Preprint

This is the submitted version of a paper presented at 9th Making Projects Critical workshop.

Citation for the original published paper:

Re-theorising projectified selves in social media: Prosumption, postfeminism and class-as-achievement
In: Västerås

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

Permanent link to this version:
http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:kth:diva-240597
Re-theorising projectified selves in social media:
Prosumption, postfeminism and class-as-achievement

by

Karin Berglund, Stockholm Business School, Stockholm University. Karin.berglund@sbs.su.se

Monica Lindgren, School of Industrial Engineering and Management, KTH Royal Institute of Technology. Monica.lindgren@indek.kth.se

Johann Packendorff, School of Industrial Engineering and Management, KTH Royal Institute of Technology. Johann.packendorff@indek.kth.se


Abstract

In this paper, we explore the consequences of societal projectification for individuals in order to identify new theoretical avenues for critical organizational scholarship. This exploration is based in an analysis of public self-narratives by social media profiles from the perspective of ‘projectified selves’ (Kalff, 2017), i.e. subjectivities evolving through a life consisting of various projects and through identification with project-like conditions. The purpose with this paper is to identify strands of theoretical development for critical management scholarship, in relation to an ongoing empirical study of bloggers and podcasters. The empirical material, consisting of blogs, pod-casts, tv-shows and, magazine interviews, will be used as examples to illustrate how the specific rationalities inherent in the project discourse interacts with the growing need in everybody to appear as useful, responsible and admirable in neoliberal
society. From these empirical materials we point to three theoretically grounded ways through which the projectified self is perpetuated and furthered in contemporary society: “Prosumption”, Postfeminism” and “Class as achievement”. These three aspects of the projectified self we suggest can advance research that seek to gain a more critical understanding of projects in contemporary society.

1. Introduction

In this paper, we explore the consequences of societal projectification for individuals in order to identify new theoretical avenues for critical organizational scholarship. This exploration is based in an analysis of public self-narratives by social media profiles from the perspective of ‘projectified selves’ (Kalff, 2017), i.e. subjectivities evolving through a life consisting of various projects and through identification with project-like conditions. To further explore and delineate the projectified self we turn to the literature on the entrepreneurial self as a genealogy of what we are urge(d) to become, the influences of that alleged being, and the effects it has (had) for society and its members (e.g. Berglund, Lindgren & Packendorff, 2017; Bröckling, 2016; Rose, 1996; Scharff, 2016).

Projects have come to be an unquestioned vehicle to organizing reality, a rational scheme of life and particular way of forming a relation to the self and others. The literature on the entrepreneurial self assist us in advancing the understanding about the projectified self through placing it in a historical context, to outline how it has progressed and to shed light for how it, as a self-improvement and activation vehicle, has become an inherent part of neoliberal society and the economization of life. Using the analytical lens of the entrepreneurial self we position our study in the emergent critical literature on societal projectification (cf Clegg and Courpasson, 2004; Knights 2006; Lindgren and Packendorff, 2006; Packendorff and Lindgren, 2014; Fred, 2015; Peticca-Harris et al, 2015; Jensen et al, 2016; Cicmil et al, 2016).

We base our exploration in an empirical interest in the emerging social media terrain of ‘podders’, ‘bloggers’ and ‘influencers’ who, through their social media activities, reinforce their fame, status and relevance feed the audience with descriptions on various forms of
consumption and their related emotions and reflections. The audience is encouraged to consume their lifestyles and personae, and thus to produce a particular ethos. What runs through the self-narratives of these social media profiles is an awareness of the need to live life as a series of projects via practices of production and consumption, which is interwoven with aspirations to improve life and selves. This results in the projectification of the self; to incessantly pursuing, producing and dispersing new consumerist projects, not only to sustain an appearance of usefulness, effectiveness and attractiveness, but also to preserve a sense of personal worth. Given the widespread attention given to these social media profiles and their, sometimes self-assumed, still commercialized roles as forerunners and inspirators, their rather extreme lives may become something attractive and a ‘new normal’ to live up to for their audiences. Living up to this ‘new normal’ demands submitting to the projectified self.

The purpose with this paper is to identify strands of theoretical development for critical management scholarship, in relation to an ongoing empirical study of bloggers and podcasters. The empirical material, consisting of blogs, pod-casts, tv-shows and, magazine interviews, will be used as examples to illustrate how the specific rationalities inherent in the project discourse interacts with the growing need in everybody to appear as useful, responsible and adorable in neoliberal society. We emphasize the discursive elements that have been highlighted and oppressed in societal projectification literature and how these both overlap and deviate from the themes of significance found at the empirical scene (Cicmil et al, 2016). Our interest is directed towards how projectification is both explicitly (running different projects) and implicitly (submitting to the projectified self) part of endeavours to build multifaceted businesses around social media personas – cantering on a constant sharing of their personal lives in combination with positioning themselves as socialites and experts on matters such as fashion, beauty, interior decoration, media trends, travel, entrepreneurship, and cultural life.

In our analysis the following four themes appeared throughout the material 1. Opportunity and choice, 2. Production: consume and to be consumed, 3. Mobilising and de-mobilising gender, 4. Class and social positioning appeared. From these themes we point to three theoretically grounded ways through which the projectified self is perpetuated and furthered in contemporary society: “Prosumption”, Postfeminism” and “Class as achievement”. These
three aspects of the projectified self we suggest can advance research that seek to gain a more critical understanding of projects in contemporary society.

