6 Gatekeepers and gatekeeping

On participation and marginalisation in everyday life

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After a rather long lunch break in town, Yara and the researcher get back to the school. Tanja, the special teacher, enters and sits next to Yara. Yara multi-tasks at her computer: she writes on a document, reads the text on some PowerPoint slides and hastily browses across different windows. She also flips through a book on her desk. Tanja sits next to Yara and both attempt to sort out a concept in the course assignment. It is a stressful situation for Yara.

The ethnographic vignette above is created from a fieldwork day at a school where Yara, whom we were shadowing in one of our projects, was completing an important assignment for a vocational course in an adult education programme she was pursuing to become an assistant nurse. Yara has various diagnoses and her grappling with institutional framings highlights her attempts at identifying and accessing avenues for support. The example illustrates what can be called ‘the *everydayness* of gatekeepers and gatekeeping’ – a key theme explored in this chapter in terms of an interest in who is included in what practice (including textual practices), by whom, when and why. This chapter aims to illuminate the everyday mundane nature of norms that both enable but also disable people’s participation, and lead to marginalisation in and across the institutional arenas of which they are members. In other words, the aim is to critically understand the ‘doing of’ participation and marginalisation *in situ*. We will try to accomplish this by focusing on: (1) social practices and the doing or playing out of participation or marginalisation in everyday life inside and outside different institutional settings, and (2) on the nature of ‘declared’ and ‘practiced’ policies (Bonacina-Pugh, 2012) that frame participation or marginalisation.

Our chapter illuminates the contemporary patterned norms of participation where even in resource-strong nation-states like Sweden, serious concerns about marginalisation are reported despite the existence of declared policies for supporting a one-society-for-all agenda. The study draws upon some of our recent anthropologically inspired research that has focused upon issues of identity positioning generally, and what gets glossed as functionality, race and ethnicity specifically.

As the introductory example illustrates, Yara receives individual, tailored support, and she displays competence in navigating it for her needs in specific situations. Yara, like some other individuals whom we will meet in this chapter, has metaphorically and literally become her own gatekeeper. This means that she knows which doors to knock on and how to get those doors opened. Yara effectively manages to solve a difficult, high-stakes situation (the preparation of an important assignment) through her knowledge about searching for, and succeeding in obtaining relevant, concrete support that matches her actual needs in specific situations. After shadowing Yara in different settings across three years, we know that she obtained her vocational degree and, despite her diagnoses, has learned to be her own gatekeeper and to circumnavigate possible barriers by aligning with people who are in positions to eliminate various thresholds (at least partially; related ideas are discussed by Groce & Scheer, 1990; Shepherd, 2020). We see gatekeeping, an analytical concept, as both a result and a prerequisite for participation or marginalisation that relates to norms about difference aligned to various dimensions of functionality, race and ethnicity, etc. In this study, we turn our analytical gaze to the doing of gatekeeping, and argue that accessibility today can be understood in terms of these gatekeeping procedures.

The two functionally disabled named groups that we specifically focus on in this chapter – deaf and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) – have seen dramatic changes in their demographic profiles since the turn of the century. Over 95 per cent of deaf children in Sweden (identified as severe to profoundly deaf) receive cochlear implants (surgically implanted advanced hearing aids) aimed at restoring hearing, while the number of children diagnosed with ADHD has seen dramatic increase. While deaf people constitute a traditional category, whose numbers are stable across time (8,000–10,000 deaf individuals and 30,000 users of Swedish Sign Language, henceforth STS), the diagnosis of ADHD has given rise to a relatively new group that has grown dramatically in Sweden.¹ Another named group focused on in this chapter relates to what is perceived as large-scale migration in Global North spaces like Europe, including Sweden. Functionality, socioeconomic status, gender, immigrant identity positionalities and technological tools appear relevant markers that have a bearing on issues of participation and marginalisation as well as inclusion and exclusion in the three projects from which we draw our data. Our analyses are presented in terms of the whats, whos, wheres and hows of the gatekeeping patterns that shape (in)accessibility through the scrutiny of everyday mundane life.

