Conceptualising feminist resistance in the postfeminist terrain

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Abstract

Purpose – In this paper, women entrepreneurs are seen as leaders and women leaders as entrepreneurial, making both groups an easy target of postfeminist expectations, governed by calls to embody the entrepreneurial self. Acknowledging that the entrepreneurial self has its roots in the universal, rational and autonomous subject, which was shaped in a male form during the Enlightenment, the purpose of this study is to conceptualise feminist resistance as a process through which the autonomous subject can be de-stabilised.

Design/methodology/approach – Empirically, this study draws on an extensive research project on women's rural entrepreneurship that includes 32 in-depth interviews with women entrepreneurs in rural Sweden. This study interpreted expressions of resistance from the women by using an analytical framework the authors developed based on Jonna Bornemark's philosophical treatise.

Findings – Feminist resistance unfolds as an interactive and iterative learning process where the subject recognises their voice, strengthens their voice and beliefs in a relational process and finally sees themselves as a fully fledged actor who finds ways to overcome obstacles that get in their way. Conceptualising resistance as a learning process stands in sharp contrast to the idea of resistance as enacted by the autonomous self.

Research limitations/implications – This study helps researchers to understand that what they may have seen as a sign of weakness among women, is instead a sign of strength: it is a first step in learning resistance that may help women create a life different from that prescribed by the postfeminist discourse. In this way, researchers can avoid reproducing women as "weak and inadequate".

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Originality/value – Through the re-writing of feminist resistance, the masculine entrepreneurship discourse including the notion of the autonomous self is challenged, and a counternarrative to the postfeminist entrepreneurial woman is developed. Theorising resistance as a learning practice enables a more transforming research agenda, making it possible to see women as resisting postfeminist expectations of endless competition with themselves and others.

Keywords Postfeminism, Autonomous self, Intellectus, Learning resistance, Neoliberalism

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The era of neoliberalism has seen the postfeminist self unfold as the extension of the entrepreneurial self, treasuring the independent, enterprising woman who takes responsibility and becomes successful of her own accord (Ahl and Marlow, 2021). However, postfeminist discourses seem to put women in a tight corner. Postfeminism sees gender equality as something already achieved and therefore blames the individual woman for any gender injustice she may encounter, thus in effect perpetuating gender inequality (Gill and Scharff, 2013; McRobbie, 2004). In the wake of postfeminism, the woman entrepreneur who starts and manages her own company has become the twin sister of the entrepreneurial woman who makes it to the upper echelons of leadership (Lewis, 2014). Both are highlighted as role models but simultaneously accused of reproducing masculinity norms, strengthening power hierarchies and perpetuating postfeminism (Lewis *et al.*, 2017). We therefore view women leaders as entrepreneurial and women entrepreneurs as leaders, making both groups an easy target of postfeminist expectations, governed by calls to embody the entrepreneurial self (Gill, 2007; Lewis *et al.*, 2017; Scharff, 2016).

The entrepreneurial self has its roots in the seemingly universal, rational and autonomous subject, which was shaped in a male form during the Enlightenment (Taylor and Vintges, 2004). This self fits discursively with "man", "entrepreneur" and "leader", but the same combination turns a woman into an oxymoron (Holmer Nadesan and Trethewey, 2000). The contemporaneous emergence of postfeminist selves is thus closely related to the autonomous self, inheriting a costume accused of fettering women and thwarting feminism (McRobbie, 2009). When postfeminism blends individual entrepreneurial endeavours (Lewis, 2014) with a regulation of femininity (McRobbie, 2004), it also silences feminism as a collective undertaking (Berglund *et al.*, 2018; Lewis, 2014). Moreover, it suppresses vulnerability as well as differences among women (Scharff, 2016). The discourse of entrepreneurial success does not include language that accommodates women's experiences (Holmer Nadesan and Trethewey, 2000, p. 245). Postfeminist discourses therefore risk silencing the voices of women entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial women who seek alternative paths. Women may find it hard to find words that describe their entrepreneurial experiences and, therefore, to be heard. Without a voice it is hard to navigate, let alone resist.

Practising resistance, understood as questioning the status quo and initiating change, has been successfully nourished through the notion of the autonomous, active and energetic entrepreneurial self; often materialised as the strong leader or the stubborn entrepreneur who goes his [sic] own way (Ogbor, 2000). Western ideals of entrepreneurs and leaders are tinged with an understanding of resistance, which reinforces the notion of the autonomous self as the lonely individual who swims upstream, clenches his fist and who does not take no for an answer. Such an understanding of resistance confirms the autonomous self as the only position from which one can resist, thus reinforcing and reiterating the autonomous entrepreneurial self. It is, we argue, a limited and limiting way of conceptualising resistance. To accommodate other experiences, resistance needs to be understood differently.

Bröckling (2015) suggests understanding resistance as a softer, more subtle, "peaceful" practice, where individuals seek to outsmart neoliberal expectations through tactics. Still, such resistance has the potential to shake up established orders and enable alternative pathways that to some extent break with neoliberalism (Dey and Teasdale, 2016). So it is possible to mobilise feminist resistance both *through* and *against* postfeminist discourses, but such resistance may unfold in more subtle and ambiguous forms than traditionally imagined (Blackett, 2016; Mavin and Grandy, 2019; Yoong, 2022).