2. Societal projectification and projects as a human condition

The consequences of project-based organizing and projectification has been critically studied since for over a decade (cf Clegg and Courpasson, 2004; Knights 2006; Hodgson and Cicmil, 2006; Lindgren and Packendorff, 2006a; Packendorff and Lindgren, 2014; Peticca-Harris et al, 2015; Jensen et al, 2016; Cicmil et al, 2016). The discourse on projects and project management is present in all sectors of society, as a way of justifying ways of working and living as well as articulating the character of successful and effective social interaction in neoliberal society (Chiapello and Fairclough, 2002; Cicmil et al, 2016). Projects, as goal-oriented ambitions of individuals and groups, reinforce instrumentalisation and masculinisation of life; they have come to be seen as predominant life-defining and personal-worth justifying engagements (Chiapello and Fairclough, 2002; Knights, 2006; Cicmil et al, 2016). This is also carried over to society in general, as a tendency to increasingly perceive life in terms of delimited, temporary courses of action (Packendorff and Lindgren, 2014; Kalff, 2017). This applies to both explicit projects (i.e. events labelled as such) and to implicit ones, as the projectified self.

Critical projectification scholarship has also emphasised the need for examining the underlying discursive developments in which the notion of rational project management has become a legitimate and desirable phenomenon in contemporary society and a driver behind the creation of projectified organisations within which the work occurs. The project management discourse contributes to the reification of projects as distinct, given, unquestionable and manageable items separated from their history and context, (Cicmil et al, 2016); to the dichotomisation of projects vis-à-vis permanent and stable organisational arrangements, (Cicmil et al, 2009); to the grandiosification of projects as a superior alternative to ineffective, rigid, boring bureaucracies, (Gill, 2002; Grabher, 2002); and to the compartmentalisation of projects into settings in which admirable achievements take place under conditions where normal rules do not apply (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2006; Lindahl,
2007). Some recent research also highlights the emotional consequences of the projectified work, portraying projects as emotionally charged and potentially addictive and harmful spaces (Rowlands and Handy, 2012; Lindgren et al, 2014). Among the consequences of projectification it is thus also important to note the ambitions and hopes tied to projects without exception and how such ambitions and hopes have become taken-for-granted in project work. Through goal-setting and planning, ambitions and hopes are projected into the future – almost to the extent that the future is ‘lived’ in advance, taken for granted and secured through project planning (Cicmil et al, 2016).

In their discussion on the cultural and political modes of understanding and justifying reality with reference to the history of mankind, Chiapello & Fairclough (2002) claim that a new ‘justificatory regime’ is emerging in contemporary society – the project-oriented cité. In comparison with the six historical cités - which were based on, e.g., religious beliefs, bourgeois civil society values, industrial logics or market mechanisms – the project-oriented justificatory regime puts primacy on activity, project initiation and social networks as basic tenets of societal activity. The successful and prosperous individual is an adaptive, flexible and connective team player, able to generate enthusiasm and handle multiple cultural traditions, always prioritising availability, employability and new projects over social stability and lifelong plans (cf. also Packendorff & Lindgren 2014; Jensen et al, 2016; Barondeau & Hobbs, 2018). Likewise, the ‘small’ persona in the projectified cité is an incommunicative, closed-minded, intolerant individual who thrives on stability, predictability and adhering to one’s roots and traditions (Chiapello & Fairclough, 2002).

The discursive constructs available to individuals in the project cite is further detailed in subsequent literatures. ‘Projects’ imply a combination of rational planning and passionate adventure (Sahlin-Andersson, 2002; Lindgren et al, 2014), of radical change and delivery under controlled conditions (Cicmil et al, 2016), of professionalism in terms of delivery and closure (Hodgson, 2002). As these discursive constructs become also virtues of the successful and ‘great’ individual (Chiapello & Fairclough, 2002), it also implies that one’s personal worth is related to never be without a project (Cicmil et al, 2016; Jensen et al, 2016; Bröckling, 2016) and that the projectified self is always in a condition of a lasting crisis that can only be handled through incessantly pursuing new projects (Evans & Reid, 2013; Cicmil et al, 2016). The
literatures on emerging ‘precariats’ further underlines that projectified selves are often achievers on the fringe, sacrificing economic and relational stabilities in exchange for being able to pursue artistic dreams and be part of prestigious communities (cf Umney & Kretsos, 2015, Berglund, 2017) – which means that ‘greatness’ in the projectified society does not necessarily mean to be able to earn a living or embarking upon traditional upwards-oriented class journeys.

3. Linking the projectified self to the entrepreneurial self

To explore, delineate and further conceptualise the projectified self we take inspiration from the literature on the entrepreneurial self, which is influenced by Foucault’s writings on how power, subjectivity and modes of governing has change over the course of history (e.g. Lemke, 2001). Accordingly, the entrepreneurial self took shape from the ideal of the Enlightenment’s Man of Reason to Homo Economicus, via the economic rational and cost-benefit calculating being, to today’s entrepreneurial self – the entrepreneur of the self. That is; the self-controlling, self-commercializing, self-rationalizing (Pongratz and Voss, 2003), affective, caring, ethical (Vrasti, 2012) self-driven and self-organized human being who runs her or his life as a project (Rose, 1996; Bröckling, 2016). Hence, the entrepreneurial self is written into strategies of mobilizing resources and optimism of the individual in the optimising of economic life, where economic points to a transactional view of self and others.

