Women Navigating the 'Academic Olympics': Achieving Activism Through Collaborative Autoethnography

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Introduction

The idea for this chapter came after participating in the Making *shiFt* Happen conference that brought together many voices of women in academia and provided opportunities for connection and collaboration. The conference drew upon key papers that we read and re-read to develop deeper meaning about ourselves and the nature of our work in the academy. In particular, 'the University as an infinite game' (Harré et al., 2017) caused us to explore academia as a kind of 'Academic Olympics' and to

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consider our daily dealings with 'finite' games and the 'infinite game'. We see the Academic Olympics at play in the higher institutions we work in, and we now recognise the different 'games' that we are asked to play on a daily basis. In their paper, Harré et al. (2017, p. 5) describe the infinite game as 'a symbol of our potential as people living together to be open and inclusive and to promote the life and growth, that helps us flourish as individuals and communities'. The 'finite games' are described as

> bound by rules that must be followed until a winner is declared. You must be selected to play and if you lose, you are knocked out or have to play the round again. Finite games can be useful, indeed are essential to organise ourselves and to train people for valuable roles. And they can promote self-development. But if they are taken too seriously, they render the infinite game obscure. (Harré et al., 2017, p. 5)

This call for activism and commitment to the 'infinite game' has prompted us to reflect and write. 'Academic activism aims to document, subvert and ultimately rewrite the rules of the finite games we currently live by, so that they make more sense to us as people' (Harré et al., 2017, p. 5). In our chapter, our activism revolves around the concept of '*achievement relative to opportunity*'—a notion that is often used in academic institutions for promotion, probation and grant submissions. As women, we have all read or heard about this category and discussed the term with others. We have also seen ethical dilemmas produced and reproduced within academic institutions around this concept when players focus exclusively on the 'finite' games. The intention of the concept is to provide support for people who may have parental leave, caring duties, disabilities or other factors that contribute to performance. While the concept is used to advertise 'equal opportunity for all', we know from our experiences in the 'Academic Olympics', a different reality exists. For us, inclusion means actively creating collaborations, peer networks and mentoring to support women throughout all phases of their career, to share strategies, to understand the importance of each other's work and to know they/we have 'earned their/our place' at the Academic Olympics.

Within academia, women represent a considerable part of the workforce worldwide (Johansson & Sliwa, 2014). While women are 'allowed' to be part of the academy (or, as we call it, the 'Academic Olympics'), they are not represented equally within their fields of expertise and they are less likely to be promoted or paid as much as male colleagues (Savigny, 2014). Isgro and Castañeda (2015) describe the heavy domination of men at the professor level and subsequent leadership levels as a 'chilly climate' for women. Moreover, Misra et al. (2011) suggest that regardless of academic discipline, there appear consistent barriers to women's leadership and professorial breakthrough in academia. Women are more likely to be represented at less prestigious institutions and in less secure employment (Mason et al., 2013). In recent COVID-19 times, the academic media has reported that women have been submitting fewer articles to journals because of other commitments, including carer roles, again highlighting the barriers and challenges women in academia face.

As women in academia, we begin to also ponder the question 'why are women perceived as less successful than men' in the Academic Olympics? Henley's (2015) research suggests the issue is connected to lack of productivity, lack of institutional support, challenges with motherhood and lack of visibility, with all of these related to the competitive nature of the academy. A strong focus on quality and output has also been linked to being able to move forward in the university setting (see Henley, 2015) but again this is dependent on what opportunities and support for women have been available and are available at the time.

One suggestion for supporting women has been the development of peer networks (Castañeda & Isgro, 2013; Macoun & Miller, 2014). Macoun and Miller (2014, p. 299) see peer networks as important, as these 'may offer critical political resources for resisting and responding to the ways that women's bodies and feminist concerns are made marginal in universities engaged in creating and disciplining compliant workforces in an increasingly competitive and corporatised environment'. Peer networks and collaborations also allow the possibility for mentoring that provides spaces for women to affirm each other's work while also fostering more collegial work environments overall (Goeke et al., 2011).

As such, we begin this chapter with a short overview of our method. We then engage in collective autoethnography to share vignettes of our own lived realities. In doing so, we align with the ideas of this book, of reimagining and *shiFting* towards a kinder and more connected academy, where we experience and create spaces for women to be heard and to share their stories—stories that often go untold within the walls of academia. We share our lived experience around this notion of 'achievement relative to opportunity' and our academic performance. This sharing of our '*shiFting*' invites opportunities for other women to share, come together and create their own understanding of academic activism and to share experiences and observations of justice/injustice and inclusion/exclusion. We end with critical reflections on moving forward and the importance of the infinite game which allows women to flourish by implementing 'achievement relative to opportunity' across all our work environments beyond academic performance.

