

## **Working Life for Everyone podcast: Johanna Naukkarinen**

**Interviewer:** You are listening to Working Life for Everyone, a podcast where we broaden our horizons about the world of work and discuss the inequalities of the Finnish labour market with people who have dedicated their careers to doing something about them. My name is Jarkko Immonen, and I am one of the career counsellors at the University of Helsinki's Career Services. Today, we are talking about the gendering of Finnish working life, or gender-based segregation.

A word of caution to the listener: this discussion may sound a little stuck in a binary notion of gender, as we are talking about male and female majorities in working life as phenomena. However, other episodes focused on this theme discuss the equality of working life specifically from the perspective of gender and sexual minorities. My guest today is Johanna Naukkarinen, a postdoctoral researcher at LUT University. Welcome.

**Johanna Naukkarinen:** Thank you.

**Interviewer:** Could you first tell us a little bit about your career and how you have ended up doing, or pursued, research on these specific topics?

**Johanna Naukkarinen:** A challenging question. I don't think I've ever really had a terribly ambitious career plan. It's been more about going where my interests take me. Especially when I completed my first degree at university, I had an idea that I might want to pursue a postgraduate degree at a certain point. I had no clue what my topic would be. I've always moved from one job and workplace to another depending on what seemed to be an interesting and motivating theme or topic. In this way, I've migrated from the technical sphere, with my master's degree in technology, towards the educational sciences or pedagogy, and also these themes related to gender.

**Interviewer:** What advice would you give to your younger self who is only dreaming of a career as a researcher?

**Johanna Naukkarinen:** I would at least urge them to ask and discuss things with others a lot more. Especially in situations familiar also to myself, when you are far from certain about what you want to do and how to get there. I was probably a little too shy for talking to people without hesitation about my dreams or my interests and ideas. In terms of what I should do, I guess I concentrated on thinking that I had to first find out what I wanted and

how to get there. Such questions must be very specific, for example. Only later have I realised that talking with pretty much anyone can be helpful.

**Interviewer:** Extremely wise words from the perspective of a career advisor. Thank you for that. And now to the topic itself. Research and statistical data have shown that Finnish working life is exceptionally segregated by gender. For example, the Centre for Gender Equality Information under the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare states that when talking about such segregation, it is important to distinguish between horizontal and vertical segregation. Could you describe the meaning of these terms?

**Johanna Naukkarinen:** Horizontal segregation usually refers to men and women seeking employment in different fields. In fact, horizontal segregation is strong in Finland. Vertical segregation means that men and women end up in different types of positions within the same field.

**Interviewer:** How do these phenomena, horizontal and vertical segregation, manifest in Finnish working life?

**Johanna Naukkarinen:** As I said, they are very prominent in Finland. Horizontal segregation especially is particularly strong in Finland. We actually have very few sectors in which men and women are roughly balanced. Our circumstances are heavily influenced by the fact that we have very large fields, such as the social welfare and healthcare sector, which is very female-dominated, and technology, which is very male-dominated. In Finland, this horizontal segregation seems to extend even to smaller fields, usually resulting in the establishment of a gender majority one way or the other. Of course, we also have vertical segregation, which is evidenced, for example, by women leaders being in the minority in pretty much every field. This is particularly evident in the technical and business sectors. In terms of the business sector, it varies by whether the focus is on corporate responsibility and operations that are more typical for men, or human resources and other support services that are more typical for women.

**Interviewer:** What generates and maintains this segregation? Why is it so strong in Finland?

**Johanna Naukkarinen:** If only I knew. Researchers from a range of fields have been trying hard to determine that, but have found no comprehensive answer. It's a really tricky question. My guess – or let's say, after investigating the matter, reading about it and so on, the situation indicates extremely deeply buried unconscious and structural notions of working life and various professions. After all, we have had a fairly strong culture in Finland,

with the exception of perhaps the last few years, where we have kind of sworn in the name of gender neutrality, which has meant that we are not talking about it either. Consequently, many phenomena have been left bubbling under the surface to produce consequences without us really detecting them. This is probably part of the reason why it is difficult to determine the cause. There are certainly a wide range of underlying factors, and my guess is that a large share of them are something that we on a personal level don't even recognise.

**Interviewer:** Going on a little further, as you said you investigate these phenomena. I would like to ask what has emerged in your research or the research you are following that you would like to highlight to our current university students in particular?

