GENDER IN TECH CITY – PHASE 1.i

WHAT THE GROUNDWORK IS, SINCE 2014:

So far 89 interviews and 13 focus groups / digital discussion groups about 'working in tech city'. Specifically topics have focused on gender and tech (and allies), and in recognition of the advancement of digital tech industry in the UK, tech city particularly and the role of 'workers' within this area. Also, 'women in digital tech'.

Additionally:

- An opportunity to understand the community and network activities with a wide variety of individuals around the world and not just restricted to London / UK
- Open to everyone who wants to participate in the research*

*As long as they share their experiences.

WHAT HAS ARISEN FROM THEMATIC ANALYSIS

A few short points, the following investigative principles are central:

(1) identification of a domain culture that extends physical / local (as in community) and digital spaces
(2) articulating assumptions underlying this culture
(3) to suggest methods for evaluating this field
(4) the sense of developing an alternative assumption environment – particularly in relation to 'gender'
(5) to consider in relation to networks the role of 'workers' and professionalism
and (6) evaluating the alternative experiences of the environment

Dualism is out: Sandberg (2000) challenged the dualist ontology that includes the prevalent rationalistic school of thought, which conceptualises professional competence as consisting of two separate entities: a set of attributes possessed by the worker and a separate set of work activities (cf Sandberg and Alvesson, 2013).

THE FOLLOWING IS RELEVANT FOR FUTURE DISCUSSION

The theme that whilst 'working in', or being a worker in TechCity, some feel that they are **from the outside looking 'in'**, this status reflects the position of the researchers investigating this space.

It is common to see StartUps as containing their own "cultures" in terms of a unitary set of values and beliefs shared by the workers, movers through and networks in TechCity. However, at the root metaphor level we can question assumptions around unity, uniqueness, and consensus, emphasise differentiation, fragmentation, discontinuity, and ambiguity as key elements in culture (e.g., Martin, 2002; Martin & Meyerson, 1988)!

HOW HAS THE CURRENT CULTURE / ETHOS BEEN CULTIVATED IN TECHCITY – OR "IS THERE **REALLY** A PROBLEM WITH DIVERSITY?"

Short answer, yes. But it is more complex than this!

What I hope to produce is a continuum of overlapping assumptions *open for problematisation;* that include from one end the experiences of those who have had issues, and consider diversity to present certain obstacles that restrict theirs/others actions.

"It is an illusion that there isn't a problem with women working in tech, and my experience has had its moments in TechCity"

To identify the environments assumptions as a broader and more fundamental form of problematisation about 'women in tech' and to consider critiques, and early challenges of assumptions in this space.

TONE OF PARTICIPANTS – AKA, ETHOS AND CULTURE

Examples:

"I can't understand why no-one seems to get upset about this, but I don't know that stating it so publicly or in such an angry or emotional way is going to help to make the points that need to be made. I try being nicer and next time I get told off for being 'too nice'!"

"When pitching I've been told by VCs, 'there's No need to get so bent out of shape!' when I was asked about my family life. They wouldn't have even asked if I were a man"

"I've been affected emotionally. Getting a public dressing down is something you get used to, 'I think you'd get a better reception if you didn't sound so emotional […] more flies with honey than vinegar after all!', this from another woman who is a high up CEO. "

"I NEED YOU TO EXPLAIN TO ME WHY YOU THINK THERE'S A PROBLEM…"

The attitude from some is that the community is solely responsible for educating itself.

Identifying assumptions				
In-house (incubators; shared workplace): Assumptions about what exists within the culture of TechCity	*Wider environment of Tech City:* Broader influence of a particular professional environment underlying existing culture	*Paradigm:* Implications underlying existing attitudes and recommendations for future change	*Ideology:* Political-, moral-, and gender- related assumptions underlying and influencing the culture	*Root community:* Assumptions about a specific subject matter that are shared across different professional networks and their social actors

Working in an incubator to be told: *"You alone are responsible for educating yourself, and while someone might answer your question, no one is obligated to. If someone tells you to go find the information yourself, GO FIND THE INFORMATION YOURSELF. This is the same as the culture in TechCity. "*

"WHEN I'M 'DOING BUSINESS'…"

The invisible culture

The CEO of a health and fitness StartUp tells a revealing personal experience about one of her first Rounds for finding an Angel Investor and funding coming into London's TechCity in August 2014. Let's call the CEO Myer:

A young woman, twenty-five, married, university educated and living with her parents in 'one of London's burbs […] while I get my company off the ground, my husband and both our parents are *very* understanding.' (emphasis in original). When I met her Myer was literally newly inside her first premises 'near Shoreditch', and waiting for her older brother-in-law to 'make an appearance for his investment'. Myer was on the phone (a lot) speaking to 'suppliers' and then 'oh the bank manager'. Myer knew me through a mutual friend who had set up the GirlGeekNetwork and Dinners in London in 2005. On the phone

Myer was arguing about price, margins and delivery dates – a very well informed and on the ball business owner. Between calls, I introduced myself to Myer 'an academic interested in TechCity', and 'especially the professional culture' I thought I helpfully offered. Myer immediately disagreed and asked, 'When you first met me five minutes ago, what did you think?' 'that here was a shrewd business owner'. 'That's precisely the issue,' interjected Myer. 'When I'm 'doing business', I'm a woman first, then a business owner or 'self-starter' second'. When I leave the house in the morning, I know my status as a woman is what is most visible, this combined with this [Myer held up her left hand and showed me her wedding band and engagement ring] […] since I got married, it's been a lot easier. But in a small area of square footage, where there are a lot of young people trying to make it themselves, its competitive and its privileged in this small box.' I pointed out to Myer, that perhaps that was not the culture of TechCity, but a variation in emphasis of the privilege she herself has experience; a good background; university education and so on.

Myer's reply really struck me, 'I am privileged, but its my woman that is most visible to you and everyone else.

Gender in the academy has been 'interesting' to understand, experience, theorise and conceptualise over, and even problematize in the same vein as Alvesson and Sandberg (2011) identified when putting Management Studies and alignment of research questions and methodology in perspective. It was after a succession of experiences; conversations with colleagues; and mention of related theory and concepts by academic peers at a range of management, sociology, communication, social media, women studies, literature, geo-science, technology, marketing and commercially run conferences when I started to speculate about the principles (if there were any) and assumptions (of which there were) about the culture of working in the tech sector longer-term (ie. of at least five years). Tech especially as this was the commercial world I had seen myself building professional experience in, had I not been hoodwinked into academia, and as this was a professional that (like academia) appeared from the outside looking in to 'have' or 'take' issue with gender – those 'women in tech'.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS AND REFLECTION:

Discussion so far November, 2015

We expect the research to hold novelty that has arisen from the dominance status granted to small elite members clubs and an even smaller number of VCs, and the (no doubt related) from the hegemonic status accorded to the organisation of business and networks in London's TechCity. There is added complexity at work here in that there is a general disregard, by some, of the impact of the marginalisation of workers working in London's TechCity – particularly women, and (as the initial findings show) workers who are forty and above.

In the first instance of data collection and approach, there was a risk of preexistant dismissal by some, and we have two important reasons for persisting with such methods and insights.

First, we argue that there is a visible marginalisation of women from the tech sector that highlights *some* aspects of the community within TechCity and that this 'outsider' generalisation may well be, in itself, one important factor contributing to women's lack of visibility, progress and indeed dismissal of a mostly silent issue.

Second, in the use of qualitative methods influenced by feminist understanding that these represent an appropriate means through which to explore issues that without their use, are difficult to get a true sense, particular when individuals are being socialised into a very identifiable community, characterised by 'full membership' and initiation through social events, networking, and 'drinkabout' culture for several professional orientations; and at the same time making professional links within the community, whilst also (having to) retain a 'safe' and 'appropriate' distance in order to avoid unwarranted attention, and/or achieve professional status.

Our use of methods and research contribution focuses upon subtle and covert discrimination that 'doesn't have a name' and is often overlooked, goes unnoticed, and there are actors who are not be fully aware of their effects.

The subtlety is important here, because we are not focusing on overtly or obvious sexist actions or attitudes, and/or otherwise exclusionary practices. Whilst this type of gender discrimination certainly exists in the culture of TechCity and is a significant disadvantage to women (especially 'of a certain age'); there are very small community groups talking about the 'women in tech problem' and, more generally, some of these disadvantages are reported in the popular media – see this one Carole,

Swallow, E., 2015. March15. The most exclusive boys' club: America's largest startups. *Fortune.com* [online] [retrieved, Wednesday, March 18, 2015]

http://fortune.com/2015/03/16/unicorns-women-boards/

One aim is to raise awareness of how the culture of tech in general pervades a male-centric exclusivity – even though amongst TechCity these concerns might typically be overlooked, or taken as not important when the community is presenting and (in some cases) publicising the networks and the place as 'gender-neutral'.