The next section explicates our theoretical framings and highlights some previous research. The specificities of the datasets we draw upon are presented in the section on methodology and data. The section called ‘The everydayness of gatekeeping across settings’ spells out two analytical themes that illustrate the gatekeepers and gatekeeping functions in play in and across people’s lives, including policies. The chapter ends with a discussion of the relevance of going beyond the dichotomised binaries that mark understandings of functionality, ability–disability and other identity positionings.

Difference, performativity and going beyond binaries

Issues regarding diagnoses and other identity positionings are salient across time, where functionality, race, ethnicity and mobility – as a constant state of transition from one position to another, one practice to another and across digital–physical spaces – mark human existence (Sacs, 1995). We have previously argued that functionality, ethnicity and mobility contribute to what is being recognised as *normal–diversity* (Bagga-Gupta, 2017a & 2019; Bagga-Gupta & Messina Dahlberg, 2018; see also Khubchandani, 1997; Machart, Clark & Dervin, 2014). Furthermore, functionality is a dimension that is relevant *for all*, given extended life spans and increasing understandings regarding potential *temporary* disabilities across the lifespan (Cureton & Wasserman, 2020). In addition, different kinds of mobilities constitute dimensions of human existence in the twenty-first century. For instance, while transitions to adulthood entail risks and challenges for all young people in contemporary societies, this is compounded for those who are, for various reasons, marked as different, i.e. being ‘an-other’ (see also Patrick Stefan Kermit’s chapter in this book). Such Othering takes place, for instance, through different *named* functional disabilities or different external markers like skin colour, physical attributes, choice of attire or raciolinguistic markers (Rosa, 2019). Perceived difference, either because of temporary or permanent markings and labels that relate to a set of norms, leads to a greater risk wherein gatekeepers and gatekeeping barriers of various kinds are encountered. This is a key reason why societies institute policies and support structures for the inclusion of difference.

The literature describes mainstreamed students as gatekeepers for the inclusion of disabled students in classrooms and their acceptance of disabled students is seen as important for the latter’s sense of inclusiveness (Adams, Harris & Jones, 2017; Naraian, 2010). Our analysis nuances this picture by indicating that although difference is a dimension of normal–diversity, people like Yara are themselves tasked with *and* contribute to their own inclusion in various ways. Parents of functionally disabled individuals too are reported to act as gatekeepers in their mundane marking of mainstream students as ‘normal’ (Adams et al., 2017), and as a corollary their disabled children as ‘abnormal’. This leads to functionality being placed outside of normal–diversity. Furthermore, some studies highlight that engaged parents are important enablers, i.e. gatekeepers, for the inclusion of disabled individuals across settings (Sagen & Ytterhus, 2014). In line with our opening example, teachers (Naraian, 2010; Sagen & Ytterhus, 2014) and para-professionals (Naraian, 2010) are also considered important gatekeepers for the inclusion of disabled students in mainstream classrooms. Research indicates that policy functions as a gatekeeper – an issue we will empirically discuss – whereby the inclusion of disabled students in mainstream education is made more difficult (Naraian, 2010; Sagen & Ytterhus, 2014; Östlund, 2015).

Furthermore, a ‘chicken or egg’ dilemma, between an intervention in a pedagogical activity and its outcomes not only constitutes a common characteristic of (educational) research but is particularly prominent in recent scholarship that deals with issues of groups marked through difference. This mainstream stance has, we argue, ideological and, possibly, problematic shortcomings in that inclusion or participation as desirable outcomes tend to be framed in terms of a relationship of direct causality with the studied interventions themselves. This means that there is an important lack of critical discussion regarding connections between interventions, their results and ideological framings that interventions often build upon.

Drawing upon theorising that calls attention to a third position which goes beyond binaries like disabled versus abled, inclusion versus exclusion, immigrant versus native, etc., enables us to raise alternative queries that focus on identity-positionalities and the playing out of participation, inclusion and policies from the perspective of everyday life. The broad policy focus, on how to optimally deal with people’s participation and mitigate marginalisation, in itself calls attention to the need for illuminating how policies are *practiced* in ‘everyday life everywhere’ (Bagga-Gupta, forthcoming-d).