Method

This collection of collaborative autoethnography (Hernandez et al., 2015) focuses on the finite games/infinite game we have played daily as female academics in the 'Academic Olympics'. A particular focus is given to 'achievement relative to opportunity' and what this means within our lived experience. Some of us have engaged with this notion, while others are yet to engage with this concept within the academy. As such, a particular focus is made on sharing vignettes from our own lives that can create possibilities for others and serve as units or case studies of analysis.

The sharing of autoethnographic research is growing within academia (see Black & Garvis, 2018), with a specific focus on sharing personal testimonies as an approach for opening up spaces for social justice agendas. Resistance narratives and collective action also allow the safeguarding of public space from the extremes of neoliberalism (Giroux, 2015). According to Delgado Bernal et al. (2012):

> [S]cholars are increasingly taking up *testimonio* as a pedagogical, methodological and activist approach to social justice that transgresses traditional paradigms in academia. Unlike the more common training of researchers

> to produce unbiased knowledge, *testimonio* challenges objectivity by situating the individual in communion with a collective experienced marked by marginalisation, oppression, or resistance. These approaches have resulted in new understandings about how marginalised communities build solidarity and respond to and resist dominant culture, laws and policies that perpetuate inequity. (p. 363)

We believe that sharing experiences allows us to witness the multiple lived realities of each other in the 'Academic Olympics'. We are colleagues and friends, and we are interested in supporting each other within the academy. We share the voices of a dean, lecturer, HDR student and two young professors who have worked in many different academic institutions across the globe. Our backgrounds and context are Australian, Finnish, Swedish and Norwegian. As such, we transcend culture and context as we write as a community of women from different countries and universities, bound by a common desire to create common spaces for women to write around 'care' issues such as parental leave, carer leave and personal circumstances. We believe that by sharing our experience, we can support each other to compete in the 'Academic Olympics'.

Our approach to autoethnographic sharing allows our lived experience to be at the forefront and does not generate a distant, third-person objective voice (Tynan & Garbett, 2007). Rather, our voices are heard and presented to allow deeper connections and meanings with the reader (Garvis, 2014). Striking a balance between theory and practice can be difficult, however. Garvis (2014) has suggested that reviewers often find it difficult to find the right balance, asking for either more theory or explanation at the cost of lived experience as data. As such, we have chosen carefully the vignettes we share to allow connection between theory and practice. This also allows the creative and analytical to come together and be 'fully wide awake' (Greene, 1994, p. 122) to the complexities and ethical dilemmas of working in the 'academic Olympics'. This approach also allows us to transform critical ideas and meanings into democratic practice (Giroux, 2015). Each author voice is presented below as an episode event, and followed by our concluding thoughts.

Episode I

The notion of 'achievement relative to opportunity' or as it is known in other higher education settings 'opportunity to achievement' (OTA) is underpinned by the recognition that the traditional norm of full-time work and uninterrupted linear career trajectory no longer matches the profile of many academics. OTA reflects a Human Resource fuelled process which allows for the re-calibration of assessment of achievement on an individual basis (not comparative basis with other individuals). OTA is an aspect of the Academic Olympics and that I have learned and am still learning to navigate in more vocal and agentic ways.

In this reflection on 'OTA', I tell a personal as well as a political story. In 1969, during the era of second-wave feminism, Carol Hanisch coined the phrase 'the personal is political' as a response to the radical women's movement's struggles. She took up the notion of '"therapy" vs "therapy and politics" or in other words, the "personal" vs "political"' (p. 1). Hanisch was not putting down 'the method of analysing from personal experiences' but attempting to 'figure out what can be done to make it work' (p. 2), that is, how to politicise it. She argued that women need to be part of changing the conditions of their lives rather than bending to them. Like the radical women's therapy meetings of the 1960s, through my ensuing discussion, the intent is not to solve personal issues but rather to politicise them. Like Hanisch, I take a feminist political perspective to consider the 'OTA' process.

'OTA' draws on the past to make sense of the present. Weeks (2007) contends that knowing about the past assists us to hold 'the present to account, denaturalizing and relativizing it, demonstrating that it is a historical creation, suggesting its contingency' (p. 3). By revisiting my own memories and experiences as an Australian Anglo-European woman, teacher, academic and researcher, I situate past and present stories that are tied together by personal and political undercurrents. My own life history, in its social situatedness, serves as a point of departure and connection for this discussion of how I view 'OTA' at the age of 60 and after an interrupted career in the field of education.