See Table One: overview of participants interviewed (separate table for two focus groups with n = 11) [Appendix One]

"WE ARE A SAFE SPACE!"

The posturing of professionalism

Disrupters within tech community

Doing social etiquette

Continuities of feminine and tech identities

APPENDICES:

Table One: Showing snapshot for first [March 2015] 26 participants interviewed

CODE	Date	Name	Name of company	Location	Type of business	Data – interview / focus group	Introduced through / known by
1TC.		Divinia Knowles	MindCandy	TechCity, London	Created Moshi Monsters – products kids and families, music online, offline toys	Email interview	AW
2TC.		Sarah Luxford*	European Leaders	TechCity, London	Tech London advocate Executive search, cloud, payments, developments	Email interview	AW

3TC.	Hermione Way	Newspepper	TechCity, London and Silicon Valley, SFO and Silicon Alley, NYC	Entrepreneur, 'new media personality', internet video production	Email interview / skype	AW/ WG
4TC.	Jules Coleman and Alex Depledge	Hassle.com	TechCity, London	StartUp, local trusted cleaners	Email interview /skype	AW
5TC.	Mary				Email, f2f interview (nyc)	PI and CI
6TC.	Vicky Hunter	ThreeBeards	TechCity, London	Marketing events and community management	Interview f2f	AW
7TC.	Lena K	kiwigirl	TechCity, London	marketing	Interview f2f and skype follow-up	AW
8TC.	Lisa Williams	kiwigirl	TechCity, London	marketing and PR	Interview f2f and skype follow-up	LK
9TC.	Shara Tochia	FitnessFreak	TechCity, London	fitness company	Interview f2f and skype follow-up	AW
10TC.						
11TC.	Gabbi Cahane	and meanwhile	TechCity, London	marketing, investor, mentor, accelerator, venture capital, entrepreneur	three interviews Jan 30th; Feb 13th; March 13th; questions via email; four skype follow-ups	LK
12TC.	Benjamin Southworth	ThreeBeards	TechCity, London	marketing, events management, PR, Silicon DrinkAbout	Email interview	GC
13TC.	Baz Saidieh	TrueStart	TechCity, London	Retail and fashion accelerator	Email interview	GC
14TC.						
15TC.	David Fogel	Wayra	TechCity, London, Israel	Accelerator, incubator, tech StartUps	Email, f2f interview (wayra)	GC
16TC.	Abbi	Wayra	TechCity, London	Accounts	Email, f2f interview (wayra)	DF
17TC.	Thomas Jones	Charlotte Street Capital	TechCity, London	StartUps and Accelerators	Email, f2f interview, skype	GC / DF

18TC.	Bill Earner	Connect Ventures	TechCity, London	Early stage VC fund	Email interview / skype	GC / TJ
19TC.	Tory Collins	Endource (third StartUp)	TechCity, London	secrete escapes, dealchecker, more…	Email, f2f interview, skype	GC / BE
20TC.	Adam Bird	Cronofy	TechCity, London	Seedcamp Accelerator support - StartUp	Email, f2f interview, skype	GC / TC
21TC.	Amalia Agathou	Dawn Capital	TechCity, London	VC [Head of Communications]	Email, f2f interview, skype	GC / DF
22TC.	Gil Dibner	VC - previously invest through DFJ Esprit	TechCity, London, Israel	AngelList	Email, f2f interview, skype	GC
23TC.	Rupa Ganatra	Yes-Sir	TechCity, London	see also YESSIR	Email, f2f interview, skype	GC
24TC.	Rose Lewis	Madtech	TechCity, London	Marketing and advertising technology, Accelerator	Email, f2f interview, skype	GC
25TC.	Diane Perlman	Microsoft	TechCity, London	tech	Email, f2f interview, skype	GC
26TC.	Kate Tancred	TheSmalls	TechCity, London	Video content and marketing	Email, f2f interview, skype	GC / DP

Next steps

ESRC bid for extended fieldwork and data collection with additional tech companies (2016). Support from TechNorthEast, UK.

Additional data analysis and evaluation for journal publication 2016-2017.

Next series of conference papers scheduled for summer 2016.

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