The study presented in this chapter also attempts to go beyond the established binaries of the medical versus the social, the native versus the non-native perspectives on inclusion or integration and exclusion or segregation; such binaries continue to frame the scholarship in areas *labelled* or connected with disability, race and ethnicity broadly. Going beyond binaries is, we argue, what allows for the identification and problematisation of gatekeeping, the boundary work that exists in participants’ everyday lives from non-normative positions and that, in various ways, reinforces inaccessibility.

Theorising on the nature of human identity, discussed in different disciplinary domains, has for some time drawn attention to the playing out or the *doing* of identity, rather than the essentialised characteristics that are focused upon in mainstream identity-sector scholarship. This *performative* stance – which, in theorising, may be called sociocultural perspectives, integrationism, activity theory, etc. – illuminates people’s participation or marginalisation through *labelling practices*. Naming people *as something* is, in such a framing, consequential for their participation (Hacking, 2006; Bagga-Gupta, 2018). Participation and marginalisation processes are also riddled with dimensions of hegemonies. Decolonial framings draw attention to the power dimensions inherent in the *hegemonic order of things* across settings, and in particular in the knowledge production enterprise (Heller & McElhinny, 2017; Santos, 2018). Aligning with these framings means that research needs to move beyond mainstream linear and monolithic universal epistemologies (in our case, with regards to participation and inclusion), including programmatic methodologies. Decolonial framings, together with sociocultural perspectives, integrationism, activity theory, etc. on issues of identity, communication and learning, recognise the role of power differentials in human life; here, participation and marginalisation are understood as

entangled dimensions of action. We refer to the entanglements of these two theoretical clusters as a ‘Second Wave of Southern Perspectives’ (henceforth SWaSP).² Assumptions at the intersection of these two framings view binaries like man–woman, native–immigrant, disabled–abled, young–old, etc. as reductionistic. Instead, the analytical thrust lies in understanding any characteristic related to identity as situated in a context that, in turn, determines and co-creates the category itself, or put differently, in terms of *its performance in mundane everyday actions*. Such a focus upon human action necessitates taking into consideration dimensions of time, space, participants and various types of tools.

Understanding the doing of identity – as it relates to issues of participation and marginalisation – relates to what becomes relevant or marked in a particular setting. Thus, difference when marked as being tall or short may, in itself, not be significant in a community where body length constitutes a non-consequential dimension of human variation. However, in a community that places high value in sports like basketball or volleyball, body length can become a characteristic that determines how members get marked and organised. Here tallness or shortness may be a value-laden differentiating characteristic. Similarly, the ability to hear or not hear has been shown to not be of consequence in communities like Martha’s Vineyard off the coast of New York and Massachusetts in the eighteenth century where everyone – deaf and hearing alike – used American Sign Language (Groce, 1985). In such communities being deaf is not consequential or in need of being marked, since everyone shares the intellectual tool of communicating in a given signed language.

Similarly, in communities where diversity has over time constituted a dimension of life and where individuals follow different religions, have different dress codes, different greeting habits, different food traditions, etc., people, at a general level, accept difference as a dimension of normalcy, even when they box one another into different named groups.

Studying the doing of identity

With the above as points of departure, the study presented in this chapter acknowledges a long-standing critique of research that focuses on demarcated essentialised identity categories based on difference like abled-disabled, race and ethnicity, gender, class and what the scholarship on intersectionality has highlighted as ‘etceteras’ (Yee, 2020). Such essentialisms over-generalise issues by studying individuals marked as disabled or those who can be boxed into racial and ethnic groups as monolithic super-categories (Rosengren & Öhngren, 1997; Machart, Clark & Dervin, 2014; Bagga-Gupta, Feilberg & Hansen, 2017). This study also aligns itself with the growing awareness that understanding equity as well as participation and marginalisation adequately or relevantly requires studying people in more than one societal arena or phase of life. People live their lives navigating different institutions and settings, so focusing on only one setting or life phase – for instance preschool,

middle school, high school – in order to understand participation and marginalisation can, at best, present a fractured picture. This study therefore engages with data from multiple projects where we have shadowed individuals and groups in and across a range of settings, including physical–digital spaces. It strives to juxtapose individuals and examples from different settings. In addition to Yara, we will meet Fatma who, unlike the rest of her secondary school classmates, wears a headscarf, and Eva, a blind schoolteacher. It is the analysis of everyday existence in which individuals with different markers live across different settings, rather than essentialised identities in one setting, that enables a critical reflective illumination of participation and marginalisation processes.