Moreover, despite the many questionings of the unfortunate consequences of postfeminism, what remains to be explored is if and how the very "template" of the autonomous, rational self can be resisted. In our re-thinking and re-writing of feminist resistance, we turn to philosopher Jonna Bornemark (2020, 2018) who has taken an interest in the connections between contemporary neoliberal culture and the thought system established during the Enlightenment (mind over body). She suggests that we are able to resist the ratio(nality) of neoliberalism, including the autonomous individual, by leaning on our *intellectus* ability. Intellectus represents the subjective, emotional and temporary and stresses human ability to "not know", but to learn to cope with insecurity, instability and anxiety and muddle through life. According to Bornemark, vulnerability, insecurity, ambiguity and non-knowing do not constitute temporary conditions to avoid, deny or escape from, as ascribed to the "bounce-backable" postfeminist subject (Gill and Orgad, 2018), but are, rather, conditions to hold on to because they teach us about the human condition. Intellectus practices help us to nurture inter-dependency, insecurity, knowing oneself and trusting one's experiences and to cope with non-knowing. Intellectus thus stands in sharp contrast to the qualities ascribed to the rational, autonomous self.

Our feminist starting point is that structures still discriminate against women, which is ignored by the postfeminist, entrepreneurial discourse. Instead, women are invited to strive for success in the postfeminist terrain and encouraged to resist any obstacles as self-sufficient, autonomous selves. This leaves no room to understand resistance against the ideal of the autonomous self. Resistance *through* and *against* postfeminist discourses must therefore be examined to explore a feminism that can take us past postfeminism, towards a post-postfeminism. The purpose of this article is therefore to conceptualise feminist resistance as a process through which the autonomous subject can be de-stabilised. Theoretically, we take inspiration from the philosophical treatise of ratio and intellectus developed by Bornemark (2018, 2020). Empirically, we focus on women entrepreneurs in rural areas who, in many respects, turn to entrepreneurship to live "an other" life than the one depicted for the postfeminist self. We hope that our results will support women as leaders interested in learning how to resist unfortunate consequences of postfeminism, moving towards post-postfeminism, and to contribute to feminist knowledge production in organisation studies (Bell *et al.*, 2020).

Resisting postfeminist expectations and neoliberal life

Drawing on (pre)renaissance philosophers, Swedish Philosopher Bornemark (2018) presents two concepts, ratio and intellectus, which are conducive to conceptualising resistance in neoliberal times. The rational acquisition of knowledge about the world through scientific thinking (mind over body) describes "ratio"; a culture which has thrived in (neo)liberal societies where the language of economy, with concepts such as customers, costs, goals, results, efficiency, competition, transparency and governance, has subtly infiltrated the understanding of self, others and society (ibid: 61–62). By leaning on our intellectus ability to stand in relation to "non-knowing", we are able resist ratio(nal) neoliberal ideas (Bornemark, 2020). Such ideas include postfeminist discourses that tend to depict women as

"blind-folded", neglecting the precarity, insecurity and vulnerability entailed (Dabrowski, 2021; Sullivan and Delaney, 2017), and making them conducive to a double-edged position as both privileged and oppressed (Mavin and Grandy, 2019). Postfeminism thus exerts control via certain rules for thinking and feeling (Carr and Kelan, 2021), rules that govern women by developing postfeminist sensibilities to cope with neoliberal pressures and influences outside of themselves (Gill, 2007).

Because of the entrenchment of postfeminist discourses, the Foucauldian wisdom that where there is power there is resistance is helpful. It helps us discern the unpredictability, malleability and transformation of power (Butler, 1997) and that "the psychic life of neoliberalism" (Scharff, 2016) can be resisted. Despite the individualist focus, postfeminist discourses may not completely silence structural critiques (Blackett, 2016), and it seems to be possible to mobilise feminist resistance even within the limits of postfeminism, at least as long as one has a voice (Yoong, 2022). However, resistance voiced within the limits of postfeminism still aligns with the autonomous self, which is why we still know little about how resistance can be mobilised from its opposite direction – from silence, interdependency and insecurity.

We find Bornemark useful here as she points to how practising intellectus can shake up established orders and make it possible to find alternative pathways where silence is not an obstacle, but in fact a precondition. Mobilising intellectus requires one to be in relation to "whatness", which can briefly be described as the unknown, or something a person senses but does not yet have words for. In Bornemark's treatise, whatness (as an intellectus concept) escapes a clear definition, because it would, if captured in a definition, move into ratio. No matter how much we polish particular distinctions, human reason is locked in a language that separates and defines, whilst life and nature are fluid and multifaceted.

Extending Bornemark's theory of standing in relation to whatness, we suggest there are two approaches to resistance: embodying intellectus and transforming intellectus. *Transforming intellectus* describes the picking up of ratio concepts and transforming them into something that makes sense for women subjected to postfeminist expectations. In this article, for example, we pick up the concept of resistance, with the aim of unearthing other ways of resisting in the postfeminist terrain. Resistance in the form of transforming intellectus may be understood as pretending to follow ratio, but in a purposeful search for other directions. Metaphorically, we can see this kind of resistance as circumvention, thus pretending to "swim with" prevailing expectations, but backpedalling under the surface. Studies describe how women engage in entrepreneurship conducive to conventional gender roles by following gender rules rather than breaking them (Berglund and Tillmar, 2015); entwine doing gender and entrepreneurship in ways that create leeway (Bruni *et al.*, 2004); or act incomprehensibly to escape gendered norms and expectations (Fournier, 2002). The women in these studies have used entrepreneurship to circumvent gendered constraints to change the terrain to their advantage. Transforming intellectus, we suggest, is what entrepreneurs often do.

