Understanding Gender and Organizations

Mats Alvesson and Yvonne Due Billing

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Second Edition

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Preface to the Second Edition

Twelve years have passed since the first version of this book was completed. In the past decade there have been positive changes within the area of gender, work and organization in most societies. Academically, this research field has expanded and matured. We have seen a more complex understanding of matters in relation to gender.

However, with regard to gender equality/equity a lot remains pretty much the same. Although there are possibilities for avoiding traditional gender traps and increased freedom to 'do gender' in unconventional ways, gendered divisions of labour still are pronounced and gender gaps in wages and promotion remain high. There have been drawbacks with regard to gender equity in some countries and there have been giant steps forward in others.

There still seems to be a lot of good reasons for dealing with gender and we have found it worthwhile to revise the former edition. In this version an extra chapter has also been added (Chapter 5), which deals more explicitly with identity. All other chapters have been revised and up-dated. Some have been shortened while others have been expanded.

This version has been commented by several people at different stages. We have greatly benefited from comments and suggestions from Yvonne Benschop, University of Nijmeegen, Jo Brewis, University of Leicester, Robyn Ely, Harvard University, Susanne Lundholm, University of Lund, Judy Marshall, University of Lancaster, Deborah Meyerson, Stanford University and Robyn Thomas, University of Cardiff.

Thanks to all of you. We still hope to be able to provoke some of the patient readers of this second edition and maybe confuse others. Confusion is not necessarily bad in a contradictory, ambiguous and paradoxical world. Gender in contemporary (Western) society and organization seems to fit that description well. However, we also want to state again, that this is not a straightforward area and we hope that this book will inspire others to be persuaded by our case for a reflexive approach to the subject matter.

Finally, Miha and Mathilda (our lovely daughters), sorry that this book took so much of our time. Some time in the future, perhaps you will think it was worth it and we will make up for whatever you suffered in the meantime.

Lund, Sweden, July 2008
Mats Alvesson and Yvonne Due Billing

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Introduction: The Many Faces of Gender and Organization

Texts on gender and organizations often start by referring to common knowledge or statistics showing an inferior position of women in relation to men. Women in general have lower wages, even within the same occupation and at the same level, experience more unemployment, take more responsibility for unpaid labour, are strongly underrepresented at higher positions in organizations, and have less autonomy and control over work and lower expectations of promotion (e.g. Chafetz, 1989; Nelson and Burke, 2000; Ely et al., 2003). There is massive empirical evidence on these issues and those arguing that there exists a gendered order (or patriarchal society), which gives many more options and privileges to men, particularly in working life, but also in life in general, have little difficulty in substantiating their case.

Clearly gender, defined as the 'patterned, socially produced, distinctions between female and male, feminine and masculine' (Acker, 1992: 250), is a key concept for understanding what is happening to individuals in their working lives. It is crucial for understanding how people encounter encouragement, scepticism, support and suffering in organizational contexts. These viewpoints are based on ideas about fairness and they typically emerge from assumptions about women's interests in removing sources of inequality, through counteracting male dominance.

It could also be said that gender issues are worth focusing on from quite a different point of departure: the business-managerial one. From a management perspective, there are reasons to be concerned about the ineffective uses of human resources arising from the current gendered order, described above (e.g. Adler, 1994, 1997). Counteracting sex discrimination and traditional gender patterns would make possible a more rational way of recruiting, retaining, training and promoting labour. Utilizing 'diversity' – e.g. by employing, listening to and taking seriously the viewpoints and experiences of both men and women may also facilitate organizational learning and creativity. A flexible work force may be used more effectively if it is unconstrained by traditional ideas about 'men's work' and 'women's work', and what is seen as natural and appropriate for men and women to do. Therefore there are good reasons for management to consider gender when addressing organizational cultures, structures and practices. To maintain ways of thinking and acting, as well as social structures, that prevent almost half of the labour force from being fully utilized

in terms of their qualifications and talents, may be said to be a prime example of irrationality. And although rationality in organizational settings – as in human life in general – is more often preached than fully practised, too obvious deviations from what appears to be profitable should have a fair chance of triggering changes, or at least attempts at change.

These two motives for taking an interest in gender and organization – injustice and profitable management – are strong and it is hardly surprising that interest in this area has expanded over recent years both in the expansion of gender studies as a discipline and, more specifically, in relation to management and organization theory as well as in organizational practice.

However, simple and straightforward arguments seldom work easily in social science. Social reality is complex and contradictory. In terms of management considerations, for example, it is possible that there is a surplus of talent in relation to high-level jobs and it cannot be taken for granted that top priority is given to encouraging and utilizing an increasing number of career-oriented people. Companies often benefit from women having learnt that their place is in relatively low paid jobs, and the lack of ambition conventionally ascribed to women and their expectations of finding fulfilment in the family sphere facilitates adaptation to the many modestly skilled jobs available in contemporary working life (Acker, 1994). A gender division of labour which means that compliant and cheap female labour is accessible may be more beneficial for many companies than taking equal opportunities seriously, at least if the latter should call for major changes.[1]

In addition, the career-oriented person, giving priority to work over family or other non-work commitments may be preferable in the business world, as a strong commitment to equality would often mean a re-balancing or downplaying of corporate matters in relation to family obligations and values. From the organization's point of view, the sex[2] of the work/career-committed person is of no significance per se. Gender equality is not in opposition to the norm of the long workweek for people in key positions or career tracks. And we are witnessing more cases where females give more priority to career than their spouses. Still, in the majority of cases, organizations draw upon and reinforce conventional gender patterns when encouraging and utilizing strongly career-oriented persons. The 'male breadwinner' image still supports strongly career-oriented, instrumental males working very hard for the business. These complications are worth considering before assuming too much management interest in gender fairness. Even for managerial jobs it may be optimal for companies if most women are not strongly committed to promotion to top jobs. A manager of a large UK retail company said,

> What I can't have are sixty very ambitious people as store managers. I only want ten very ambitious people. Fifty I see as being hardcore managers, permanent in the areas where they are. And what I am looking for, crudely, is thirty- to forty-year old females, with a good retail background, who are very effective and very efficient in their job but, because of their domestic circumstances, won't want to move. (Cited in Cockburn, 1991: 49)

Rather than focusing on so-called rational arguments, for example around objective interests and means to ends, it is better to explore how people in companies define

priorities, think and act in this area. We argue in this book that it is more meaningful to focus on complexity and variation in different industries, labour markets, occupations and organizational cultures, rather than trying to arrive at an average picture for organizations and working life as a whole. Presumably there are very different opinions and motives among executives over pursuing a more progressive corporate practice. Sometimes organizations have an interest in increasing the pool of female talents for managerial tasks; banks employing many women seem for example often eager to do so, while mass service industries benefit mainly from the access to inexpensive (female) labour. Although equal opportunities is increasingly espoused by companies, this may often be more a matter of lip service for legitimacy reasons than serious business intended to permeate corporate practices.

In terms of universal gender discrimination in working life and society, the common picture outlined at the very beginning of this chapter may therefore be too self-evident. Let us complicate the picture somewhat. Even though males apparently have much more access to privileges associated with formal power, wealth and status, this is not necessarily the same as they have better lives. Men do not have a monopoly on privileges, and women in some respects score more points on the goods of life. That men are, in general, much better paid, have far more formal power in organizations and hold the most prestigious jobs is beyond any doubt. However, equally clear is that men's life expectancy in the Western world is shorter than women's.[3] They end up in jail much more frequently, more often than not lose custody battles over children after divorces, are (or used to be) forced to do military service in many countries (which for some may be seen as a privilege, but for many it is a mixed blessing or strongly negative), and more men than women commit suicide (WHO, 2005).

Furthermore, we would not wish to paint too negative a picture over women's representation in many of the top jobs in both the public and private sector, albeit there are significant variations by country. In the Nordic countries, women make up about half of the cabinet members. This can be compared with, for example, the UK where 28 per cent of the cabinet members are females (EOC, 2006). Of the EU commissioners – the top people in the union – about a third are women (2007). Women are represented in many top-level public sector positions such as university presidents (or vice chancellors), police chief constables, etc. For many it is clearly seen as positive, indeed important, to elect or appoint women to such posts. Of course, it can be argued that the proportion of women in these examples is still fairly low and that they offer merely symbolic examples, forms of 'window dressing', tokenism and to appeal to female voters. And in, for example, Sweden it seems that it is not uncommon to place females in board positions in order to fill the quota and make things look good and avoid critique. However, it is still worth noting that some of the mentioned political top positions are among the most powerful, prestigious and visible ones, and the impact in substantive, but perhaps even more in symbolic terms, should not be underestimated. The election of women and the espoused value of having women in top positions in these high profile and visible areas reflect a fundamental and positive attitude that people hold with regard to female representation in top positions in politics and many public sector organizations. Recognizing that there are generally held attitudes

that are in favour of women holding top jobs in our societies, does not mean that the achievement of gender equality is straightforward and without problems.[4] Furthermore, it can be added that people might express one opinion regarding relatively distanced holders of top positions – safely located far away from one's immediate life/work context – and another when it comes to women being their own managers. Attitudes are seldom consistent.

There are huge variations in different societies with regard to women's representation in top positions in business and other organizations and it may be argued that the above examples are only relevant to relatively more gender progressive societies such as those in Scandinavia. Generally, women are, if not totally absent, then strongly underrepresented in top jobs in most countries (including the parts of the world that this book primarily addresses, i.e. the Western world). However, in most Western countries the number of women in top jobs is increasing, albeit slowly. The case of Scandinavia is not that atypical; even though it is reputed to have a high degree of gender equality, the overall picture is highly contradictory and in many respects contradicts the general positive view presented by the statistics on female political leaders and public sector top administrators. The gender division of labour is as pronounced in Scandinavia as in most other Western countries. In most high-level jobs, male overrepresentation is very strong. Only about 22 per cent of higher middle and senior managers in Sweden are women and there are even fewer at the top.[5] Compared to this there is a much higher percentage of female managers in the US than in other countries, but also in the US few women reach the top jobs. (Of course, one may have doubts what statistics really say, but it gives at least some crude hints about the state of affairs.) Although women's share of management jobs has increased, the gender hierarchy in organizations has not been altered substantially. Women managers are mainly concentrated at the lower levels in chains of command. They tend to supervise workers of their own sex, and their role in decision-making is primarily providing input into decisions made by men (Reskin and Roos, 1990). However, this does not necessarily mean that women are disadvantaged in performance assessments and recruitment to top jobs. One study, for example, of applicants to senior executive positions in the US federal government showed that women received higher performance appraisals and were more likely to be hired than male applicants (Powell and Butterfield, 1994).

If the reader now feels a bit confused, he or she has got the message. Our point, hardly original, is that gender patterns are complex and often contradictory. There is considerable variation in the evidence of biases, subtle social mechanisms and cultural ideas against women, as well as there being indications of the opposite. Case studies of organizations show considerable variation in the working lives of men and women, in terms of careers and work conditions as well as the structures, cultures and processes affecting options, actions, values, satisfaction and suffering (Billing and Alvesson, 1994; Billing, 2000; Thomas and Davies, 2005; Deutsch, 2007). Also different parts of the labour market and during different times show considerable variation (McCall, 2005) (see Chapters 3 and 4). It is not easy to discover universal mechanisms or structures below these empirical 'surface' variations. Talk about 'gender systems' (or patriarchy) is then problematic and not very useful for the understanding of organizational

phenomena, since this means overstressing broad patterns and consistency while disregarding variety and change.

However, it is not only gender discrimination and obstacles to the realization of equal opportunities in work organizations that we wish to highlight. Nor is it solely male domination and female victimization and lost opportunities that are to be focused upon. Of interest is also the rich variation in the way in which organizations carry gender meanings, and how men and women live their organizational lives. Work organizations are not just representative of privileges for men. For both women and men, work organizations can bring about conformism, constraints and suffering. Conversely, both may experience joy and benefits not just from wage labour but also from everyday organizational life. In other words, some of the constraints on individuals in organizations – such as the pressure to give priority to work over family – do not solely originate from male domination, but are also contingent upon the workings of capitalism and the idea of organizations effectively and competitively producing goods and services, making a high material standard of living possible.[6]

The exploration of *gender-in-organizations*, the mapping of what happens to men and women at workplaces, as well as of *gendered organizations*, seeing organization cultures in terms of masculine and feminine values, ideas and meanings, may lead to the telling of many different stories. The gender-in-organizations perspective focuses on women and men as fairly robust categories and investigates how these are treated, behave and/or experience work and life. The interest is often in measurement and comparison of groups of men and women. The idea of gendered organizations indicates that workplaces are more than sites where gender is played out. Organizations are seen as inscribed by gendered meanings – structures and practices are characterized by assumptions and values of a masculine or feminine nature actively 'producing' people in organizations (Ely and Padavic, 2007). Here the emphasis is on construction processes, how organizations like other social institutions are 'artificially' shaped in specific ways and in their turn contribute to the construction of men and women.

Many of the *gendered organization* stories, but also quite a few of those focusing on gender-in-organizations, are explicitly and intentionally pro-women, opposing male domination and aiming at improving the conditions for women. However we also believe that it is worth addressing how many women may act conservatively in relation to equality ideals, perhaps against their own interests, and how organizational cultures may affect many men in unfortunate ways. In addition, a gender perspective on organizations can give us important insights into how organizations function, for example in terms of, inter alia, leadership, strategy, organizational culture, groups, communication, ethics and corporate social responsibility. In other words, the approach goes beyond questions about positive and negative outcomes of gender patterns for careers and work situations of females (and men).

This variety of significant issues on the topic of gender and organization is, for us, part of what makes the subject so exciting. We try to take this variety of important issues and aspects seriously in this book, considering men and women in organizations but we are also going beyond this and look at a range of organizational phenomena from different angles.

Organization theory and gender

It should be clear by now, that there are many good reasons for taking an interest in gender and in organizations as well as for combining the two. Organizations are central economic institutions that take care of the production of goods and services and of a major part of the control and care of the citizens. Most of us are in daily contact with organizations, either working in them or relating to them as clients or customers. Organizations are workplaces, sites for childcare and education, and institutions taking care of social services and health. Organizations are the context for our working life and play a significant role in our well-being, and it is therefore of great importance to appreciate how they function, which logic (goals and means) dominates, which actors and groups set the agenda and how the relations between people are formed. The study of organizations – Organization Theory – is accordingly a large and expanding field.

Over the past two decades there has been an increased interest in gender and organizations to such an extent that, as Gherardi (2003) observes, recognition that mainstream (cynically referred to as 'malestream') organizational theory is male gendered has become something of a truism. However, despite this recent recognition within the more critical strands of the discipline, it is worth reiterating that organization theory has traditionally neglected gender issues; employees have been viewed either from a supposedly gender neutral perspective (but in reality representing a male perspective, given that studies were invariably on male workers by male researchers) or from a point of view that considers only male and masculine aspects of work and organization as interesting (Hearn and Parkin, 1983; Mills, 1988; Martin and Collinson, 2002). In a *Handbook of Work and Organizational Psychology* (Drenth et al., 1984) one short article out of 42 deals with 'women and work', while gender aspects are not addressed in any of the other chapters.

The massive literature on organizational culture in the l980s, often driven by an interest in the meaning of life at the workplace hardly considered gender. However, despite this, there has been increased recognition of the importance of this area of study.[7] It is now almost obligatory to include a chapter or section on gender (and/or diversity) in an ambitious overview or textbook of organizational behaviour. Despite this both gender-in-organizations and gendering of organizational analysis remain marginalized topics with mainstream organizational and management theory still assuming that both knowledge and knowledge production are gender-neutral (Martin, 2000; Gherardi, 2003). Gender for many seems to be a theme that has to be included and ticked off so that expectations of what needs to be addressed are met and critique is avoided. What impact might this have had on the resulting analysis and interpretations? Few have considered the impact on the process of developing knowledge and understanding of organizations of the fact that only men (with a very few exceptions) have participated in its production (Martin and Collinson, 2002). Of course, the female sex in no way guarantees an interest in gender any more than the male biological sex excludes an interest in the topic (see Note 7).

Masculine dominance in academic life as well as in the organizations studied has had an important influence on the kinds of questions raised and the answers subsequently produced in management and organization studies (Martin, 2000). Some

subjects have not been considered at all or they have at least not been considered from a gender point of view. At the same time this established research is presented, and may for the 'naive' reader appear, as objective and neutral. It has been implicitly assumed and communicated that organizations are neutral to gender or that it is a man's world. The manager is assumed to be a 'he'. (This has at least been the case until quite recently, although nowadays it is perhaps only the most senior executives that are assumed to be men.) It is therefore maintained that it is the life and work of men that has been considered the research standard, both within the human relations school, strategic management research, cultural theory or any other known schools and fields of organization theory. This holds true for great parts of science as well. Research often uncritically reflects cultural beliefs. The traditional North American concept of leadership may be described as 'a pastiche based upon a masculine ego-ideal glorifying the competitive, combative, controlling, creative, aggressive, self-reliant individualist' (Lipman-Blumen, 1992: 185, see also Prasad, 1997). Arguably, the whole management field has (so far had) a masculine bias (Collinson and Hearn, 1994, 1996; Simpson, 1996); and according to Cullen (1994), even a seemingly more 'neutral' theory, such as Maslow's need hierarchy, may have a similar bias. There are however changes in the discourse on management and leadership, possibly including 'feminization' or at least 'de-masculinization' – we return to this issue later in this book. Some 'truths' easily lag behind a changing world. Some claims and results in gender studies seem more relevant yesterday than today or in the future.

A gender perspective implies analysing the importance, meaning and consequences of what is culturally defined as male or masculine as well as female or feminine ways of thinking (knowing), feeling, valuing and acting. A gender perspective also implies an analysis of the organizational practices that maintain the division of labour between the sexes. The vertical division of labour according to sex can be intimately related to conceptions of the masculine/feminine, that ascribe a gendered meaning to phenomena that is contingent upon the cultural beliefs of what are typical or natural orientations and behaviours of men and women. For example, ideas and norms for leadership may, despite changes, often express a masculine undertone, which makes leadership appear to be more natural or easy to engage in for men than for women (Schein, 1973; Lipman-Blumen, 1992; Billing and Alvesson, 2000; Ely et al., 2003).

The use of a gender perspective on organizations would also lead to a higher degree of sensitivity to contradictions and ambiguities with regard to social constructions and reconstructions of gender relations, and to what we consider to be discrimination and equal opportunities at the workplace level. It is important to stress that gender relations are not statically structured and defined once and for all but are emergent and changeable. This counts for the overall societal level and everyday interactions in workplaces. Apart from studying discriminating practices and gender bias in organizations it is also important to study the elements of modern organizations that produce tendencies towards equality between the sexes. This last aspect has been very much neglected in gender studies. As we shall see later on, a great deal of the literature tends to be somewhat one-sidedly critical and 'negative'. 'Misery stories' and an emphasis on problems are popular (Deutsch, 2007). There are strong reasons for a critical approach, but arguably some modern societies and many organizations have

social values and rules that promote the espoused interests and opportunities of women and do not only or mainly discriminate against them – even without the use of special legislation. These (social) rules are probably of greater importance to middle-class than working-class women.

Modern societies praise themselves for being meritocratic and most (younger) people in Western societies probably claim to be in favour of an ideology that gives equal opportunities to both sexes, even though this is sometimes restricted to lip service. The chances of 'choosing' ways of following or resisting norms and guidelines for how to be and act in terms of gender – and avoiding sex roles/constraining gender norms – are probably better than earlier in history for large groups. The possibility of organizations playing a progressive and 'rational' part should not be excluded – even though this progressive and rational part has its limits; for example it may give women better options of employment and promotion, but it does not address wider issues such as the goals, values and interests that form organizational life in a capitalist society.

