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Re-purposing Fika: Rest, Recreation or Regulation in the Neoliberalised Swedish University?

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Fika: The F-word in Sweden

Fika is a coffee break in Sweden, but it is invested with considerable socio-cultural and symbolic significance (Kjærnes 2001; Ljungström 2013). Twice a day, in mornings and afternoons, Swedish workers can gather for a short break, in the internal fika-area. Employers are expected to bear most of the cost of breaks as an investment in their employees (Spross 2016). Without wishing to stereotype, it seems that fika represents the positives associated with Swedish commitment to welfare and well-being, in so far as it provides both social and material benefits for rest and recreation. Averbuch (2013 np) suggests that there is a double meaning in how:

Fika, as a noun, refers to the combination of coffee and usually some sort of sweet snack. But fika, as a verb, is the act of partaking in a Swedish social institution.

It has also been argued that there is an affective economy, with diverse feelings circulating in relation to fika. Ahmed's (2004) analysis of affective economies, is 'where feelings do not reside in subjects or objects, but are produced as effects of circulation' (8).

Kymmer (2014) asks if fika serves to reduce alienation at work and make people feel more integrated and valued? Fika could also build on the Swedish cultural value of *lagom* (moderation), and is indicative of commitment to work-life balance and well-being (Wieland 2007). It is also associated with workers' rights and health and safety. Fika time has been negotiated by trade unions in Sweden, and university employees are seen as being at risk in the same way as truck drivers, if they do not take breaks.

It appears that fika is polyvalent and paradoxical and understood and experienced in multiple ways. It can be a signifier of employer recognition and generosity, and a challenge to the mind/body dualism in academic work cultures. Fika, like coffee itself, can be an equality intervention that breaks down organisational and social hierarchies (Adelswärd 2013; Ljungström 2013). As a care intervention, it has the potential to reproduce normative gendered performances and power relations. It could also represent a form of incorporation and governmentality as it promotes normative desired configurations of academic citizenship, sociality and community. As a pleasurable and sociable assembly, it can mitigate the corrosive effects of market principles upon collective social bonds and values (McNay 2009). Most of the writing on fika is laudatory (Quito 2016), celebrating it as a positive intervention, or technical - explaining how to do it (Brones and Kindvell 2015), or marking it as an important aspect of Swedishness (Kjærnes 2001). While fika has been appreciated, celebrated and even satirised (Go Royal 2017), its sociological implications have been under-theorised.

Our research interrogates and deconstructs fika in the context of the political economy of neoliberalism. Recognising the multiple and situated readings, our central research question explores what purposes fika serves in today's neoliberalised university. We ask whether fika is purely a social event for staff community-building, rest and recreation, but possibly also a technology of governmentality, a subtle strategy for regulation, surveillance and the promotion of normative performances of workplace happiness, team-building and well-being (Davies 2015). To answer these questions, we conducted a case study of fika in a large, research-intensive Swedish university's Faculty of Education. We argue that fika captures and reflects some of the socio-cultural changes that have come about as a consequence of the stealthy, but steady introduction of the political economy of neoliberalism in the Swedish higher education system.

Neoliberalising Higher Education

Neoliberalism is a type of market fundamentalism that seeks radical changes in the relationship between state and society. Brown (2015, 9) argues that it has become: 'A normative order of reason developed over three decades into a widely and deeply disseminated governing rationality.' The neoliberal transformation of higher education globally has been discursive and material, shaping what it is possible to do, say, and be, and is linked to funding and employment regimes (Ball 2015). It has ontological and epistemological consequences, constructing academic identities, priorities and knowledge itself. Neoliberalism promotes particular forms of subjectivities and citizenship, linked to income-generation and entrepreneurship (Morley 2018). The Swedish higher education system, like its counterpart in the UK, values market-driven interests, income-generation, performance-based management, competition and entrepreneurship (Habti 2010; Rider,

Hasselberg and Waluszewski 2013). Regulation extends to performance management and the requirement for accountability via diverse productivity measures and key performance indicators (Collini 2012; Morley 2018).