Entrepreneurship also entails certain challenges for women and "othered" groups. "Equal access to resources, participation and support, as well as an equal chance of a successful outcome" is a vision rather than a concrete reality for women (Brush *et al.*, 2019, p. 393). Studies show how the entrepreneurship discourse perpetuates "the rational European/North American male model" turning women into an "antithesis of entrepreneurial norms" (Ogbor, 2000, pp. 618, 621); but rather than changing these norms, the entrepreneurship discourse finds women to be in need of "fixing" (Ahl and Marlow, 2012). Women are advised to improve their skills and strategies so they can emulate male entrepreneurial behaviour (Bröckling, 2005), including taking the position of the

autonomous self to resist that which is stopping her from success. For example, she is encouraged to start her own enterprise when she hits the glass ceiling (Orhan and Scott, 2001), finding ways to muddle through gendered constraints in organisations (Calvert and Ramsey, 1992) or breaking free from power constraints in general by going against unjust and excluding structures (Goss *et al.*, 2011). Recent postfeminist discourses do not help, because they veil rather than highlight such structures.

Thus, women's voices may provide us with alternative views, but "imitative" and "fixing" practices simultaneously de-legitimise the voice that first must be acquired (Calvert and Ramsey, 1992). As Fricker (2007) puts it, lacking words to describe one's experiences is a form of epistemological injustice that may perpetuate injustice for marginalised groups. To revise and re-examine the possible, women must first engage in an in-depth analysis of what is to be revised. This is something we, as feminist researchers, engage in here. We can bring up the ratio concept of resistance, bringing it closer to the unknown to be re-examined and revised. In everyday practice, this may be a cumbersome task for the intellectual. This is where the second mode of resistance, embodying intellectus, becomes important.

Embodying intellectus draws on sensing the unknown. When we sense something, for example, that something is right, or that something is wrong, our body speaks to us. Sensing calls upon us to be aware of ourselves and the situation and to have the courage to stand in relation to the unknown. It is interesting that what we call embodying intellectus does not always have a voice or a language. Rather, it appears as an embodied act, something that silently "speaks to us", which makes us ponder and turn in some (other) direction, act in an alternative way, make an unexpected decision. Even if this "something" escapes us when we try to verbalise it, it is enacted in some way. We still know little about how embodying intellectus is practised by women entrepreneurs or entrepreneurial women. Discourses of feminist resistance have, thus far, required a voice, a strong individual and a scene on which to find tactics to circumvent expectations (Yoong, 2022), all of which may suppress expressions of embodying intellectus.

Hence, in the postfeminist terrain, it appears that a woman can find tactics to resist, but that she must first present herself as a strong individual with a voice. Adopting masculine entrepreneurial discourses, fashioning one's entrepreneurial experiences through the words of others, implies imitating and fixing. In other words, women are likely to be either misrepresented or not heard. This may further obscure any other practice of resistance by women. We suggest that both transforming and embodying intellectus provide us with clues for how resistance can be conceptualised differently.

Method

Our interviews with women entrepreneurs in Swedish rural areas urged us to rethink feminist resistance, and in so doing, we found Bornemark's concepts of ratio and intellectus helpful. Our methodological process is therefore best described as abductive; Bornemark gave us a language to understand and interpret our observations and to develop a new conceptualisation of resistance.

Empirically, our study draws on an extensive research project on women's rural entrepreneurship that includes 32 in-depth interviews with women entrepreneurs in rural Sweden. The interviews were, with some exceptions, carried out on their business premises, which also enabled observations of mundane (business) practices. We developed an open-ended interview guide based on information from focus group interviews with actors in the business support system, and on prior research. The interviews, with an average duration of 75 min, aimed to stimulate meaning-making, where we joined as "fellow travellers" (Gabriel and Ulus, 2015) eager to follow any narrative the women wanted to share. The interviews

were conversational and included rich details of the particular, as well as stories of major life shifts. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and complemented with field notes, photographs taken during the interview and material provided by the respondents, such as company brochures. The interviews were conducted by the four researchers in the project, sometimes in pairs, although we often met the women one to one.

The women we met talked about what it meant to live in a rural area; their efforts to make a living by developing new products, services and companies; their desire to contribute to their community; their attachment to a certain place; and their reflections on life at large. What caught our interest was that their stories contained two contradictory narrative strands. On the one hand, the women emphasised "feeling/finding their way" on their entrepreneurial journeys; pursuing their entrepreneurial endeavours tentatively and indecisively. They did not always know what to do next or how to understand what they did, but they did not allow this insecurity to stop their "knowing bodies" (Thanem and Knights, 2019) from attempting to make the journey. Simultaneously, the women expressed a strong determination to do their own thing. They presented a well-elaborated story where they appeared as autonomous subjects with the capacity not only to make decisions but also to break away from situations that constrained them.