We draw upon multiscale ethnographic data from three projects (two of which are ongoing) in the Communication, Culture and Diversity research environment³ of which we are members. First, the Swedish Research Council project ‘Participation for All? School and Post-School Pathways of Individuals with Functional Disabilities’ (PAL) 2017–ongoing; second, the societal developmental project *Delaktighet och Teater* (‘Participation and Theatre’, DoT) 2012–2015; and third, the research project ‘Digitalisation Initiatives and Processes’ (DIP) 2016–ongoing.

Project PAL focuses on the two named groups: deaf individuals and those who are diagnosed with ADHD across different life arenas. Project DoT focuses on how communities constituted by signers, speakers and writers, irrespective of their hearing levels, negotiate meaning-making in the mundane processes involved in theatre production and consumption. Project DIP deals with the lives of adults and students who are members of technology-infused secondary schools and the tensions in the explicit discourse of equity and the one-school-for-all ethos on the one hand, and implicit and explicit marginalisation in mundane everyday lives of participants in schools, on the other hand.

The data in these three projects was generated through our direct involvement in the field, i.e. our presence in a physical location or through engagement in shared digital spaces where the people we follow live parts of their lives. We have thus shadowed individuals across sites (particularly in Project PAL), in line with what has been framed as a new mobilities paradigm (Sheller & Urry, 2006; Landri & Neumann, 2014), including the practice of ‘go-alongs’ (Kusenbach, 2018; see also David Wästerfors’ chapter in this book). The latter is particularly suitable for following participants on the move and, in our projects, participants are indeed in a constant state of motion across both physical and digital sites. The go-along methodology provides researchers with a toolkit that enables following participants in the daily arenas and practices that are part of their own routines (Scott, 2019).

‘Ethnographic miniatures’ (Geertz, 1973: 20), such as Yara’s opening example and the examples in the next section, constitute some illustrations of gatekeeping and gatekeepers. These examples emerge from video–audio recordings of naturally occurring life in and across different institutional sectors and in online settings, informal discussions and interviews, and policy documents used in Sweden. The specific arenas that are part of our data

include schools, higher education settings, workplaces, homes, support services (like healthcare, employment agencies, insurance agencies, etc.), theatre, leisure settings etc.

The methodological approaches used in the projects are not mere instruments for data generation. Rather, irrespective of whether it concerns conversations, observations, go-alongs or text and policy scraping, our approach takes a dialogical stance, wherein we see ourselves as part and parcel of the data-creation process. This process is a result of a dialogical co-production of knowledge among researchers and between researcher(s) and participants (see also Bagga-Gupta & Messina Dahlberg, 2021). It is through this lens that the reader should understand the vignettes, or the ‘ethnographic miniatures’ presented in this chapter. Specific issues or themes that have arisen from such analysis illustrate how identity markers play out in relation to gatekeepers and gatekeeping practices. Gatekeepers and gatekeeping are complex intertwined phenomena which the next section unknots and illuminates through a focus on the mundanity of people’s lives.

The everydayness of gatekeepers and gatekeeping

Education is a salient gatekeeper which enables inclusion into mainstream society. The ethos of the Swedish compulsory school system is conceptualised in a framework that strives for inclusiveness. All students are expected to be able to participate in it on an equal footing. Schools are required to compensate students who face challenges due to race and ethnicity or socio-economic disparity, physical or intellectual disability (SFS 2010:800). Nevertheless, the high degree of freedom that teachers in Sweden enjoy to shape their instructional activities confers upon them a pronounced gatekeeping role that can lead to exclusion and marginalisation, as the following example illustrates.

Fatma is attending a German language lesson. The students’ desks are arranged in three rows, with eight desks in each row, grouped four and four. Only girls from the class are present in this space; the boys sit and work in an adjacent room. The teacher divides her attention between Fatma’s classroom space and the adjacent room where the boys from the class are making oral presentations. Fatma is seated alone in the front right row. The other girls work in pairs. In addition to Fatma’s spatial position that singles her out from the rest of the students, she is the only student who dons a headscarf. Furthermore, she is not working on the German assignment like the rest of the class, but on an essay in Swedish. While the teacher explicitly notes that Fatma is working on the ‘wrong subject’, she proceeds to assist Fatma with the Swedish language essay.