The Swedish university reform of 2008 (SOU 2008) indicated the importance of greater autonomy of universities while maintaining policy demands for performance, accountability, and efficiency (Government Bill 2012, 2016). It is argued that the power of central management has been increased and decision-making of academics de-democratised (Peterson 2015). There are indications of increased vertical and horizontal differentiations of academic institutions (Gustafsson 2013; Angervall and Gustafsson 2015). There is also evidence of gendered career paths (Berggren 2011). These intensifying organisational divisions pose opportunities and threats for *fika* as an idealised non-hierarchical assembly. Organisational cultures are being transformed by the pressure to generate research income, with the resulting stratification of winners and losers (Beach 2013; Morley 2018). Employment regimes are becoming more precarious, with short-term contracts and the casualisation of academic labour (Schnaas 2011; Swedish Research Council 2015). Performance is measured and academic identities are calculated via the indicators of research income and publications (Sandström and van den Besselaar 2016). While so much of Swedish academic life has been accelerated to meet neoliberal rationalities, the tradition of *fika*, with its assemblage of citizenship and collegiality, appears to continue to flourish. However, the collectivity of *fika* might be in conflict with neoliberalism's political philosophy that society is at its best when it embraces competitive individualism (Harvey, 2005).

Methodology and Materialising Meaning

We initially conducted a co/auto-ethnographic series of discussion groups, where we, as a team of international feminist researchers, explored the topic in relation to our diverse theoretical analyses and situated perceptions. Our research team comprised two Swedes, one German, and one British national. This combination of fika 'natives' and 'newcomers' provided valuable knowledge exchange, and informed decision-making about the research questions and design, data collection instruments, ethics, theoretical framing and analysis. Drawing on Smith's (2005) work on institutional ethnography we completed 13 semi-structured interviews with three administrators and ten academics, of which five were in leadership positions. The Faculty of Education is large, situated over three floors and has a majority of female employees in all occupational categories. Our sample comprised ten women and three men at different career stages - six late-career (two men and four women), five mid-career (four women and one man), and two early-career (women). Ten interviews were with employees that had grown up in Sweden, and though some had worked or studied abroad, their national identity was Swedish. Three were employees that had come to live and work in Sweden from other countries. The sample was selected to include variables of career stage, gender, nationality, and responsibilities, status, and employment conditions. These diverse positions were included to illustrate various strategies for planning daily work, and relationships with time and financialised productivity. With the exception of four interviews conducted in Swedish, the medium language was English. The Swedish interviews were conducted by Swedish researchers, and were translated, transcribed and analysed in English. Our analysis was thematically driven in order to discover keywords and concepts embedded throughout our interview data. Participants have been given pseudonyms and specific information about job titles

has been removed to protect anonymity. We questioned how fika functions as both a noun and a verb, how it is understood, performed and experienced in a Swedish university and what purpose and interests it serves. We asked participants why they do or do not participate (do fika), their positive and negative fika experiences; and why they believed that universities continued to invest materially, temporally and spatially in this socio-cultural practice in the face of increasing economic stringencies.

Affective Ambivalence: Community-Building or Corporate Duty?

We observed an affective economy in relation to fika, with diverse emotional engagements including guilt, shame, pleasure and anxiety. Neoliberalism's incitement to become an entrepreneur of the self is also registered and lived out emotionally (Winnubst 2012). Shame, fear, pride, guilt, desire and joy are crucial to the ways in which technologies of neoliberalism becomes internalised and reproduced (Morley 2018). Davies (2014 np) suggests that neoliberalism thrives on governing through unhappiness, or 'Heat up the floor to see who can keep hopping the longest'. It could be argued that fika is a happiness formula, and has an oppositional relationship to the neoliberalism that stimulates fear and anxiety. Paradoxically, we found that fika also stimulated anxiety! Neoliberal discourse, with its emphasis on audited productivity influenced how people in our study felt about the use of time. In the context of conspicuous productivity, fika can seem like profligacy and self-indulgence in hyper-professionalised work cultures (Gornall and Salisbury 2012). The 'always on' 24/7, self-beratement, machinic academic

production line culture suggests that one lacks the entitlement to stop work to attend to one's health and well-being (Gill 2017). Business models favoured by neoliberal employment regimes suggest that every investment requires a return. The placing of academia within a system of accounts (McGettigan 2013) means that several of our participants recognised the importance of taking breaks and socialising, but on the other hand, they conceptualised social activities as non-productive, or inauditable labour, as Henry, a mid-career academic explained:

For me, it's something I really do not have time for. I am almost ashamed when I say so, but I am so busy with my work that it is not even in my mind. It almost feels like such a moment would sink me or make me have to stay even longer at my job.