A gender perspective will not only mean dealing with the way men and women are constructed as individuals – how they are formed and reformed through social processes, how they act, how they experience their working life (as well as their private life), how they are supported and discriminated – but will also include a broader view on organizations. Some ideals and values could be seen as expressing male dominance, for example, companies that ruthlessly exploit nature, 'human resources', consumers, and so on. Ideals such as profit and maximum growth, aggressive competition, the tendency to make quantitative ideals (money) the ultimate measure of success, could be related to masculine conceptions and a male rationality.

The limits of the explanatory/interpretative powers of a gender perspective are of course disputable, and it is certainly not the best perspective for the study of *all* aspects of organizations and working life. Being sensitive about the limits of the analytic and interpretive range of the perspective hardly implies that women should cope with their under-privileged position in working life by a one-sided adaptation to structures, goals, languages and logics that have for ages been influenced by a strong masculine dominance. A gender perspective on organizations implies studying these phenomena and focusing on fundamental questions of rationality, e.g. the structure and aims of the organization, maintaining a balance between a broad and an all-embracing view. The trick is to interpret gendered meanings sensitively in non-obvious situations without totalizing organizational life through seeing everything in terms of gender.

Besides studying general patterns and tendencies within organizations, when we deal with the construction of gender it is also important to be aware of existing variations. Most researchers have analysed what they argue are the typical and dominant trends and patterns aiming at a general picture of gender and organization, even though diversity and multiplicity have received more attention recently. Often diversity is reduced to considering the formula of gender, class and ethnicity (e.g. Ferguson, 1994). While acknowledging the risk of getting caught in complexity and detail, it is important to be aware of variation also within and outside these sociological standard categories. There may be interesting diversities among black middle class US women, for example. People may also differ depending on which of their

parents they primarily identify with: far from all identify with the parent of the same sex. Lifestyle, political standpoints, sexual orientation, age, religion, (dis)ability and family situation also account for variation. Individual differences associated with family or career-orientation may matter more than the standard categories for experiences and behaviour at work.

Also, organizations differ very much when it comes to historical and reproduced gender biases in social practices, just as the gendered meanings that characterize different fields of work, functions, professions and positions differ (Billing and Alvesson, 1994; McCall, 2005). Considering diversity without losing sight of certain patterns and tendencies then is one – of many – challenges in the gender and organization theory that this book will address.

The idea of gender studies

Conventional thinking, as well as social research concerning gender, aims at finding out 'how it really is'. Does leadership by women differ from leadership by men? What are the causes of unequal pay? Why are there so few females at the highest levels in organizations? How common is sexual harassment? Which values do women and men hold respectively? One idea of gender research is to provide authoritative answers to such questions and to develop valid theories about these matters. There are, however, great problems with an approach aiming to establish the 'truth' in gender studies as well as social science in general. The problems are of a historical, political and methodological nature.

Gender is a historical phenomenon. Gender is understood, developed and changed differently in different cultural contexts and times. There is variety between, as well as within, societal cultures. Men, women and gendered practices are dynamic, at least in modern society: social science is part of, and contributes to, culture and thus affects how gender understanding and practice will look in the future. Social science is affected by the historical context and intervenes in the making of history as part of the general cultural understanding. Consequently, social science does not only study gender, but contributes actively to the construction of gender as well. Cultural ideas and social practices rather than genes account for the ratio of males/females in terms of full-time, part-time wage labour and unpaid homework and in various occupations and hierarchical levels in organizations. Social science is fused with cultural ideas and contributes to their development.

All statements and reasoning about gender issues are informed by value judgements and are never politically neutral. The idea of studying gender is one political choice, as is of course the 'non-choice' (not paying attention to gender). To treat the distinction between 'men' and 'women' as crucial is another. One may see other distinctions – age, sexual orientation, work orientation, ethnicity, life style, religion, personality, interest in children – as equally important or even more so, or simply refuse to divide up humans into two sexes, seeing the significance of this distinction as problematic in social science as it obscures variation and misleadingly indicates that the categories of 'men' and 'women' are universal and homogeneous. It is far from certain that identifying/classifying a person as a male

or female is relevant or informative in many situations. Neither should we ignore
that it is not that easy to incorporate a gender perspective to unpack social life, as
gender norms seldom come through with clear subtexts. There is often a thin line
between inscribing (or projecting) and revealing a specific meaning.

Also how one treats different phenomena and exercises judgement is politically
informed. Does one, for example, choose to emphasize what may be perceived as
relative equality or relative inequality in gender relations? How does one strike a
balance between voluntarism and determinism in accounting for human action? To
what extent is a particular gender division of labour treated as the outcome of 'free
choice', and to what extent does the researcher emphasize constraints in the form of
discriminatory practices or sex stereotypes that produce different kinds of prefer-
ences and work orientations among women and men? 'Free choice' is never a simple
matter but may be understood in terms of how cultural prejudices and expectations
operate as forces of power and produce certain gender-stereotypical orientations and
constraints discouraging people from engaging in sex role-incongruent behaviour.
On the other hand, the researcher cannot just assume that she or he 'knows best',
and treat women and men as ignorant 'cultural dopes' or passively shuffled around
by societal structure and disregard their espoused wishes and preferences as simple
outcomes of the operation of power or false consciousness. There is no clear-cut or
easy way of dealing with such issues, but how they are treated undoubtedly reflects
the researcher's values and priorities. How the researcher deals with these issues is
never politically neutral. In social science generally, it is impossible to avoid either
questioning or reproducing existing ideas and institutions (Alvesson and Sköldberg,
2000).

Gender research like other social research, is clearly, therefore, a political project.
It intervenes in the negotiation of how gender is understood and thus in the (re) pro-
duction of gender relations and society. This does not reduce its intellectual value
and significance. Its value is, however, related to matters other than the offering of
'neutral' truths accomplished through the use of a scientific apparatus. The poten-
tial value is as a source of intellectual inspiration and as an input in ongoing con-
versation about how one should live one's life and shape political institutions,
including companies.

Methodologically, gender relations and dynamics must be seen as a particularly dif-
ficult subject area. Often, the most significant issues are hidden and elusive. How
social processes and cultural understandings produce and re-produce certain gendered
social relations may only rarely be directly observed. Interview accounts about these
matters may be more or less reliable. They tend to be strongly affected by the inter-
view context and hardly work as mirrors of pure experience (Alvesson and Deetz,
2000; Silverman, 2001). Responses to survey questions are notoriously unreliable
when it comes to issues, which do not have a clear and simple meaning. Most com-
plex and interesting issues are difficult to grasp through standardized questions. The
research subjects attribute their own meanings to the questions – meanings that may
deviate heavily from the meanings intended by the researcher. A particular problem
concerns the subjectivity of the researcher. Although scientists are never objective, neu-
tral and distanced towards their research, gender issues in particular are among the
most personally sensitive topics one may study, meaning that existential matters,

personal background and convictions, including political sympathies, are more at stake than if one is studying, for example, formal organizational structures or mergers and acquisitions or other less emotive subjects. One may sometimes doubt whether an empirical study says less about the empirical phenomena out there than the perspectives, vocabularies, interests and preferences and idiosyncrasies of the researcher and the paradigm/research tribe s/he belongs to (Alvesson, 2002b). That a person is an 'expert' on gender is certainly no guarantee against prejudices and odd ideas about the subject matter. (The reader of this book should be aware!) Without denying that there are sometimes clear-cut answers to questions about gender, which have some validity outside local space and time contexts, the major contribution of gender studies is not to produce robust and unquestionable research results, which claim to establish the truth once and for all. Empirical research is undoubtedly valuable and should be central, but one must be open to the ambiguities involved and the historical and situated character of the empirical object as well as of the constructed and interpreted character of so-called data (Calhoun, 1992; Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). All this means that reflexivity becomes very important. This involves self-critically exploring how the researcher is involved in producing specific knowledge outcomes and how the researcher's own frameworks, vocabulary and lines of interpretation may command the social world; this, one should open-mindedly and cautiously try to understand.

Gender over- and under-sensitivity

The purpose of gender research is, in our opinion, to facilitate advanced thinking and reflection about gender and, thereby, about social relations, society, organizations and working life in general. Such thinking may be discussed in terms of counteracting *under-sensitivity* about the meaning and significance of gender in various contexts. More than this, however, gender studies is a political project, where knowledge production is oriented towards change.

On the one hand gender studies should therefore aim to 'sensitize' academic disciplines, politics, management and organization decision making and, in particular, everyday life interaction of organizational practitioners about the gendered nature of thinking, feeling, valuing, acting, material and social practices and structures. The major task of gender research, therefore, is to oppose the persistent under-sensitivity and gender bias inherent in thinking on many aspects of academic and everyday life and social practices that are claimed to be gender-neutral. As stated earlier, organization and management theory as well as managerial and working life practice on which it is based has neglected and disregarded the issue of gender in the past. Now gender has become a mainstream topic of discussion, meaning that gender has been paid attention to over the last two decades, but in very specific and not necessarily nuanced or very insightful ways (see e.g. Linstead, 2000; Brewis, 2005). This book will show this in some detail.

On the other hand, however, the opposite problem also sometimes occurs in gender thinking, an inclination to '*over-sensitize*' gender. This refers to a tendency in some research, as well as everyday life, to see gender as relevant and decisive everywhere, to emphasize the gender dimension consistently without fully considering

other important aspects and dimensions. A gender perspective, which assumes that male domination, or patriarchy, is the mechanism behind all sorts of miserable phenomena (perhaps in combination with racism and class structures) will legitimize indiscriminatory critique. Some authors might be criticized for overstressing a gender perspective, or for dismissing this criticism as unimportant. Of course, it could be argued that no distinction in society is more crucial than the one between male and female and that no area is therefore gender-neutral. According to this line of thinking, everything bears a significant gender meaning and reflects or constitutes gender bias, normally to the advantage of men or to forms of masculinities. This argument may, however, be accepted while still insisting on the problems with gender over-sensitivity. That everything could be perceived as having some gendered meaning or that it may be difficult to point out non-trivial areas or issues that are perfectly gender-balanced or gender-neutral does not imply that a gender aspect is worth emphasizing all the time. Also aspects including a grain of 'truth' may be overstressed. Any perspective runs the risk of being used in a one-eyed fashion, reducing all phenomena to issues of men and women or masculinity and femininity.

Why draw attention to gender over-sensitivity? It is an important part of reflexivity and a nuanced and fine-tuned approach of any research project and understanding to carefully consider when and how to apply a specific lens. In order to counteract a tendency to use a favoured vocabulary to command the world – to see it when we believe it – we must be aware of the problem of overusing a perspective. As the insensitivity to gender issues is well documented and strongly emphasized by most gender literature, we here also highlight the opposite tendency.

Gender over-sensitivity thus means not considering or too quickly disregarding other aspects or possible interpretations. It means privileging gender over other standpoints. It makes gender the only decisive factor, and this way gender as a mode of understanding becomes totalizing. The metaphors of masculinities and femininities take precedence and repress other metaphors and perspectives as interesting points of departures for interpretations and theories. Similarly, there is the difficulty of gender losing its conceptual purchase within analysis – a case of gender reductionism, where everything becomes a matter of gender and not much else.

There are different themes to consider in terms of gender over-sensitivity. One relates to the political function of gender studies. If the political aspect is stressed too strongly, it may be perceived as propaganda. Many people are sceptical about gender studies, which are seen more as ideological than scientific. There is an inherent dilemma in gender studies – as in much other critically oriented work – between, on the one hand, intellectual curiosity and academic criteria about constrained political commitment and, on the other, political engagement involving a wish to speak for the underprivileged and encourage social change to their benefit. This dilemma may be formulated in different ways: between gaining academic respectability and saying something important, unfettered by academic norms and conventions; between open-minded curiosity and a wish to use one's privileged position and skills to change the world in a liberating direction; between a wish to be as honest as possible and a drive to facilitate one's political cause (or career prospects) through the selective reporting of (and at worst manipulating) findings, arguments and language. Making strong political points may call for emphasizing

simple, coherent, politically correct descriptions and arguments (e.g. about men choosing men for senior positions), and reducing the scope for investigating and writing about complexities and contradictions (e.g. many women also preferring men in managerial and career jobs). In particular, politically powerful points involve a specific kind of rhetoric. Recognizing and emphasizing signs of increased equality or conservative tendencies among women in, for example, occupational preferences or family life orientations may weaken the case for female politicians and academics as well as perhaps risk impoverishing the base for one's own career as a researcher of gender studies, as this is normally tied to the strength of a case for discrimination and suppression of women. Often a good case for this can be made, but there is the risk of 'victim feminism', where males and male-dominated institutions are seen as oppressors and females as victims.

A related aspect of gender over-sensitivity concerns how seductive gender concepts and ideas are. They may be used to account for – or at least illuminate – all types of phenomena: from nuclear power to analytical thinking and creativity and language use. Ideas about masculinities and femininities may blinker the researcher, rather than being used self-critically and with an open mind. Of course, gender research may be seen as particularly susceptible to this, given its emotive and personal character. Gender issues involve much more of the researcher as a person than most subjects. This may be inspiring and enrich the research process as private experiences may be used productively as an input into the research. However, balancing rich experiences with qualified interpretative and reflective work calls for self-critique and scrutiny over, inter alia, use of vocabulary, selective memorizing, over-generalization from single cases and repressing alternative viewpoints. Or to say it more plainly, to be (pain)fully aware of the strong tendency not to believe it when one sees it, but to see it when one believes it (Weick, 1979).

It is not possible to state categorically what is under- and over-sensitivity to gender, nor is it easy to evaluate when either of the tendencies imprints itself in a specific case. These terms have little to do with what is 'true' and 'false' and it is impossible to prescribe an appropriate degree of gender sensitivity. However, they are issues worthy of reflection and discussion as part of knowledge production. Critics may be of help in pointing out imbalances. Sometimes there may be quite strong signs that somebody has fallen into one of the traps of under- or over-sensitivity. In the case of under-sensitivity for example, it is not an atypical experience during a lecture on gender that some students protest against the claim that gender is significant in organizational contexts and suggests that 'we are all individuals'. This is of course not untrue, but the meaning of an individual is hardly gender-neutral. Individuals (female and male) are encountered and encounter themselves in various ways, involving expectations, constraints and rewards/punishments associated with dominating discourses about gender. In this section, we focus primarily on the issue of over-sensitivity, as this is underscored in the gender literature. Here is just one example: A feminist colleague told us about a woman whose (feminist) paper she had reviewed and rejected. The woman had attributed this to the journal not wanting feminist papers. This conclusion seemed to be somewhat premature. The journal had sent the paper to be reviewed by people who encouraged and were sympathetic to feminist work (such as our friend). The paper was however

logically 'flawed', according to the opinion of people who, in principle, were supportive of feminist work.

The author felt discriminated against because she was doing feminist work and this experience is undoubtedly valid in many cases, although perhaps decreasingly so in many countries. The problem is that one might end up attributing all kinds of negative outcomes to discrimination. In this case, however, the paper may have had substantial scientific problems and was rejected for that reason (according to our friend).

How can the risk of gender over-sensitivity be minimized? Of course, this is a matter for careful discussion in relation to specific instances. In academic work, feedback and the sharing of opinions may also lead to better judgement. What is hidden or downplayed by the use of terms such as masculinity(ies)/femininity(ies), patriarchy, sexual harassment, etc. should be reflected upon and the research text be 'opened up' so that some of the cracks in the approach become visible, counteracting totalizing writing. The reader is thus activated in relation to the text and alternative interpretations can be considered (cf. Rorty, 1989; Steier, 1991). One possibility is to broaden the interpretive repertoire, i.e. the set of concepts, metaphors, theories, ideas and other interpretive resources that are used. These may make interpretation open to different aspects and arguments when approaching empirical phenomena or developing theoretical arguments (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000). Instead of solely reading and utilizing gender theory, other theories should be drawn on in the process of intellectual work. For example, the following may be valuable: various ideas on class and ethnicity, critical theory ideas on technocratic consciousness, as well as Foucault's notion of the interrelatedness of knowledge/power and the production of subjectivity (Foucault, 1980, 1982). But also more conventional understandings of management and organization are relevant. Therefore, what we are arguing for here is a broader portfolio of interpretive tools and approaches. This means that instead of just incorporating these ideas into gender theory and using them to support gender interpretation, these other theoretical approaches may also make it possible to produce other kinds of interpretations. In doing so, this raises attention to other forms of oppression, but also to conditions and constraints around the effective functioning of organization.

Even though it is usually recognized that there are considerable differences in the category of women/men, differences associated with sexuality, class, race and ethnicity are often treated as secondary. It is common that gender researchers 'add' other forms of oppression such as class, 'race', etc. Of course, the whole idea of gender studies is to focus on, and develop knowledge of gender, but this main focus does not need to imply a sole emphasis on gender issues and a total neglect of issues and themes conceptualized in other terms.

If we wish to take the problem of over-sensitivity seriously, gender studies should have access to other vocabularies and be open to the use of these. Alternative aspects and interpretations to those favouring gender as a concept should be routinely considered. What is hidden or downplayed by the use of terms such as masculinity(ies)/femininity(ies), patriarchy, sexual harassment, etc., should be reflected upon and the research text be opened up so that some of the cracks in the approach become visible, counteracting totalizing writing. The reader is thus

activated in relation to the text and alternative interpretations can be considered (cf. Rorty, 1989; Steier, 1991; Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000). Therefore the tendency to talk of women's oppression in a simplified and collective sense has been increasingly questioned, given the intricate web of interconnected forms of oppression, such as race, sexuality and class (hooks, 1984; Sum, 2000). Increasingly, therefore, other political philosophies of activism that critique inequalities and accepted ways of representation in the construction of knowledge have influenced the field of gender studies, most significantly, post-colonial theory (e.g. Spivak, 1987, 1990) and queer theory (Sedgwick, 1990; Butler, 1993). But also perspectives showing how less gender-constrained forms of interaction and 'non-negative' gender differences are possible have emerged (Deutsch, 2007).

Of course, gender studies are not only a matter of using sound judgement concerning *when* to invoke gender concepts. More crucial is *how* gender perspectives are used and interpretations are made. Even though we think the first issue is important and needs more attention the second – how – issue is the major theme of this book.

The purpose of the book

In this lengthy introduction we have avoided the conventional norm for starting a book and refrained from a straightforward formulation of purpose and viewpoint. We have rather tried to signal our outlook of this field as messy and calling for recognition of contradictions and difficulties. We have tried to illustrate a reflexive approach and hinted at some concepts aiding this – like under- and oversensitivity. Before we proceed, some short summarizing statements about our ambitions are in place, partly in order to counteract the reader's possible frustration and partly to give further clues to whether the book is of interest for further reading.

Compared to many other books on this topic, we are not so much in the businesses of offering robust truths, ideological support or recipes. This is neither an exercise in neo-positivism, victim feminism nor a resource book for change work. This book aims to contribute to a more reflective and multi-levelled approach to key themes in gender and organization, in which the researcher (or practitioner) considers alternative aspects, approaches and interpretations and carefully considers and acknowledges the limitations and shortcomings of the line(s) of inquiry taken. Of course, all research involves elements of reflection, but often the researcher devotes much more time and energy to developing and persuading readers about the superiority of a particular language, the reliability of empirical results or the virtues of a particular theoretical point. This is important enough but disregards and hides basic uncertainties and problems. Taking a broader perspective means exploring in depth the use of knowledge about gender and organizations, and the problems in developing knowledge in politically hot and personally engaging fields. It is our hope that this book will encourage such work in gender studies and more reflective and thoughtful practices in work and organizations.