The emergence of contemporary entrepreneurial self is also a story about how modes of government has changed over history; from the disciplinary power of the governor (the almighty king) to the invention of new modes of productive power makes possible a governing through ‘mentalité’ where people are offered more freedom to make decision and to be ‘in power’. To be ‘in power’ however requires self-governing, responsible, and active citizens; entrepreneurial selves who can exercise their activities through projects. In contemporary society the project has turned into a fundamental element of governmentality: “Governing becomes project management in two ways, the governing of project and governing by projects” (Bröckling, 2016, p. 172). Projects propel the entrepreneurial self in a way that the one does not work without the other. In our conceptualisation of the projectified self we refer
to this dual notion of projects. Projectification implies to run life as a project, and through projects. What governmentality adds is that – the freedom sought through projectification – is a conditioned freedom. In the advanced liberal society, we are also governed by projects.

Rose (1996) expounds how “contemporary individuals are incited to live as if making a project of themselves: they are to work on their emotional worlds, their domestic and conjugal arrangements, their relations with employment and their techniques of sexual pleasure, to develop a ‘style’ of living that will maximize the worth of their existence themselves” (p. 157).

The sequencing of work demands maximums flexibility of the projectified self who has, not only to span between an intense mode of self-organizing to high degrees of cooperation, but also to manage different project and their potential overlapping, clashes and opportunities for coordination. There is a constant need for the projectified self to negotiate his/her project plans; as if s/he was an enterprise. Similarly, to the descriptions of the entrepreneurial self, the projectified self becomes both its own boss and subordinate, and its own supplier and customer:

By applying the principle of intrapreneurship to itself and splitting the self up as, on the one hand - a “customer of itself” – and on the other hand - the “supplier of itself”. If the internal exchange works well ‘all’ parties (supplier, customer, boss, subordinate) profit from it. (Bröckling, 2005)

It is just as important to explore one’s own wishes as one’s own strengths and weaknesses in the negotiations with the projectified self. Project management is thus based on clever bargaining to a common goal, and the ability of all the participants (the demanding customer/producer of the self, or the collaborative partners s/he needs to synchronise with) to commit to the goal that appear by far most important in that very moment (c.f. Scharff, 2015; Bröckling, 2005). In ‘the projectified cité’ (Chiapello and Fairclough, 2002) we are offered ‘entrepreneurial freedom’, but to gain access to this freedom we need to ‘projectify ourselves’ and run life as a project, and through projects. This involves not only the accomplishing of particular tasks through projects, and to be on alert for new potentially
interesting and valuable projects that can be integrated into the project portfolio, but it also requires an intricate negotiation with self’s demands as customer/producer. To gain success and admiration in such a life one must display optimism and action-orientation and identify oneself with billionaires and jet-setters rather than with the socioeconomic context in which one is situated (Gill, 2014).

To sum this up, the partly overlapping literatures on projectified selves and entrepreneurial selves point at a number of possible (and interrelated) empirical themes of interest in further inquiry. One such theme is the consequences of project-based fragmentation of careers and lives – to what extent is the projectified self a fragmented self, and what does that mean for long-term achievements and well-being? A second theme is the far-reaching responsibilisation of individuals (Berglund et al, 2017) in neoliberal society in relation to the responsibilisation going on in project-based settings (Hodgson, 2005; Kalff, 2017). Here, it is of interest to ask how such responsibilisation is articulated, internalised and what the consequences are for the sense of individual risk and vulnerability (Cicmil et al, 2016). Third, the enterprising self is a highly gendered subject position (Bröckling, 2005; Berglund et al, 2017), implying that it is of interest to inquire into what femininities and masculinities that are produced and re-produced as discursive notions of project work are drawn upon (Lindgren & Packendorff, 2006). Finally, it should also be of interest to revisit the notion of ‘greatness’ in Chiapello & Fairclough’s (2002) work; what does it mean to be ‘great’ or ‘small’ in projectified milieus, and what possibilities and problems are in store for those aspiring to achieve, prosper and gain social status?

4. The empirical scene: Among bloggers, podcasters and socialites

In this paper, we study the emerging terrain of social media by turning to popular bloggers’ sites asking what kind of subject positions that are promoted. Our empirical material consists of blog posts and podcasts from a number of professional Swedish bloggers/ influencers/ entrepreneurs, both male and female. They are clearly not the ones most at peril in the projectified society or gig-economy, but they are at the same time forerunners and inspirators for a young generation in search for values to project one’s ambitions onto.
What is common for all these entrepreneurs is that they have built up thriving and multi-faceted businesses around their personas – cantering on a constant sharing of their personal lives in combination with positioning themselves as socialites and experts on matters such as fashion, interior decoration, media trends, travel, and entrepreneurship. The base – usually a blog site and/or a weekly podcast – has been expanded by all sorts of other activities; e.g., Instagram flows, book publishing, TV shows, stage performances, beauty products, clothing lines and magazines. Blogs and pod-casts at this level (i.e. six-digit number of individual listeners) are highly profitable operations; the cost of production and broadcast is very low and the revenues from advertising and sponsor partners may sometimes exceed 1 MEUR/year. In all three studied cases, these incomes are obviously invested into extravagant lifestyles from which the entrepreneurs can draw further stories, ideas, episodes of consumption for their blogs and pod-casts.