In this analysis, Henry distinguished between unproductive and productive labour and material production and social reproduction. Fika was conceptualised as an unproductive workload, outside the audit culture, but non-participation carried an affective load. He rationalised his non-participation by the desire to avoid prolonging working days that had already been extended by neoliberal enterprise cultures. Henry's feelings of shame and guilt about under-performing in his moral obligation and commitment to the collective were more bearable for him than failing to meet professional performance indicators.

Discussing the contrast between natural and scheduled breaks featured in the academics' narratives who did not grow up with the tradition- the fika 'newcomers'. For them, the routinisation was sometimes experienced as a stressful interruption of their productive labour. Sophie, an early-career international academic, explained her preference for spontaneous rather than scheduled breaks:

For me, I guess, it's actually having these established times, especially at 2:30 in the afternoon. For me, that's my prime work time. So, I really don't want to uproot... I feel like it can be a bit of a distraction ... if you want to try and get ahead, especially early in your research years you need to stay focussed.

Getting ahead can be understood as producing tangible outputs such as publications and grant capture, rather than induction into socio-cultural relations. In our case study university, researchers had limited research time if they were not externally financed. Hence, they were reluctant to spend accountable time on institutionalised fikas. Carol, an international mid-career academic, also highlighted cultural differences in relation to time:

I was very surprised that early in the morning, I think around nine or something, people will go there and catch their first coffee ... Then, at 9.30, 10 o'clock, there's another one...I, myself don't go...I feel that I have too much workload ...Even though I would like to go and sit there but ...I feel that it breaks the flow. It breaks my flow... but maybe Swedish researchers, they plan their days differently. So, they take that break very seriously and they plan their work ...

The routinisation of fika was perceived as stressful for some. For many of the female administrators who were often more office-bound with less autonomy and flexibility than the academics, fika offered stress reduction, as Jessica, a mid-career administrator explained:

Twice I've had stress related illness because of work ... I went to see a work...counsellor... She told me ...you have to have fika breaks, you have to have them, because, as I never had them at that time because it was so

stressful and I was expected to be available all the time and I couldn't, I was too stressed to sit down and have a coffee. But she said, that's your first homework, you have to have fika... And she said that every study shows that you get more efficient if you have breaks so it doesn't pay off not to have breaks because you make more mistakes, you're more inefficient and so on... And it's helped me afterwards.

Fika, in this conceptualisation, was productive labour as it aided mental health by challenging the 'always on' culture promoted by the accelerated academy and digital economy. The issues of work/life balance and well-being featured in several narratives. Livia, a mid-career administrator, believed that fika promoted a feel-good factor that enhanced the organisational culture:

My guess is ... that it's believed to generate appreciation, that the staff feels appreciated, that it will create well-being. That it will contribute to a better working environment.

Sophie explained how fika was part of a wider package of commitments to work/life balance in Swedish universities:

I think it has to do with the work-life balance that's promoted here. That's seen not just through fika but, the other benefits we get, the promotion of going to the gym, for example...I can't remember if it's researchers too but at least administrators get an hour a week—so I think it just falls into that category.

Fika participation could be perceived as a site for entanglement of choice and coercion, provoking affective ambivalence. On the surface, it appears voluntary, pleasurable and inclusive, but some participants described feeling guilty about wasting time when they do attend fika and feeling guilty about bad citizenship when they do not. Henry described how he attends the special weekly fika, when he is 'invited' by the head of department:

Yes, I normally go. It is expected. Sure, they are framing it as a kind of offer, an invitation from the management, but... it is also an expectation. Definitely...I would prefer not to go, but then also, being employed here, you are kind of expected to contribute also to social relationships, you know.