When I interviewed my two sisters in 2016 for the second phase of my PhD research on the mother-daughter relationship (https://mothersanddaughterbook.com), my older sister reflected on our upbringing.

> Oh, I think we were taught resilience from an early age, because of Mum's illness; that disrupted the dynamics of our family immensely. Well, for me as a teenager to suddenly come home and your mother's in some sort of hospital having shock treatment; your lives turned upside down from that day … your security was changed after that.

My younger sister responded:

> I would echo what [you just] said, the situation growing up with Mum's illness, I think that we in a sense had a lot of security. I think in one sense we were a very close family, we had a lot of structure, but we also had to all pitch in and we had to face things that were out of our control. I think that builds resilience…

As my sisters noted we were shattered by my mother's illness, but our family structure provided us with a sense of security and resilience.

My mother's mental illness was not explicitly raised when reporting on the mother-daughter research. Perhaps, I was unsure how to sensitively and considerately engage with the subject matter. I was also reluctant to discuss it in a public forum. As a daughter, I relate closely to Drusilla Modjeska's (1990) book *Poppy* which tells the story of her mother's mental illness. Modjeska wrote about the impact Poppy's [her mother's] breakdown had on her own life. She spoke of her own fears of having a breakdown like her mother's, 'as if such things are part of our inheritance. The fear that we will follow the patterns laid down by our mothers seem deeply embedded in the female psyche' (p. 77). Modjeska's fears were realised for me as, like my mother, I experienced depression at a similar age—in my late 30s post my PhD. After I recovered from my illness, I pondered over whether this mental state was 'part of my inheritance' or was there other ways to explain it? This story of mental wellbeing across generations is unfinished business and I, as a daughter and researcher, continue to patch together reconstructions and versions of events from different perspectives and engage with commentary on the aftermath of this shared mother-daughter experience.

The fragility yet resilience associated with this story of wellbeing is about the '"tenuousness" of selves and selfhood, the ways in which powerful discourses shape what is felt to be permissible to say (when) and what remains unspoken…' (Modjeska, p. 300). The accrual and intertwining of personal and relational experiences are a political act. Hanisch (2006) contends that revealing a personal struggle can be seen as 'navel-gazing' and 'personal therapy' nevertheless 'individual struggle does sometimes get us some things', and 'we need to always be pushing the envelope' (p. 2). I remain unsure about how and when to discuss issues such as this and push the envelope, particularly in a high stakes work environment, even when there is a process called 'OTA'.

The issue with making the personal political is that we never leave our social world and when to start and 'when to stop' revealing one's strengths and vulnerabilities is a nebulous question. Silence is part of memory, and memory maybe a prompt, a cue to think about something that would rather be forgotten… (Hodgkin & Radstone, 2003). Passerini (2003) contends that 'silence can nourish a story and establish a communication to be patiently saved in periods of darkness until it is able to come to light in a new and enriched form' (p. 238). I suppose it is this new enriched form of memory that I seek in telling this story of depression. Modjeska observed that 'it is with difficulty that I come to the point where I can respect [my mother's] silence on this episode [of depression] and accept the limitations of what I know' (p. 84). This silence in its many shades and hues represents the nuances of this mother-daughter story of mental wellbeing that I never until now have disclosed in a public work-related forum. Perhaps it is what my sisters' name 'resilience' which has been the strength of my silence and now my voice on the topic.

Nonetheless, I still remain perplexed about 'OTA' and the opportunities and (hidden) costs it may incur as I, as a female academic, work within the bounds of the finite games of the academy. The Academic Olympics involves a complex and at times, vexed set of games which at different points in my life and at various stages of my career I have navigated better than at other times. Being part of a collegial culture where people are open and inclusive, I believe like Harré et al. (2017), promotes growth in a range of ways. In the very act of contributing to this chapter, I feel that I am part of a supportive network of female academics who through sharing their experiences recognise the importance of each other's personal as well as professional and political lives. This act of writing individually yet collectively is a form of academic activism providing a space to affirm each other's work and allowing opportunities for developing communities of practice and the infinite game.