**Johanna Naukkarinen:** I guess it would be precisely that when you are thinking about your career or future working life, you don't really have to think about it as a career, but rather in terms of what you want to do and what you are interested in. This may sound a bit clichéd, but what I'm maybe urging people to do is analyse this in terms of their inner wishes and, for example, their inner motivation. And to consider which factors are potentially influenced by the environment in one way or another, either encouragingly or less encouragingly. Keeping in mind that each of us has the right to like and take interest in all things, also those typical or untypical in terms of gender. People often swear in the name of individualism, of people making their own decisions, and we easily think that we're making enormously independent decisions. I'd maybe also urge people to dig a little deeper into their personal thoughts, trying to determine how independent they actually are and what affects them. Starting to realise how you are affected by your surroundings may open up new ideas on what you might want to do, what the options are. Another thing to consider would be, especially in our current university or higher education model based on the notion that there are no dead ends, that you can always continue and switch fields, carry on the educational path, to remember that many roads lead to Rome. Not all roads necessarily lead to the same Rome, but the same goal can be reached via a great many routes. In addition to thinking about where you want to get to, you should also chart out a little the variety of options available, and not necessarily embark directly on the most obvious path.

**Interviewer:** In fact, this is a fitting segue, more broadly speaking, to the concrete nature of the dismantling of segregation, as it were. You have been actively involved in the Equal Career Paths for Women (NOW!) project funded by the European Social Fund, where Finnish higher education institutions together with TEK, the trade union for academic engineers and architects in Finland, aim to create, and I quote the website, a permanent culture in higher education and professional life making it possible to discuss structural inequality and fix its related problems. In addition, the primary goal of the project is described as supporting and promoting women's equal employment and career development quantitatively and qualitatively. Could you tell about it in more detail? What has been done in the project and why, and how do you think goals have so far been achieved?

**Johanna Naukkarinen:** We actually have four larger, kind of separate lines of action or sets of measures, the first of which is the understanding of the current situation, that is, various surveys, mappings and such. This is because, as I said just now, there has not necessarily been a great deal of discussion about these matters in Finland, nor a great deal of factual information. Without fact-based knowledge, it is often very difficult to discuss matters in a constructive manner. If everyone has their own truth, you may never get to establishing shared knowledge. In fact, all of our activities are based on this idea of increasing knowledge. In addition, we have developed a range of operating models related to gender-aware advice and guidance, experimenting with various things within higher education institutions, with women who are already studying at them. This is the second line of action and the second set of measures. It includes career guidance workshops and various materials. Among other things, we've been developing online courses and such.

The third set of measures is more for women already active in working life. Measures relating to the transition and interface between higher education and professional life, including mentoring programmes. Quite many higher education institutions have had mentoring programmes geared specifically at women. This is also the aim for content intended for postgraduate students, as they are, after all, in an interesting situation of being both students and employees at once. For example, we have designed a game that can be used to illustrate what gender or equality in postgraduate studies is or is not about. As the fourth entity, we have one relating to unconscious bias, where we have primarily trained higher education institution staff but also the staff of other organisations about everything under the surface.

We've been doing all of this. Actually, we've done a lot, but the goal, as you just read out, is ambitious. And culture cannot be changed through a single project. In that respect, there's still a way to go, but I would say that we're off to a good start. We have certainly engendered a lot of good discussion and forms of support for both young women and the guidance and teaching staff of higher education institutions. And we've opened their eyes to how influential they too actually are in terms of these issues. I would say that change is a longer process, but we have gotten off to a really good start.

**Interviewer:** It really sounds like it. Another very interesting product from the project is the Tasa-arvoisesti uralle ('Equality in professional careers') website. Could you tell us more about it? What is it and whom is it for?

**Johanna Naukkarinen:** It's quite a lot of things, and it's for everyone. Already at the planning stage, we kind of decided that we didn't want a website that describes the project and is sort of maintained for the duration, but then doesn't necessarily stay terribly current after the project ends. At the planning stage, we agreed to start building a more permanent site where information and tools related to the theme will be collected. The idea is for the

website to stay operational even after the project concludes at the end of the year. The website will be supplemented and updated to make it a bank of research-based knowledge on the topic. It contains two types of articles, first of all articles containing information produced by us. And then there are blog-type opinion pieces on current themes that also introduce relevant equality efforts carried out elsewhere. And then there are tools, very practical ones. The idea has been that anyone can visit the website and find something that they could use in, for example, guidance or teaching.

There are tools for students too, and, for example, basic vocabulary on how to talk about these things. And there is some very specific content that can be used as part of education, even entire training offerings and other things. Of course, they are perhaps primarily designed from the perspective of higher education students and staff. I would say that many of them are extremely versatile. For example, I've been developing the unconscious bias training concept in the project, and I have used the same concept in a higher education institution in, for example, academic or labour matter settings, and in a project by the Finnish Olympic Committee for athletes. In a way, the fundamental idea is that these offerings apply to a range of spheres of life. I would say that the website is for anyone interested in segregation and improving professional life.

