

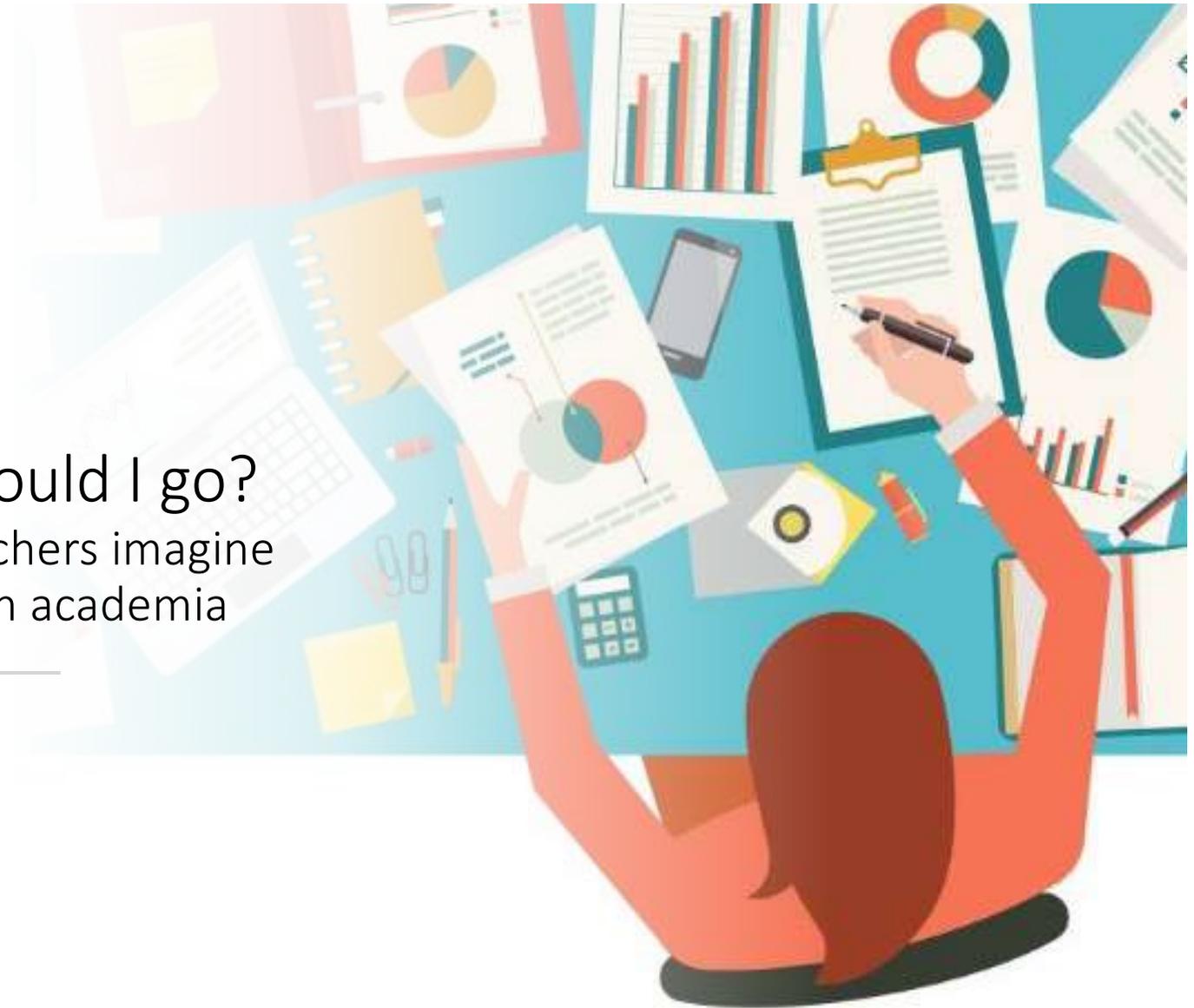


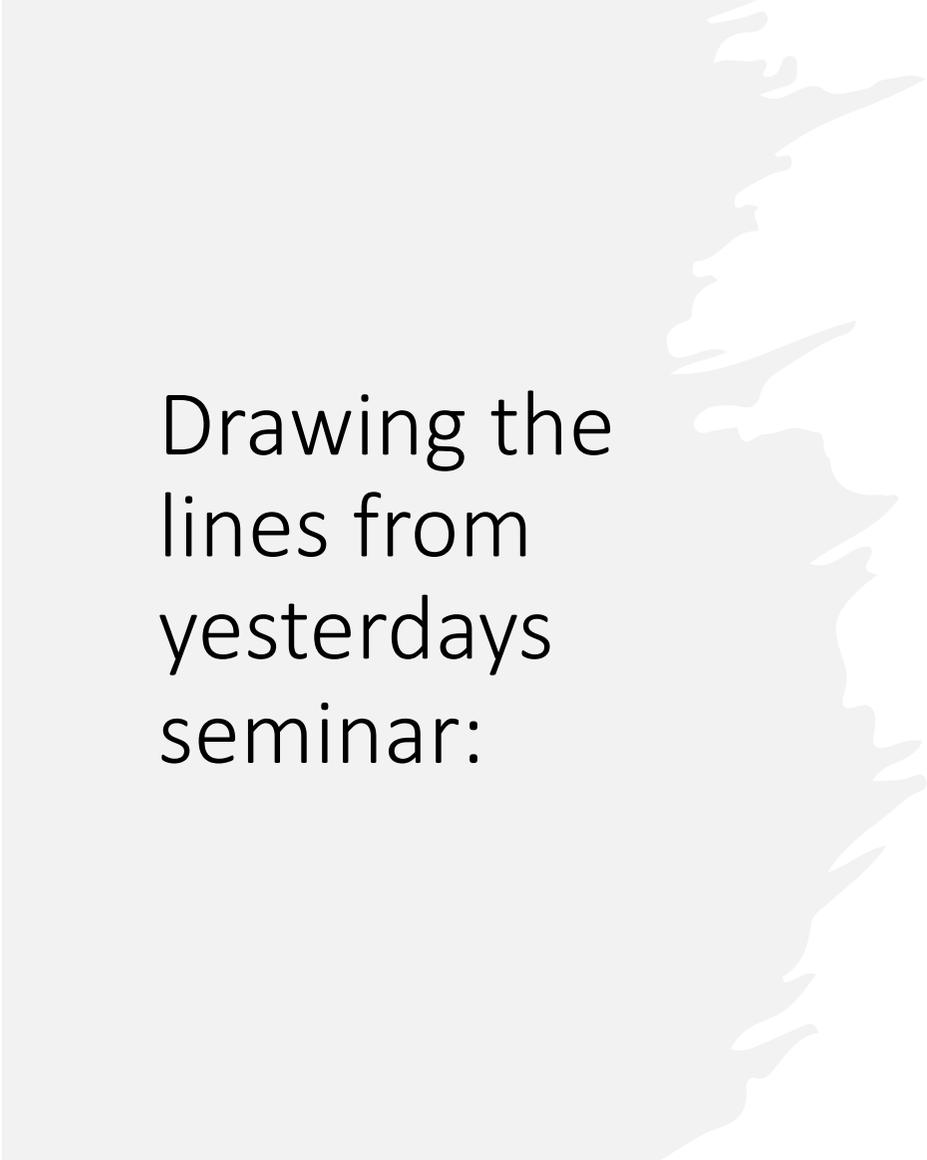
Should I stay or should I go?

How early career researchers imagine
the (im)possible future in academia

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ProGender seminar 10.11.2021





Drawing the lines from yesterdays seminar:

- Existing research shows persisting patterns of gender inequality and indicates the necessity for novel approaches both in research and change strategies.
- Existing policies are aiming at equal representation and equal opportunity (“balance”, “inclusive environment” (omit harassment))
- The role of policy makers, decision makers, institutional arrangements
- **What about everyday life and academic careers? How do early career scholars make sense of pursuing or opting out of an academic career? What can we learn from the experiences of early career researchers?**

Imaginign (im)possible futures in academia?



What do you think about the possibilities to pursue what you described as your plan A, an academic career?

To stay in academia?... It's not like that. It doesn't feel like that is something one can just choose to do...



Sørensen, Siri Øyslebø and Guro Korsne Kristensen (2022). "Should I stay or should I go?" How early career researchers imagine the (im)possible future in academia in Gabriele Griffin (ed) *Gender Inequalities in Tech-Driven Research and Innovation: Living the Contradiction*, Policy Press (**forthcoming**)

The post doc phase is crucial

- Even in fields where women outnumber men in the student population, and the numbers of female and male PhD candidates have been equal for more than a decade, an imbalance persists in top positions (Næss et al., 2018).
- In Norway, where our study was conducted, there has been a particularly sharp increase in number of post docs over the last decade (Kwiek and Antonowicz, 2015; Kyvik, 2015).
- Academic career trajectories are not identical across national contexts. Local situations influence how early career researchers make sense of their opportunities (Le Feuvre et al, 2018).
- An enhanced understanding of how early career researchers perceive their potential futures in academia is crucial for informing future work on gender balance (Murgia and Poggio, 2019).