Fika can be interpreted as a complex assemblage of mechanisms to promote the social and the managerial as it raises the visibility and knowability of those who participate and those who do not. Fika was felt to be a site of evaluation of one's social skills and commitment and loyalty to the group, or a contribution to social relationships. Fika was experienced by some as a form of soft power, or a component of the investment economy and well-being industry, as it materially constructs workers as resources whose productivity has to be nurtured (inputs) rather than just calculated, managed and monitored (outputs) (Davies 2015). As such, it has the potential to be an example of biopower or a panopticon, promoting compulsory communality and conformity. Maria, an early-career academic, felt that fika's performance pressure reduced, rather than enhanced her productivity. For her, fika involved affective labour and was experienced as a ritual designed to evaluate social performance in the workplace:

I've never thrived in those types of social situations, where you have to sit down with people who you barely know, and that you don't work with really...And you have to have like a nice conversation about things that you don't really care about. ... I've always felt that there's a pressure to perform socially, and it takes more energy than it gives me. And, if I have the time to have a stop, a break, from my work, I want to get energy. I don't want to be de-energised.

For Maria, fika is not an innocent project, but has been re-purposed as an intervention to manage affect. This is one situated reading among many, but Maria's knowledge of how regulatory and disciplinary techniques operate at the level of the body pollutes any pleasurable potential.

The narrative of the group permeated accounts and rationalities of fika. Sarah, a late-career academic, suggested that fika originated in fuel poverty i.e. using valuable firewood once to heat coffee for the workers, and that this notion of the efficient use of resources has been incorporated in the Swedish welfare state. Now, fika is a symbol of Swedish prosperity and even the Swedish exceptionalism associated with state generosity. However, in his discussion of the development of human capital theory by Chicago economists, Fleming (2017) reminds us that there is no such thing as a free lunch. Maria suspected that employers want corporate loyalty in return for fika:

You get an e-mail ... It's an invitation to go downstairs to a big fika ... My feeling is that they want everyone to go down there and mix, and feel... Build

some kind of loyalty between everyone. So, if you sit there, and you laugh together, you feel connected to each other, and you create, yes, some sort of loyalty between all of the employees. And the employer. I think that's the feeling, or that's the thought behind it.

Carol argued that fika ultimately served as a form of conflict avoidance:

That is also, as you say, it's belonging. Create a belongingness. We are a unit. We are doing something together...So, in this way, you can smooth the atmosphere a little bit.

Other participants also conceptualised fika as an essential component in the fostering of workplace social relations and well-being, team-building and development of informal networks and conversations. For them, it was a happiness formula (Ahmed 2010).

Emily - a late-career academic, suggested that the sociality of fika counters the isolation of the autonomous subject that exists in large-scale, pressured, atomised working environments:

I realised that there are so many different parts of this building. People don't see each other...And to me it's very important to make people get to know each other and to see who else is working at the place... Even if we do quite different things you have to know who your work mates are.

For Emily, the preferred institutional subjectivity was embodied and relational. While she attributed the fragmentation to the digital economy and expansion of the university, Andrew, a late-career international academic, discussed the pressures of financialisation, intensification of academic labour, research-income generation and the de-

collectivisation of labour in neoliberal employment regimes (Brown 2015). He observed that academics in Sweden work largely in their specific research teams:

Research is today a little different too... We didn't necessarily have to be financed. Now you do. You have to be financed in order to come in.

The financial pressures that create the fragmentation of the labour force also impose temporal restraints that impede recreational breaks and the creation of community.

James, a late-career academic observed that the accelerated academy and its accompanying accountability and accountancy reduces time for exchanging ideas:

I think fika is important in the Swedish university because it supports the academic conversation and it breaks some of the boundaries that we put on who we talk to, and that's a good thing. So, I think ... that part may disappear...The system of the university and the drift towards the individual accountability of innumerable tasks push people, individuals, to opt out from investing time...

From these diverse accounts, it seems that both fika and neoliberalism could indeed be exemplars of the indirect style of social control in which identities and selves are co-opted into normalising social dynamics (McNay 2009).

Fika as Affective Labour?

Fika, it seems, represents a form of affective labour in the care economy (Oksala 2016).

Whereas fika is intended to be a democratising device in which deans circulate informally with early career academics and administrators, this led to some participants grieving for a bygone golden age in which fika provided discursive intellectual space for academics

instead of being a site of small talk across hierarchical divisions. The issue of dumbing down featured prominently in our research findings, with some participants emphasising the affective labour involved in making small talk. For some late-career academics, there was a nostalgia for a fika linked to academic conversations, as James suggested:

And I think something which troubles me at the moment... I see the tendency in the faculty...that some components of the academic discussion are dying.