Three Swedish ‘social media phenomena’ during the past 5 years has been studied in depth for this paper. It is one blog and two pod-casts that was followed and documented by the authors during spring 2018. All three are among the most successful ones in Sweden in terms of number of listeners/readers. They are anonymized in this paper.

4.1 The Anna & Asta podcast

Anna & Asta is a famous weekly podcast by two female fashionistas/socialites, addressed to an audience of fashion conscious modern working women. In their pod-cast Anna & Asta, together, guide the listener through their busy working life, family and fashion. The podcast thus constructs the busy, but aware, women who is ‘in midst of life’ trying to make ends meet and find a balance between all expectations to be a good mother and spouse, have a career, take care of herself (and her body), and have time for friends and interests. They also offer insights to their private lives; how they live their lives and what they do – e.g. who their friends are, what a shopping experience can look like, what they to take care of their children, how they expose the less glamorous mum’s life wanting to sleep longer in the morning and struggling with the ‘life puzzle’, but also how they find new ways to start exercising, and how they plan dinners, parties, travels with friends and family. In close relation to their podcast
Anna and Asta also offer new lines of clothes and accessories, and are frequently seen – also individually – as fashion experts in various media milieus.

After listening to some podcasts their first friendly tone – used to confirm the counterpart, and other women, by using a stream of superlatives – veils the content of their talk. It sounds like this: “Honestly,’ that’s great, God, how handsome you are, It’s absolutely amazing, You look brilliant today”. The world is constructed in a positive way, which can be sustained by navigating the landscape of fashion outfits and behaviour. In this world social interaction appears to be more social when outfit is thought out. Anna and Asta guide each other, and their audience, around ideas for how to be and behave in different contexts, as well as how to cope if one steps in the wrong direction. To appear as the self-securing woman is important. With some distance this securing of self through navigating various outfit, paradoxically signals lack of confidence and uncertainty of fitting into social contexts. The self-securing woman has to find the formula of balancing between blending in and at the same time illuminating and making an impression. She needs to consciously choose what to consume to feel more confident, prepared and push aside anxiety, worry and the fear of being ‘wrong’. What is communicated in between the lines is how women can prevent social situations to become embarrassing by securing her outfit. But she should not only keep an eye on her own appearance, but also on her family (husband, children, homes and animals included). Anna & Asta offers their advice to help other women feel safe in their bodily appearances so they can progress, aiming for fulfilment. They invite us to consume carefully selected products that they promote and offer us insightful narratives on exclusive clothes and accessories. Both Anna & Asta have well organised family lives, but they seem to take the main responsibility for family, home and children when residing in and travelling to upper-class areas in Stockholm, the Swedish west coast, south coast, Switzerland, Los Angeles and the French Riviera.

4.2 The Bert & Benny podcast

Bert & Benny are two male journalists/socialites who host a famous weekly podcast. In addition, they also throw occasional stage shows and experiment with various male beauty
and clothing lines. In the podcast they discuss everyday life in a philosophical and humorous manner, distantly reflecting over it rather than immersing in it. They oscillate between a slightly arrogant tone and a sense of vulnerable honesty and provocations. The atmosphere and relation between the two men can be described as close, almost intimate, and they appear like couples in an old marriage, constructing a particular form of homosociality where they reaffirm each other’s status and importance for the other, whilst simultaneously stressing their autonomy. Although the tempo of the show is slow, allowing space for a reflecting conversation where they often express their wish to scrutinize themselves, their past and their behaviours, they do not signal any clear ambitions to self-improve. Instead they indulge in their less flattering sides of themselves in a self-confirming way.

Despite their influence on the social media scene, they do not seem to reap the fruit by engaging in, neither making business of - excessive consumption. As part of the pod they insert commercials from their sponsors, which are sometimes introduced in an embarrassing tone. Of interest here is how the tempo of their conversation seem to increase in the commercial to decrease when they move back to their homosocial introspective conversations. Thus, they are more interested in the ideas of things, than things themselves and we invite the audience to consume their daily lives and inner thoughts. Although ‘everybody knows’ about their luxurious lives, it is never brought up in the podcast. Their entrepreneurial endeavours there for appear to be a matter of getting people to like them for ‘who they are’ and they sell themselves through their events, books, cultural engagements (that of course attracts sponsors) and not as an influencer who promotes particular products upfront. They are also well aware of the responsibility to meet the audiences demands and expectations and find ways to meet the consumer needs. Both men hail from famous families and are brought up in culturally upper-class homes. Behind the ‘homosocial podcast façade’ both are married, have children and a well-organised family lives. Both are also part of the media scene in Stockholm and are frequent visitors at famous restaurants where media people go and meet each other and to be watched and recognised. To conclude, the podcast constructs a (masculine) listener that likes to question everyday life, who knows a little about everything, but who does not need to change much in life.
4.3 The Carla blog

Carla – a top-read blog with add-on ventures in media and beauty products. The blog is updated once or twice every day and invites the (female) reader to follow Carla’s life in real time; hard work, lavish consumption, ambitious thoughts on entrepreneurship mixed with reflections on bringing up her small children. Carla herself is very open with herself as the front face of an entrepreneurial team and the blog being a profitable enterprise aimed at promoting products and services. From time to time she gives recommendations to prospective social media profiles on how to build up similar businesses. The tone is authentic, and varies depending on subject and mood; from enthusiasm and optimism to melancholy and sadness. In contrast to Anna & Asta, Carla goes her own way – being the independent woman and also wants to be a role model for young women by showing that it is possible to make it on your own.