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2016, Kvinner

2016, Menn

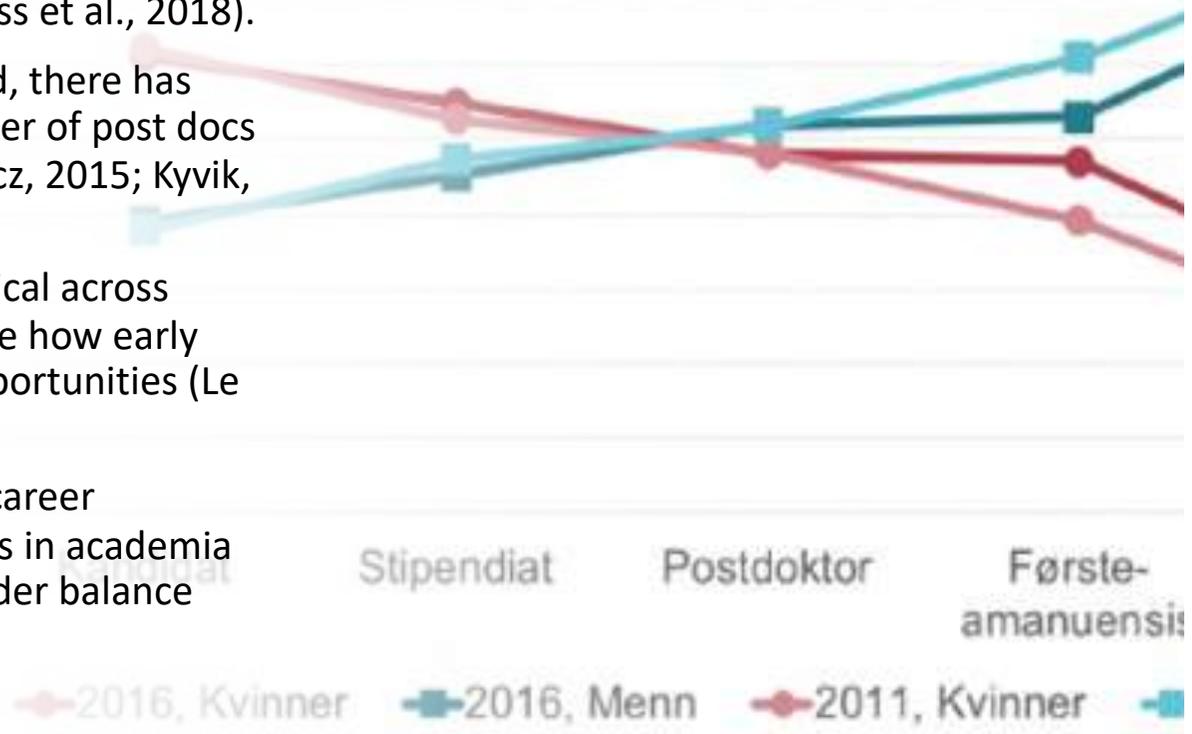
2011, Kvinner

2011, Menn

Stipendiat

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The extant literature shows that scientists' sense of professional self is shaped by understandings of research as purposes and 'passion', and also strongly influenced by gendered perceptions of the self (Armano and Murgia, 2013; Bozzon et al, 2019; Søndergaard, 2003).



Three narratives about (im)possible careers:



'Skills, help and luck, basically'



'If you want to live a balanced life, it is difficult to become a professor.'



'When you've already invested a lot, it is hard to let go'

'Skills, help and luck, basically'



I never had an ambition to become a professor, or to do anything within academia so I was kind of also just a bit thrown into it because I was offered a PhD position, and didn't have any other job offer at the time, and then we received funding for further research so I could continue into a postdoc. And now that I am in academia, I want to do the best that I can do and use the energy that I will to try to make something, make something good out of it. (Børre☺)

I have definitely been helped. I am not a bad scholar, because I guess there would be no point in helping me if I was. But I guess someone needs to get involved, to personally make an effort. And I was very lucky to have that. First for my PhD, and then also for my postdoc. But, then it was also a matter of luck. I was the right person at the right place at the right time. And someone saw that. **So, skills, help and luck, basically.** (Berit)

‘If you want to live a balanced life, it is difficult to become a professor.’

There is something about **that feeling of being stuck at home** with the laundry, while others travel to conferences and write up their articles. It is just as if it creates a self-fulfilling prophecy in a system where **you are supposed to brand yourself as the person who is willing to go ‘all in’**.

Bringing it down to personal desires and expectations, it seemed more difficult to envision a work-life balance as something that could be reconciled with becoming a professor. Nevertheless these early career researchers opted for an academic career. This dynamic has been labelled a **‘trap of passion’** and **‘promise dispositif’** (Bazzon et al, 2019). -->



‘When you’ve already invested a lot, it is hard to let go’

Sometimes I think that it is such a waste if the knowledge I have accumulated just disappears from the university. (Henriette)

I agree, it is such a huge choice to make to give up, to let go of the idea that one day I will be sitting there, looking out. (Hilde)



Concluding remarks

- Interestingly, ideas about what a professor is, and what it entails to be a professor, played a crucial role in how the postdocs made sense of their own choices.
 - A trap between passion and overwork, as discussed by Bazzon et al. (2019), was also implied in the narratives of these Norwegian early career researchers.
 - In contrast to the ideas circulating amongst early career researchers, professors at the same university regard academia as flexible and adjustable to family needs.
 - The shift from precariousness to predictability that comes with a professorship is of crucial importance to how both work within, and life outside of, academia is made sense of.
- This discrepancy needs to be acknowledged in future work to promote gender balance.