Loss narratives highlighted tensions between the need for fika to be inclusive and relaxing, and a line of flight from the concerns of the neoliberal university as opposed to being work-related, focussed and goal-oriented. Tensions were frequently rehearsed in discussions about who participates with an evident hierarchical division between academics and administrators. In several narratives, fika represented a form of embodiment, making the body visible in increasingly virtual, disembodied employment regimes. But the embodiment intersected with power relations and hierarchy, with questions about which bodies should mingle and for what purpose. Livia believed that academic staff were more strategic about how they used their time and with whom they networked:

That kind of togetherness ... I have the impression that ...researchers rather talk to those who they need to talk to, for work... rather than talking about everything you can think of... as maybe the administrators do ... As a researcher, you're more focused on your work and that's why ... you do not leave it.

Amy, a late-career administrator, describes how it was important for her to get out of her office, socialise and meet colleagues informally. However, she was also aware of the need

to be mindful of spatial divisions in relation to organisational hierarchies and power structures:

... if I come down to have a fika, and there is a bunch of researchers in one of the sofas ... and they sit there and talk, then maybe we administrators do not go there ... we go to the other sofa and talk about our interests.

Many of the academics commented that fika now existed for the benefit of administrators. If the main proponents of fika come from the female administrative sector, it is important to ask who is not participating. In our case study university, senior staff - especially men- rarely participated in fika on a quotidian basis, and only tended to appear for high-profile events such as retirement or work meeting fikas. The inward-facing orientation of the female administrators was in marked contrast to the outward-facing male academics, as Andrew illustrated:

But as I say I'm probably...more guilty than most of not being at fika. I'm not usually in the building to be honest.

Early-career academics, especially doctoral researchers, were clear that they did not have the capacity, flexibility or desire for non-productive conversations- a point that Charlotte, a late-career academic lamented:

These students sometimes, they should participate more...Network. Contacts. Because it can be very isolating if they stay on their own... They need to familiarise themselves with the staff here so the staff know them and so when they have finished their PhD they are well-known in the department ... it is easier to get a job when you've graduated... I think the fika pause is very good for that to talk to others as well.

In this analysis, fika was instrumental and productive - an investment in future employability and opportunity structures, but also operated as a community-building device. However, fika participation carried opportunity costs and informal gatherings could be a deviation from the heavily audited performance indicators in the academic workplace, as Barbara, a mid-career academic, noted:

To be honest, it is not important to just do a fika ... with people I don't know, or have anything to share workwise. I would never just sit down and do small talk ... I am not interested basically ... and of course, several say, you need to go, we all should go, we need to show ourselves down there, but... no I don't.

Fika can be a normalising intervention which reinforces heteronormativity, dominant ethnicities and language, and sociable, outgoing, interactive dispositions. Several of our participants commented on how conversations often focussed on children and families, for example. International participants also expressed discomfort about their lack of understanding of Swedish cultural references and how fika time was a test of the extent to which they had gained linguistic competence. A noticeable tension was between fika as a performance of Swedish identities, dispositions and traditions and the internationalisation of the academic workplace. Sophie described how fika, for her, was not a rest, but merely enhanced her visibility as 'other':

If I were to go it would be no mental break and I still have to be on or if I chose not to attempt the Swedish then you get harassed a little bit, you know. Well, you should be practicing your Swedish and using these opportunities. So, I'd rather just have a break alone or with the people I feel more comfortable with.

Fika, linked so closely with Swedish identity that values the social, can foster in and out groups and related feelings of belonging or 'othering'. Carol described how she was frequently invited to fika, but felt like an affect alien (Ahmed 2010) when she attended:

I feel anxious because of this language thing ... They are laughing and I don't know what is the joke about. ... It's in Swedish and it's really hard to pick up anything. So, then I tried to avoid that.

Fika, it seems, occupies a contradictory space of being simultaneously inclusive and exclusive.