We advocate an interpretive and processual view where the ways we – as people in everyday organizational life and as academics – do and sometimes undo gender

(i.e. break away from following sex stereotypes) is focused. We think that research should be about sensitive readings of the meanings and understandings held and expressed by people at work around gender. We also bear in mind that people sometimes navigate around gender norms and constraints. Going beyond categorizing and comparing people as men and women and sensitively using ideas of, but also being aware of the dangers of inscribing, masculinities and femininities in relation to identities, cultures and practices are key elements in our approach.

In the book we comment critically on parts of the literature and even on widely held views within the subject area. This should not be read as if we are particularly sceptical to gender studies or that this field is more problematic than others. A reflective approach means that established ways of doing social science are critically illuminated and a reorientation is suggested. As gender studies are often marginalized and are faced with little understanding, not to say hostility, from conservative and gender-ignorant circles, we are eager to avoid our intentions being misunderstood or misused. We feel confident that a critical-constructive approach also addressing problems in developing knowledge about gender, and shortcomings in substantial parts of the existing literature, will be beneficial for gender and organization studies.

On readership

In writing this book, we have a broad and mixed audience in mind. We hope that it will be of relevance for academics and students in all areas of social and behavioural sciences who are interested in gender, organizations and working life. We draw on literature from management, sociology, psychology, anthropology, history, philosophy, public administration and education and, to a lesser extent, economics. Themes like culture, identity and interactions are highlighted in particular.

The book takes a broad view but is more oriented to qualitative approaches that focus on issues of meaning and understanding rather than quantitative concerns about frequencies, correlations and explanations. This does not mean that we want to emphasize the conflict between the qualitative and the quantitative, or that we are very critical of the latter, or ignore research taking a quantitative approach. Quantitative research is drawn upon where it is recognized to be of value in addressing certain questions. However, the approach taken is interpretative.

The book combines research and textbook ambitions. In other words, the aim is to present an overview of the field and to introduce gender perspectives while still aiming to make research contributions, adding new critiques, ideas and theoretical frameworks to existing knowledge. Theoretical research contributions are more prominent in the final sections of the book.

The book is Western-international in scope in the sense that we utilize literature and examples from a variety of countries. We do not aim for constant comparisons. A restriction is that throughout the book, with a few minor exceptions, we only address highly (post-) industrialized countries, similar to our own. We assume that most of what we are saying is of relevance for Anglophone and Western European countries – although variations between these (and, of course, variations within

countries) should be borne in mind. We believe that the situation in very different cultural parts of the world may motivate other themes and other kinds of analysis and possibly other kinds of frameworks than those of most relevance for Western working life and organizations. Many of the problems salient in the latter may appear as irrelevant and almost of a luxury nature in countries where the situation of females is extremely worse than in the West and other comparatively progressive countries. Issues like female leadership and the use of poststructuralism may for example be less relevant in countries where male domination is almost total and takes crude forms. As authors, we live and work in Scandinavia, which presumably influences our text in various ways. We try to be sensitive to ethnocentricity in our approach. We frequently remind the reader – and ourselves – that empirical studies must be considered in terms of where they come from and the specific empirical terrain they cover. For example, US female managers in the l980s must be understood as such, rather than female managers per se. Given theoretical fashions and preferences in different countries, in particular, the dominance of positivism in the top US journals in the field of organization studies, this too needs to be considered in the nature of knowledge that dominates the field (Hardy et al., 2001).

In the book we have given priority to certain areas, especially gender division of labour, work and organizational cultures, identity, masculinities and femininities, work orientations, power, socialization, leadership and promotion patterns. Some areas are included but receive less attention, including sexual harassment, unpaid work, family and work, race and ethnicity, sexuality, and earnings. We do not cover institutional conditions such as labour markets, state policies, unions, taxes, etc. (see McCall, 2005, for a review). We also devote little explicit space to how planned change may be accomplished, although it will be clear that we have greater faith in consciousness raising and learning than in efforts to accomplish changes from above through the use of for example, quotas. The book reflects our interests, competences and societal context, but also the wish to achieve sufficient depth, which makes it difficult to cover 'everything'.

The outline of the book

Above we discussed why and when to use a gender perspective on organizations. In the following chapter we will outline the different perspectives found within gender research. This field of research has become increasingly complex. The traditional view focusing almost exclusively on women as a neglected group or category within organizations has been replaced by a situation where several perspectives compete and where few assumptions can be taken for granted or left unchallenged.

In Chapter 3 we will deal with gender segregation, the horizontal and vertical division of labour. We will discuss the phenomenon of gender labelling – how jobs and tasks are defined not as open or neutral in terms of gender, but as masculine or feminine, and why male jobs tend to be more valued and, in particular, are better paid than female. But why is division of labour according to gender and gender segregation still common, and why have so few women reached top-level positions? These are questions we will explore in some depth in subsequent chapters.

In Chapter 4 we address how constructions of masculinities and femininities permeate social life, and guide and constrain people's behaviour. Arguably, understanding masculinities and femininities is an important key to understanding gender division of labour and other organizational phenomena. This chapter elaborates on the possibilities and problems of using these terms, which are then employed in the subsequent chapters to address various key themes.

Chapter 5 then deals with identity. How identity is gendered – self-understandings of being a man or a woman, or a particular kind of man or woman – is a key theme in order to understand gender constructions and how people 'do gender'. Of course, it is also of interest to consider how identity may be non-gendered, i.e. when people are less bothered about defining themselves in gender terms, e.g. when other identifications and self-understandings are central at work. (An individual may feel more like a PhD student or a biologist than a female, during the work day in a laboratory.)

In Chapter 6 we treat organizational culture in terms of gender and also discuss the construction of masculinities (and femininities) in specific organizational contexts. We will explore how rites, material expressions of culture and language reflect and actively construct gendered meanings. As masculinity is the dominant characteristic of work functions and cultures in most organizations, there is less focus on femininity.

In Chapters 7 and 8 the focus is on women in management, especially promotion and leadership. While Chapter 7 summarizes the development of, and current research situation on, women in management, the subsequent chapter reviews contemporary assumptions and ideas about women in management from a four-way perspective. We look at some alternative positions in accounting for women's leadership style, difficulties encountered by women in attaining managerial jobs and some of their problems, such as a high stress level, when working as managers.

In Chapters 9 and 10 we discuss the field of gender and organization from a broader perspective, treating organizational issues on the border between gender and other critical perspectives. We discuss some basic problems in gender organizational studies and suggest some ideas for an organization analysis that is sensitive to oppositions, ambiguities and local variations in different organizations. We also touch upon how gender studies may avoid being ghettoized and cut off from mainstream concerns – still neglecting issues of gender. Moving to something in between gender-blind and gender-one-eyed understandings of organizations is seen as a vital task. Finally, we also further address process aspects on gender, reminding the reader about the need for a situation-sensitive and interpretive perspective where we recognize the limits of static ideas – like the one of a fixed gender system or a patriarchy – and look more at the many faces and dynamics of gender in organizational context.

Notes

1   A similar reasoning can be made about ethnic minorities and people with a working class background. Corporations benefit from meritocracy but also from people being willing to adapt to low wages, routinized work, the latter being facilitated by understandings and expectations taking segregation along gendered, ethnic and class lines as 'natural'.

2 Sex and gender are overlapping concepts. Sex is typically seen as referring to biological sex, i.e. the fact that nature produces people as men and women. Gender refers to how men and women are being formed through social and cultural processes.

3 As life expectancy has to do with what conditions we live under, we might expect a change in this pattern, if and when the work and life situations of women and men become more similar.

4 Another issue is how women cope in these positions. Their situation is not necessarily gender-neutral. They may encounter gendered situations, which may affect how they can operate (e.g. Billing, 2006).

5 Lathund om Jämställdhet, 2006.

6 One may argue that capitalism, or at least certain versions of it, carries a heavy ingredient of male domination and that gender equality would mean abandoning or domesticating capitalism, making it less raw and brutal. Capitalism cannot, however, be reduced to male domination, but needs to be explored also in non-gendered terms.

7 An exception from the trend is Baum (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Organizations* (2002), where 15 of 57 contributors are females, but where gender is mentioned on two out of 900 pages. (This also illustrates that female researchers do not necessarily express any interest in gender and that the presence of women does not have to have implications for the putting forward of gender-relevant themes or perspectives. Why should they, anyway?)

2
Different Perspectives on Gender

In the previous chapter we argued for taking a gender perspective in understanding organizations and also touched on some of the main problems with such an approach. This chapter presents some different perspectives that can be taken in understanding gender and organizations, and considers their respective contributions as well as problems and difficulties.

Gender studies are dominated by feminism – or maybe more accurately, feminism*s* as it is anything but a unitary concept. There are various opinions about how this broad orientation should be defined. Most authors emphasize that feminist theory critically addresses the subordination of women with the aim of seeking an end to it. As Weedon (1987: 1) comments: 'Feminism is a politics', and should be seen as synonymous with critique and change. Feminist theorizing is directed at the creation of knowledge not only to study the world but to change it (Stanley, 1990). Similarly, Chafetz defines a theory as feminist 'if it can be used (regardless by whom) to challenge, counteract, or change a status quo which disadvantages or devalues women' (1989: 5). Historically, feminism is connected to the struggle for women's economic, social and political independence. It goes beyond theory and research as it also refers to political and social practice. Here we are mainly interested in theory and research, so feminism should be read as feminist studies in this book, unless otherwise specified. Contemporary feminists also emphasize (not without tensions, as we shall see later) the importance of considering other forms of oppression, in particular, through class, race and ethnicity, and sexuality. A key concept here is intersectionality, referring to 'the simultaneity and linkages of oppressions in the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, etc., aiming to understand these as processes and outcomes in the context of social structuring' (Calás and Smircich, 2006: 305).

We prefer to use the concept gender studies rather than feminist studies for several reasons. One is about research politics. Although along with critical theorists, including feminists, in general, we advocate the view that research should be socially committed to fight injustice and irrationality, we also believe that research is more than a tool for political activism. Political awareness is a key quality of reflexive research. However, to a priori take the side of what is constructed as one category (which is seen as sharing a particular interest) seems premature. The primary purpose of research – to find out what is going on – becomes subordinated to what is perceived as benefiting a specific group (in this case women). Research and theory should be

politically relevant and practically useful, but to see research as directly oriented to advantaging or up-valuing women (as the citation of Chafetz above seems to imply) is narrow and may potentially lead to biased and by political assessments controlled knowledge production. Knowledge then easily becomes constructed in ways to benefit the cause. Key virtues such as honesty, curiosity, carefulness and caution may suffer. In addition, there is the problem of who is to determine how the social world should be changed and which part of status quo disadvantages or devalues women. Researchers should carefully reflect upon this, be aware of arrogance and elitism and show considerable openness about whether their views are the 'correct ones' and not only the politically correct ones.

Perhaps even more important is that gender relations widens the debate to consider not only female issues, i.e. the objective of gender studies is not necessarily solely to support the presumed interests of all or some women and to deal with what is seen as disadvantaging (many or some) women. More diversified aspects of gender are also called for, including the study of men and masculinities. We are critical, therefore, of the tendency to equate gender with women and women's concerns alone. In doing so, maleness is ignored and remains invisible (or treated at a distance, as the Other, that can be written off quite easily) and gender relations are unquestioned and overlooked. In addition, a focus on feminist studies rather than gender studies is also problematic, as we will elaborate below, as it tends to treat 'women' as a robust and unitary category. Diversity within the category means that it is not always obvious how certain conditions relate to the interests of different groups of women. Having said this, many versions of what is often labelled as feminism share our concerns and the somewhat one-sided focus on women can be motivated by the years of exclusion and marginalization of females:

> As long as the interests and practices of the 'other' gender are ignored or distorted, there will be a need for feminism to focus, disproportionally, on women and the constraints of assumptions about femininities. (Martin, 2003: 85)

Although we prefer the term gender studies, overlapping and being favourable to most views presented as feminism, nevertheless, in this and other chapters we often talk about feminism as it is a dominant concept and orientation within gender studies and other authors frequently use this label. In many cases, it gives a more precise description of the orientation of an author and/or a school. The overlap between feminism and gender studies is sufficiently strong to enable us to use the words as synonyms in many contexts, even though the latter term covers a broader area and indicates a more open (and less politically oriented and/or instrumental) attitude.

Gender studies seem to centre on three major points: (l) the notion of gender is central and relevant to understanding all social relations, institutions and processes; (2) gender relations constitute a problem as they are characterized by patterns of domination/subordination, inequalities, oppression and oppositions; (3) gender relations are seen as social constructions. They are not naturally given – an offspring of biology and impossible to change – but an outcome of socio-cultural and historical conditions, i.e. of processes in which people interpret and (re)create the social world. Gender is the

effect of social definitions and internalizations and reproductions of the meaning of being a man or a woman. Gender can therefore be radically changed through human action in which gender is redefined. Social definitions and processes, not nature, form gender, according to most feminists – although some also see biology as significant. It is the 'doing of gender' (West and Zimmerman, 1987), which is interesting rather than gender per se. This means that it is the construction of differences between women and men (girls and boys), which are paid attention to, differences that are not natural, essential or biological – but after they have been constructed as such they will easily be looked upon as 'essential'. The process of doing gender we also refer to as gendering, and this process might take place at different levels, the macro level (societal level), meso (e.g. in organizations) and micro level (in daily interactions). We deal more with these three levels in Chapter 3.

The label sex has been used to distinguish biological sexed bodies whereas gender refers to the culturally constituted forms of masculinity and femininity that produce the specific ways in which men and women are developed in a particular society; the splitting of the terms being an act of defiance by 1960s feminists to challenge biological determinism, at least in Anglophone countries (Moi, 1999). However, the distinction is somewhat unclear. Ideas about biology, too, are social phenomena and understanding biology is not just a matter of letting nature speak for itself (Kaplan and Rogers, 1990), a point emphasized by a further challenge to the culturally accepted meaning of 'sex' by the move away from viewing sexed bodies as an essence and more as something that is in itself culturally and historically made up (Butler, 1990).[1] Nevertheless, most people interested in gender take biological identity as a given point of departure and talk about 'men' and 'women' as unproblematic, easily identifiable categories. Sex thus in a sense dominates, even if researchers claim that their interest is gender. Therefore we do not rigidly stress the sex-gender distinction, but follow the general practice of using the former term when social constructions are not very central and the bodies of women and men are seen as the criteria for identification, while the term gender is used when emphasizing the more social and cultural aspects. We see the terms as overlapping, rather than clearly distinguishable.

Political positions in feminism

The various positions within feminism can be identified and classified in different ways. A common way is to classify positions according to their *political positions*; that is, distinguishing them according to the way they view society and what they consider to be desirable changes. Probably the most commonly used classification is to divide feminism into a number of approaches: liberal, structuralist[2] forms, including radical, socialist and Marxist, and poststructuralist/postmodern feminism. However, as with all forms of classification there are inherent limitations in their use, in that they tend to suggest a temporal and special fixedness and therefore underemphasize the dynamic and evolving nature of the different approaches to feminism and their classification.[3] Therefore, it is important to remember that feminism (and other forms of gender studies) is also a process, with each category identified being revised and reshaped.

Liberal feminism traces its roots back to the early eighteenth- and nineteenth-century political liberal pioneers who emphasized equal rights for all. However, it is normally associated with the second wave of feminist activism in the 1960s and 1970s anti-discrimination campaigns for sex equality. Liberal feminism aims at gender equality but does not seriously address or question any other aspects of society than those that work directly to negatively influence women and their opportunities. Ironically, the image that might be gained from the liberal approach is that it is concerned with only making upper-class women equal with upper-class men, working-class women equal with working-class men and minority men and women equal within the minority without considering other possible forms of oppression and injustices in society and their intersections with gender. Critical scrutiny of society is limited to those aspects that are seen to work against women's access to the same options as men and in the more obvious ways where men are oppressing women (e.g. sexual violence). It is as if organizations and societies are only 'accidentally gendered' (Halford et al., 1997: 7), that gender neutrality will be regained by the removal of discriminatory individuals, policies and practices, and that women's emancipation will be achieved by a greater inclusion of women into 'male-stream' organizations and organizational theories. For liberal feminists, gender primarily means strict comparisons of men and women and a commitment to reducing differences unfair to women.

Radical feminism rejects the male-dominated (patriarchal) society as a whole and claims that women – when freed from the dominance of patriarchal relations – should aim to transform the existing social order radically or even develop their own social institutions. This radicalism is based on the assumption that women have different experiences and interests than men and/or that women have radically different orientations than those characterizing traditional and contemporary patriarchal society. This idea of the 'united sisterhood' and a common experience of pain and oppression, or 'wounded attachment' (Brown, 1995) provide the main source of resistance and political struggle. Radical feminism does not aim at competing with men on equal terms or to share the benefits – top jobs, higher wages, access to formal power – on a 50/50 basis, but wants to change the basic structure of society and its organizations and make competition a less central notion.

Marxist feminism and *socialist feminism* study society in a critical way with the ambition of contributing to a radical change where new gender relations are included as central elements. Class and gender inequality are seen as by-products of capitalism and gender inequalities are examined as parts of a system of stratification in society. The main focus is on women's marginal position and weak bargaining power in labour markets, serving as low priced, flexible and disposable labour. Capitalism and patriarchy[4] are viewed as independent but interacting systems, which work together to oppress women (Hartmann, 1979). This is sometimes named dual systems theory. According to Walby (1990) there might be conflicting interests between capitalism and patriarchy, as women's entrance to the labour market potentially might undermine patriarchy. While liberal and radical feminism mainly focus on improving the living conditions of women – especially when it comes to career possibilities (for liberals) and

sexuality and economic independence (for radicals) – socialist and Marxist feminisms focus on changes in society in a more general way that will also benefit other unfairly treated groups, including those that are not restricted to only one sex (the poor, the working class). The oppressive features of capitalism are highlighted. Issues such as ecology are also taken seriously, seeing the exploitation of nature as an inherent characteristic of capitalism and its dominating, masculinistic logic of exploiting people and nature.

Finally, in recent years, *poststructuralist* and *postmodern feminisms* have emerged as a major influence in understanding gender. They emphasize variation and fragmentation and tend to discourage broad-brushed views such as the one about women's general disadvantaged position in society and the idea of a gender system. Gender is seen as unstable and constituted by discourse meaning that we cannot really say something about gender as such, out there, outside representations. We will come back to this stream in the next section. Sufficient here is to say that postmodernism has no clear or 'strong' political agenda, but is overlapping with and has inspired directions such as third-world, post-colonial, transnational feminism and queer theory[5] and these in turn have had a significant impact on feminist thinking. Sometimes referred to as 'third wave' feminism or postfeminism these approaches are seen as a radical departure from 'second wave' feminism, arising out of the feminist activism of the 1960s and 1970s. The key distinction is its distancing from a general portrayal of women as 'victims of oppression' or 'the second sex', whether that be in relation to a denial of equal rights (as in liberal feminism) or as victims of patriarchal/class/white power (as in the structural approaches). Politics within the 'post-fem' streams become much more local and situation-specific, and less focused on a broad struggle for universal women's interests. Issues around lesbian and gay politics are, for example, seen as different from many concerns of heterosexual women.

Post-colonial feminists aim to emphasize the importance of other forms of oppression – race, class and ethnicity – and their interrelationship with gender oppression in marginalizing women. They present a critique of Western forms of feminism for their privileging certain presentations of the subject, and certain visions of a utopia, that reflects a White supremacist position in the generation of knowledge. In espousing a politics, post-colonial feminism also challenges liberal and radical feminist accounts, seen as promoting Western ideals of emancipation, freedom and equality and imposing Western cultural norms, perpetuating Western hegemony (see Alexander and Mohanty, 1997).