Fatma is excluded from the classroom in different ways. First, her focus on another school subject excludes her from learning German, risking that she

lags behind the rest of the class in the lesson. Second, she is excluded from the class community, because she works with another school subject and is *de facto* not part of the class discussions about the language assignment. Third, Fatma sits on her own, while the other girls sit and work in pairs on the lesson assignment.

The teacher (un)wittingly acts as a gatekeeper whereby Fatma is excluded in several ways. By allowing Fatma to work with another school subject, she seems to encourage Fatma to not focus on German, thus limiting Fatma's possibilities to engage in the class community and learn German. Given that the teacher disregards the routine of directing students where to sit and whom to work with during lessons, she also acts as an obstructive gatekeeper in Fatma's spatial inclusion during this lesson. Fatma is the only student who sits on her own. Having said this, the teacher also acts as a facilitative gatekeeper, enabling Fatma's engagement with the main societal language.

Grouping students in gendered groups is enabled through the gatekeeping of the teacher in this lesson. This *practiced* policy contrasts with the *declared* policies in place (cf. Bonacina-Pugh, 2012). While the Swedish National Agency for Education highlights that:

... based on international conventions, children have the right to meet girls and boys during their education and work together⁴ [...] if it is reasonable, the school should be allowed to temporarily separate the children into groups or use other organisational and pedagogical interventions, to avoid the occurrence of sensitive situations for individual students or groups of students. For example, a segregation can be made during swimming education where girls and boys are separated.

(2017:14 & 5, *our translation*)⁵

Going beyond pragmatic issues of why groups are formed, creating gendered learning spaces illustrates a practiced policy wherein the teachers' independence overrides the declared policy of gender-integrated classrooms. In this sense, the teacher becomes a gatekeeper when Fatma's class is divided into two. This gatekeeping is manifested literally in the physical door that separates the two classroom spaces and which only the teacher uses.

However, gatekeeping is not necessarily a teacher's privilege. The next example of the everydayness of gatekeepers and gatekeeping across settings is also from school: a grade 8 history lesson. This highlights how teacher and students co-construct gatekeeping and the role of functionality in these processes. While the social science teacher Eva is blind, her functionality is not explicitly obvious in the lesson that we use illustratively here. Functionality plays into Eva's ways-of-being in the classroom setting in specific ways. She repeatedly asks students for the time. Furthermore, she does not comment on or otherwise react to the breaking of declared classroom and school rules; for instance, listening to music during the plenary phases of the lesson, handing in mobile phones on entering the classroom, arriving late. During the lesson,

the students move around the classroom space. This results in Eva not knowing where in the classroom a student has, without permission, moved to. She uses technologically mediating tools through her braille-enabled laptop to attend to classroom administration, for instance, reading student lists to mark attendance.

In this example, able-bodied students set the limits for the teacher who cannot see the classroom or them. In comparison with how they negotiate classroom spaces where teachers are able-bodied and can see, these students navigate classroom spaces and their own ways-of-being more freely during Eva's lessons. The students themselves become agents of gatekeeping when they choose to break institutional rules, like listening to music, moving seats or not turning in their mobiles on entering the classroom. The teacher's control further decreases when a fundamental classroom interactional order of temporal control is handed over to the students, when Eva repeatedly asks for the time.

However, here technology acts as a gatekeeper that enables inclusiveness. Digital tools are facilitative, in that a blind person can take care of tasks that an able-bodied sighted person can. Eva listens to, or reads using braille, emails, booklists and notes on where students are seated. Digital tools enhance the teacher's agency vis-à-vis the students' agentic advantage. With technological tools, the teacher can be seen to reclaim temporal control from the students and can check the laptop to hear or feel what time it is.

Policy as gatekeeper

A second theme that we illustrate in this chapter has already been touched upon: the role that policies play in how access is enabled and disabled for participants in the course of their lives and across settings. Thus, for instance, while declared policies call for girls and boys to be co-members in educational settings, a teacher's autonomy enables how policies are practiced. In contrast to the declarations of policies or the ways in which participants envisage policies to play out in settings (i.e. perceived policies), our gaze here is on teasing out the promises in policies and how policies play out in social practices, i.e. practiced policies (Bagga-Gupta, forthcoming-d).