Fika could be constructed as a happiness technology (Ahmed 2010; Binkley 2011) – one which converts the unhappiness of stressful working environment to the happiness of the social and collective. The unspoken imperative to be upbeat and positive implies a degree of affective labour, as Carol highlighted:

People can pick something and talk very negatively ... and that will disturb the atmosphere. So, that is kind of a negativity. It's not very welcome. So, everyone is trying to be positive and rise up the good things and that is how I understood that this fika is about.

In this reading, happiness is seen as an affective duty that constructs and defines institutional subjectivity and citizenship. One way in which several of our participants resisted what they perceived as the management imperative to perform was simply to self-exclude - become fika refusers. Barbara explained that she participated strategically:

I would never stay in the fika room ... and if I'm going to sit down and drink coffee, it's with people I feel I can have an exchange with. Then we make an appointment. We will talk about something specific. Otherwise, it does not feel meaningful.

However, refusal was an organisational challenge that Emily rationalised, and even re-purposed, in terms of personal characteristics such as shyness:

Sometimes there are people here ...They don't want to participate and of course that's the freedom. You don't have to be here. Because they didn't want to socialise, they were shy, or some people I picked up and made them come. Yes, come on and meet, and I saw that some people looked very embarrassed and not very comfortable because they are not that kind of social people. They preferred sitting in their room with a cup of coffee.... I mean there are people who prefer to have their cup of coffee and go back to their room and close the door and other people that get very irritated. Why is she not social? But you talk to them, no I don't like this, I don't like to be among so many people. And others enjoy it, meeting all the people.

Fika can escape institutional regulatory purposes and can function as a site of resistance. Its materiality, especially its spatiality, can provide opportunities for assembly and worker solidarity. For example, it often takes place in elegant surroundings which seem to offer flexible and fluid boundaries between the entangled spheres of home and work, with soft furnishings, microwaves, fridges, coffee machines and dishwashers. The material environment conveys potent messages about valuing and rewarding employees and

casting them as an idealised workplace family. However, for Andrew, fika could be re-purposed as a site of worker solidarity:

I think we should be a little bit more resistance-minded in terms of protecting the spaces for sitting down and talking together ... The facility of talking critically and politically is there for us to use.

Fika was sometimes associated with control or avoidance of colonisation by the corporate world. In the accelerated academy, fika can be interpreted as a regulatory device or behaviour modification reward to avoid resistance, as Amy suggested:

We have a little obligation to attend the actual meetings, we get information there, all at once, and we should be happy and grateful for that, I think ... but the fika afterwards, you long for it ... the reward.

Brown (2015) argued that neoliberalism is generally more termite-like than lion-like, and has been introduced by stealth, rather than by revolution. It is a form of capillary power in so far as it is everywhere and nowhere. Fika could exemplify this technology of governance in so far as an intervention for workers' rights might have been incorporated into management practices.

Gendered Affect: Fika as a Feminist Issue?

Work-life balance discourses are heavily gendered (Lynch, Grummell and Devine 2012; Sørensen 2017; van den Brink 2009). The focus on social gatherings or care in institutions that have been notorious for their neglect of bodies, relationships, work-life balance and well-being raises questions; complexities and contradictions. For example, Lynch, Grummell and Devine's (2012) work on caring practices in higher education suggest that

they often tend to create or stabilise/reify femininity discourses. Performing care has been transferred to teaching and tutoring, but also to social relations at work (Coate, Kandiko Howson 2016). This has also influenced how mostly women experience and try to live up to combined demands of being professional high achievers *and* caretakers in circumstances where discourses of performativity, ranking and competition work in parallel with how collegiality and collective work are losing ground (Angervall and Beach, 2017). Fika can be a form of self-care – especially for women. Sarah remarked on how coffee gatherings were originally the domain of Swedish women who did not consider themselves worthy of expensive lunches or dinners. This observation relates to participants’ comments about how fika is now largely the terrain of female administrative staff in the case study university - most of whom are tied to the organisational housework as opposed to enjoying the flexibility and internationalism of many academic staff. Fika calls on the gendered moral imperatives for women to be caring (Cantillon and Lynch 2017). Traditionally, as Sarah related, women, performing the script of good mothering, were employed to oversee the performance of fika. This included laying the table and preparing a coffee pot and even baking the cakes. There are dangers of re-traditionalisation, as women, in our study, were still responsabilised for the staging of fika, and were often the most enthusiastic participants, as the cultural practice provided some respite from other forms of organisational housework, and the opportunity for self-care and congregation with other women in the workplace (Lynch, Grummell and Devine 2012). Amy believed that fika represented an important value for administrators:

Maybe it's because administrators are somehow the social cement of the business ... or maybe we're the fika cement... that we care ... or think more about fika and socialising...