Also having a significant influence on feminism in recent years is *Queer theory*, where, again, the united womanhood is challenged. Probably the most influential contributor to feminism in this regard is Butler (1990, 2004), who views gender identity as a performance, a fluid variable, shifting over space and time. Common to these postfeminist approaches is the eschewal of the metanarrative of women's fundamental oppression upon which structural theorists base their critique, emphasizing a more ontologically fractured and complex 'woman' and multiple and complex material realities. Transsexuality and the avoidance of clear categories like men and women and the inboxing of people into these would be a key concern.

Gender studies and epistemology

Another common way of classifying gender positions and overlapping with the classification discussed above, is according to the researcher's view on *knowledge* (epistemology). As we have already seen there are different ontological and epistemological positions, i.e. fundamental assumptions about the basic character of social reality and in what sense one can develop qualified understandings of it. The understanding of knowledge cannot be totally detached from one's political standpoint but other elements are also important, e.g. the understanding of the nature of language, of what research methods are the most appropriate and what kind of knowledge products are possible/most valuable: precise empirical description and/or testing of hypotheses, valid theories, insights, change-stimulating arguments, practical advice and so on. One important dividing line concerns whether gender is only an object of study or also a part of research projects' 'input' to the study, explicitly or implicitly imprinted in theoretical frameworks and methodological ideals. Research ideals such as objectivity, neutrality, and the ability to quantitatively measure may, for example, be seen as gender-neutral or strongly masculine. Perhaps, for example, the experimental psychologist wanting to reveal gender (inequality) unintentionally does so less through the focused study and more through the set-up and ideals of the study. A lot of research and general knowledge production can be paradoxical in this respect, sometimes triggering questions such as

- Do we study gender (sex) with a 'non-gendered' (e.g. inductive or in other ways 'gender assumption-free') methodological approach?
- Or do we study gender – as well as a range of other phenomena – with an approach that is unavoidably (explicitly or implicitly) 'gendered'?

In taking this approach to classifying feminism, we follow Harding's (1987) distinctions (but modify the terminology) between three main perspectives. In the first one, women and men are treated as rather robust categories; in the second gender is believed to be an organizing principle; and finally the third one is post-structuralist feminism. Of course, to reiterate, all distinctions and ways of dividing up a complex, heterogeneous and rapidly expanding research area are problematic. They inscribe order and obscure disorder, ambiguity and variety. Thereby they invite not only simplifications but also distortions. Combinations and syntheses are common and there are also orientations emphasizing other aspects than those focused upon here, for example, psychoanalytic feminism. We do believe, however, that Harding's distinction aids getting an overview of the field of gender studies.

Gender as variable – women and men as robust categories

The first line of approach views gender (sex) as a variable and maintains the category of women (men) as a relevant and unproblematic research category. The focus is on comparisons between men and women in terms of inequality and

discrimination with the aim of explaining such phenomena. Traditional (male-dominated) research within a number of different disciplines has disregarded women as a category and failed to pay attention to possible differences between the sexes (Acker and Van Houten, 1974). Within this perspective it is investigated if, in what respects, under which circumstances and to what extent, men and women differ in terms of subjective orientations (psychologies, ethics, values, attitudes) and how social structures and processes affect them. Various forms of gender inequity are measured and explained. Understanding gender requires that research pays careful attention to the specific conditions of women and does not take equality between the sexes for granted. Therefore, possible differences between men and women should be taken into consideration when we wish to understand different kinds of economic, social and psychological phenomena, ranging from horizontal and vertical division of labour, class differences, and salaries to work motivation, recruitment and selection, leadership style, and political and moral values. A large part of this research 'adds' women to the analysis of different phenomena.[6]

In the beginning of the 1970s, focusing on women and their conditions and how these differ from the conditions of men was a 'logical' consequence of the fact that women had been absent from or poorly represented in most previous research, both as subjects and as objects. Often, this approach shows a rather simple and unproblematic understanding of gender. It is very easy to classify people according to their (biological) sex, but defining the meaning and significance of this and finding out when, how and why men and women are treated differently can become a difficult task.

To divide women/men into categories has been and still is a dominating trend within organization theory, especially within the field of women in management (WIM). It has been carried out since the 1960s, according to some critics without much change:

> The majority of the women-in-management literature is still trying to demonstrate that women are people too. Consistent with the tenets of liberal political theory, it conceives of organizations as made up of rational, autonomous actors, whose ultimate goal is to make organizations efficient, effective, and fair. (Calás and Smircich, 1996: 223)

But other kinds of gender studies also use this approach as their starting point: for example, studies of gender wage discrimination or sexual harassment, and also studies that show how women are kept in an inferior position because of oppressive structures (glass ceiling), and studies which show that differences in attitudes can be explained by differences in work tasks and job situations for men and women rather than by sex *per se* (Kanter, 1977; Powell, 1999). In other words, what appear to be sex differences may be outcomes of other circumstances.

Critique of the idea of women and men as robust categories

This approach dominates in much research, especially within management and psychology. It has, however, been criticized for its assumptions about scientific

knowledge, the question of method and its rather restricted intellectual and political agenda. This of course overlaps with the critique of neo-positivism. Neo-positivism has been and still is an unexpressed 'premise' in a lot of the scientific practices that make women (as well as other groups) the passive object of science, and establish technical procedures as servants of truths and legitimizers of science as authority.

For example, this approach tends to operate with a naive view of language and the assumed ability that language can mirror an objective reality through the strict adherence to scientific techniques (Ashcraft, 2004). Critics claim that the results of trying to *measure* gender relations by means of questionnaires, observations of experiments or even (semi-)structured interviews are unreliable. Formulations in questionnaires and interviews are typically interpreted in different ways by different people. Therefore it is difficult to know the intended meaning of a given answer. Even minor changes in the way the research interview is framed or the questions are formulated can make a big difference to the answers received. Questionnaires assume that language is transparent and that people's experiences, orientations and mastery of language are so straightforward that they can easily be expressed as responses in pre-structured formulations chosen by the researcher. On most issues, language and personal experiences, as well as the very nature of social life, are far too ambiguous to make such assumptions realistic or 'accurate' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Deetz, 1992a; Denzin, 1994).

A second problem with most variable studies is thereby touched upon: the artificial nature of the empirical material (see for example, Graves, 1999). Sometimes experiments are seen as the most rigorous method. In human studies, however, such research involves considerable problems. Often it may better be described as the study of the behaviour of students in simplified and artificial settings. It is thus a question of what exactly can be learned from laboratory studies. What seems to hold true in the laboratory does not necessarily correspond with what might be going on in the outside world. We are not suggesting that experiments or survey studies are of no value. They may often give us some valuable input to thinking and may be seen as arguments for why a particular view on a social phenomenon makes more sense than another one.

A third major problem is that the researcher is often objectifying and/or 'controlling' the research subject.[7] By constructing a questionnaire or an experimental situation the researcher typically defines the issue at hand and a narrow range of possible responses, and thus 'forces' the research subjects to respond to the questionnaire or to behave in the laboratory within a particular set of constraints. Subjects are deprived of using language in any non-trivial way to describe meanings, feelings and cognitions.

A fourth problem is that the robust category view tends to 'freeze' gender and gives sex priority. Through assuming – even taking for granted – that men and women form easily accessible and unproblematic variables for comparison the entire approach reproduces and reinforces the categories. The distinction becomes normalized and naturalized. Even if specific research may or may not challenge such a norm and naturalization – e.g. if a group of women are seen as victims of pay discrimination – the self-evident and unproblematic character of dividing

human kind into 'men' and 'women' and assuming that these labels say something vital, means the reinforcement of gender divisions.

Having said all this, some of the advantages of dividing up people into men and women and comparing them should be mentioned. Our critique here mainly refers to the use of a variable approach to measuring phenomena that can also, and often better, be understood 'qualitatively'. But far from all phenomena are like that. Of course, there are important questions that can only be handled quantitatively or through strict comparisons of men and women (and other categorizations), e.g. broader societal changes on labour markets and in occupations, studies of gender (sex) and pay, discrimination in promotion. The approach encourages a kind of rigour and clear procedures for study. Compared to other approaches – to be addressed below – it is more disciplined and can counteract some of the tendencies to insert or project one's own preferred results onto the research project. Even though we believe that the robust category approach and the quantitative studies that go with it are too frequently used and are far more problematic than they seem, it would be foolish not to recognize that they have an important place in gender studies.

Feminist standpoint: gender as a fundamental organizing principle

This perspective stresses the importance of a much deeper exploration and theorizing of women's situation and experiences. Gender is seen as a fundamental organizing principle of patriarchal society; social relations (of all kinds) are heavily structured by hierarchical differences in the social position of men and women. This perspective proceeds from an assumption of the existence of specific experiences and/or interests of women that differ radically from those of the majority of men, at least with regard to how these experiences and/or interests are formed and expressed under contemporary (patriarchal) conditions. Many researchers are aware of the possibility, indeed likelihood, of variations in terms of women's espoused interests or manifest orientations across time and culture, but they de-emphasize this point in favour of shared experiences arguments. Below the variation of surface manifestations of groups of women, some common logic or basic themes are seen as uniting them. Widespread oppression and devaluation of women are regarded as central features of society and its institutions.

While the robust category perspective is broadly equating with the liberal feminist category discussed above, the fundamental organizing principle is generally more in line with the structuralist accounts of radical, socialist and Marxist feminism though it could also, to a certain degree be combined with a more liberal political perspective. However, again, it is worth reiterating that some feminists categorized as thus are not always comfortable with being lumped together within these labels of convenience. Within this perspective, theorists argue that women see the world differently to men and have certain values derived from their material, marginalized and alienated positions, that enable them to understand and relate to others in ways that

give them both an epistemological and political edge. Women are viewed as being more intuitive and in touch with the natural world, rather than agents of capitalism. Empirical research focuses on making the lives of women visible, viewing women as more than variables to be considered in comparison with men, presenting women mainly as victims, but also as active participants essential to the creation of their own lives.

It is assumed that there is something that characterizes women as such and that women, irrespective of differences associated with class, age, sexuality, race and ethnicity, have something in common. This unique and unitary femaleness is seen as originating from a variety of sources, for example positions in the relations of production (reproduction), a universal status as the second sex, where men are culturally defined as the first and as superior, a specific female sexuality, experiences associated with childbirth and childcare and/or a language that generates a certain feminine 'logic', common feminine values or a general way of relating to the surroundings (Brown, 1995). Specific qualities tend to be associated with women: sensitivity, nurturance, emotional expressiveness, social orientation and social skills. Most researchers are now sensitive to the notion of essentialism – the idea of defining women in terms of a universal, stable basic quality – and want to avoid biological explanations or lines of inquiry emphasizing the existence and social significance of biological differences *per se*. Nevertheless, biology is viewed as being of some significance, without having definite, determinating impact (Weeks, 1998). Cockburn (1991: 162) is probably representative in saying that we should not ignore biology and in arguing that 'the social practices that structure gender relations neither directly express nor are without reference to natural biological differences'. She emphasizes childcare as of particular significance for the orientation of women. Even though it is often downplayed by gender studies researchers, females sometimes appear to change their orientations and commitments drastically after childbirth, upgrading the role of children and seeing work and career as less significant, at least for a time (Fearfull and Haynes, 2006). For the 'gender as a fundamental organizing principle' researcher it is important to explore the meanings, experiences and orientations of women (in particular, it seems).

Many authors are not so interested in subjectivities but focus on an overall system or structure rather than individuals or specific actions and conditions when accounting for gender relations, e.g. gender system (Hirdman, 1988; Rubin, 1975), patriarchy and capitalism. Here the reasoning comes close to the robust view of men and women, but the interest is not in the detailed comparisons of men and women, as it is in the overall system that produces effects on gender.

Those writers who might be categorized as taking a fundamental organizing approach in their research represent a broad range of positions and within the category a complex and detailed set of debates have taken place over experience and the 'knowing subject' (see Harding, 1987; Hartsock, 1987; Collins, 1997; Smith, 1997). This approach considers the nature of knowledge and knowledge creation in far greater depth than the robust category perspective. All significant aspects of society are, in principle, seen as gender-relevant. The institution of science is – like all other sectors – heavily gendered, influenced by masculine assumptions, priorities and central notions, giving the enterprise a narrow and constrained orientation. The

predominant principles and rules of science are seen as essential parts of patriarchal dominance, preventing the exploration of vital social issues, such as an in-depth understanding of gender, including the experiences of women. The ideal of positivism – the dispassionate, neutral, objective, analytic, number crunching researcher – is viewed as expressing a masculine bias (Jaggar, 1989). Often, feminist researchers outside the robust category camp are not very eager to stress science as a central base and criterion for their writings.[8] Instead of arriving at the ultimate 'truth' or insight, input into rethinking and political consciousness-raising may be crucial guiding values. The question of whether women have different understandings of reality, whether they are attracted by, or would benefit from, alternative ways of creating knowledge, have therefore been raised by researchers, leading to an interest in feminist methodology (Olesen, 2000; Hughes, 2003).

This approach maintains that almost all research is regarded as biased (or sexist) if it does not take the interests, experiences and insights of women seriously. In terms of methodology, those giving more room for personal experiences and critical insights are usually preferred. The idea is that research founded on women's experiences and interests will have something special to offer. Harding, for example, states that the personal experiences of women are a 'significant indicator of the "reality" against which hypotheses are tested' (1987: 7). It is believed that the marginal status of women enables them to develop certain kinds of insights, that they can provide science with more adequate and critical descriptions and interpretations than is possible when only the point of view of a more privileged group, i.e. men, is available. The female experience 'is a more complete and less distorting kind of social experience' (p. 184), because women have a double consciousness: they have knowledge of the dominant (male) culture as well as their own. This perspective claims to provide alternative insights compared to those established, well known and, therefore, taken for granted.

This perspective is usually related to – and justified by – claims about women's concrete and unambiguous experiences of discrimination and oppression. In Ferguson's (1984) work *The Feminist Case Against Bureaucracy,* this feminist vision and transformatory project is set out. Ferguson draws on the Foucauldian interpretation of discourse to present a (radical feminist) critique of how women's voices represent a submerged discourse within the bureaucratic organization. Through deconstructing the bureaucratic discourses, and pointing to a different set of values based on what is said to be women's morality and individual identity and emphasizing caring and connectedness, an alternative mode of social interaction may be promoted, 'out of which a fresh form of understanding and action might emerge' (op. cit.: 155). Crucially, Ferguson is not arguing for feminine discourses to be incorporated within the dominant bureaucratic discourse (i.e. to become like men), rather it is to use the subjugated feminist discourse to render bureaucratic capitalism obsolete by challenging the truth claims upon which it is built. She dismisses the liberal approach – that an increase in the numbers of women in senior positions will change the nature of bureaucratic control, arguing that to succeed within the existing frameworks demands that women internalize the bureaucratic discourses. Women and men struggle within bureaucracy, Ferguson argues, but women more so because of their 'double disadvantage' of their subservient position within the

patriarchal institutions of home and family. Ferguson promotes a critical under-standing of the repressive character of modern organizations based on 'the concrete and common interests of women' (1984: 27). Similarly, Cockburn advocates a women's movement in organizations in order to strengthen women's position and self-confidence 'so that we can re-introduce our bodies, our sexuality, and our emotions on our own terms' (1991: 159).

Within organization studies, this perspective is primarily expressed in the form of critical investigations of organizational practices (e.g. Ferguson, 1984; Cockburn, 1991) or in studies of feminist organizations – organizations oriented to the needs and goals of women using principles and means viewed as feminist (e.g. Brown, 1992; Morgen, 1994). The latter include combining the private and the public, considering life as a whole also in the context of work, building upon feelings of community and using democratic means of coordination. Feminist alternative visions of organizing are proposed that emphasize a non-hierarchical, non-goal orientated organizational form, for example, cooperatives, or non-hierarchical sub-cultures within bureaucratic organizations, such as women's studies courses within the bureaucratic university. In a similar vein, Acker (1990) also calls for an end to the masculinist organization, promoting instead one where:

> The rhythm and timing of work would be adapted to the rhythms of life out-side work. Caring work would be just as important and well rewarded as any other; having a baby or taking care of a sick mother would be as valued as making an automobile or designing computer software. Hierarchy would be abolished, and workers would run things themselves. Of course, women and men would share equally in different kinds of work. (Acker, 1990: 155)

Critique of the idea that gender is a fundamental organizing principle

The main problem of this perspective concerns the ontological basis for claiming that gender is a fundamental organizing principle and the effect of this. In what sense is it organizing, and how is it fundamental? Is it in the sense that there is a rigid distinction between men and women as social categories and a privileging of the former and/or a tendency to divide the social world into masculine and feminine meanings and viewing the former as superior? And is gender crucial for one's experiences?

To what extent can, for example, women's experiences be said to be uniform? Based on ethnicity, nation, class, age, profession, sexual orientation, religion, and so on, women, and men for that matter, are very different. Different historical periods and different cultures change the notion of man and woman and the connected experiences. Even when it comes to individual backgrounds, lifestyles, lifecourses and political and ethical values, variations are considerable (Chafetz, 1989; Sum, 2000). Within a specific category of women, for example US white middle-class women in their thirties, some are heavily consumption-oriented, others less so. Some appear to think that children are the most important thing in life, while others see work as equally significant or as the prime source of satisfaction. Some women are pro-, others are anti-abortion. Even though the voting behaviour of women differs

from men in many (Western, modern) countries, females tend to be somewhat more leftist – possibly contingent upon women more often being employed in the public sector and benefiting from the welfare state – but they, like men, vary, from radicals to conservatives.[9] The claim of speaking on behalf of all or even a larger group of women is therefore questionable, sometimes even criticized for being an ethnocentric expression of white middle-class women (e.g. Mohanty, 1991).[10] Critics thus claim that feminist researchers have repeated the criticized universalism and narrow perspective prevalent in what they see as masculine research, only exchanging traditional notions with female experiences that are often understood to be generalizable and superior.

As a consequence, there have been detailed critiques from Black feminists (e.g. hooks, 1984; Brah, 1996) and sexual difference theorists (Grosz, 1994; Braidotti, 1998; Felski, 1997) giving rise to greater focus on issues of 'intersectionality' between different social groups to which we may simultaneously belong or be assigned, which presents complex and fluid experiences of advantage and disadvantage amongst women at different times and therefore greater focus on women's 'relational positionality' (Friedman, 1995). Inter-sectionality is then not just a question of how class intersects with gender (like the dual systems theory) but more complex as many more aspects of difference interlink. This means looking at different social dynamics and trying to understand how they work together and perhaps create multiple disadvantages (Bradley, 2007). An example is that upper and middle class women and men might employ cleaners and maids (often immigrants or guest workers) to help with housework and childcare and they might be managers over lower class employees and thus their class power enables them to 'buy themselves out of many of the problems other women might face' (p. 191). They might however be faced with gender trouble in the street, be harassed by other men and perhaps be subject to domestic violence. Another divider is age; many people have experienced age discrimination, whether they are men or women. Feminists are of course aware of the fact that the category of woman is heterogeneous and that gender never appears in the abstract, but in the context of a variety of social and material situations. Considering all variations is impossible. It is often hard to avoid, in research and discussions on gender, as on race, ecology and class, 'a flattening of the world and a silencing of other voices … all human characteristics, relationships, investments and viewpoints unrelated to the binary are suppressed' (Gergen, 1994: 61).

One way of handling the diversity problem would be a differentiated approach departing from specific groups of women, for example, elderly skilled British female factory workers or young black female professionals in the up-market US consulting industry. The experiences and perspectives of these specific groups can then possibly be defined and studied, if one is open to their unique as well as possibly diverse experiences and accounts. Also within a social category, diversity may be prevalent. For example, in a study of Swedish female civil engineers and MBAs of the same age, 55 per cent answered that they had felt themselves discriminated against (treated negatively) at work on at least one occasion because of their sex, while 58 per cent answered yes to the question 'Are there situations in which you think you have been treated differentially because of your sex in a positive direction?' (Wahl, 1992: 298–9).