The contents and messages of the blog were documented during a period of two months for the purpose of this paper. The blog is occasionally used to promote products and services from Carla’s various businesses and collaboration partners, but otherwise it is much about herself and her view of things. Carla openly identifies as an thriving and successful entrepreneur, and assumes the role as spokesperson for a new generation of smart women who are not just ‘blogging girls’ anymore, they run carefully designed media concepts and build their brands. “On the internet, there are no glass ceilings, just opportunities and collaborations”. She performs the young, smart entrepreneur that travels across Europe meeting other entrepreneurs for inspiration and collaboration, dining at high-end restaurants, staying in luxury hotels – at the same time as she maintains that entrepreneurship is about hard work, big dreams, daring to take risks and that such a life is not for everyone. This also implies that her life is framed as unfolding in terms of conscious and rational choices. She wants to focus on work and motherhood – so everything else in private life is outsourced to butlers, maids, inhouse chefs, nannies, gardeners, doctors and security staff. She wants to be free to organise her own life – so she decided to go through a divorce with the man who she earlier selected to become a great father. She wants to focus on strategig business development – so all daily management of the companies are delegated to people who are better at that; “don’t end up in roles/places that are not you”. From time to time, this stirs up controversies among her
followers who are most active in the commentary fields in the blog. Many do not approve of her focus on work (instead suggesting she should be more at home with her children), her promotion of entrepreneurship as the way for women to become free and self-reliant, or her celebration of lavish consumption episodes as ways towards feeling more happy, independent, creative, attractive and prosperous.

5. **Empirical themes**

The three cases described above are part and parcel of the projectified society, and they all need to submit to the projectified selves who, itself, becomes a project and lives life through projects. Hence, they work through projects, they live through projects – what seems important is to display an incessant flow of new projects in different spheres of life. Their audiences have been hard to win over, expects new ideas, activities and provocations all the time, can easily get bored and move on to other blogs, podcasts and Instagram flows. In that sense, projects have evolved into a human condition for our social media profiles (Jensen et al, 2016) which possibly also spills over onto their followers in form of performative expectations on an active, prosperous lifestyle. We departed from the empirical areas of interest indicated above – fragmentation, responsibilisation, femininization/masculinisation and greatness/social status, we will here expand the analyses of how social media profiles present themselves and their context. These areas came to overlap each other as the following themes emerged.

5.1 **Opportunity and choice**

The world that is constructed in these materials is a fragmented world to embrace, a world consisting of opportunities, creative collaborators, and an incessant flow of new projects and activities. Bert & Benny may at times become a bit preoccupied with how their roots and upbringings in famous families have affected them as adults, but there are otherwise no acknowledgements of societal structures as hindrances for their way of living. All three materials convey an optimistic project-orientation in life; Anna & Asta as well as Carla promotes the enhancement of self-confidence and well-being through consumption of
fashion, accessories, travel, exclusive food and spa treatments, whilst Bert & Benny find the same in relaxed settings with famous friends. Carla is the one most focused on self-improvement in everything she does; there is always a reason and a goal behind every consumptive initiative that she takes, but there is also always an element of risk and no one else to blame. Anna & Asta are more prone to ‘play safe’; their projects are less risky and often centres around the need for control of life, of appearance, of relations. Consumption is in general not to be taken lightly, it is approached as a demanding venture requiring knowledge, careful planning, evaluation of options and so on.

In general, entrepreneurship is celebrated as way of successfully linking together work and family life, as making the right and rational choices irrespective of what others think, as becoming liberated from everyday life. There is an awareness of structural societal problems in all three cases – but the solution is individual initiative and inspiring others to take their individual initiative. The necessary ethos in life is to choose to stay positive, whatever happens. Being critical, is being negative, is being un-entrepreneurial, is being un-attractive, is being un-sellable, is being nobody.

5.2 Consume and to be consumed

All three are also clearly ‘out there’ to be seen, acknowledged and consumed. Not surprisingly, they display a high degree of awareness that someone is always reading and listening, they engage in constant dialogue with their followers, they come up with new activities, ideas and provocations to keep the dialogue going. Most of their professional and private lives are on display, we are fed with even their inner thoughts and emotional reactions even to things that happen in relation to their spouses and children. This closeness which is built up as their persona are being consumed by their followers is of course also employed in every podcast to convey recommendations to the very same followers regarding consumption opportunities elsewhere. None of them hesitate to label themselves professionally in a multitude of ways, they talk about themselves as ‘bloggers’, ‘fashion experts’, ‘stylists’, ‘entrepreneurs’, ‘entertainers’, ‘journalists’, and ‘influencers’ and describe a hectic social life replete with other such professionals. Being occasionally overworked is a signifier of passion for
entrepreneurship, almost an aesthetic statement in performing the make-up’ed, make-over’ed, consumed and consuming subject. All of them are to varying degrees being covered by other media as well, so they do not have to tell everything through their own blogs and podcasts.