Episode II

After reading a systematic literature review of metrics and models of researcher achievement and impact (Braithwaite et al., 2019), my mind races to my own performance and how it is measured within the academy. Moreover, the authors propose a comprehensive research achievement model to access the key characteristics that influence performance, before also suggesting there is no ideal model or metric by which to assess individual researcher achievement. Rather a holistic judgement of many different approaches is needed (Cabezas-Clavijo & Delgado-Lopez-Cozar, 2013). Does this suit me, given my time on parental leave and not being as active as a researcher? Where do life circumstances fit into these criteria? Some people would argue that this is why the 'research to achievement' concept is important in the academy. But what does this actually mean? How many papers should I be writing when I am a mother of a young child? The thinking implies I should be playing a 'finite game' in the academy to succeed. Moreover, studies have shown that there is a limited relationship between having children and a woman's academic performance (see Bentley, 2009).

In trying to provide better opportunities for women in the academy, Klocker and Drozdzewski (2012) conducted a study on women's opinions of the phrase 'achievement relative to opportunity' and how it was used in their working lives. Klocker and Drozdzewski (2012) caused controversy by asking female researchers how many papers they felt a child was worth, even though some women chose to answer with one to four papers per year on average. The authors found the notion of 'achievement relative to opportunity' was 'largely perceived as a tokenistic gesture put on forms and never taken into account by the people who make decisions and evaluate work' (Klocker & Drozdzewski, 2012, p. 1275). If this perspective is true, I begin to wonder if the support for being a working mother in the academy is just rhetoric where actually understanding the infinite game is not possible.

The way I play the infinite game amidst the finite ones however is to reject the prejudices against working mothers and to be surrounded by like-minded females in the academy (both before and after parental leave). I have established connections and networks which continue even when I may not be able to be 'in the moment', and these allow me to contribute and lead when I am available. The power of connections and networking for women with regard to 'opportunity to achievement' has been recognised in many studies as the main strategy supporting academic women's success (Hunter & Leahey, 2010; Sewell & Barnett, 2019). There have been calls for universities to provide more opportunities for women to connect, collaborate and network. I suggest that this advocacy also starts at the ground level, with women learning to support each other and create their own forms of mentoring circles to allow networking opportunities and collaboration. While the value of these relationships cannot be easily measured, they provide opportunities for women to play the 'infinite game' through endless possibilities. Such a caring and collaborative approach also creates a more collegial work environment for all (Goeke et al., 2011). Castañeda and Isgro (2013) showed the power of women as peer mentors to each other and the strong support culture subsequently created. This included valuing concepts of noticing, connecting and responding to the various needs of people on campus (Miller, 2007), or 'infinite' ways of working. Thus, I advocate and model a relational approach to overcome barriers and perspectives about the performance of working women and to openly discuss notions of 'OTA'.

Episode III

During the first week of my second master's degree, I read an article titled *Invited to Academia, Recruited for Science or Teaching in Education Sciences* written by Petra Angervall and Jan-Erik Gustafsson (2016). I had interviewed Gustafsson during my bachelor's degree at the same university, and I had sat for an hour listening to his fascinating journey through life, from childhood to senior professor. I found myself wondering how I could become one of the 'invited'. The authors questioned how 'academics gain career capital and symbolic value in career and use it to gain recognition' (Angervall & Gustafsson, 2016) and identified three possible career paths. These were *the invited, the useful* and *the uninvited*. I was 40 years old, married and mother of two preschool aged children and had two degrees already in my backpack and a 15-year-long career in management behind me. This, coupled with extensive travel experience, made me feel that I had at least something of value to bring to the table, but the question was, in which category would I fit? That first week I started identifying my strengths, not in relation to myself as an individual, but in relation to my perception of what academia needed. According to Henley (2015), women's choices in society are often times of a narrow nature, meaning the options due to traditional social restraints are fewer than in the case of men. From this 'opportunities' perspective, Hanisch (1969) argued that if the conditions for women are to evolve, it is the women who must alter the conditions to suit their post-modern needs, rather than entertaining old traditions and habits. The 'infinite' game in a feminist perspective is thus an eternal machine of renewed knowledge produced through female solidarity and multi-directional relationships within the academy.