Sensing that these narrative strands could be understood as practices of resistance that might be interpreted in terms of intellectus and ratio, we first read all 32 transcriptions to "detect" such practices. However, this analysis tended to end up in abstract descriptions of women's rural entrepreneurship, which did not leave much space for nuances of resistance. It did help us, however, to understand that there was a variety of ratio(nalities) resisted in the women's stories. They resisted, among other things, the anonymity of urban life, the growth paradigm, large-scale production and the quest to optimise life (but interestingly, they did not cite starting a company to resist gender discrimination). In this stage of the analysis, we learned to pose the question "What is the woman trying to get away from?" to understand the ratio(nality) that bothered each woman. Detecting intellectus was much more difficult, as we looked for both discursive and embodied expressions. Here, photos, field notes and material provided during the interview helped us recall memories from the interviews.

In the next step, we returned to Bornemark and, given the analysis so far, developed the conceptualisations of transforming and embodying intellectus. With respect to these conceptualisations of resistance, two interviews were selected that provided us with "compelling data" (Pratt, 2009, p. 860). The interview with Anna (a pseudonym) was selected because the first author felt that Anna reflected together with her during the interview and tried to find answers to some of the struggles she faced, providing us with insights into embodying intellectus. The interview with Stina (a pseudonym) was chosen because she was one of few who explicitly addressed resistance and was open about how she had sought to "bend the rules" to create an art studio in her community (c.f. Berglund and Tillmar, 2015 on playing with the rules of the game). Engaging with these cases, embodying and transforming intellectus took shape as an analytical grid. Embodying intellectus gave us insights into the women's emphasis on feeling and finding their way, while transforming intellectus explained the well-elaborated story where the women stressed their strong determination to do their own thing.

Third, we discussed the relation between embodying and transforming intellectus and asked if there was a connection between them. With the analytical grid of embodying and transforming intellectus we now returned to the remaining 30 narratives, which helped us identify a middle ground: *verbalising* intellectus. The interview with Viviane (a pseudonym) became our third example. Her story provided insight into how verbalising intellectus

connected the other two modes. The three women – Anna, Stina and Viviane – were thus chosen because they clearly illustrate each of the three modes of intellectus that unfolded through our abductive approach. However, each mode could be found in the stories of these three women, as well as in the remaining 29. For reasons of space, we concentrate on the three selected.

The methodological process, involving initial failure, relying on first impressions and not knowing what would unfold when reading the stories through the ratio/intellectus lens, can in itself be seen as an intellectus-driven practice. Bell *et al.* (2020, p. 187) view the acceptance of uncertainty in knowledge production as central to feminist analysis in its ambition to challenge "epistemic community norms" in organisation and management studies.

We will now meet the three women: the craftsperson Anna, the artist Stina and the farmer Viviane. We have focused on telling their stories from the three modes of resistance, which did not leave room for lengthy quotes. Rather, we focus on giving the three modes of resistance "flesh and bones" through our feminist writing, guided by our wish to explore forms of resistance different from that of the autonomous self. Because the first author's recollections from the interviews and her memories of situations and body language are essential, we use the first-person voice in the text below.

The craftsperson, Anna: Embodying intellectus

Anna runs a woodworking firm, whose business is mainly renovating old windows. She lives in a small, rural community which has been affected by industrial transformation. Anna decided to give up her job with a kitchen manufacturer to start her own business.

Details and precision

The most important motive for leaving her employment was to "do it my way" and to "set the bar", Anna explains:

> This was one of the reasons why I did not like the carpentry business where I was previously employed. In that company one person designed the kitchen and handled the contact with the customer, since the kitchens were purpose-built. I was the one building the kitchen cabinets, mainly from pre-made modules, but had to take a lot of responsibility for the end result [. . .].

During the interview, Anna returns to this issue and her frustration at not being able to make decisions on quality. She tried to suggest a change of focus, such as filling a certain piece that contained too many knots, only to be told: "Don't bother to fill them, just cover the knots with paint" [. . .]. Anna felt such responses were not only disappointing, but unprofessional. If we focus on details and exactness, we can do so much better, she explains. She could not understand why they accepted things that did not look good, because it is not worth it in the long run, it is not sustainable. She admits that it is impossible to be completely immersed in detail and that she has learned where to put her energy, but she also stresses that there is something called professional judgement and pride:

> When it comes to some details, I can absolutely understand that you shouldn't be too exact. And, sure, I'm exact in what I do, but that is what I would like to be. That was pretty much the driving force when I decided to work on my own; to be able to decide when something is as good as it can be.

It is important for Anna to pay attention to detail, to take her time and to exercise exactness. As soon as our discussion approaches what drove her to become an entrepreneur, she circles around the notion of exactness. This was the very reason why she decided to start her company.

Resisting ratio of effectivisation

In Anna's case, the reason for leaving her employment was to escape a world of effectivisation – a world where the craftsperson must sell her skills at the expense of precision; a world where Anna had to negotiate with herself and, more precisely, with her view of a professionally executed task, product or renovation. Inhabiting a space which can be described as a "factory of effectivisation", she never felt good about herself and was not able to enjoy exercising her skills, not to mention receiving appreciation from someone else. What mattered was the production time, an attractive surface and a paying customer. She was forced to adapt to fixed requirements that did not meet her view of a job that was "good enough". Listening to Anna describing how she felt trapped in the kitchen factory, a ratio which elevates efficiency and cost-awareness emerged. Anna practised her trade, for which she had adequate training and experience, but she wanted to practise it with the pace, pride and judgement of the craftsperson who decides when something is not merely good enough, but a job well done.