(Of course the questions are independent. One may sometimes be positively, sometimes negatively treated contingent upon any characteristics.) These figures indicate considerable variation in terms of the experiences associated with gender at work. This is illustrated in research carried out among Swedish female physicians, in which one head physician said,

> I have little in common with 25 year old junior physicians with small children. (Sahlin-Andersson, 1997)

Of course, if a few other dimensions (age, industry, ethnicity, immigration status, family status, sexual orientation) are considered, some of the heterogeneity may be accounted for, with the risk of the attention to gender issues being weakened and the general relevance getting lost in favour of the details of the highly special situations. But if the interest is in a group of women (scientists in biotech companies, parents with mentally disturbed children, UK senior citizen voters, for example) there is an a priori tendency to read into and emphasize something universally female in the group being studied (e.g. being oppressed, communitarian, nurturing). In other words, even if a distinctive standpoint for women does not necessarily imply 'a general attribute of women as a class of persons', it is still assumed that there is 'a mode of experience that is distinctive to women' (Smith, 1989: 34) and that this indicates something close to universal. Even a more local version of studying female perspectives and experiences therefore has difficulty in avoiding some of the problems mentioned.

A problem with the idea of genuine experiences and in particular the idea that feminist research is an exploration of women's experience, concerns the vague, ambiguous, often contradictory and always constructed nature of experiences. Experiences are not just out there in the subjectivities of women, waiting for the feminist researcher, in a dialogue, to elicit and subsequently 'mirror' them in research publications. Experiences may be made sense of, constructed and told in many different ways. Depending on the assumptions and interest of the researcher and the dynamics between her/him and the interviewee, very different accounts (or stories) may be produced. As social identity theory shows, when an individual is defined/defining herself as part of a specific social category (e.g. women) the response is different from if the person is called upon in another identity (professional, manager, member of an organizational unit) (Haslam, 2004). Experiences cannot only be expressed in different ways but are also affected by the vocabularies and interpretative frames that guide how sense is made of the world and one's experiences. Experiences and accounts of discrimination are not independent of talk about gender inequality in society at large. The interaction and language used by the researcher in the interview does not so much tap the subject about her genuine experiences but is also productive in constructing these. The assumptions, style and vocabulary of the researcher greatly influence what comes out of the interview.

There is a tendency for some feminist research to give a strong privilege uncritically to women's experiences, seen as carriers of superior insights. Elshtain's critique of 'systematic know-it-allism' is relevant here. It is characterized by an 'unquestioned inner authenticity based upon claims to the ontological superiority of female

being-in-itself' (1981: 129). A similarly focused critique concerns the tendency to put a female way of knowing against a male, dominant version.

> There is no male science, or female science. True, the experience of women differs from that of men. I would rather state this differently: some women's experiences (in plural) differ from some of men's. Does this mean that their scientific methods have to differ? (Coser, 1989: 201)

A strong tendency to look for one perspective capable of explaining all oppression is related to the whole idea of assuming something universal about the situation of women and men as the point of departure for a general critique of dominating social relations. This is usually thought to be work/economy (capitalism), patriarchy, sexuality, childcare or language. The cause of the oppression is described as a phenomenon that has always existed and is relatively independent of limited historical contexts (e.g. patriarchy). The concept of patriarchy, embraced by many, appears to be particularly problematic in this respect, tending to function as a totalizing concept reducing historical and cultural variation to the status of different versions of the essence of patriarchy.[11] Even though since the beginning of the 1990s it has been more common to talk about patriarchies, i.e. in the plural (e.g. Hearn, 1993), it is clear that the essence of male domination over, and the victimization of' women is given a universal status and that this aspect is privileged over other ways of understanding society. Assumptions that 'men have political interests with other men' (Hearn, 1993: 150), and that the contemporary society is a patriarchy, 'a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women' (Walby, 1990: 20), first, underestimate the role of subjectivities – interests and orientations anchored in their ways of being rather than in abstract, elitist sociological categorizations; second, neglect enormous social variations within the categories of men and women; third, underestimate what the large majority of men and women have in common (e.g. interest in clean air, peace, good housing, safe transport, healthy food, low criminality, good schools, low unemployment, low inflation, preferences for autonomy and variation at work, close relationship with children, etc.); and finally, simplify the notion of 'interests'. This is, of course, not to deny that some men share some political interests or that (some) women are dominated by men.

It is easy to agree that being a male is a significant symbolic resource in many areas of life in general, and especially in work organizations, and that women and women's work are often devalued, but there are also situations and areas where men do not enjoy the privileged position that they do where formal power, status and income are concerned. Studying oppression, hierarchy and discrimination are certainly core themes for gender studies, but not the only relevant themes to study. We don't do gender only in hierarchical and discriminatory ways. Defining women primarily as victims of patriarchy freezes the intellectual project too categorically.

The most significant problem is that the broad-brushed view on patriarchy, men and women, means that variation, complexity and contradiction are lost from view. Aspects of organizations falling outside what is addressed by the dominance–resistance–victim vocabulary tend not to be seriously considered. The question of variation is exactly what the third perspective of feminism revolves around.

Gender as floating signifiers:
poststructuralist feminism

A third position views gender as much more fluid, processual, uncertain and shifting. This view is closely associated with poststructuralism (and postmodernism, but we favour the former concept). Poststructuralist feminism, sometimes shortened to post-feminism, questions the gender categories that were taken for granted by the two perspectives previously described.[12] As discussed above, notions like men and women, the male and the female, are no longer viewed as fundamental, valid points of departure but considered to be unstable, ambiguous and attributing a false unity (Flax, 1987; Nicholson, 1990; Weedon, 1987, 1999). One might rightly ask what is the common significance of 'woman' when applied to a 70-year-old, retired Brazilian schoolteacher as well as a 14-year-old girl from the New Delhi slum, a Norwegian female minister, a black single mother of several children in South Africa, a young Scottish female accountant and a lesbian upper-class middle-aged artist in Victorian England? There are hardly any interesting common social and cultural characteristics or meanings for these 'women', a poststructuralist would argue.

Even the biological sex of these women has different and maybe even contradictory meanings in different situations: in the gynecological clinic, in different employment situations, in political elections, in consumption settings, etc. Because of these considerations it is argued that unitary notions such as 'woman', 'feminine gender identity' and 'mothering' (like male and men) are problematic as they imply a false unity and suppress divergence and variety (Fraser and Nicholson, 1988). The general understanding that language is not simply a mirror of reality but has validity only within, and in relation to, a specific local situation–context, supports this standpoint. The meaning of 'woman' is not universal, but varies with the language contexts – discourses – in which it is used. Also other favoured concepts such as masculinity, dominance, hierarchy or discrimination may indicate a misleading unity – if the use is not governed by an appreciation of the local context giving these words some meaning in particular instances. Deetz (1992a), for example, stresses that the words 'man' and 'woman' do not simply represent a given reality 'out there', but communicate a certain way of making people aware of what is the case 'out there'. No use of these notions is ever neutral. The distinction reveals that the identity of the subject is constructed as woman or man, and that people are defined as objects with certain rights and characteristics. When the chain of definitions (signifiers) has become a net the woman can be viewed as mother in a family relation, as wife in a marriage relation, as a Scottish married accountant, etc. In every case, the way possibilities and limits have been defined by institutional dispositions provide the individuals with advantages as well as disadvantages. The distinction, however, remains arbitrary. It can be neglected or become irrelevant or questionable from one moment to the other, and the relational system of concepts can therefore be generated differently. The mother in a wife context gets a different meaning from the Scottish accountant one. And when eating haggis or flirting with a colleague at work, the wife, mother, Scottish or accountant aspects of the person – and how these are gendered – may be lost out of sight.

This understanding of language not only has consequences for addressing what is naively seen as specific and robust categories, but also has drastic consequences for our attempts to develop knowledge in the traditional sense of the term. Methodologically, all observations and interview accounts are contingent upon the vocabulary and distinctions applied and there are always alternative ways of representing phenomena. This means that social reality, as well as 'inner life', for example, attitudes and feelings, becomes problematic and difficult to account for in any self-evident or objective way. All descriptions tend to be seen as arbitrary and stand in an ambiguous relation to any phenomenon 'out there'. Therefore, the ability to say something definite, for example about feelings or values is now not accepted, at least not without reservation.

Female experiences – like all experiences – are therefore not seen as robust, language-independent concepts and points of departure. Apart from some aspects of anatomy the notions of men and women (masculine/feminine behaviour, work, etc.) are generated and defined in various ways in different situations. It is argued that 'the most important single progress within feminist theory is the fact that gender relations have been questioned. Gender can no longer be viewed as a simple and natural matter of fact' (Flax, 1987: 627).

Poststructuralism is an intellectual movement – or rather, several rather heterogeneous streams – that has been extremely influential within social studies since the late 1980s. The understanding of language, individuals, how science works (or doesn't work) expressed in poststructuralism and related writings (particularly by Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard) has had a significant influence on parts of gender research. Many maintain that there is a considerable overlap between a poststructuralist perspective and a feminist position (Flax, 1987; Nicholson, 1990). Like the poststructuralists and many others prior to them, feminists have also revealed the political power of science and argued against the illusion of objectivity and neutrality.

The perspective introduces a general scepticism as to universal understandings whereas differences and variations become central notions. Any attempt at a true or ultimate understanding is rejected, as are most uses of statistics, based on the idea that representing reality in numbers indicating 'the truth' means that diversity is suppressed. In opposition to the other perspectives, poststructuralism questions the idea of finding a universal ground for reason, science, progress or even the subject. The feminist search for 'truth' is seen as just one more attempt to conquer reality, preventing researchers from addressing ambiguities, diversity and fragmentation and understanding how reality is rhetorically constructed rather than discovered by social researchers. Rather than developing valid knowledge based on a firm methodological standpoint or a strong political commitment, sensitive listening and providing space for alternative voices is celebrated in poststructuralism.

As opposed to other gender researchers poststructural feminists stress the arbitrariness and vulnerability of social constructions. Gender as a label and a guideline for identity and experiences is viewed as imposing a view on the world. Gender identity and gender-related ideas about social and individual phenomena must therefore be understood as dynamic, indeterminate phenomena. Static and specific definitions and correlations are of no use and must be replaced by such questions as: what is, in the local situation, defined as masculine and feminine? What does

such labelling obscure? What is the significance of these definitions when it comes to creating and recreating subjectivity, that is, the feelings, cognitions and self-image of a person? In other words, what are the effects of language use? All answers must be understood as uncertain and tentative, not only historically limited, but also locally oriented. Gender and gender relations differ at different times and places. To repeat, 'men' and 'women' – like other signifiers – have only a precarious, temporal meaning tied to the context in which these words (signifiers) are used, according to poststructuralists.

The question: 'How do we put together the myriad standpoints of women?' (Acker, 1989: 78) is important. Of course this could be read as calling for suggestions how this should be accomplished, the worthwhile task then being to put it all together. From a poststructuralist perspective this question should be given a critical meaning, not intended to search for a positive answer, but to encourage critical reflection on how this is actually done, that is, how order is created and fragmentation suppressed. The poststructuralist avoids or minimizes putting standpoints together, actually being highly sceptical about the very idea of there being specific (stable) standpoints. Instead of hiding the diversity, the myriad should be taken seriously and demonstrated in research texts.

For poststructuralists the gender perspective cannot be specifically related to men and women in organizations. Instead, discourses about men and women – as expressed and constituted in the use of language – become central. A discourse may be defined as a set of statements, beliefs and vocabularies that is historically and socially specific and that tends to produce truth effects – certain beliefs are acted upon as true and therefore become partially true in terms of consequences. Different discourses produce different effects. There are no independent objective truths existing 'before', or 'independent of' a discourse.

Viewed as an important phenomenon in society that saturates all cultural relations, fragmented gender relations and discourses may be traced in the basic structures of social institutions and our general concepts of goals, rationality, values, and so on. Gender can therefore be useful as a perspective on, or a metaphor for, understanding organizations, for example. The gender dimension could be stressed on a more abstract level than the actually existing relations between men and women; for example, one is not counting bodies or taking accounts of experiences as 'truths' or even valid viewpoints. Calás and Smircich (1992a: 227) suggest a radical reinterpretation of organizational thinking in terms of gender: 'We will examine how the idea of "gender" can become a strategy to question what is commonly presented as organization theory. We would also like to start discussing how this leads us to a different way of writing "organization".'

This kind of feminism disregards the level of the individual subjects and replaces the interest in forming essential ideas about gender by showing how discourse constitutes masculinity, or rather masculinities in organizations. Talking about 'corporate strategies' could for example be seen as a way of expressing/enforcing a masculine identity by using terminology from the military (Knights and Morgan, 1991). This kind of research strategy avoids the problem of defining men and women based on biological criteria, and also bypasses the assumption that there are experiences tightly bound up with this biological equipment. To the extent that

men and women are of interest to study, it is the discourses in which they are constituted that are relevant to explore.[13]

The purpose of research is thus not to develop 'truths', but to show the contradictions and problematic claims of efforts to establish truths, to open up and destabilize cultural meanings and beliefs that appear too rigorous and unproblematic. Discourses defining 'women' and thus tying and subordinating these subjects to this signifier – locking subjects into the fixed identity of being a 'woman' – are critically examined.

Within the general commitments of poststructuralism – giving privilege to language, diversity, fragmentation and the local – one may distinguish between a *strong* and a *weak* version. The former pays exclusive attention to a discursive level, where the social reality is cut off and sceptical analysis of rhetorical claims is made in texts. All accounts – interview statements, conversations in everyday life, academic texts – may be seen as texts to be analysed in terms of structure, how claims are supported by rhetorical moves and undermined by contradictions, repressed meanings and alternative representations. Gender is a text. This branch, here broadly defined, is called deconstruction and aims at showing the false robustness of claims (e.g. Calás and Smircich, 1991; Martin, 1990, 2000). It might be viewed as a rather purist approach, antithetical to empirical work and empirical claims, at least as this is normally understood.

The weaker (or moderate) version sees language as precarious and loosely coupled to social reality but maintains an idea of some relation, although an uncertain one, between words and a social reality beyond language. Texts may throw a certain light on social conditions. Something 'out there', apart from language use, 'exists'. Representation in texts is possible. Ideals such as fragmentation, diversity and an emphasis on the local means that one holds back strict theorizing and the prospect of generally valid points, including universal concepts (class, race, men, manager, women). Empirically oriented work takes the accounts of interviewees seriously, but these are seen as multifaceted and context-dependent, not arising from a uniform subject, mirroring genuine experiences and viewpoints. Accounts have a narrative quality, following their own logic of story telling. Discourses form the subjects' experiences and accounts, which are open for a variety of representations (descriptions) and interpretations. For the purpose of the present book, it is the weaker or milder version of poststructuralist feminism that is of relevance (cf. Fraser and Nicholson, 1988). Such 'mild' poststructuralism then becomes close to a process- and multiple meaning-oriented version of interpretation (Alvesson, 2002b).

Critique of poststructuralist feminism

The poststructural critique has turned upside down a number of dominating ideas within gender research, destabilizing meanings fundamental to feminism's political and theoretical project. It has highlighted the role of language in shaping our understandings of reality and illustrated therefore the instability of meanings and the power relations involved in their construction. It is especially popular among those who take an interest in theoretical and philosophical questions rather than in empirical or political issues. There has been considerable resistance towards poststructuralism

within some feminist circles, where the central tenets of poststructuralism are viewed as a fundamental challenge to identity politics (politics based on identification with a specific, disadvantaged social category) and praxis that lie at the core of feminism. This critique draws attention to a number of tensions when feminism meets poststructuralism, in relation to the subject 'women', privileging concerns over language and text over material situation and experience and feminist praxis and change.

In consideration over the loss of the subject, one line of critique maintains that the ideal of diversity and variation is strongly exaggerated. Most researchers now probably accept that it is not reasonable to consider our universalized and abstract notions of gender, reproduction, sexuality, marriage, man, woman, etc., to be adequate when applied to a wide range of different cultures, groups in society, historical periods, etc. But this does not exclude some generalizations, which could be relevant or even necessary in order to say anything of any interest.

> In our determination to honor diversity among women, we told one another to restrict our ambitions, limit our sights, beat a retreat from certain topics, refrain from using a rather long list of categories or concepts, and eschew generalization. I can think of no better prescription for the stunting of a field of intellectual inquiry. (Martin, 1994: 631)

Bordo (1990) also finds the emphasis on diversity problematic as it easily leads to a mechanical and coercive requirement that all enlightened feminist projects should take race, class and gender seriously. One cannot include many axes and still preserve analytical focus and argument, she argues. In addition, the ideal of diversity would mean that research does not stop with adding class and race to gender. The list of what diversity may draw attention to is endless: sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, family conditions, and occupation ... these categories may also, and quite contrary to poststructuralist ideals, be seen as unitary, macro, a priori. Discourses involving these categories may, from a poststructuralist point of view, call for deconstruction – showing the fragile and contradictory nature of the way they are used – rather than be understood as positive and authoritative guidelines for what should be explored.

Another criticism is that the importance of language is overestimated at the expense of empirical studies (as conventionally defined). Gender is being reduced and considered as 'nothing but' a discourse on men and women; all that can be done, therefore, is to destabilize ideas and terms. It is difficult to maintain that anything 'is' in any 'positive' sense, that something is actually the case. No statements claimed to convey truth are accepted as such, but are treated as claims always less robust than they appear to be. This way everything that is being said is viewed as contingent upon a very specific point of view and use of a specific language. At least the stronger forms of poststructuralism could be seen as expressing a kind of language reductionism, overprivileging the linguistic aspect.

Researchers more inclined towards empirical research have found poststructuralism unhelpful, not to say destructive (Stanley and Wise, 2000). Much energy has been devoted to both exploring and defending the nuances of different critical positions and increasingly such theorizing has become enshrined in 'texts', endlessly 'poured over like chicken entrails' (Stanley and Wise, 1993: 24). Concern

with the discursive construction of reality and identity has seemingly turned the attention away from central concerns about material oppression and has led to an apparent practical, political and ethical paralysis (McNay, 1992). A key focus on these concerns is the move from feminist activism to academic debates. Stanley and Wise (2000) lament the increased self-interested 'language games', where the 'data' is increasingly the writing of other feminist theorists rather than social phenomena. The line between productive text critique and navel-gazing can, however, be thin. Too thin, according to critics.

The demand for change in material and social relations upon which feminism has been grounded clashes with poststructuralist feminism's emphasis on the disassociation of struggle from a prescribed end goal. The debate here centres on whether a transformatory politics can still sustain a unified utopian vision, given the recognition of multiple voices within feminism. Much of the critique of poststructuralism concerns its (lack of clear or focused) political implications. Identifying suffering and problems 'out there', for example, in organizational life, and suggesting lines of thinking improving the life conditions of people is discouraged by poststructuralist thinking. This may be subversive in problematizing and deconstructing dominant discourses, thus opening the way for alternative ways of relating to the world. But poststructuralism may equally well be used against observations and accounts of discrimination, suffering and injustice. Any form of critique with a claim to express the truth or a better judgment may be disarmed.