Educated in the Norwegian, English and Australian educational systems, the casual Swedish approach baffled me. Perhaps due to the absolute saturation of ageism that I was met with at every turn? Here I was, mid-life, with a husband and two kids, working full-time as a teacher and in addition to that, pursuing a career in academia—not exactly the norm. While my peers formed groups and enjoyed nights of drinking and partying, I went home, put my children to bed and studied. I always arrived at class very well prepared and would actively engage and participate. This high level of participation was my 'sliding door' and five weeks into the programme a door was opened as my name was put forward for a research assistant position. I was in effect recruited for academia (Angervall & Gustafsson, 2016). The professor who recruited me, a mother herself, was Australian, and although I am Norwegian, I felt at home with her attitude to academia since that is where I did my first master's degree, my past laying the path for my future (Weeks, 2007). Her earnestness and non-competitive nature were compelling, but above all she inspired me to strive to be better, to produce more and to earn my place in hers and her colleagues' forum. Very soon, I started developing that side of me that I needed for a possible career in academia, and contrary to Isgro and Castañeda's (2015) chilly climate for women, I encountered instead an open and inclusive environment born from a will to promote growth and development (Harré et al., 2017), specifically feminine development. This OTA represented itself first through what I assumed to be my finite game playing, and my master's degree; however, my motivations evolved slowly into an infinite one, the goal becoming a place at the table of global educational research. That I should be less successful than men (Henley, 2015) during this OTA journey was not on the horizon.

Negotiating meaning from a reflective perspective both as a mother and as a scholar has been imperative in finding my base and being accepted among more seasoned and well-connected academics. There is no tabula rasa; there is no being without knowing, no learning without contributing. In life, there is only participation, or non-participation (Wenger, 2018). I chose to participate. Personal evolution is not linear; feelings matter in the university (Beard et al., 2007), and after having returned to academia after 16 years away, I was reluctant to ascribe to the idea that opportunity precedes achievement and that when that achievement is inequitable, or lower than what was expected, opportunities become limited as a consequence.

I am not a seasoned academic, nor do I have a large network or 'selection' of players upon whom I can call in order to start, develop or complete a task. However, I am not alone in my OTA experience, and writing this is a testament perhaps to the support I have found in this network of female academics (Castañeda & Isgro, 2013; Macoun & Miller, 2014), where having a personal life, a family and sometimes shortness of time, is okay. I am aware that I do belong to a circle of female academics who consciously try to use what they have learned to further support fellow early years researchers while braving the dialogues regarding working and learning conditions 'so that we may collectively build a socially just university' (Mountz et al., 2015). In doing that, I feel valued for bringing to the metaphorical table many years of growth and stretched bones, but above all I believe that these stretched bones are what have laid the foundation for my personal evolution as an aspiring researcher and which has allowed me to understand that practice is being alive in a world where I am active, and contribute to the learning (or working) situations in which I find myself.

It is through participating, and by being active in an environment, community or group, that I am able to engage with my environment in a meaningful way. This in turn may lead me to increase my knowledge and broaden my perspectives. Through this broadening, I build trust, connections, networks and critical friends—components that I need to continue my role as 'the invited'. Meaning, feelings and the embodiment of the self as a non-linear evolutionary being are imperative for my personal wellbeing, and I believe that herein lies my greatest strength: the knowledge that I have evolved into who I am in the academic rhetoric today through being absent from the academy. I have not had time to make enemies, nor suffered under Henley's (2015) lack of productivity, lack of institutional support, challenges with motherhood and lack of visibility. Upon returning to the academy, I have enjoyed tremendous feminine support through the development of peer support networks (Castañeda & Isgro, 2013; Macoun & Miller, 2014) and been given a seat at the table of sisterhood where my questions and curiosities are met with both respect and support.

Episode IV

In my 20 years in academia, I have had the opportunity to work in four countries, ten universities, visit several universities and work on multiple international projects. With each project and new academic environment, I have gained new competencies and skills and, most importantly, connections. I have discovered we are all closely and in complex ways connected within our academic working environment (Harju-Luukkainen, 2018). The connections in our networks are developed along our career paths, and some of them can be considered stronger than others. At the beginning of my career when I was working in Finland, I had very little connection. I had to figure out how things were 'done' in academia on my own. I did not understand the Academic Olympics and the finite games that needed to be played in order to be successful. I also did not have an academic mentor or peers to seek guidance from. I was always the youngest one in my academic community with a PhD, and I had often the feeling that I was not necessarily taken seriously. I sometimes thought that it was contradictory that the academic career should be started early in order to be able to get a full professorship. I wondered at the limited support available in terms of knowing how to navigate academia and how to successfully develop one's career. I did not understand that as a working mother I might be positioned differently in the academia, compared to others, and become horizontally and vertically invisible in the academic context (see Angervall & Gustafsson, 2016). I did however understand that I had to keep on moving to new academic environments in order to gain connections and to position myself in the Academic Olympics.

