.

Lastly, I have shown how women play an important role in the culture of resistance, and in upholding the prevalent male-norm. I have argued that resistance from women at the Office, is best understood as a result of the women’s minority position in the organisation (Kanter 1977), as contextual and as dynamic as it changes over time (Pettersson, Persson & Berggren 2008).
Chapter III

Conclusion
Changing Narratives: Gender Equality as Result and Process

You walk down a corridor and you look at all the heads of UN, and they are all men, and slowly as you walk down you feel more and more invisible. And the Strategy… It sounds very childish to say, but, it suddenly makes you feel like ‘hey, I have… I’m someone and I have… I could have a career, I could have a really good shot within the UN with something like this that supports me’. And that’s how I felt. I was like ‘okay, this could be… if this is where we’re headed, I see that I could do more, I could do better’. And I can understand [voice cracks] why men don’t feel so good, because… I don’t know how they felt when they read it, but it was empowering. And I think we need empowerment. Because… because it’s hard.

The UN has long been a male dominated organisation, despite several efforts to achieve gender balance. In 2011 Defeis called for a change in policy and in the political will from the UN secretariat (Defeis 2011). This change has come in the shape of a System-wide strategy on gender parity (UN 2017), launched in September 2017. While it is far from first attempt to achieve gender balance on all levels throughout the UN system, the Strategy paper (UN 2017) does not leave any room for disappointments. If UN bodies fail to show progress, it will be made sure that the targets are met, by removing the Office management's right to recruit their own staff (UN 2017). The Strategy (UN 2017) shows an incredibly strong, partly radical push for gender equality from the top. Still on a rhetorical and policy level, but the message is clear. It is no longer about expressing hope (UN General Assembly 1970) it is about meeting the requirements of an entirely new organisation.

In this thesis I have shown how gender equality is constructed and understood, as an idea and in practice, within the Office. The Strategy paper (UN 2017) constructs gender equality as quantitative by representing the problem as insufficient representation of women. The interviewees view gender equality as larger than solely gender parity. Gender equality is complex, and gender parity is rather understood to be a result of an organisation that provides equal treatment and opportunities to all staff of all genders. Gender equality and gender balance within the UN system is viewed as important for many different reasons. It is seen as a normative issue (Adler 1986; Alvesson & Billing 1999), a question of having access to the best candidates (Reif, Newstrom & Monczka 1975; Cockburn 1991; Alvesson & Billing
The interviewees argue that having more women in senior positions adds perspective. But whether this added perspective is a result of the sex or of the positions of the women in a discriminating structure is debated. Gender equality and gender balance is viewed as particularly important for the UN by the interviewees, as it is an organisation that advocates gender equality in the field. There is a tension between two conflicting views on equality within the organisation, equality as result, not process, and equality as result and process. On one hand, the Office is an organisation, which experiences a strong push from the top management for a shift in views, towards becoming a gender equal organisation, towards equality as process and result. On the other hand, the interviewees are experiencing an organisation, which does not quite reflect that push. How is it that gender inequalities persist within the organisation, despite the dedication to achieve gender equality in the field, despite decades of efforts to increase representation of women, and despite strong support for inclusion of women expressed at the highest policy level?

Women, who to a larger extent than men negotiate their work life and careers with responsibilities in their private life, are not met with the same opportunities and treatment as men. Instead women working at the Office describe how they face stereotypes, intangible biases, discrimination and micro aggressions on a day-to-day level. Gender inequality persists and is upheld by gendered processes of the organisational structure and culture. The structural sex segregation is constructed and re-constructed through the processes of recruitment, retention, and promotion. Gendered processes such as meeting hours and parental leave have including effects on men and excluding effects on all others. Furthermore, gender inequality is constructed and re-constructed through excluding processes in the intersections of sex, nationality and sexuality, by the prevalent masculinity culture, the hetero cis male-norm, through stereotyping and tokenising of women, and through active and passive resistance. These gendered processes of the organisational structure and culture uphold the inequality regime (Acker 1990; 2012).
EPILOGUE

I close my eyes and turn my head away from the ceiling. As I picture a future, it is no longer a union of white men. The giants are gone. They belong to the past. The narrative of the future we want is about to be re-drawn.
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**Personal interviews**

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Interviewee 2, 12 December 2017.

Interviewee 3, 7 December 2017.

Interviewee 4, 15 December 2017.

Interviewee 5, 14 December 2017.
Abstract

Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, is one of the United Nations (UN) core objectives. However, the UN has been struggling with achieving gender balance in its own organisation, despite numerous attempts. Men have been in numerical dominance at the UN since inception, especially on senior positions. This case study takes place just months after the System-wide strategy for gender parity was launched by Secretary-General Guterres. It captures the initial reactions through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with five women working in one UN body at the UN Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. Through these stories and experiences, this thesis aims to analyse the UN as a gendered organisation, focusing on organisational structure and culture. I argue that gendered processes of the organisational structure and culture preserve the male-dominance by having including effects on men and excluding effects on women. In this thesis I use gendered processes (Acker 1992), combined with post-structural policy analysis (Bacchi 2009) and complex systems theory (Ramalingam 2013), as analytical tools to show how equality is constructed and understood as an idea and in practice.

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Organisation, gender equality, organisational structures, organisational cultures, the United Nations, gendered processes, complex systems theory, policy analysis