In practice, most feminist poststructuralism in social science avoids the extreme poststructuralist position that totally ignores humans as beings of flesh and blood, rejects any claims about the objective existence of a system or a pattern and regards all accounts of oppression and injustices as mere linguistic expressions (truth claims to be targeted for deconstruction). Instead, most researchers have some interest in political issues and in promoting change. Fraser and Nicholson (1988) are inspired by poststructuralism and criticize mainstream feminist research, but find that studies making empirical claims are legitimate and reasonable if they are aware of and acknowledge their historical and contextual limits; that is, if they avoid the problem of overgeneralizations and fixed categories. They thus adhere to a 'soft' or 'weak' version of poststructuralism. Its relevance for social research is thus maintained but the approach easily becomes a bit muddled. Sometimes authors move between a strong and a weak version in an inconsistent way and may be accused of ontological gerrymandering. This mixture of the philosophical position and a more robust feminist perspective addressing reality 'out there' – although a reality that is constructed by the researcher and open to a variety of representations and viewpoints – is a common attitude among feminists who take an interest in poststructuralism (e.g. Weedon, 1987). The risk of becoming deeply mired in philosophical contradictions, inconsistencies and conundrums, however, is ever present within this position.

A critical–interpretive perspective

The three perspectives, discussed in this chapter and outlined in Table 2.1, highlight different and important dimensions of gender research. The most central differences

Table 2.1 Comparing the perspectives

Politics	Conception of knowledge ideal		
	Robust truth, validation of theories/ hypotheses	Positioned truth, valid points, insightful arguments	Avoiding 'truths', resistance through opening up/deconstructing
Political engagement		Gender as a fundamental organizing principle	
Doubting, sceptically committed		The position of this book	Feminist poststructuralism
Cool, constrained commitment	Women/men as robust categories		

concern their focus on the importance of political involvement and their expectations as to the possibility of obtaining, by means of good research, dependable and valuable knowledge of reality 'out there'. The broad approach taken by the authors of this book is to subscribe to a middle position (with a slight 'down-right' tendency) in this table; a position that could be described as critical–interpretive. This critical–interpretive perspective should be seen as a loose, basic orientation rather than a distinct, clearly elaborated theoretical position. Used as a general framework this orientation is helpful in trying, as in the case of this book, to describe and comment on the field of gender research rather than promoting distinct viewpoints. The critical–interpretive perspective could also be the starting point of empirical research, but in this case it would have to be combined with more specific theories, e.g. on identity, culture, leadership, sexuality, etc.

The characteristics of the critical–interpretive perspective are influenced by insights produced by poststructuralist feminism as well as other modern philosophies of science, such as hermeneutics and variations of critical social studies (Deetz, 1992a; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000). A certain, not to say considerable, amount of scepticism is part of this influence. As opposed to poststructuralism, we tend to find that some degree of scientific rationality is possible. Empirical studies may be taken seriously, which does not exclude a concern for differences, variations and considering 'undecidabilities'. Moreover, we feel that it is important to say something of relevance to the world outside a specific, narrowly defined local context or being heavily focused on discourse (texts). Language is a significant and problematic theme for reflection in research, but it also offers the possibility of illuminating important phenomena and seeing them in constructive perspectives. Carefully used, language opens up more than it closes in terms of constructive understanding, although the element of closure (the use of a specific vocabulary discourages alternative understandings) cannot be neglected. Theory – in the

sense of a framework and vocabulary offering a line of interpretation and understanding sufficiently abstract to work across empirical situations – is desirable and necessary. Even though we as researchers (and practitioners trying to understand what is happening and doing something about it) are constructing the constructions of people, we can do this in a careful and insightful way, saying something valid about the social world. The risk of absolutism, however, should be handled first, by incorporating elements that allow for reflections on language, perspective dependency and one's own rhetoric, and second, by alternating between alternative perspectives and interpretations, letting these confront each other (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000). These two methodological principles overlap and facilitate each other. Rorty's (1989) ideas on irony are relevant in this regard. The writer should be aware of the fact that alternative interpretations are always possible and should therefore maintain a certain distance from his/her own writings – so that neither the writer nor the reader are led into believing that they are witnessing the final and ultimate 'truth' or the superior interpretation.

The characteristics of our favoured approach are set out as follows. An essential element of this approach is a disciplined social and political involvement, which implies emancipatory interests – although we are modest about its potential and well aware of the dangers of elitism and negativism of critical research (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996: Chapter 7; Nord, 2002). The critical–interpretive perspective, however, tries to avoid the desire to stimulate social change being one-sidedly privileged, and does not take for granted that research can do much more than suggest questions to be reflected on and discussed (without any clear-cut political objectives), offering arguments, illustrations and raising question marks (not evidence) for certain understandings. As opposed to many traditional feminist ideas of describing the 'true' nature of the patriarchal society in broader ways, this position is more doubting as to what an adequate description of the multifaceted and varied character of actual society would be. It is also more humble as to its own contributions. There are very few safe truths on the subject matter and these tend to concern relatively simple issues.

A critical–interpretive approach tries to stimulate critical reflection but is wary of invoking too dogmatic images in its use of what might be regarded as feminist political propaganda. Descriptions of women as victims and (many) men as brutal oppressors can, at times, be fair and important, but can also express and reinforce crude stereotypes – as witnessed in some feminist literature and studies of masculinities. Other, less negative, aspects of gender relations might also be considered worthy of comment.

The critical–interpretive approach identifies with unfairly treated groups and aims to bring forward their voices and interests. Possible alternative meanings are brought into relief, by studying different ideologies, ideas and discourses, and helping to clarify social phenomena and ideas in new ways, in order to provide a broader foundation for understanding and dealing with gender relations. Simplified and one-sided descriptions of asymmetrical structures of power and interests such as a universal notion of patriarchy are considered problematic. For example, expressions such as 'women's interests are subordinated to the interests of men' (Weedon, 1987: 2) are too general and thereby potentially misleading. Detailed

studies of, for instance, workplaces show large variations as to how gender relations are organized. This of course does not negate that Weedon's proposition could, in many specific cases, be relevant and that gender studies should be critical to forms of male domination.

It is thus important to maintain that gender relations vary considerably not only between different societies, cultures and other macro-categories (class, ethnic groups, age, profession, country), but also within and across these categories. Even within a group of white Scandinavian female managers in the same businesses there are considerable variations in terms of experiences, identities and motives (Billing, 2006). Research should be sensitive to these variations, and within organization research it could be relevant to consider how different branches, workplaces and occupations, or even different situations and processes within the same workplace, constitute and express gender relations. An interpretive sensitivity does not, however, imply stressing differences and variations as far as possible, as in the case of poststructuralism. Instead of avoiding universal categories altogether, they are used in a locally defined situation but with the ambition of finding patterns as well as variation in the local case. One should be very careful when generalizing or using universal concepts such as men, women, patriarchy, and use them carefully when motivated. Not only local grounding but also middle-range conceptualizations – universalizing across micro-situations but not across history, class and society – should be seen as a valuable ideal.

The interpretive perspective aims to achieve a 'deeper' understanding of limited empirical phenomena. Empirical studies are considered important even though it is admitted that they cannot provide us with any ultimate truths; results are always contestable and open for reinterpretation. Researchers – like other people – have a tendency to find what they expect. At the most, empirical studies can provide us with a basic understanding and input for further, more differentiated considerations and theories. Empirical material can also be used as a more or less strong argument for a case of how one should represent and understand a specific piece of social reality.

Another central aspect of the research approach is the element of criticism of ideas and meanings expressed within social groups and situations being studied. Instead of embracing a non-evaluative attitude towards the meanings produced by subjects, as most interpretive research tends to do, this approach allows for critical viewpoints that can stimulate reflections on ideas, values, experiences and practices. Critical investigations are thus not only directed towards abstract categories such as patriarchy, capitalism or class society, but also embrace the subjectivities and the 'politically incorrect' feelings and orientations of people. Challenging and stimulating rethinking of established ideas, theories and social practices is important.

A final point concerns language. Not only the choice of vocabularies, but also how one views language, is crucial in all research. As emphasized by poststructuralists, language is not a simple medium for transporting meanings; it is a system of differences where some meanings and relations between meanings are hidden. A word like masculinity (or leadership or work) has for example, no simple and absolute meaning. There is no one-way relation between the notion and some cultural or social reality 'out there'. This does not mean that the term is unable to describe a social

phenomenon or stimulate thoughts about social reality, extrinsic to language, but it is important to recall the hidden and suppressed meanings that give the notion an arbitrary and relative meaning. Masculinity presupposes femininity, which again presupposes masculinity. The meaning is unstable and dependent on context and perspective. Poststructuralists sometimes use the inability of language to mirror reality as an excuse for focusing on language alone, on deconstructing texts and in this way avoiding the question of extra-textual (social and material) reality as such. Conventional researchers tend to avoid the complications of philosophical questions on language by ignoring them and treating language as a tool for communicating 'facts', genuine experiences and abstract, general theories.

A critical–interpretive approach struggles to find its way between these two positions. Language is ambiguous, all descriptions and ways of talking about subjects and things are in a certain way arbitrary and liable to redefinitions. Language does not mirror anything outside, instead it re-presents. But language has the ability to accomplish shared understanding – if only in a precarious form. Researchers should therefore consider their use of language very carefully. Alternating between different vocabularies – using theoretical as well as empirical/low-abstract terms – could be a useful way of not subordinating the researcher and the reader to a particular vocabulary (and way of thinking). The ideal is to present theories and reflections in a way that generates open-mindedness. This is difficult to do and it must be seen as an effort and ideal rather than something that is (fully) accomplished. Dealing specifically and exclusively with language is, on the other hand, not essential to a critical–interpretive point of view. Language is important as a theme for reflection and as the object of study but less significant than the ambition of making empirical studies and generating interesting interpretations and theories. Language will of course be part of this, but it is not necessarily treated as the most important. It is definitely not seen as the sole and exclusive concern.

An important theme running through all kinds of research is that of defining its limits and the legitimate field of research. What kind of questions can it even attempt to answer? In this regard we think that the field of gender research should be carefully expanded beyond the limits of the variable approach. This expansion should be combined with critical considerations as to how and when notions of gender are broadened too far, so that they are made to be all or nothing. Assuming that gender is everywhere, and/or that it is useful to question everything in terms of gender, involves a risk of absolutism. Gender is often an interesting and productive approach to various phenomena, but sometimes other approaches may provide a better understanding. Intellectual imperialism and its partner reductionism represent a serious threat in all research, and gender studies are no exception. Some research and thinking simply neglect how gender always exists in a matrix of other ways of dividing people and society and that some conditions affect men and women more or less equally. Gender research should be, as with all research, accompanied by self-criticism, for example, admitting that the gender vocabulary is no more absolute or self-evidently reliable or valuable than other vocabularies, which sometimes have more to offer. The researcher may, therefore, broaden and enrich the interpretive capacities through developing an interest in other fields of research, as well as becoming acquainted with their approaches (Chapter 10).

Other ways of slicing the pie?

From a theoretical point of view the four approaches or perspectives (robust category, organizing principle, floating signifier and critical-interpretive) outlined above seem easy enough to distinguish, but researchers often make use of a mixture of two or maybe even all of them, or work with other ideas and points of departure. Especially within qualitative empirical research, approaches often appear in hybrid forms.

At a superficial level, elements from all the perspectives could be considered within empirical studies of specific research areas. For instance, when analysing labour market and organizational conditions the following questions could be raised. How are the sexes divided according to work tasks and social positions, that is, what does the horizontal and the vertical work division look like? How are privileges distributed? How do recruitment, selection and promotion take place seen from a gender perspective? Asking these questions mean making anatomy (bodily differences) the decisive distinction and accepting that women and men are robust categories. This, however, does not exclude a subsequent broader approach, and the results could therefore be followed up by another set of questions. Are some experiences gender-specific? What are the predominant relations of power and dominance for men and women? Do actual power relations, priorities and ideologies favour one gender rather than the other (normally men or a certain group of men)? Or is power unstable and multidimensional, including also female forms of power and male subordinacy, or are forms of power to a large extent non-gendered? How is gender being constructed by organizational structures and processes, that is, how are men and women created within the organization (how is their gender identity being influenced) by means of language, patterns of interaction and social practices? How can the organization – objectives, practices and values be described from a gender perspective? Can ideas, values, actions and practices be interpreted in terms of masculinities/femininities, for instance, carrying male and female values and meanings respectively? If so, what kinds of masculinities and femininities dominate and, if there is not hegemony, how do they interact? Why do we (as researchers and other kinds of developers of knowledge) define something as masculine or feminine, and what do we gain or lose from using these concepts? Is the language used expressive of gender bias? How do discourses on gender interact with different forms of subjectivity, and what is made possible or impossible by the dominant discourses and attempts to develop resistance against them? To what extent does it make sense to talk about dominant patterns? Perhaps fragmentation, inconsistencies and ambiguity should be emphasized instead?

This whole cluster of questions goes far beyond what could be asked within a specific study, but some of them could be combined, thus reflecting aspects of all perspectives. If approaches are to be reasonably consistent, however, they cannot be combined in an arbitrary way. There are profound differences between perspectives, which mean that the specific approach of an individual researcher is committed to one or a combination of two of these and not to the other(s). It is, of course, not possible to combine totally different worldviews or political commitments. In general, eclecticism, the free borrowing from different sources, easily leads to shallow and confusing projects. One cannot count and compare bodies of men and women

(in relation to other variables), nor focus on the experiences of women as carriers of particular insights and simultaneously view 'women' as a signifier without trying to give a stable and unitary meaning to 'women'. Normally, one main position forms the starting point and minor inspirations from other perspectives can then be included subsequently. If all the suggested questions are included in the same study, the variable idea of counting and comparing bodies of men and women can provide a general foundation, while the following more complicated questions aim at more central research perspectives. Comparisons of men and women (defined in terms of bodies) could give some ideas for the examination of female experiences and disadvantages as well as for the study of discourses on 'men' and 'women'. It is very rarely possible to include all questions in just one study, even an ambitious and longer one, giving priority to some at the expense of others is inevitable.

Summary and implications

We have in this book reviewed four overall positions within the field of gender studies. The first three, often used in reviews of the area, we label gender as robust category, as organizing principle, as floating signifiers. These correspond to what often is labelled gender as variable (where men and women are compared), as feminist standpoint (where experiences and crucial divisions in society closely following gender lines are highlighted) and poststructuralism (where clear gender categories are deconstructed). Our fourth perspective, which we label critical–interpretive, is partly a kind of synthesis of the other three.

We will in this book mainly proceed from the critical–interpretive position, emphasizing the level of meanings, beliefs and constructions rather than behaviours, structures, facts and 'truths'. We take the often precarious and shifting character of these meanings and constructions seriously. This means an interest in the more nuanced aspects of cultures, identities and interactions at work and in organizations. We will, however, not stick strictly to this overall perspective – which in itself is quite broad and open for various uses. We will also review and discuss research results and ideas from the other three perspectives and sometimes critically scrutinize and sometimes more positively build upon them.

The various chapters that follow are somewhat different in relationship to these perspectives, depending on the theme and the character of available studies in the sub-areas. The next chapter we devote to division of labour and here some ideas from gender as robust category and organizing principle are more salient. Also the two chapters on women and leadership (Chapters 7 and 8) – an evergreen in gender and organization studies – take the mass of studies discussing this from primarily a robust category viewpoint seriously. But here also critical–interpretive reasoning surfaces, and somewhat critically discusses the issues at hand. This line of reasoning dominates most chapters, although in the final chapter we draw a bit more heavily and provokingly on poststructuralist ideas when discussing how we can avoid reproducing established and conservative tendencies to take the categories of men and women for granted when addressing gender. There is thus some degree of eclecticism in this book, but this is hopefully seen by the reader less as a source of confusion or

worry than as a well motivated choice in order to be able – in a productive way –
to address a diverse body of knowledge on gender and organization and the wealth
of topics within the field.

Notes

1 Like West and Zimmerman, Butler sees gender not as an expression of what
  one is, rather as something that one does.
2 Structuralist approaches cover a range of different, often conflicting positions.
  For a detailed outline of their positions and how they relate to the study of orga-
  nizations, see Calás and Smircich, 1996 and Gherardi, 2003.
3 Another approach is to combine political, theoretical and epistemological
  dimensions as grounds for dividing up the field. Calás and Smircich (1996)
  do so and include seven versions of feminism in their review article: liberal
  feminist theory, radical-cultural feminism, psychoanalytic feminism, Marxist
  feminism, socialist feminism, poststructuralist feminism and third world/
  post-colonial feminism.
4 There are major controversies with regard to the precise meaning of patriarchy.
  Weber used it to describe a special kind of organization of the household in which
  the father dominated (and controlled) the other members in an extended family
  network. Millet (1970) was one of the first to use the concept, patriarchy, as a
  universal concept, independent of the form of production. All societies should
  then be seen as social systems of male dominance. Despite the controversies
  whether it is a relevant concept (in the Western world) today, most would agree
  that it refers to a society where there are hierarchical relations between men and
  a solidarity between men which maintains male domination. Some call such a sys-
  tem for a sex/gender system (Rubin, 1975; Hirdmann, 1988).
5 Queer theory is partially inspired by Foucault. It is critical towards binaries, like
  homo- and heterosexual, and prefers instead to see our (sexual) identity as more
  unstable (changing).
6 Apart from making women visible as a specific category within different empir-
  ical studies, it is also a question of pointing out important but disregarded con-
  tributions by women to, for example, politics, art, science and administration
  (see Keller, 1974; Lerner, 1986; Stivers, l993). Or it can be a question of draw-
  ing attention to activities and themes that are seen as mostly related to or prob-
  lematic for women, for example, household work, pay gaps, childrearing and
  sexual harassment. Arguably, certain research areas have been disregarded con-
  tingent upon the traditionally low representation of women in research.
7 Deetz (1996) talks about this as an elitist/a priori approach, which means that the
  researcher decides in advance and without listening to the voice of the field, about
  central categories, theoretical concepts and/or hypotheses.
8 This position they share with a number of different critical schools that view the
  dominating notions of science and method as conservative, technocratic and limited
  and try to justify their research approaches in alternative ways (Alvesson and
  Sköldberg, 2000).
9 In Turkey (2007) more women than men voted for the fundamentalist right
  wing party.

10   One may even go further and say that the level of representativity is often
      restricted to the quite limited group of white middle-class, leftist, feminist pub-
      lic sector professionals.

11   There is no absolute relationship between this position and the use of the con-
      cept of patriarchy. Many feminists do not talk about patriarchy and the con-
      cept may be used also by researchers not adhering to this perspective. There is,
      however, a strong connection between an inclination to capture contemporary
      society as a patriarchy and the adoption of the idea that gender is a fundamen-
      tal organizing principle.

12   Poststructuralism (sometimes labelled postmodernism – we treat the concepts as
      overlapping) is a theoretically and philosophically sophisticated stream. Our
      intention is not to review the core ideas in a way that does the complexities full
      justice, but only to summarize some vital aspects of relevance to social science/
      gender studies that maintain an empirical interest in social phenomena and do
      not move into literature criticism, philosophy or – something poststructuralism
      sometimes seems to border on – the esoteric. For reviews of poststructuralism
      (postmodernism), see e.g. Dews, 1986; Poster, 1989; Rosenau, 1992; Sarup,
      1988; Smart, 2000.

13   From a strict poststructuralist position there are reasons to open up and
      deconstruct the idea of the 'masculine' nature of 'corporate strategy'. This
      would mean showing the fragility of the notion of 'masculinity' or 'strategy'.

3
Division of Labour and Sex Typing

A key theme in the gender literature concerns the division of labour. One universal dimension is that men and women tend to work in different occupations and do quite different things in their organizations. The labour market in most (Western) countries is often characterized as being segregated, horizontally and vertically. There are few sectors and job areas where there is an equal distribution of the two sexes (normally defined as the minority group being at least 40 per cent) and it is common that men occupy around 90 per cent of the positions at the top.[1]

There seem to exist more or less profound ideas that certain types of work, education, career choices and positions are connected with a certain gender. Labour markets as well as work organizations are divided up according to gender, segregated into female and male work, and thus seen as 'natural' respectively for women and men to occupy.