Now, after decades in academia, my networks are worldwide, and working has become easier due to these connections and my deeper understanding of the finite games surrounding me. I have received mentoring and support from many women on many occasions. At different times people need different types of support from individuals or networks in order to be academically successful (Harju-Luukkainen, 2018). Macoun and Miller (2014) describe, in universities, peer support networks represent a crucial strategy for those attempting to survive and thrive in academia (see also Johansson & Sliwa, 2014). My networks work for me as a 'toolbox'. Different people have different skills and competencies that are crucial, for example, in writing a paper. From my toolbox of connections, I can seek out those people who can help me finish a task. I have found that the strongest connections I have are with similar-minded female academics who are in the same phase with their career. These are women who understand the 'academic game'. They are also mothers with young children who are struggling with similar issues, such as visibility in the academy (see Angervall & Gustafsson, 2016). As we connect, we share our stories of the academic pressures we feel and our struggles about how to combine our family and work lives. I feel that without these connections, I would not have continued in the academy. I also would argue that it is because of these connections and the mentoring and support received through them that I have been successful in my career.

According to Savigny (2014), women are not equally represented within their fields of expertise, and women are less likely to be promoted or paid as much as their male colleagues. After I gave birth to our third child, I was told that I had now made my choice (referring to the number of children I had) and that I would never make it in academia. At the time I was shocked and hurt. Also, a part of me believed it was true, that I had chosen my 'destiny'—chosen to be the 'uninvited' in the academic context (Angervall & Gustafsson, 2016). Now, looking back at that time, I can see this perception was ridiculous. However, I do better understand it. The women who thought I wouldn't make it was an elderly female academic, and she had struggled throughout her career, familiar with the finite games of the Academic Olympics ahead of me.

Academia has a merit-based system, and it plays finite games that you need to understand in order to be successful. Higher education has faced policy changes that have affected the field of education sciences as well, and these have led to increased competition and competitiveness in academic circles. This has natural implications for women's career development and their future prospects in academia, especially when the quality and quantity of publications are relevant for moving forward in university settings (see Henley, 2015). However, different countries have developed their own academic assessment systems, something that I did not understand early in my career. In each of the countries I have worked in, the academic 'game' has looked a bit different. I agree with Henley (2015) that the issues connected to success in academia for women are connected to lack of productivity, lack of institutional support, challenges with motherhood and lack of visibility locally and internationally.

Concluding Thoughts

In our collective autoethnographic reflections, we have shared our personal stories and experiences around the term 'achievement relative to opportunity' or 'opportunity to achievement'. We have considered the impact of the finite games that have been present in our careers to such an extent it has seemed like we are part of an Academic Olympics. We are all at different stages of our academic careers, but we have each experienced the importance of supporting each other through connection and active engagement with networks and mentoring. We do not see 'opportunity to achievement' as merely a term used for promotion, but rather it is a prompt for us to develop and enact strategies to support each other and to help each other play at the Academic Olympics—valuing the playing of the infinite game where we can *all* achieve. We believe that through our focus on connection and teamwork and coming together to form collectives of academic women, we can provide opportunities for women to achieve and support to help them overcome potential barriers. We also understand that for us to be savvy players of finite games within the Academic Olympics, collaboration is key. We are navigating our country-specific institutions and the international academic world. We are also playing our own personal game, a game of connection and growth and relationship building, providing formal and informal networking possibilities in workplaces, professional organisations and through social media where our experiences are shared and reflected upon. Through such revisioning of how we work, we believe that we are expanding opportunities that allow us all to grow and succeed in our academic work. This chapter, for instance, has been a way of working in academia that has met the metrics of academia's finite games while allowing us to sit together with the value of the infinite game.

Like Angervall and Gustafsson (2016), we recognise that academic research careers seem to be linked to an institutional gender structure, and to academics' abilities to engage with wider networks. In our reflections, we understand that not all women are collaborative or supportive of each other (as seen in some of our episode encounters). Sometimes women can be the biggest critics of each other's performance. We, however, have chosen to connect and to engage in network building and mentoring. We try to stay alert to the subconscious biases and gendered institutional processes that promote inequality—because in the end we *all* are affected negatively by them. As such, we recommend that women collaborate with each other, developing their networks and mentoring opportunities from early in their career, and then mentoring women as they reach the senior stages of their career. The challenges of the 'Academic Olympics' are likely to remain, but informed by the infinite game, we can choose how we will play the finite games, and we can play as a team.

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