5.3 Mobilising and de-mobilising gender

The gender differences in our materials are visible. Bert & Benny’s podcast is taking place in a virtual mancave, a detached homosocial place for relaxation, everyday philosophizing and friendly banter. They seem almost void of ambition and stress – except for occasional outbursts of hypochondria or childhood anxieties. Anna & Asta and Carla, on the other hand, are achievers in control – they manage their professional lives and their families impeccably, through active, rational choices. Problems are attacked with a positive ‘can do’ attitude, people in their vast networks are described as marvellous, lovable, generous individuals that inspire them. The notion of the well-organised family life is important, especially being a perfect parent. Carla, representing herself as the autonomous individuals who is on her own, obscures these gendered divisions and mobilise gender from a division of gender to appear as a question of individual willpower and rational choice.

In this sense, entrepreneurialism has become a signifier of the postfeminist female subject; active, self-made, self-improved, rising through shattered glass ceilings by means of attention to details, explicit business models and collective girlpower. Masculine entrepreneurship (as underlying the relaxed ‘ladness’ in Bert & Benny’s conversations) is disguised behind nerdness, self-introspection, attention to ideas, being seemingly unaware of economic realities.

5.4 Class and social positioning

Social status and mobility are most present in their individual projects, but in different ways. All of them exhibit quite lavish spending habits: it cannot be missed that they reside in exclusive neighbourhoods, travel to exclusive vacation spots, buy expensive things and so on
and so forth. But what is more interesting is the social positioning going on, in which even Bert & Benny in all their ignorant relaxation rarely misses an opportunity to tell the followers about what famous people they are friends with and at what high-end venues they congregate. Like with Anna & Asta, they hail from famous families and depict themselves as yet another gifted generation rather than as ascending from nothing. Their ambitions are still directed upwards; towards befriending the sort of people that it takes generations to come close to – royalty, nobility and international jet-setters.

Carla is a bit different in this respect, her subject positioning as a hard-working businesswoman indeed imply a focus on professional networking but then rather with corporate executives and successful entrepreneurs. Her personal life only allows for a close circle of a few select friends. Carla tries to consume herself into influencer stardom, but increasingly invoke more traditional masculine entrepreneurial discursive elements – her story is (also) about money, cars, business press awards, start-ups, venture capital, stock market investments, product-centred companies – she is more into becoming a traditional star entrepreneur than she is a feminine socialite, she builds freedom rather than new dependencies. This is another way of dealing with class, networking with politicians, big entrepreneurs, corporate executives. Not the traditional upper class but the upper business class where performance and money are the keys for entrance and accept.

All three cases show how the social media projects construct a sense of upper-class life, where they hang out with celebrities and refer to them as close friends. The listener, who nurtures a relation with her or his social media personae, can develop a relation with this life in proximity to oneself, lived out by consuming the ethos offered.

6. **Towards re-theorising projectified selves: Prosumption, Postfeminism and Class-as-achievement**

In this section we will return to the purpose of this paper, i.e. to identify strands of theoretical development for critical management scholarship, in relation to our ongoing empirical study of bloggers and podcasters.
While the literatures on projectification go into some depth concerning the discursive resources that individuals draw upon in pursuing a project-oriented life, they rarely investigate how power structures in society underpin the emergence of the project-oriented cité (Cicmil et al, 2016; Kalff, 2017). These literatures are, to some extent, also stuck in a productive notion of projects – i.e. projects as something that is organised and experienced purposefully – whilst neglecting that projects include modes of consumption. Projects are discursively invoked in order to frame episodes of consumption and thus also episodes of personal development and (re)affirmation of personal worth. Moreover, the gendered aspects of the project discourse also tend to be obscured, i.e. the consequences of how taken-for granted masculine norms of rationality and control invade projectified subjectivities (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2006). Additionally, class is a neglected theme in these literatures. The themes on consumption, gender and class are all prominent in the social media landscape studied. Linking these to the theoretical discussions on entrepreneurial selves and enterprise culture we suggest that the following theoretical avenues can shed light on how the projectified self thrive and expand in social media landscape: prosumption, postfeminism and class as achievement.

6.1 Prosumption and the projectified self

In all three cases production and consumption is entangled in intricate ways, which sheds light on how these social media entrepreneurs mix the two in their projects. Whilst some projects involve their own consumption habits – it could be the project to consume this spring’s new wardrobe, or to travel to an exciting place/event – this consumption also turn into the production of themselves and their ethos at the social media market. From this view entrepreneurship is not only about production, but also about consumption. Because these entrepreneurs are to be consumed - by producing their daily lives through digital media, the audience not only consume inspiration and reflection, but also how daily life ought to be rationalised. To better understand the entangling of production and consumptions in the projectified lives of social media entrepreneurs we turn to the concept of prosumption.

Prosumption is a combination of the two concepts ‘production’ and ‘consumption’ which was invented by Toffler (1980) to describe the growing engagement of consumers to participate
in production processes, often aided by new technology (at the time; Internet). Recent social changes – not least the spread of user-generated social media landscape) – have given prosumption greater centrality as new business models for cooperation emerge where consumption and production cannot easily be separated (Charitsis, 2016; Fuchs, 2014; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010).