In our view, Anna was in contact with her fine-tuned handicraft skills and sensibility to improve the quality of an object with exactness. Her ability to sense how she could bring something new, something renewed, into the world is seen in her work. Anna's skills are in themselves a rejection of the ratio of a throwaway society and an invocation of a society where we should respect our history and care about restoring things made with love by previous generations.

Making sense of Anna's story

The meeting with Anna was contextualised in an "embodied way". I met with Anna at her house, where she had a workplace in the garage nearby. The meeting was as much an instance of observation as an interview. Anna showed me how she worked on the windows, the frame to be painted that she had made and the tools she used, and I could sense her tempo, the smell of wood and how she paid attention to details in her creative work. I also got to meet her children and her husband, who had just come home to take care of the children and housework to give her time for the interview. Her story made sense during the meeting, through the combination of observation and conversation. When reading the interview transcript, I realised that Anna communicated her embodied experiences by showing me how she worked, rather than narrating verbally. The interview transcript, with only the verbal story lacked coherence and left me puzzled, because my experience from the interview was almost the opposite. How was this possible?

Anna had arranged for us to go to a beautifully located but derelict building, which she and her husband had bought with the intention of renovating it to create a better workshop for her, and also to use part of the building to let to elderly people. Anna had brought coffee and pastries that we enjoyed at the outdoor table. The bulk of the (transcribed) interview took place at that table. After the interview we entered the building and Anna continued using her body to tell a story about her expectations for her future entrepreneurial life. Her body language and attempts to put embodied experiences into words were important. They gave context and coherence to the interview which, taken out of this context, appeared fragmented.

The initial story above (with a couple of quotes) was put together from several passages in the interview; as far as Anna was concerned, it was not a ready-made story. Instead, she appeared to use the interview as a space for reflection, addressing not only the importance of exactness, but also how difficult it was to have an equal relation with her husband, considering the expectations placed on her as an entrepreneur; the roles clashed. Finding a balance between working in her business (which she mainly did in the garage) and her

perceived responsibilities as a spouse and mother appeared to be a constant struggle. When we said goodbye after the meeting, Anna expressed gratitude for having been given an opportunity to talk about these things, acknowledging that our conversation had helped her see new directions in her life.

Embodying intellectus overshadows transforming intellectus

Embodying intellectus, which helps us find direction in life, but which often escapes verbalisation, appears to be present in the interview with Anna. This is why we suggest that embodying intellectus constitutes the dominant mode of resistance in Anna's life story. Anna appears to sense both what is wrong (effectivisation) and right (taking time for exactness and making the decision to create space for her trade) but does not (yet) have all the words for this as a story of resistance. Whilst she is still grappling to find ways to express herself, her body language fills in the missing words.

While Anna has begun to verbalise effectivisation and "poor" workmanship, the interview also revolved around her position as a woman; realising that she bears the brunt of the housework, she seeks ways to resist the gendered division of work. The gender issue is not (yet) included in her story. Both effectivisation and gender issues are thus mainly silent in her story, yet made relevant in the interview through passages of reflection here and there and through her body language.

What is not silent in Annas story is the need to make a living and to charge well for her services. In relation to starting her business, she explains that she systematically analysed the market and also asked a craftsperson who ran his own business in the same area for guidance, because she wanted to gain a better understanding of how to charge adequately for her work. Anna realised the difficulties her colleague had charging for his work and decided that was not something she would accept. "Of course I need to make ends meet, so I needed to learn from the beginning to charge properly". Deciding to learn the art of charging from the beginning, and to encourage others to respect handicraft work, Anna decided to set an even higher price. This resembles transforming intellectus, seeking to change an undervalued profession into an attractive occupation. Although embodying intellectus is dominant during the interview, Anna's story also contains instances of transforming intellectus.

The artist, Stina: transforming intellectus

Stina is an artist known for her initiatives to create a communal studio in one of the old glassmaking areas in the Swedish "Kingdom of Crystal". Stina works with utility and sculptural ceramics. She has lately explored the latter and received international recognition for her work.

Grounded in artistry

Stina spends most of her time creating unique, sculptural objects, but often returns to making everyday utility objects, with which she started her career. Her choice of ceramics comes from the excitement she found in working with clay. "There is something satisfactory in taking a lump of clay and transforming it into an object of value, I think that activity fills a basic human need", Stina explains. The material itself appears to be an inspiration in her artistry and she describes how she views artistry in a Swedish TV programme:

> I have rarely visited the forest. The forest was just there. When I opened the door as a child I ran out in the woods. So it has been the scene where things have happened [. . .]. I met lots of things [in the woods] that have shaped me.

Stina describes how her outlook on life is something she has developed in relation to practising art. She describes the forest as her "filter" and emphasises that her excursions in the forest give her energy and provide her with opportunities for sensing surfaces and structures, that are central in her ceramic work:

> The fir tree, as a symbol, is strong for me. I experience it both as a shelter and at the same time as so exposed to nature, to weather and wind. It is struggling. It is both very strong and sensitive at the same time [. . .]. You can look at it [the forest] as both threatening, as a mystery that takes you further and opens up a world which is difficult to access. A world within yourself.