Sweden follows international conventions (for instance, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities since its ratification in 2008, the UN Sustainable Development Goals). The Swedish Discrimination Act (SFS, 2008:567) also constitutes an overarching policy that shapes the work of national, regional and local authorities and councils. The Discrimination Act is furthermore binding on both government and private bodies and requires institutions to follow a wide range of directives with the intent to include everyone, create a democratic basis for everyone's participation and mitigate marginalisation. Article 9 of the UN Convention, which the Swedish government is obliged to adhere to, requires that member-states support persons with disabilities with the intent that the latter can live independently and

participate fully in all aspects of societal life. For deaf people this includes having access to professional STS interpreters.⁶ Such laws and directives can be understood as declared policies but there are also two further levels of policies: *perceived policy*, i.e. how individuals and institutions interpret policy declarations, and *practiced policy*, i.e. how these policies play out in everyday lives (Bonacina-Pugh, 2012).

Access to STS interpretation has emerged, in our analysis across Project PAL and Project DoT as a key dimension that enables deaf people's participation in settings where everyone cannot use STS. One such dimension has been explicated in terms of 'the circus of interpretation policies' (see Weckström & Bagga-Gupta, 2017, 2020; Holmström & Bagga-Gupta, forthcoming). Interpretation services in Sweden are structured through declared policy directives in different domains wherein county councils or regional authorities are tasked to make this provision available and prioritise situations for support when resources are meagre. However, and more significantly, responsibilities are also based on who is tasked to pay for the provision. The following, in part, illustrates the 'circus' of interpretation services, where interpretation responsibility:

- *in everyday life* lies primarily with the regional authorities, for instance, private meetings at banks, leisure time activities at sports, pubs, visits to health services, some – not all – general meetings at workplaces;
- *in educational contexts* lies with the county councils and regional authorities such as higher education and people's high schools, but the financial responsibility lies with the institutional setup⁷ that needs the services; and
- *in working life* lies primarily with the regional authorities, for instance, meetings, seminars, conferences, courses for further training, but the financial responsibility lies with the institutional setup that needs the services.⁸

Policies function as gatekeepers in that the provision and payment responsibilities enumerated therein act as roadblocks to participation. This is poignantly illustrated by the fact that deaf people are required to invest time and energy to support the work of interpreters to mediate communication in activities where everyone does not know STS. They are required to take responsibility for their own participation in such activities, for instance, by booking an interpreter, providing them with logistical information, etc. Hearing participants, who are not knowledgeable in STS, are neither required to, nor allowed to, order an interpreter. Thus, the latter's *inability to use STS* is not marked, it is the deaf person's *inability to hear and talk orally* that is marked as being the cause of the use of interpreters. The responsibility to create an inclusive activity, in which all participants have equitable conditions for participation given their different communicative possibilities, is exclusively bound to the deaf individuals' inability to hear and talk orally. Furthermore, the interpretation costs are borne by public funds if the deaf person who has ordered the interpreter for a meeting participates passively at the

meeting. However, if this deaf person leads the meeting, then it is that person's employer who is required to bear the interpretation costs. If the deaf person is an entrepreneur, then their company is required to cover these costs.

Practiced policies that have been identified in the analysis in terms of who has the right to access services, who is responsible for and pays for them, what happens when a meeting organiser forgets to order interpreters, etc. create a number of roadblocks for deaf people's participation in societal arenas, i.e. their accessibility (Weckström & Bagga-Gupta, 2017, 2020; Holmström & Bagga-Gupta, 2019, forthcoming). Our recent studies, for instance, indicate that deaf individuals are positioned as both *patients* whose needs authorities and employers decide upon, but also as *citizens* who have a say in which services they can access, whose opinions are solicited, and who are tasked with making sure that interpreters are present at different activities.

The second theme we illustrate here is aligned with a 2020 report by the Swedish National Association of the Deaf titled 'Right to Interpretation, No Interpreting Issue'.⁹ Here this national NGO highlights its frustration with the splintered nature of interpretation services – both in how declared policies are formulated, but also how these shape deaf individuals' possibilities to access arenas in a resource-healthy democratic society in the Global North. Our analysis and the frustrations recently presented by the association indicate that the nature of declared policies and practiced policies both function as gatekeepers and gatekeeping mechanisms for deaf individuals' participation in societal arenas.