A question is whether these gendered socio-cultural practices are also ripe for re-theorisation with the emergence of neoliberal feminism? A key aspect of neoliberal feminism is for individual women to demonstrate that they are personally ambitious, aspirational, capacious, and able to manage competing demands to achieve a work-life balance (Gill and Scharff 2011). While binaried thinking around gender is rapidly shifting, and the concept of gender fluidity has gained considerable currency (Nestle, Howell and Wilchins 2002), women have traditionally been associated with the private and domestic domains. Fika can be an attempt to bridge the gap between public and private worlds, and enact work-life balance in the workplace itself. However, fika can also get entangled with neoliberal feminism, with networking perceived as an instrumentalising investment to add value to one's academic capital (McRobbie 2009; Rottenberg 2014).

Concluding Remarks

Remarkably, fika has survived in our case study Swedish university in a policy context of intense academic competition and time and performance management. We found that fika has considerable social and symbolic power and is intrinsically linked with Swedish national imaginaries concerning the importance of the social. However, there are complex entanglements of affect, assembly and alienation that suggest it is more than simple rest and recreation. For some, it provided vital social assembly in the face of increasing atomisation and isolation of neoliberalised employment regimes. For others, it was a site of visibility and evaluation of their interpersonal skills and corporate loyalty, and even to the nation state itself. A potent narrative that permeated our research related to well-being and the need for balance and self-care. In the financialised neoliberal university, people do not know when to stop. Neoliberalism promotes excess

e.g. overworking, over-production and encourages relentless self-promotion, boasting and conspicuous productivity (Morley 2018). This is in distinct contrast to the Swedish concept of *lagom*, which favours balance and modesty.

Fika, it seems, has been re-purposed. Whereas traditional fika was about the social, now some believe that it has been incorporated into the economic project. Boundaries appear to be both fixed and fluid, with a democratisation etiquette that was also interpreted as a technology of normalisation. Wieland (2007, 251) argues that excessive relationships with work (and life) that exist in neoliberalised employment regimes provide the preconditions for 'a more fertile ground for corporate colonisation'. Some of our participants felt this colonisation in the sense of management expectations of fika attendance and even affective performance. It was not enough simply to attend. The unspoken rules about conduct, dispositions and conversational subject matter represented affective labour. While fika was intended to be a democratising intervention allowing staff across organisations to assemble, our study suggested that fika did different work for different occupational and possibly gender groups. For female administrators, it provided much needed respite from office-based responsibilities and quotidian routines. For academics, it was often a vehicle for transacting business informally and maintaining a profile for networking and community-building. Late-career academics, especially the men, lamented the loss of the academic conversation and associated contemporary fika with a dumbing down discourse. While late-career female academics celebrated the sociality, early-career academics felt that they had to be strategic about how they used their time as every investment needed a tangible and fairly immediate return. For them, as female academics, fika was a distracting duty and form of unproductive affective labour. Our

international participants, or fika newcomers, while appreciating the inclusiveness of the fika invitation, often experienced the reality as a site of affective discomfort that marked their difference. Some female and male participants at different career stages believed that fika had been appropriated as a management tool for surveillance and regulation, and the relay of social, organisational and occupational norms. However, an overarching theme in our research was whether there is an irreconcilable opposition between the traditional values of coming together as a group and the subjectivity of individualism and detachment required by neoliberal employment regimes. The comfort of collective caffeine and carbohydrates is not conducive to cut-throat competitive individualism. Fika is a multiplicity, or an assemblage, of material and socio-cultural practices and discourses. It has migrated from a personal practice to the more formal, public workplace ritual. In academia, it has mutated over time from a social, academic conversation, to a site of managerial assessment, and from the collective to the competitive. It is likely to continue to evolve. We are left with the question as to how fika will survive, and possibly transcend, the calculabilities and constraints of the neoliberal university.

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