Stina is active in one of intellectus' three playing fields: art (Bornemark, 2018). This provides her with a framework for an activity that takes shape from within, an urge to sense and explore new materials, taking inspiration from nature and giving shape to art objects. There are no predefined guidelines from external experts to follow, but Stina explicitly (and skilfully) describes how she developed an ability not to avoid non-knowledge, but to stay close to it by standing in relation to what she calls "mystery"; the as-yet unknown, which assumes material shape in her unique objects. She stresses that it is she who formulates what she wants to do with the clay; she does not engage in market research, asking customers what they want to buy, neither does she think in these terms. Art is produced for its own sake, but through artistic work, new interpretations can be made. This attests to Bornemark's (2018) suggestions that art – as a playing field – may provide space for micro resistance to the marketisation of art.

However, Stina does not shy away from the fact that she must also make a living from her work. She says that business and art are not incompatible. They can co-exist, without compromising artistic freedom. Although business is a necessary part of making a living as an artist, in Stina's view art does not follow the rationale of profit, effectivisation, growth or the desire to influence people in a certain direction, but is a search for that which, without art, would otherwise be difficult to access. During the interview, she describes herself as grounded in artistry, with her long experience in the field. Through her art, she wishes to give life to another world than the conventional ratio(nalised) world we inhabit. She is engaged in an intellectus practice, which she hopes will stimulate the fantasy of the spectator. Such fantasies may themselves be seen as an invitation to intellectus; not only for the artist, but also for those who can experience and become immersed in the artwork.

Combining art and entrepreneurship

Stina describes herself as being born into an entrepreneurial family where she learned from the outset that it is possible to create things, to have a dream and make it work. She also learned that it takes a lot of work, but if you enjoy what you do, this should not be a problem. Stina says that the rural location provides a place of cheerful harmony and space to turn inwards and ponder about what she wants to do. She has never focused on "making it" in terms of career or money, just on making enough to make ends meet (although she is comfortably off today). During the interview she returns to valuable learning experiences. One was her two-year struggle with the Swedish tax authorities, who investigated her meticulously for tax evasion, because they did not believe anyone could manage on such a small income. Stina took the fight, which led to a trial where she was found to be in the right on all counts but one. From this experience, she learned about book-keeping, rules and regulations and the importance of keeping track of details.

We also returned to the issue of "cracking codes" in our dialogue, because Stina has developed a deep insight into how to navigate the artistic world. For example, she realised early on that you should never pay to hold your first exhibition; if you do, none of the real

galleries will touch you. She was advised to move to the city to "become someone", but moving to the city, pushing herself into the fancy galleries, was not an attractive option. Instead, she stayed in the countryside and made international contacts, had successful exhibitions in other countries and invited colleagues to spend time in her studio. These experiences, Stina emphasises, helped her find alternative routes to making it as an artist. By resisting conventional ways to succeed in the artistic world, Stina discovered opportunities that did not necessitate leaving her community.

To create better conditions for herself, and for other artists, Stina and her husband took the initiative to create a communal studio for artist entrepreneurs in the abandoned glassworks area. It has since gained local and national recognition. She describes, with a smile, how she learned to present things in such a way that the municipality would say "yes". When she introduced her idea, she emphasised that art is business: "We talked numbers, we talked economy and we talked about other advantages too, but we approached it pretty much from their point of view". Her point is that they decided to present their idea of a studio using the rational business language of the municipality. However, the content was something else: a studio where artists can start up, be active artists, but also where the municipality could participate and collaborate (e.g. in evening workshops and art school for children). Together, they reached an agreement and found a financial solution that became sustainable in the long term for both partners.

Embodying intellectus grows into transforming intellectus

In our view, Stina appears, from her childhood and her art training, to be grounded in the *embodying intellectus* and to have developed mastery of the *transforming intellectus*. She describes how, to make the artistic collective possible, they made use of ratio, thus business language, to convince key stakeholders in the municipality. Stina's story shows how she invited the audience to reflect upon the meaning of ratio concepts such as "incubator" and "art entrepreneurship" and bring them to the border of non-knowledge where they can be examined, whereby current ratio can be rejected, revised or deepened.

We suggest that Stina's ability to transgress boundaries and transform through her art, through practices of playing with ratio to unfold space for intellectus practices, originates from being grounded in embodying intellectus to the extent that she has developed the ability to "play with" transforming intellectus, finding ways to circumvent norms and expectations and find her own way. This is the water in which she has been swimming for a long time. She appears to be quick to "read" the environment – to sense what is going on – but has also learned from her experience and has skilfully reflected upon and verbalised her experience and integrated this in her story, emphasising the need to find (and the joy in finding) alternative entrepreneurial trajectories when necessary.

The farmer Viviane – verbalising intellectus: the missing link

From our analysis of Anna's and Stina's stories, resistance unfolds as embodying and transforming. Whilst one form dominated in each story, both were present. At first sight, their simultaneous presence suggests they are in a dialectical relation to each other. Embodying intellectus, featuring sensing, perceiving, noticing "something" (whatness, in Bornemark's vocabulary) oscillates to transforming intellectus, featuring a purposeful play with conventions that can thwart constructions of meaning. The indication of abrupt shifts between the two extremes of embodying and transforming is, however, misleading, because it veils the nuanced and subtle mode of *verbalising intellectus*, a mode of resistance that binds together what is sensed through the body with purposeful resistance, by practices of putting silenced knowledge into words. Verbalising intellectus thus translates embodying

intellectus into words, which are later played out in transforming intellectus and used to bend rules and act out resistance in unpredictable ways.