Whilst prosumption can (and have) been used as a more descriptive concept, sometimes with normative appeals, it has also been discussed in critical consumption studies as and aspect of the governing of producers/consumers and that marketing itself becomes biopolitical with the growing integration of social and cultural value in economic production (Skålén et al., 2008; Zwick & Bradshaw, 2016). In these more critical literatures they point to how capitalism is taking on new forms in as prosumption is intensified and become more and more entangled in all facets of life. With this comes the need to ask new questions. Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010) points to the need to understand that prosumption makes capitalism take on a different. In their view this is implicated with “a trend toward unpaid rather than paid labor and toward offering products at no cost, and the system is marked by a new abundance where scarcity once predominated” (Ibid. p. 14).

For the purpose of understanding the entrepreneurial self, who ‘becomes a project’ and runs its life through projects, we point to the more fine-grained interaction of how the individual needs to submit to a negotiation with herself and with ‘team-members’ of the project. This very negotiation we posit, are implicated in the intensification of prosumption where participants constantly need to think both as producers and consumers and where the products sold - i.e. the personas of prominent social media figures - are produced through consumption of particular products, offered to consumers to produce their own entrepreneurial selves in a constant circulation of presumption. In this mishmash of consumption and production it is of interest how those involved advance projects for prosumption. In the prosumption of social media, an ethos is advanced that intensifies the projectified self. We become who we are though prosumption and in order to become those selves we make ourselves through projects. Prosumption thus integrate the individual in a limitless way. Additionally, it requires the constant improvement and innovation of business models where sometimes ‘old-fashioned’ analogous media, as listening to a conversation at a
theatre stage for a few selected, is blended with digitally broadcasted podcast available for the broader audience.

6.2 Projectified selves as postfeminist subjects

In all social contexts gender is ‘done’ in one way or another (ref). In the cases of social media entrepreneurs, the doing of gender invokes an explicit feminist tone by affirming femininity, women’s choices and independence. These feminist aspirations presuppose a woman who submits to the project of ‘becoming woman’ through prosumption; navigating the landscape of outfits, styles and measured behaviour. This particular kind of feminism is investigated in feminist literature under the label of ‘postfeminism’.

The postfeminist woman represents ‘neoliberal dreams of winning and “just doing it” against the odds’ (Ringrose, 2007: 484). She is a ‘can do,’ ‘have it all’ poster child for ‘free market feminism’ (McRobbie, 2004), celebrated as one who rises above her station in life to become not only a more productive and fulfilled worker, but also a better self (Duffy and Hund, 2015; Sullivan & Delaney, 2017: 840). This is visible in our examples as well as in other social media concepts centring around fashion, lifestyle, careers, entrepreneurship, which have tremendous impact on younger generations - as coveted inspiration and disguised coaching (e.g. Duffy & Hund, 2015). Our examples well illustrate how ‘the women entrepreneur’ who starts up and manages her own company, has become entwined with ‘the entrepreneurial women’, who affirms already achieved gender equality, expressed femininity and ‘women can’ attitude, but who find collective feminist activism less necessary to pursue (McRobbie, 2004; Gill, 2007; Gill & Scharff 2011, Lewis, 2014). This postfeminist subject is cultivated through the entrepreneurial self - they breed each other (Berglund et al., 2018), with their emphasis on individualism, choice, and empowerment (Lewis, 2014). The active, responsible and freely choosing, self-reinventing and self-commercializing constitute the postfeminist subject that find ways to thrive, make change and cope at the market place (e.g. Gill & Scharff, 2013).

Postfeminism is here seen as a cultural formation, which has emerged as part and parcel with the neoliberal society (c.f. Lewis et al.). This has resulted in more porous relations, the
dismantling of structures and a destabilisation of institutional terrains (Lewis et al). Hence, boundaries are blurred, including the male/female division, whilst the autonomous male subject of liberal polity (‘the economic man’) is turned into an invisible template (Hekman 2004). Postfeminist tropes are typically empowering, offering women ways to reach her potential (Scharff, 2016). But to reach this ‘freedom’ female subjects need to submit to self-surveillance, self-discipline and self-commodification technologies in order to perform as a successful woman (Gill & Scharff, 2013; Lewis et al., 2017; Rumens, 2017). ‘Classic’ feminism (the collective struggle for structures that provide all with equal opportunities) can indeed be an integrated part of all this, but in a ‘girlpower-ish’ postfeminist sense where women can be independent and successful by their own making. In this vein postfeminism (together with her sibling of neoliberalism) is often criticised for participating in shifting responsibility unto the individual. Postfeminist discourses govern subjects through their freedom to be both a woman, an entrepreneurial person and a change-maker. Regardless of which, she needs to relate to – and make use of – projects.

Postfeminist tropes (and hopes) can be found in women’s magazines, where studies report on the disappearance of feminist content and the emergence of content which offers women space for self-revaluation and self-actualization (McRobbie, 2004, 2009, 2011, Holmer Nadesan & Trehewey, 2000; Bröckling, 2005). These ideals are also prominent our cases, and related social media profiles, requiring a subject who submit to view herself as a project, and to run different projects to reach set goals, dreams of success and wishes of life (Sullivan & Delaney, 2017), and ‘to have it all’ (Duffy and Hund, 2015). This subject may however take different shapes depending on how prosumption is activated. In the case of Anna & Asta a version of the hard-working mother is constructed, who adapts to changing circumstances and takes responsibility for the family so that everyone can ‘have it all’ (Duffy and Hund, 2015), whilst Carla more represents the autonomous self-made woman who show her success by narrating her rags to riches story. In both cases, femininity is reconfigured and aligned with the different personae that is prosumed, offering audiences a variety of female outfits to choose from. What unite the postfeminist subject, except from expecting undisputed economic freedom, is the wish (or need) to continuously self-actualise and transform, take responsibility, exercise often conflicting choices, without upsetting the world with a radical feminist politics (Lewis et al, 2017).
6.3 The ‘great projectified self’: On class as achievement