The concepts of feminine/masculine are constructed as oppositional, dichotomous and hierarchical where the masculine is (usually) privileged. Hence, the division of labour into 'female' and 'male' work areas is considered to be a key element in the subordination of women in work and society. Women are more likely to work in the less secure, more precarious forms of employment, which are also characterized by lower earnings and fewer opportunities for training and promotion, compared with men (Giddens, 1989; Fine, 1992; Roos and Gatta, 1999).[2] Also within organizations there is a gender division of labour, horizontally and vertically. As we will see later on, ideas, language use and practices that depart from assumptions about gender differences contribute to gender division.

Most work is not gender neutral but is attributed some form of masculinity or femininity, either vaguely or in the shape of more specific ideas about what the work involves and the kind of qualities 'typically' demanded and believed to be possessed by a 'man' or a 'woman'. The present gender division is historically rooted in cultural systems of meanings and ideas about what is feminine/masculine (female/male) and then considered suitable and appropriate work for women and men.

In this chapter we are first going to present how this area is conventionally addressed in traditional theory, by briefly going into the historical division of labour, contemporary work, segregation and inequality, childcare and state politics and then we will discuss critically the different ways of explaining the division of labour, and later move over to discuss it from a critical–interpretive perspective. The nature of the topic – division of labour – invites taking gender as robust categories a bit

more seriously and moving further than just describing the number of male and female bodies in different occupations and in different job positions.

History: a few glimpses

Most cultures seem to include systems of meanings and norms prescribing different activities and characteristics for women and men. Women's work throughout the ages is described by Novarra (1980) as six tasks, which predate the money economy and which are necessary for the human race to survive and life to be tolerable, and these functions are still today women's main work areas. These are: to bear children; to feed them and other members of the family; to clothe people; to care for the small, the sick, the elderly and the disabled; to be responsible for the bringing-up of children; and to take care of the home (including making products of use value for the home). Men have shared, in varying degrees, the tasks, which are needed to sustain and continue the human race, such as farming, but our image of men's work is neither historically nor today drawn from the six tasks, Novarra argues.

In the pre-industrial era women and men both produced goods for the household and women also took care of the home. Work was then not regarded as separate from private life. It was possible to produce what the family needed for its daily existence. Although women and men's tasks overlapped, there were rather strict ideas about women and men's work within the specific community. What historically was regarded as feminine or masculine to a considerable extent varied from country to country and even from one region to the other and the cultural local meanings attached to the respective job tasks differed.

Within certain areas there were even taboos against the other sex doing the work. Men risked ridicule from women as well as other men, if they did women's work (Shorter, 1975). Besides, prestige was connected to the work men did, and men lost status and power if they did women's jobs. When women did men's work they were not harassed in the same way. However, it was difficult for women to achieve the status connected to men's jobs (Göransson, 1996).

The industrial revolution transformed the way work was done. The work of craftsmen, for example, was industrialized and the control of production was transferred to capitalists. The former self-employed farmers and craftsmen were forced to sell their labour on the market. Some parts of women's production of useful items in the home were now also to be carried out on a market-basis (e.g. textiles), first in the cottage industry and later in factories and many of these jobs were primarily reserved for (unmarried) women. In the early industrialized countries men became the large majority of the labour force while women's main responsibility was to take care of the home. The breakthrough of industrialism and capital's need for plentiful and cheap labour power then made it possible for/forced (mainly working-class) women to join the production process. Whatever the household produced earlier was now possible to produce on a larger scale because of the development of the means of production and of industry. Spinning, weaving, knitting, baking, butchering, etc. were done on a commercial basis. All sorts of consumer goods could be produced faster and cheaper than in the home. In the early

period of industrialization in many countries women and men faced unregulated working conditions – for example in England there were no regulations of the length of the working day and no possibilities for maternity leave. Protective labour legislation was eventually passed in European countries, in the late nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth. These provided women with some protection and maternity leave, and so on and limited the length of the working day. Because women's labour was indispensable both for industry and the proletarian household economy, it was important that protective labour legislation made it possible for women to reconcile paid work with family demands. 'Women's protection was not rhetorically linked to their working conditions, as in the case of men, but rather to their sex' (Schmitt, 1995: 128). The underlying discourse on women's work was then connected to their motherhood and family roles and thus confirming that housework and childcare were women's duties.

This legislation served the purpose of 'reconciling the competing needs of women and families to meet a broader set of social purposes including sustaining the family wage male breadwinner ideology; supporting a sexually segregated labour market; and enhancing the possibilities of survival for future generations of workers' (Kessler-Harris, 1995: 23).

Because the family was no longer a production unit and could not meet its own reproductive needs any longer, it was important to earn enough on the market to support the family. Women's wages were lower than men's and the latter became the main providers, the 'breadwinners'. A majority of married women became dependants and housekeepers and the labour force became predominantly male. Many middle class women only had paid work until they married. Then they were expected primarily to take care of the house and children. In countries where the family wage model was accepted by employers, it is believed to have asserted women's primary role as mothers and subsumed their role as providers (Kessler-Harris, 1995).

Capitalism has had a crucial role in maintaining, consolidating and reconstructing patterns of segregation and sex typing (Bradley, 1994). In the new industries (and in the public services) work was 'designed' according to one or the other gender (Göransson, 1996). Because of the lower social value accorded to women and their work, labelling jobs as women's work meant that there was an extra benefit for capitalists. Women could be employed more cheaply. Capitalists even benefited from men reserving jobs as male jobs, as that resulted in relegation of women to low-paid (female) jobs.

The status of the job was dependent on if it was regarded as a male or a female job. One example is secretary, while it was mostly men who worked as clerks,[3] it ranked high in the social classes. In 1871 clerks in the UK were almost all men, while in the 1930 women constituted over 40 per cent of the clerical workers, and the status had dropped from class I to class III (out of five classes), according to official rankings of occupations (Kirkham and Loft, 1993). Eventually it became a 'typical' women's job and the title was changed to secretary.

Dairying changed from being a female area of competence for many hundreds of years (in Scandinavia) to becoming a male job in the 1930s. One might claim that in both these cases, clerks and dairying, technological development played an important

role – but in one instance (the introduction of typewriters) it meant that the job was considered an (easy) woman's job. In the other instance the introduction of machines and the development of a more scientific approach to milk meant that the association between milk and women was eroded. Milk was no longer something mysterious, taken care of by women (like breast-feeding) and this inclusion of milk in a technological-scientific tradition led to a transcendence of the gap between masculinity and milk and seen as appropriate for men to work with.

A re-labelling of a job takes some time; it is not done in a matter of days. As a result of the industrial revolution (and mechanization) in Britain, men eventually took over former female specialities like baking, brewing and spinning (Bradley, 1993). The introduction of a new technique might also work the other way round, eventually redefining a man's job as a 'typical' woman's job. This clearly shows that the gender division of labour has little to do with biology but is historically constructed on the basis of historically changeable interests and assumptions. An interesting example is aircraft pilots after the First World War.

In both wars (World War I and II) women had access to jobs, which were ordinarily men's jobs in the combatant countries. Reskin and Padavic (1994: 51) cite slogans designed to attract women to blue-collar jobs 'if you can run a sewing machine you can operate a rivet gun'. They mention, for example, that women worked as bus conductors, and that they were building and flying cargo planes. When the war(s) ended women were laid off and transferred to low-paying jobs such as assemblers and clerk-typists and it was not until the 1970s that women generally took up what were regarded as traditionally male occupations (Reskin and Padavic, 1994). Although Bradley (1989) regards the two world wars as important challenges to sex segregation, because of the liberating experience in itself that women were able to demonstrate that they could do all sorts of tasks (from managing offices to maintaining railways), she concludes that wartime experience had little long-term impact on the structure of segregation. After World War II many women were channelled into service-jobs, and many employers (in the US) introduced marriage bars. Women were required to leave employment on getting married (becoming housewives). Married women again became dependent on their husbands' wages. Marriage bars continued for a considerable period post World War II with Australia, for example, not removing the bar until 1966 (Sawer, 1997).

The period of housewives culminated around 1950s in countries like the US, Sweden and Denmark, after which more and more women (including married women) had paid work. There was an increased labour demand due to economic growth and, in the Nordic countries, also to the expansion of the welfare state where childcare became the responsibility of the state. In the beginning of the 1960s around 40 per cent of Swedish, Finnish and Danish women were active in the labour market. By the 1990s this number had doubled. In Western Europe the number of women in the labour force differed very much, mainly due to differences in family politics. For example, in Sweden and Denmark married women have long been accorded individual rights and supported in their economic independence whereas married women in the rest of Europe have been (and still are) regarded as dependent on their husbands. Differences in the policies of the state combined with different

cultural gender ideologies have probably influenced especially mothers' participation in the labour market.[4]

The gendered division (of labour) today is the result of a long historical process, with women and men sometimes in reversed roles. The general cultural conceptions and expectations of the sexes are influenced by factors inherited from a time when the roles of women and men were more fixed. These still influence how we view, judge and treat men and women today, through cultural frameworks and identities that still carry the traces of old traditions of men and women doing very different things and being distinguished along often rigid lines of work.

At the same time, restructuring of the economy in the Western world since the 1960s towards expansion of the service sectors and improving the level of education for females, in particular, has lead to decline in gender inequality and a substantial increase in the number of women in managerial and professional occupations (McCall, 2005). But the total picture is still considerably distant from equality. Despite enormous progress over a couple of generations, there is still a strong over-representation of women among the lowest-paid, lowest-grade workers and generally the masculine is valued over the feminine.[5]

Contemporary work

There are now roughly equal numbers of women and men in paid employment, worldwide (Lopez-Claros and Zahidi, 2005). Within the EU three quarters of the new jobs created in the past five years have been filled by women (COM, 2006). This rise in the number of women participating in paid employment over recent decades has not been met with a reduction in the persistent gender segregation.

A very large part of the paid work women do today is allied to the traditional six tasks we mentioned earlier (to care for children, the sick, the elderly and the disabled, to clothe people, to be responsible for the bringing up of children, and to take care of the home, etc.) although many of these tasks in our part of the world have now to a great extent become professionalized, institutionalized, industrialized and commercialized. We can mention food processing, restaurants, hotels, textile industries, and nursing, social and health worker, teaching, furnishing, decorating and cleaning. Around 75 per cent of female workers within the member states of the EU are concentrated mainly within what is loosely described as the service sectors. Females predominate within the education, distribution and health sectors. One third of all working women are within these three sectors. For example within the EU around 40 per cent of women work in education, health or public administration, compared with 20 per cent of men (Fagan and Burchell, 2002). With regard to the last of the six tasks, taking care of the home, most women today feel and hold most responsibility for the home and for the children.

The early traditional division of labour contributed to the present sex typing of jobs or gendering of work in the late twentieth century. By the end of the last century most industrialized countries had a labour market that was divided into sectors according to sex. Women play a dominant role within the social security, health and service sector, teaching and retail trade while men play a dominant role within the technical fields, trade, transportation and administration, national

defence, etc. (Reskin, 1984; Bradley, 1989). Women's occupations have changed little in the course of the last century; the characteristics of them are surprisingly similar. 'Most have a strong welfare or "service" element or they reflect domestic functions directly' (Scott, 1986: 162). Gender segregation remains. Most industrialized countries have a labour market that is divided into sectors according to sex (Blackburn and Jarman, 2006). Women (and men) are under-represented in some sectors and some jobs whilst being over-represented in others relative to their percentage share of total employment. Sex typing of jobs or gendering of work continues. There is also a vertical division of labour. Women are poorly represented at higher levels in the organizational hierarchy. Within the EU women account for 32 per cent of managerial positions (Eurostat, 2008), and women hold about 10 per cent of board memberships and 3 per cent of CEOs of larger enterprises are female (COM, 2006).

In every country, women (in 'general') earn less than men. Within the EU, women on average earn 15 per cent less than men for every hour worked (COM, 2006). Women's lower pay is often explained as a result of the devaluation of women's work and it is believed that 'the more women in an occupation, the less both its female and male workers earn' (Reskin and Padavic, 1994: 9). These authors mention, for example, that in the US most dentists are male, whereas most dentists are female in Europe. In the US the wages are very high, whereas they are average in Europe. Pfeffer and Davis-Blake (1987) found that increases in the proportion of women in jobs as college administrators resulted in lower wages. Reskin and Roos (1990) show that although the loss of status in former male-dominated occupations is reinforced by women's entry it could for example be technological changes demanding different skills which start the erosion of the status and the lowering of wages. It is often claimed that a significant increase of women in a job will affect the status of the job and increase the differentiation within the field. However Wright and Jacobs (1995) found that an increase in the ratio of women in computer work did not affect wages, and Jacobs (1992) found a narrowing of the gender gap in wages among managers. They suggest that an integration of women does not necessarily result in a decline of the status of the occupation or in an increasing differentiation within the field.

We are faced with the possibility that there are no simple and straightforward explanations or universal truths about the relationship between a certain proportion of one sex and the level of wages. Similar situations (a high number of women and small wages in a job) may have different historically specific explanations and cannot be treated as identical. Although much of women's work is under-valued and paid badly, it might be other circumstances than just the sex of the workers within the area, which might have caused this effect.

Segregation and inequality

The perhaps most significant issue of gender concerns inequality, which is often related to segregation. Of course, this is not self-evident. One could imagine the two sexes being different and doing different things in the labour market, but being equal

in status and influence. But most would argue that horizontal segregation too, i.e. not only the hierarchical segregation (which is obviously inegalitarian), is part of the inequality theme.

However, the relations between gender segregation and gender inequality are complex and gender segregation does not always work against the interests of women (Rubery et al., 2001; Blackburn and Jarman, 2006). As we saw in Chapter 2, there are also many different ideas of what is meant by gender inequality. Some mainly consider body-counting (equal number of women/men in different positions). Others emphasize the imbalance between what is seen as masculine and feminine ideals and values (masculine values are favoured), and others again would consider other (additional) dimensions as part of a measurement of inequality, like the World Economic Forum (WEF), which operates with a gender gap index on the basis of five measures, which are considered important dimensions of empowerment.

In 2005, WEF launched the first 'gender gap index' that measured gender inequality in 58 countries (Lopez-Claros and Zahidi, 2005). In the study, countries were ranked on the basis of five measures: economic participation, economic opportunity, political empowerment, educational attainment, health and well-being.[6] In this study, the Nordic countries were ranked highest, with the smallest gender gap according to these measures. The Nordic countries are followed by New Zealand (6), Canada (7), United Kingdom (8), Germany (9), Australia (10), Latvia (11), Lithuania (12), France (13), Netherlands (14), Estonia (15), Ireland (16), USA (17), Costa Rica (18), Poland (19), Belgium (20). The Russian Federation is thirty-first. China is ranked thirty-third, Japan thirty-eighth, Italy forty-fifth, Greece fiftieth, Turkey fifty-seventh. Egypt is fifty-eighth, the last in the rankings.

The Nordic countries are characterized as 'strongly liberal societies, protective of minority rights and comprehensive welfare systems' (p. 10). This does not mean that economic participation is the highest in these countries. In Norway and Iceland, for example, women are ranked thirteenth and seventeenth in terms of economic participation (and second and third in the overall index). The authors then conclude that 'this is not necessarily the result of barriers to women's entry to the workforce, since it is certainly the case that women in some developed countries are in the fortunate position of being able to choose not to work outside their homes.'

Compare this to China (33) where women's economic participation is ranked ninth, but it falls down in the rankings in education (46) and political empowerment (40) and to the Russian Federation (31), where economic participation is high (third), but falls down on low political empowerment (47) and health and well-being (57).

New Zealand, Canada, the UK, Germany and Australia are considered 'woman-friendly' nations, according to the authors. Some of the former East European states score higher than the US and this is explained by these countries subscribing to a socialist ideology for a long time where the woman worker was an ideal (in industry and in the home). Thus economic participation, educational attainment and economic opportunity are ranked highly. However they fall down on health and well-being. The US is ranked the seventeenth, falling down on economic opportunity and health and well-being, having poor maternity leave provision and benefits and limited access to subsidized childcare.

Commenting on the poor rankings of Greece and Italy, Lopez-Claros and Zahidi (2005: 10) state the following.

> As is to be expected of countries notorious for their patriarchal cultures, Italy and Greece each perform particularly poorly on the economic participation and economic opportunity dimensions.

The conclusion of the study is that no country, no matter how advanced, has managed to eliminate the gender gap. The top ten are however regarded as more successful at eliminating the gap than others.

Much of the 'success' of the Nordic countries is attributed to the comprehensive welfare systems. However, comprehensive welfare systems with a gender division of labour with most women working in the public sector may mean less status, fewer possibilities for advancement and less pay than in men's jobs, which tend to be more in the private sector. However, recent job losses arising from economic restructuring in industrialized economies have been in male dominated manufacturing sectors, whereas the growth of employment has taken place in service sector employment, where women are strongly represented (Fagan and Burchell, 2002; McCall, 2005). There has also been a decline in employment in agriculture and heavy industries in the developed world. This has led some commentators to suggest a worldwide shift towards the feminization of work, defined as a move toward precarious, insecure and relatively low paid work. Therefore gender segregation needs to be understood within the wider context of developments in society (Blackburn and Jarman, 2006). Countries may score high on empowerment for women and at the same time demonstrate high levels of vertical segregation. Blackburn and Jarman's study suggests an overall positive advantage for women in societies where there is high gender segregation. For example, Sweden has a high level of horizontal and vertical segregation and yet (according to WEF) scores high on rankings of equality.

Childcare and state politics

Poor provision for childcare has long been highlighted as a contributory factor to driving individuals either out of the labour market or to lower wage part-time jobs. In Scandinavia, where public childcare opportunities are more generous compared with other European countries and the United States there is a higher participation rate on the labour market, especially among women with children under school age.

In addition high taxes (to pay for the welfare state which is also the major employer of women) have made it difficult to cope at least with what is considered to be a reasonable level unless there are two wages (or 1.5). Most women regard it as obvious that they should work and only have short career breaks when the children are small. This may be supported by state politics, for example, if taxation is based on the individual not the household. In many countries the family wage and the era of housewives has long since gone, not only as a material possibility but also as a relatively compelling norm and as an espoused preference among the large majority of women. The social construction of what is 'normal' and 'good' is to have wage labour or earn an income as a self-employed person, not to be a housewife.

Despite women's entry into the labour market, it is still women who are mainly responsible for the housework and care of children (when they are not in daycare). Quite a lot of women work part-time, one third of women in EU countries compared with 7 per cent of men (COM, 2006).

In some countries in continental Europe the dominant ideas still promote women as primarily housewives, dependants and childminders, and men as breadwinners. Many women face a double work-day and many choose the solution of a part-time job while the children are young. This double day, partly paid work, partly unpaid work in the home, has been discussed as one of the factors holding women back. But also generous terms for employees on parental leave appear to hold women back, as this is costly for employers and reduce women's firm-based experience.

> Somewhat paradoxically, then, the one country without paid leaves, USA, has a high level of full-time employment among women, considerable integration of women into male-dominated jobs, and rapidly rising levels of gender wage equality (although other factors explain the US situation as well). (McCall, 2005: 88)

Smithson et al. (2004) found that flexible working and part time working in the accountancy profession impact promotion and pay negatively for women. They mainly choose this option to combine caring commitments with working, while men chose flexible working when their careers had progressed. This meant that flexible working arrangements, in this context, reinforced the gender pay gap.