To feature a story where verbalising intellectus was prominent, we now turn to Viviane, who has been a farmer all her life. She runs a family farm together with her husband, but together they have also developed an astonishingly wide array of ventures. They installed an automated barn, expanded the farm by keeping pigs over the summer, bought an old school (disassembled into modules and then reassembled at their farm), turned the school into a café for city visitors, held summer concerts, offered lunches on special occasions, made breakfast boxes, packed boxes of lamb after slaughter, experimented with artisan food, made cheese and offered courses in cheese making and welcomed school children to learn about farming. Some of these endeavours are for profit, others non-profit but for the good of the surrounding society. Viviane admits that they have achieved something, but talks about it not as "growth", but rather "degrowth" (cf. Jarvis, 2019). In Viviane's description of growth, humans move with the flow of nature and animal life, rather than push for maximum economic growth. Viviane does not make a big thing of her accomplishments, but talks about them in a down to earth, prosaic way, in sharp contrast to the typical heroic entrepreneurship tale (Sørensen, 2008).

In contrast to Anna, she talks about them in a comprehensible way, but, just as with Anna, her story reveals how the ventures developed from sensing that something had to, or could, be done to develop the farm business. The ideas were then verbalised in conversation with her husband. Viviane views the day-to-day interactions between herself and her husband as a way to come up with ideas, ponder over them, polish them and find ways to enact them when the time is ripe. "It is a symbiosis", Viviane explains. "When my husband and I walk next to each other, then one says something, which gives the other something to ponder, before replying with something else". This way of "walking the walk" at the farm unfolds as a verbalising intellectus, one that is nurtured in the silent understanding of those who share the same reality. A few words can be picked up by the other and transformed over time to a meaning-making process. Viviane's story highlights the need to stay in tune with her husband, family, animals, nature, the local community and urban life. She shows a sensitivity to grasping that which appears in between – between life and death, humans and animals, local terrain and global economies – and to translating these experiences into words, whether with her husband, friends, relatives or when she is with the animals on the farm. That gives her an opportunity to verbalise her embodying insights. Verbalising intellectus appears in her descriptions of being in dialogue with humans, animals and nature, emphasising how that gives direction to her life. Verbalising intellectus thus involves being aware of relations to existential matters and embracing our sensibility and vulnerability in ourselves and others.

Resistance as learning process

Recognising that the three modes of intellectus practices are neither an individual feature nor a uniform feature (resistance unfolds in different ways in individual trajectories), we suggest understanding resistance as a progressive learning process where embodying intellectus is followed by verbalising intellectus, which is followed by transforming intellectus (Figure 1).

Iterating this cycle over time and in different contexts, the individual learns how to resist. It is the subtlety of the two first modes of resistance (embodying and verbalising) that adds to our understanding of resistance. Hence, the three modes of intellectus linked together in a learning process unveil the contradiction of the two narrative strands –"feeling/finding their way" versus appearing autonomous and strong-willed – as a learning process consisting of

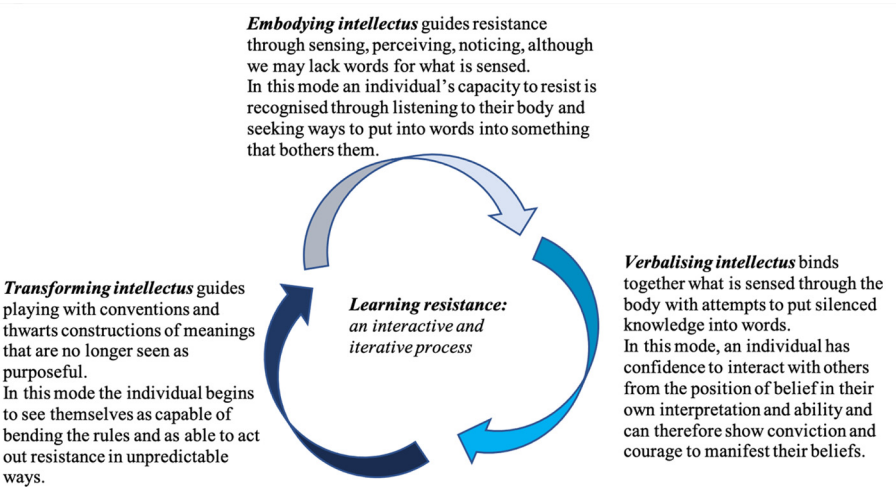

Figure 1.
Resistance as a learning process

three practices that shall be seen as interrelated and iterative. The women in our study learn to resist by standing in relation to non-knowing and by finding the words and expressions that can guide them in their lives. Whilst embodying intellectus is guided by sensing embodied experiences, verbalising intellectus is guided by an inquiring dialogue with family, friends, animals, place and nature. Finally, transforming intellectus is played out on the entrepreneurial stage, where the individual purposefully seeks to bend rules and to thwart conventions.