**Interviewer:** And the web address is [tasaarvoisestiuralle.fi](http://tasaarvoisestiuralle.fi), if I remember correctly?

**Johanna Naukkarinen:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Good. Let's take a slightly temporal perspective and consider things that have taken place in your career path. Has anything changed in society in terms of these phenomena? If so, in which direction – or is it both?

**Johanna Naukkarinen:** Of course, the discussion has increased. That's surely the clearest change evident to anyone. Whereas people used to prefer to keep quiet about these things, I think the MeToo movement brought about this avalanche that has continued and expanded to other areas. That's certainly the biggest change of all. For instance, higher education institutions are getting used to discussing these topics and understanding that they need to be discussed, and that they are part of everyday life in the institutions just as they are part of the everyday life of any individual or any other work community. Naturally, the discussion has its pros and cons. There is a lot of constructive discussion that advances things, but there is of course also polarisation and escalation, which is manifesting also in many other areas of society. Unfortunately, there is also inappropriate discussion and various juxtapositions, which do not necessarily benefit the theme. Then again, you could say that these too often stem from people's concerns and fears. If you are able to identify those concerns and fears and put them aside, you can potentially engender appropriate

discussion also from such viewpoints, even appropriate action. Broadly speaking, it's about discussion, but concrete measures have been taken in, for example, higher education institutions. After all, there are a variety of measures taken relating to these matters. Indeed, the value of it is certainly better understood than before.

**Interviewer:** In fact, you just referred a little to juxtapositions, conflicts and their underlying factors. Going from that, do people have any typical misconceptions about gender segregation, equality or the lack of it in professional life?

**Johanna Naukkarinen:** I have the feeling that a big misconception you quite often come across in Finland is that equality has already been achieved. People think that since many areas of life are already fairly equal, everything is fine and nothing needs to be done. Correspondingly, if things are not yet in order in a certain area, people think that it will get fixed over time. As women's representation in higher education is now increasing in general, it is thought to fix the gender balance of all, for example, higher education fields. I guess it's these kinds of notions related to neutrality, and the notion of equality of opportunity prevalent in our society. In Finland, there's not a lot of clear-cut discrimination that you can point to as inappropriate. In principle, everyone has the same opportunity to apply for higher education, choose their field and so on. People think that it's enough and don't really recognise the underlying mechanisms affecting the fact that the same kind of opportunity may not necessarily be an equal opportunity. Of course, there are notions of equality in general on women and nurturing, and all the things related to such notions, and on men and technology. They are general notions that, at least from our point of view, have a very strong impact on segregation.

**Interviewer:** You mentioned this earlier, but I'm asking, as I wrap the episode up, what would you like to say to our students contemplating these themes in their lives and careers right now?

**Johanna Naukkarinen:** I would urge you to ask yourself three questions. The first is: What kind of things do you wish to promote? In other words, what kind of values are associated with the work? What do you want to do? The second is: What kind of duties and challenges do you like? The first question about the things you wish to promote, which refers to the fact that many things can be promoted in so many ways, is not necessarily enough. You should also consider the situations in which you wish to promote them, and the duties that feel meaningful to you. Where do I feel comfortable? The third question is, of course: What kind of community do you wish to work in? Once you have an inkling about the possibilities, I believe discussion, if nothing else, will help you find suitable opportunities. Of course, you should keep in mind that it's never too late to change course. After all, we don't really know what the future will bring or what work in a specific field will entail. Or what a certain

profession is like. You shouldn't let uncertainties prevent you from trying something out. As I said, we don't really have any dead ends. You can always find new beginnings and steer your career in new directions. Having the self-awareness, self-reflection and courage to make choices without being terribly afraid of failing.

**Interviewer:** Prudent questions and wise words for all of us. Is there anything else you would like to add before we wrap up this interview?

**Johanna Naukkarinen:** To add, take advantage of the career guidance and services offered by higher education institutions. Actually, I forgot to mention this when listing what has changed. Well, the question was what has changed in terms of equality, but what has taken a particularly positive turn in general in recent years is precisely the fact that we already have access to considerably more career-related guidance services and modes of action at higher education institutions. They are designed for students, so make the most of them.

**Interviewer:** This was not a paid advertisement, just to let the audience know. Thank you very much, Johanna. It was really wonderful to have you on the podcast.

**Johanna Naukkarinen:** Thank you, it was really nice to be here.

**Interviewer:** Thank you for listening to Working Life for Everyone. This podcast was brought to you by University of Helsinki Career Services.