Conclusion: practiced norms of participation

Our findings call for making visible a plurality of spaces across institutions. This means that issues of participation and marginalisation – as spelled out in policy – need to be attended to in terms of practiced policies (see Bonacina-Pugh, 2012; Gynne, 2016) and in tandem with what people and institutions like schools, adult education or authorities *do* with policies (see Bagga-Gupta, Messina Dahlberg & Winther, 2016; Bagga-Gupta, Messina Dahlberg & Vigmo, 2020). This puts the spotlight on the role that policies themselves play, i.e. their agency, in how access is enabled and disabled for participants in the course of their lives and across settings.

Thus, the legal framings created in legislation and policy are artefacts that aim to significantly shape the possibilities to participate in society for specific groups that are required to be marked as belonging to such groups. Policies of support and inclusion, are mutually bound to conditions that mark individuals and groups as being in need of such support or even protection, as is the case, for instance, in the Swedish Discrimination Act.

Gatekeepers – people, institutions (like interpretation agencies) and policies thus have agency. Gatekeepers could have formal as well as informal agency, where gatekeeping often overrides formal agency. Teachers, parents and policies all have formal agency and act as gatekeepers including and excluding

people, as we have seen in the case of students marked with disabilities or ethnic Otherness. However, as Eva's example shows, students, whose formal classroom agency tends to be curtailed, can act as gatekeepers for the disability-marked teacher. At the same time this example highlights how technology, which is often understood in terms of artefacts without agency, can act as a gatekeeper. Students, too, can act as their own gatekeepers. Yara, for instance, chooses to visit the course teacher's office to elicit support for completing her assignment. Fatma chooses to work on her Swedish essay during the German language lesson. In the social science classroom, students' actions shape the teacher's possibilities of participating or being marginalised; the students choose to answer in the affirmative (or be silent or respond in lieu of another student) when a blind teacher takes attendance. Students display agency when they do not hand over their mobiles to the teacher or leave them in the designated box. They choose to work on their assignments or watch YouTube videos. A teacher chooses whether Fatma should focus on her German assignment or her Swedish essay. A teacher chooses to group the students at specific desks or delegate this choice to the students. The teacher appears to divide the class according to gender.

Such examples highlight how gatekeeping is not necessarily connected to human agency alone but is a phenomenon that arises from interactions between participants-in-(inter)action-with-tools of various kinds, who have an unequal distribution of agency, for instance through (dis)ability or other identity positioning. A tenet of SWaSP theorising – and in particular socio-cultural perspectives – relates to the need to recognise the shifting shades of human traits and their situatedness across social practices that fall into a continuum, rather than as mutually excluding poles of a dichotomy. Thus, not all short members of a community that deeply values basketball can be without expertise in other areas of that or some other sport. Not all people can be placed at the far ends of the scale of being deaf and not deaf, or hearing and not hearing. A point of departure from the SWaSP framing adds to this conceptualisation of a linear continuum by framing these ideas in terms of 'meshwork' (Ingold, 2015) or a non-linear dynamic continuum. This means that a person's characteristics or attire may stick out in specific ways that are marginalising in some – but not all – settings. This may sound both minor and self-evident. However, as both our analytical themes and examples illustrate, such marginalising is not a totalising issue in one and the same setting, nor across different settings.

Tenets of decolonial framings that are part of SWaSP call attention to the need to shift focus from the marginalised labelled Other to the non-marked norm, and to the boundaries that are drawn between binaries in everyday actions and activities that in themselves create 'an-other'. A SWaSP framing enables going beyond the *naturalisation* of hegemonies regarding communication and identity on the one hand, and on the other hand, the by-and-large continuing *marginalisation* of scholarship where social activities are focused. A key concern of this chapter is to illuminate accessibility and

participation as they play out in everyday life, rather than in terms of homogenised monolithic categories deployed for marginalised individuals. Here understandings about identity, wherein ‘people are made up’ (Hacking, 2006), is central to how support services are planned and organised for labelled persons and named groups. Thus, an important issue in this study has been finding viable ways of re-centring and re-balancing (in)accessibility and gate-keeping by turning the analytical gaze *in the middle of things*, for instance on social practices as they play out *in situ*.