Discussion and conclusion

The purpose of this article was to conceptualise feminist resistance as a process through which the autonomous subject can be de-stabilised. Stories told by women entrepreneurs who run their businesses in rural areas sparked our interest; in particular, the embodied and non-verbalised nature of resistance we observed. Although the empirical material refers to conventional entrepreneurship contexts, we address entrepreneurship as part of the entrepreneurial contemporary culture which perpetuates idea(l)s of the postfeminist self, ideals that position both women entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial women as forerunners for others. The two contradictory narrative strands identified in the women's stories – a hesitant "feeling/finding their way" versus appearing as autonomous and strong-willed – led us to engage with contemporary female philosopher Bornemark's (2018, 2020) ideas and concepts. From our analytical endeavour, feminist resistance unfolds as an interactive and iterative learning process where the subject recognises their voice, strengthens their voice and beliefs in a relational process and finally sees themselves as a fully-fledged actor who finds ways to overcome obstacles that get in their way. Conceptualising resistance as a learning process, we suggest, stands in sharp contrast to the idea of resistance as enacted by the autonomous self, who swims upstream, clenches his [sic] fist and who does not take no for an answer.

The result of the learning process that emerges exhibits similarities to practices of tactics or circumvention where one plays *with* the conventions and norms, instead of exercising head-on confrontation (Berglund and Tillmar, 2015; Dey and Teasdale, 2016; Hjorth, 2005). In particular, transforming intellectus resembles practices of circumvention. Resistance in

the form of circumvention is seen not only as practicable but also recommendable in neoliberal and postfeminist regimes, because head-on confrontation tends to result in co-optation and incorporation, instead of changing structures and systems (Bröckling, 2015; Carr and Kelan, 2021; Scharff, 2016). What we add to the literature on neoliberal resistance is that practices of tactics or circumvention – transforming intellectus in our vocabulary – is learnt, and moreover, it is preceded by two other forms of resistance, embodying and verbalising intellectus. These two, very subtle forms of resistance will either escape notice or be misrepresented if we look only for the third form of resistance.

In neoliberal discourses, the entrepreneur and the leader are constituted through male characteristics and underpinned by the idea of agentic individuals with clear ideas of what they want and how to get it. This "go-getter" understanding of resistance only perpetuates the autonomous self, which in turn constitutes the foundation of the postfeminist self (Gill and Scharff, 2013). Viewing resistance instead as a learning process, which involves seeking and finding one's way by listening to the body and verbalising one's insights in interactions with others, implies that resistance may indeed be practised from a position other than the autonomous self. It helps us as academics to avoid re-constructing entrepreneurs and leaders as autonomous, agentic selves with a clear motive. It also helps researchers to identify vulnerability, insecurity, dependence on others or difficulties to express oneself as forms of resistance and therefore as strengths rather than weaknesses. As such, it provides an avenue to avoid the common construction of women leaders and entrepreneurs as inadequate or weak.

In addition, and in contrast to previous conceptualisations of resistance, our conceptualisation includes the body and the senses. That which precedes circumvention – embodying and verbalising – includes sensing, perceiving and noticing one's body and verbalising these insights in interaction with others. The relation to the body that unfolds here is in stark contrast to that of the postfeminist woman who is to live up to the "beauty premium" (Mavin and Grandy, 2019), endure the never-ending fight of competing with oneself as depicted in the psychic life of neoliberalism (Scharff, 2016) or control her emotions rather than be guided by them (Dabrowski, 2021; Mavin and Grandy, 2019).

Understanding resistance as a learning process can help women in leadership positions fathom the ambiguity of privilege and opposition they may encounter (Mavin and Grandy, 2019). Practising embodying and verbalising intellectus and seeing it as resistance may enable the (postfeminist) self to embrace inequality instead of disavowing it, to accept vulnerability instead of hiding it and to collaborate with oneself and others instead of competing, and thus enable one to see the structural dimensions of power (Ahl and Marlow, 2021; Carr and Kelan, 2021; Mavin and Grandy, 2019; Scharff, 2016). Learning to resist through embodying and verbalising intellectus can help women distance themselves from postfeminist expectations, to find their directions in life and to "play" more with societal expectations. It might shape a more inclusive and collective feminism, in contrast to the individualised, postfeminist version that puts women against each other (Carr and Kelan, 2021; Dabrowski, 2021). Inviting discussion on structural injustices, appreciating collaboration and acknowledging that we are dependent on each other to bring about social change might thwart the postfeminist discourse.

Through our feminist re-writing of feminist resistance, the masculine entrepreneurship discourse including the notion of the autonomous self is challenged, and a counternarrative to the postfeminist entrepreneurial woman is developed. In this way, we reclaim feminist collective resistance, support women as leaders interested in structural change and contribute to feminist knowledge production in organisation studies (Bell *et al.*, 2020). Theorising resistance as a learning practice enables a more transforming research agenda,

making it possible to see women as resisting postfeminist expectations of endless competition with ourselves and others.

The empirical context in this article was women rural entrepreneurs. We welcome similar studies in other contexts, such as that of women leaders employed in large organisations, be they public or private, or by leaders in non-profit organisations with an explicit agenda to transform inequalities. The latter are likely to have resistance of neoliberal expectations on their agenda and such resistance might be made visible by the conceptual development of resistance offered in this article. Making it visible, however, may also entail the development of research methods sensitive enough to capture embodiment, that which is not said. Finally, we encourage feminist theorists to take inspiration from contemporary female philosophers. We are deeply grateful for the perspectives provided through our engagement with Bornemark.

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