For the entrepreneurial self there is always the potential to acquire more, to reach new goals, and to find new directions. The entrepreneurial self is perpetuated through movement, propelled by improvement idea(l)s, optimisation demands and desire of desire itself (e.g. Jones and Spicer,). In such Darwinian landscape the winner takes it all, but those who do not win is not losers, but future potential winners, nurturing a story of ‘making it’, and sometimes maintaining practices of fighting against all odds. Class becomes a matter of achievement, something that is in reach – and perhaps also always out of reach. Entrepreneurship discourses, Ogbor (2000) suggests, have “been used to further enhance the divisions among humans, race ethnicity and gender, through processes of classification, codification, categorization and taxonomies”. In her article of class as achievement Gill (2014) further point to how entrepreneurship discourses “reproduce class hierarchies around notions of exceptional capitalist ownership, action and innovation and opportunity recognition”. Individuals independence has turned into an entrepreneurial class achievement (Gill, 2014), which is reached through consumption and a critical gaze on the self (Tasker & Negra, 2007).

This consumption of the social media profiles also entails threading a fine line between exclusivity (these projects are not for everyone) and achievability (anyone can do this, with some hard work and sacrifice). At the same time, the fragmentation of the projectified self (Chiapello and Fairclough, 2002) is not always there – all their projects happen at a stage with a quite high degree of permanency. All three profiles studied here also tend to embrace long-term predictability in life, based on stability in terms of family life, close relations, financial viability, exclusive residencing and so forth. That stability is in itself not very interesting to consume for external followers, unless it can be translated into new projects all the time. The question here is of course how this can be theorized further.

Class is on the surface achieved through visible consumption episodes – being able to travel to, knowing all the secrets about, and successfully gaining social acceptance at fancy places like Los Angeles, Maldives, Mauritius, St Tropez, London, Paris and selected Swiss ski resorts. It is also achieved through displaying connections, friendships and occasional feuds with
celebrities, important people in media, high status athletes and – perhaps most important – members of royal families. But gaining access to such social circles requires not only stardom, but also pedigree. All of them are, consequently, talking about their families with respect and pride and how successful earlier relatives have been (specially Anna & Asta). Class is something that is built through generations and not just one isolated individual project. Class is something you can’t just buy, this is a achievement that is hard to get if you don’t have the right background. Consequently they try to front things that are class signifiers, such as telling that a grandmother wore designer clothes and accessories, effectively saying “in my family we have been able to buy haute couture for 100 years” or “in my family we have been writing successfully for 100 years”. This is quite far from the expectation on fragmentation and short-sightedness as characteristics of personal greatness in the project-oriented cité.

7. Concluding thoughts

In the terrain of emerging ‘new’ capitalism we have used social media personae as cases for how contemporary human being tend to live life in a constant flow of projects. As shown this has consequences beyond the apparent fame, glory and enterprise building. To take an example from the empirical field investigated in this paper: from being a serious journalist with broad interests, the self is successively re-framed through projects into a business women/man with a focus on fashion, consumption and self. The audiences are enticed to scrutinise their ways of living, what they value in life and to carefully steer their consumption towards a commodification of self though consuming the idea(l)s of the social media personae they follow. In this terrain, the producer and consumer become inseparable – and both the producer (the social media profile) and the consumer (the listener) are entangled in their own practices of prosumption.

As a consequence, traditional boundaries are blurred and twisted. One example is the unlocking of cooperation and competition, which are no longer in opposition as in conventional tales of capitalism. In the projective cité they complement each other. Entrepreneurial selves only need to find the right way of mixing the two and turning them into enhancing projects that minimize the risk of turning into a victim. This requires the ability to
blend consumption with production, to aspire for market affirming parts of feminism whilst rejecting collective political feminism, and to mobilize oneself to rise through classes.

Living with the rhythm of project cycles also fosters a type of self that it ‘alert’ for opportunities and new projects and who can stay detached from long-term commitments that would require to say not to such offers. Practicing the projectified self thus lead to an inevitable neglect of societal structures and inequalities and politics of change. Instead these are constructed as outmoded phenomena. The social media personae not only market themselves, a particular life or idea, but also create opinion. Perhaps the social media personae have become our times shamanistic healer, the one who has the ability to guide the behaviour of the(ir) tribe.

The discussion on how we can understand the projectified self as an entrepreneurial self from the concepts of prosumption, postfeminism and class as achievement is important for critical project studies. All of these phenomena have emerged in the wake of the neoliberal turn and point to how the entrepreneurial self is propelled by and through projects. Projects have extended into myriad ways for how life can be lived via temporary ‘enterprises’ (projects) and allows maximum of flexibility for optimisation. Again, this flexibility demands flexibility from the entrepreneurial self who must coordinate, negotiate, and juggle to make it work. Social media thus appear to intensify the projectified life and make consumption, feminism and class into projects which help the entrepreneurial self to thrive whilst trying to reach unachievable goals.

References