Recognising the shifting values placed on the relevance of human difference in terms of functionality, skin colour, attire, gender and the innumerable intersectional etceteras across time and space is thus a key message of this chapter. What, in one situation, is a norm or an asset can turn into a disadvantage in another space and time. The functionality of not being able to hear in a community where everyone signs has different consequences for an individual’s participation compared to a situation where few or no members of a community know a specific signed language, as our discussion on STS interpretation illustrates. Being a recognised user of more than one named language in school can be seen as a disadvantage in specific spaces and not others, and the consequences of not being able to see can shift when technologies extend a blind person’s abilities. These points highlight an important tenet of SWaSP framing: norms and naturalisations do not constitute a given but are situationally bound.

This study contributes the analytical insight that being free from disabilities is the norm that itself excludes disabled people from settings that are meant to be for ‘everyone’. We note this occurs differently in Fatma’s example, wherein the majority language, Swedish, which she is focused upon, and attire which marks ethnicity, constitute norms that exclude students who deviate in terms of where they or their parents are born or because of their attire. The dichotomy between included and excluded, abled and disabled, majority and minority students or abled and disabled individuals as they are identified (or stigmatised) is based solely on specific characteristics or place of origin. As our ethnographic explorations highlight, Othering processes are common irrespective of the identity characteristics that individuals and groups are boxed into.

Ethnographic studies like the one presented in this chapter illuminate the types of assumptions and shortcomings that intervention studies do not make explicit. Such assumptions relate to whose norms, why, where and when, are taken for granted in the scholarship that focuses on participation and marginalisation across the areas of disability, race, ethnicity, gender, etc. The salient point of our analysis is that which empowers and provides access in one context or situation will not always be relevant in another setting. Special arrangements and support in educational activities, for instance, are important dimensions in the everyday lives of people who are different from the norm in one way or another. At the same time, it is the very handling of such special arrangements that requires specific knowledge and competences as to how they can be used in the most appropriate way for any given task or situation. In that, we argue, lies the balancing act that many individuals in our projects struggle with over the course of their lives.

Notes

- 1 For more information on statistical data see: <https://www.sdr.org/item/319-hur-manga-dova-finns-det>; <https://sdr.org/component/k2/item/320-hur-stor-andel-av-befolkningen-ar-dov>; <https://openarchive.ki.se/xmlui/handle/10616/46702> (accessed 18 March 2021).
- 2 For more on SWaSP, see Bagga-Gupta (2017b, forthcoming-a, forthcoming-b, forthcoming-c), Bagga-Gupta and Carneiro (2021), Bagga-Gupta and Kamei (forthcoming).
- 3 For more information on the Communication, Culture and Diversity research group and the different projects see <http://www.ju.se/ccd>.
- 4 Swedish: *För att tillförsäkra barn den utbildning de har rätt till enligt internationella konventioner är det enligt Skolverkets mening viktigt att låta flickor och pojkar mötas och arbeta tillsammans.*
- 5 Swedish: *skolan, tillfälligtvis, om det är rimligt, bör kunna använda gruppindelning eller andra organisatoriska och pedagogiska åtgärder, för att undvika att känsliga situationer uppstår för enskilda elever eller grupper av elever. Det kan till exempel avse simundervisning där flickor och pojkar skiljs åt.*
- 6 See Bagga-Gupta, Messina Dahlberg and Winther (2016) and Holmström and Bagga-Gupta (2019, forthcoming) for empirical analysis on declared and practiced policies in the Swedish context.
- 7 The government has set aside resources for interpretation services at universities and colleges. Special resources are available for the Swedish People's High Schools (*Folkhögskolan*) through the National Special Schools Authority.
- 8 Provision for video relay services exist but are not relevant to this discussion.
- 9 Swedish: 'Rätt till tolk, ingen tolkningsfråga', <https://www.sdr.org/component/k2/item/1828-rapport-ratt-till-tolk-ingen-tolkningsfraga-pessmeddelande>, 25 March 2020.

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