In many countries, success at gaining higher positions (for women) has been at the expense of having a family; for example in the US 49 per cent of 'high achieving' women had no children, compared with 19 per cent of their male colleagues (Hewlett, 2002). One might speculate whether the fairly low proportion of female high achievers with children is an outcome of the career preventing this or if a lack of strong interest in having children makes a category of women relatively well represented in top positions. Within the EU women work more hours per day than men in every country except Sweden, if this measure includes not only paid employment but also study and household work (COM, 2006).

Epistemological questions

Before moving on to an overview of some influential efforts to understand gender segregation at work, some words of caution against an uncritical view of the histories and statistics reviewed above are called for. Interpretive researchers, but even more people inspired by poststructuralism in particular, think that the use of broad abstract concepts and divisions such as women's jobs, domestic work, the service sector, employment or low prestige are problematic and rely on questionable distinctions in which social dominant meanings are taken for granted.

> If we write the history of women's work by gathering data that describes the activities, needs, interests, and culture of 'women workers', we leave in place the naturalized contrast and reify a fixed categorical difference between

women and men. We start the story, in other words, too late, by uncritically accepting a gendered category (the 'woman worker') that itself needs investigation because its meaning is relative to history. (Scott, 1991: 144)

A more common sensical critique concerns the notorious unreliable nature of statistics. Without going so far as suggesting that it only reflects social norms of classification, it often gives a misleading impression of robustness. The way occupations and industries are divided up is quite arbitrary, for example. Are university teachers one occupation or many – full professors, instructors, psychologists, nuclear physicists? Behind the seemingly unitary concept of manager, totally different work conditions, tasks and social relations may be found. Titles may say more about impression management than what people do. In many cases, it is an empty title, so if X per cent of all 'managers' are females, what does it say? The health care sector involves activities as diverse as giving advice, post mortem examinations, and abortions. Terms such as university teacher, manager and health care sector – as other terms – create order and unity out of diversity and ambiguity. Statistics suppress the often undecidable nature of things and often create a misleading impression of certainty based on 'facts'.

Having said this, favouring a critical–interpretive rather than a radical poststructuralist view, we acknowledge that we need statistical material in order to get some broad indicators of social reality. It is definitively often at least partly useful. But this needs to be balanced against recognitions of the uncertainties involved and how statistics often based on simplified and fixed categories, easily hides norms for classification and reinforces the assumption that we can divide people into two seemingly homogenous sexes and then measure their frequencies.

Different ways of understanding gender division of labour

How can we understand the pronounced gender division of labour with women and men in different occupations and the low number of women in management, considering that women constitute half of the labour force in most countries? We shall briefly refer to and discuss some of the most influential explanations, which we have chosen to relate to three different levels, macro, meso and micro where the creation of differentiations and inequalities between women and men, often referred to as gendering, might take place. We use the terms of macro, meso and micro for pedagogical reasons mainly, finding them useful as a background for the development of the local cultural approach we develop and advocate in the subsequent chapters.

These three terms refer to different types of analyses: macro focuses on general features of society and highly aggregated patterns indicated by statistics, whereas the focus at the meso level is on organizations and workplaces and at the micro level, on the individual/person. At the macro level we can locate Marxist feminist analysis, patriarchy theories and the dual systems theory. At the meso level it is theories which deal with organizations, workplace structures and dynamics. Here middle level institutional conditions are in focus. Structural explanations, which, for example, address sex ratio and the effects of minority status, are of relevance in organizations. At the micro

level, mainly role theory, socialization theory and psychoanalytic theory are salient. Far from all theoretical approaches may be easily divided up in this way. It is in fact often productive to transgress such divisions. A way to avoid focusing too strongly upon a particular analytical level is to use a social constructionist approach and concentrate on the gender symbolism of the job (and the organization) in order to understand gender patterns as well as deviations from clear patterns. We will address this in Chapter 4 and there connect some of the level-based distinctions to be focused below.

Although it is artificial to make a subdivision into levels, it seems nevertheless that most work trying to account for gender segregation focuses on one analytical level and therefore we follow this principle in the overview below.

Macro

Marxist feminist analyses are interested in investigating the specific nature of the oppression of women under capitalism in the light of the gender relations preceding capitalist production relations. They start with the assumption that capitalism is dependent upon the reproduction of the workforce, on a daily basis and over generations. The unpaid labour of women in the home served as a means to reproduce the (primarily male) labour force and thus the relations of production (and capitalism) (e.g. Seccombe, 1974; Barret, 1980). Because of this primary role of women, it was possible to pay them less when they had waged work – their labour was (and is) valued at a lower price than men's labour.

Some Marxist feminists saw capitalism as the root of all social inequalities and the family as the foundation for women's subordination, serving as a necessary and functional means for the reproduction of labour, ideologically and materially. Hence it is believed to be in the interest of capitalism to maintain this gender division of labour in the family, women's unpaid work being vital for capitalism. For Marxist feminism, reproduction is central to understanding the gender division of labour where women's domestic duties are seen as contributing to their unfavourable situation. The present gender division of labour is then regarded as 'firmly' established in capitalist production relations. In the early industries (in capitalism) jobs were even 'designed' according to one or the other gender, making it possible to employ women more cheaply because of the lower social value of their work.

Radical feminists believe(d) in a more universal oppression of women. The concept of patriarchy is used to explain women's universal and trans-historical oppression. Patriarchy, 'a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women' (Walby, 1990: 20), is believed to have played a role historically in keeping women out of well-paid work and gendering this as male work. Patriarchy is not exclusive to the macro level. The relations between men and women are believed to be characterized by men's oppression and domination of women at all levels[7] thus excluding women from certain types of occupation, at the horizontal and vertical levels. Patriarchal threads are believed to run through the state and government; women do not have access to equal political representation and the welfare state is believed to support these inequalities. Patriarchy is a concept much debated, and by many still seen as being of central importance for understanding gender relations of today.

Finally, these two concepts (the Marxist explanation and the patriarchy theory) were synthesized into the dual systems theory, first by Hartmann (1979) and later on developed further by Walby (1990). The main point was to not exclude either of the two theories but to regard them as equally important to the way gender relations are structured. Capitalism and patriarchy are seen as two analytically distinct systems of power relations, which meet and interact, encouraging gender antagonisms and systematically oppressing women. The present division of labour is regarded as a result of a long process of interaction between patriarchy and capitalism and is fundamental for the reproduction of patriarchy. In contradiction to Hartmann, Walby saw patriarchy and capitalism in conflict and on this basis she refined the dual systems theory into a more complex theory where more patriarchal structures were involved.[8]

Meso

At the meso level the objects of investigations are the specific institutional sites – corporations, workplaces, occupational groups – in which the gendering (gender differentiation and inequalities) is taking place. Here it is the more concrete social level, which is studied. Three meso level approaches are seen as significant; structural explanations, organizational policy and organization culture theory. Structural explanations see the dynamics and effects of positions in organizational hierarchy and the ratio of women/men as crucial for understanding career patterns and work orientations connected with gender. An organizational policy approach focuses on how employers and managers create gender division of labour. A third approach, organization culture, focuses on shared meanings, symbols and understandings that is the culture, which 'informs' people how they should live their gender lives in organizations. Organizational culture is a theme we will return to and discuss more in Chapter 6.

Structural explanations

A seminal work within the structural approach is Kanter (1977) who emphasizes that gender does not matter as much for career aspirations as the structural situation of the individuals. Behind what is superficially seen as gender-related orientations, other forces are operating. Three factors are seen as decisive for men and women's career aspirations. These are first, the opportunity structure; second, the structure of power; and finally, the proportional representation of a social category in these positions.

Kanter thinks that it is decisive for one's career possibilities to be centrally placed in the opportunity structure, to be on a career track, and not in a dead-end-job. This sounds self-evident, even tautological, but Kanter's analysis is interesting because it points to structure rather than the actor (or culture) as being vital for one's chances of getting ahead. Women being less oriented towards careers should then be explained by them being in subordinate positions in the organization, where they develop an anti-success culture. One's attitude towards work is a function of how one is placed in the organizational structure. The central positions will advance attitudes and values facilitating people (men) who have these to move upwards in the hierarchy. Women are

'late entries' in organizations, where male values (like working late) already prevail thus making it harder for women (especially with children). The male dominated power structures and a tendency to homosocial reproduction, meaning that men seek, enjoy and prefer the company of their own sex, also contribute to the gendered division of labour. If women should get ahead it is important for them to make alliances with others, including men.

Finally, people of any social category (e.g. women) who are few compared to others of a different social type (e.g. men) will experience pressures and be caught in social processes which stereotype them into positions, which are more in accordance with their social category. The numerical relation between the majority and the minority is believed to influence women's career possibilities, making it easier if their number exceeds a certain critical mass (sometimes this is said to be 30 per cent).

Kanter emphasizes then that gender per se does not matter as much as the structural situation of individuals when we find sex differences with regard to engagement in work, career interests, etc. This is supported by other research, for example, Lefkowitz (1994) who found that differences between men and women in relation to their jobs, like preferences, values, attitudes were largely spurious effects of other variables. Although 18 significant differences were found which reflected traditional gender stereotypes, almost all these disappeared when sex-related differences in perceived job characteristics, age and tenure, level of education, income and occupational level were controlled for. His conclusion was that 'men and women react similarly to the world of work when one controls the spurious effects of systematic differences in the jobs held and rewards received by women in comparison with men – especially differences in income level' (p. 323).

The importance of gender ratios is to some extent demonstrated by Ely (1995), who studied US law firms. She found that women in firms with few women in senior positions characterized men as more masculine and evaluated traits ascribed to women less favourably in relation to success criteria.

Other studies, for example Ott (1989) and Williams (1993), have raised some doubts about Kanter's claim that the number of people in a certain category is significant in order to understand what advances people's careers. In a study of minorities working in jobs where the opposite sex is in majority, Ott shows that male nurses mostly experience advantages while the male majority within a police group rejected women before they reached the critical mass. Williams suggests that there is a mix of advantages and negative effects for men, like positive attention *and* suspicion of being too masculine for the job calling for 'feminine' skills. In Chapter 5 we are going to discuss this aspect more in relation to identity.

Organizational policy

The action patterns of the employers (and employees) may (re)produce gender segregation. One may talk about gender policies, that is, the inclination to make various types of jobs available or unavailable for different sexes.[9] Here, a gender policy refers to regularities in actions, i.e. what is practised rather than espoused at the organizational level. Such action patterns, to the extent that they emerge from a

central source and are systematic in character, count as structural explanations. At the organizational level there is some evidence of male workers' resistance to females joining 'their' field. Men's fear of loss of status of the job and accompanying lower wages is relevant here. More important perhaps than the employees' actions are the actions of the employers, who are often seen as the real gatekeepers, as they recruit people for the organization and decide the (gender) division of labour (Reskin and Padavic, 1994). Stereotypes about gender or the job are vital in this respect. Hochschild (1983) showed that employers held very firm ideas about the 'attributes', which were necessary to carry out a certain job, and that these expectations were gender connotated. For example, there are different expectations about the emotional and relational orientation dependent upon whether one is hired as a flight attendant or as a ticket collector.

More important in these studies is that employers may (re)produce the gender segregation of labour through organizational policies, by acting as gatekeepers, recruiting people and deciding who is to do which job. According to this position employers and their representatives to a significant degree control the gender division of labour. Gender or job-based stereotypes underpin this explanation. The male-dominated power structures and a tendency to homosocial reproduction contribute to the gendered division of labour.

But organizational policies and management also sometimes work the other way around, reducing gender divisions. Public oversight, which tends to be stronger in public than in business organizations, matters here. Equal opportunity sympathetic management and large organizational size also contribute – the latter being an outcome of large organizations often having more rational and professional personnel policies and human resources management arrangements and, like public sector organizations, more exposure to public scrutiny.

Organizational culture

The third explanation within this meso level relates to organizational culture. Here, it is the meanings, ideas, values and beliefs that are shared by a collective of people that underpin the explanation for gender segregation. While structural theory focuses on what is measurable, culture theory pays attention to the ideational level, on socially shared meanings as expressed in communication and collective symbols (Smircich, 1983; Alvesson, 2002a). While structural theory gives priority to the 'objective' side of organizations and views behaviour and attitudes as reflections of it, cultural theory sees actions and other externalized phenomena such as formal structures and positions as manifestations of socially shared beliefs, ideas and definitions. This is further discussed in Chapter 6.

Micro

At the *micro* level, role theory, socialization theory and psychoanalytic theory are salient, but also interactionist theories indicating the active 'doing of gender' through manoeuvring in the context of norms of being (West and Zimmerman,

1987). Individuals are taken more seriously in this approach. Most micro level theories on gender are social psychological. Socialization theory and role theory draw attention to expectations and norms and the influence of these on the individual. Within socialization theory a more psychoanalytic approach has developed ideas about the psychological background underlying differences in the emotional development of children and subsequent consequences for identities.

It is culturally communicated in a variety of ways that girls and boys, women and men (are believed to) have different psychological characteristics and thereby capabilities. By accepting the culturally 'agreed upon' rules and norms as mediated by people we interact with, we internalize these and live up to expectations and thus perhaps constrain ourselves in different ways in the prevailing gender roles, for example, by believing that only certain jobs and education are appropriate for one's gender. Roles are normative in the sense that it is expectations to 'ideal' behaviour that are focused. Gendered socialization of girls and boys is believed to influence choices made in education and work. Women and men apply for different jobs, thus accepting different gender roles and positions.

Many jobs are sex-typed as feminine or masculine, and there are strong norms prescribing the 'proper' place for women and men. For example, in many parts of the world it is still unusual to see female police officers and male nurses and there are different expectations of the two categories. Stereotypes about women and men even make it 'natural' that they do different jobs. Hakim (1995) explains women's position in lower paid jobs as an outcome of their own choices, as these jobs often offer possibilities for flexible work hours, a better work-climate etc. Women who work in jobs, which are unusual for them sometimes feel that they are regarded as unfeminine. Because we associate the opposite traits with masculine/feminine, it is for example believed to be a contradiction to combine a top management job with being feminine (see Chapter 10 for a discussion of a tendency to demasculinization of leadership). For a woman to become a top manager, it is then necessary to transcend the normative (ideas about) women's roles because of the incompatibility between management and what is stereotypically ascribed to women. One way of explaining the small number of female managers at the top level is then to point to the female socialization process that traditionally has meant development of traits which have been thought of as not compatible with top positions.

Sometimes the gender division of labour is explained by the fact that women and men simply apply for different jobs because of different interests. Women and men are socialized differently and hence accepting different gender roles and positions in life, their jobs and work behaviour reflecting their orientations. Men seldom apply for women's jobs, not only because of their low wages and low prestige but also because of their feminine 'label'.

Role and socialization theory assume that women prefer 'women's jobs' because they are more in line with the orientations of women. Behind this is a powerful historical and cultural tradition connecting women to work with children, health care and human relations. Women's jobs may then fit with other role requirements, better than men's jobs do, such as family circumstances and part-time job opportunities. Some would argue that men's identity is more connected to and dependent upon a

paid job, while women's identity is more connected to home and family. This is arguably weakened over time, but historically developed and culturally reproduced meanings still play a role.

According to Chodorow (1978) the gender division of labour between the parents in relation to mothering is also important for the development of the child's self-perception and for understanding women's greater interest in social relations and social/humanistic jobs and men's in technical and managerial jobs. Gender differences are seen as a result of the mother-child relationship. Boys will base their identity in opposition to all that is feminine and thereby consolidate a male sexual identity, whereas girls' identity is much more based on closeness and a continuing identification with the mother. Masculinity is defined through separation and femininity through closeness. Male sexual identity will then be threatened by intimacy while female identity will be threatened by individuation. There is then according to this theory a basic contradiction between femininity and achievement deriving from socialization and this should then account for many women's ambivalence or lack of interest in career jobs. Some studies support the idea of men and women having different preferences for and engagement in work, but there is critique of research focusing on stated preferences, the key questions being whether these are stable and where they emerge from (Benschop, 2006).

What is common for all these explanations is that they emphasize differences between women and men, and this is a result of the focus being on women and men. A somewhat different micro understanding is interactionism, emphasizing not what has been picked up and internalized in terms of gender, but rather how action and interaction are guided by strong norms for how to do gender in the right way, leading to confirmation and avoiding sanctions for deviations. Here it is the level of interacting, the doing of gender, that is crucial. Normally this doing is viewed as a matter of complying to established, non-egalitarian patterns, but there are argumentations about possibilities of resisting or bypassing gendered norms, the 'un-doing of gender' (Deutsch, 2007). If we shift the focus from persons to jobs we will see that many would say most jobs seem to be sex-typed, defined as feminine or masculine and thus seen as natural for women or men, respectively, to occupy. One could also say that a job has a certain gender symbolism (Billing and Alvesson, 1994). Focusing on symbolism makes it possible to transcend the three theoretical levels we have dealt with so far and to go beyond differences between women and men. This we will return to in the following chapter.

Discussion of the three levels

These explanations deal with different levels and none of the different ways of understanding gender segregation in labour markets and work organizations reviewed can provide the final answer to why we have gender segregation. Although we are going to discuss them critically we will also argue that they provide explanations which might have some value at different historical times and at different levels.

Critique of macro

Marxist feminism faces the problem that its explanatory power is too narrow for understanding women's situation today. It was relevant for understanding the situation of women and the family at the beginning of industrialization where the dissolution of the family as a product unit was central, but it is hardly possible to reduce the gender relations of today to relations with capital. All inequalities and subordinations cannot be understood as founded on the family and its role as reproducer of the male work force. Families and husbands are different, and some are even egalitarian, and exploitation of women's work in the family is also shown to be dependent upon, for example, ethnicity. bell hooks (1984) for example claims that family played a completely different role for black women, for whom family is the place for resistance and solidarity against racism and it cannot be reduced to the place for subordination of women. For women of colour, it is argued that it is racism rather than men which is the problem (Holvino, 2003: 89).

Patriarchy theories are also based on conditions, which were different from those of today but patriarchy (in the form of men's unions) played a historical role in keeping women out of well-paid work and gendering this as male work and household work as women's work. In the household production which pre-dated capitalism it is appropriate to use the concept patriarchy, while the usefulness of the concept today is more debatable. Most would prefer other terms, like masculinist or male-dominated. This counts for the Western world, although we cannot ignore that there are also (patriarchal) families here, which still operate according to that system.

Macro (and meso) theories tend to objectify women and men and see them as passive reproducers of existing structures. This makes it difficult to conceive of women and men as actors on the historical scene and to understand variations in women's and men's situations, such as the increase of women in positions of power, and men's inroads in female jobs. Many macro-oriented theories are at a level of abstraction where it is difficult to conceive of differences from the classical pattern and very difficult to understand how any (woman) could transcend the vertical division of labour. Of course, the very idea of addressing the broad picture is not to see exceptions or consider nuances, and part of the critique referred to here may be seen as being of questionable relevance. Nevertheless, it is important to be aware of what is neglected in macro level systems approaches. From a poststructuralist position it could be argued that the use of the concept of subordination as a universal way of grasping the situation of all women is totalizing and creates too rigid a sense of order in a social world characterized by fragmentation, variation, contradictions and disruptions. The tendency in macro theories to treat the societal whole as a relatively uniform totality is of little help in understanding the specifics and diversities of organizational life.

Critique of meso

Organizational structure theory and gender policy express important insights but often at the expense of the level of meaning and the subjectivities of men and

women. That structures are reproduced by people and only exist in actions is not considered. People are seen as appendices to structures.

The neglect of the importance of socialization and education preferences is also problematic. In the context of organization studies, more specific patterns, variations and ambiguities are of interest to investigate. In addition, Kanter's emphasis on the effects of numbers, and her understanding of power is rather mechanical and static, referring to something which one might or might not have a share in (for a critique of this concept of power, see Clegg, 1989). Arguably, power is better understood in terms of interacting processes between people in the organization, trying to reduce the scope for action of others not only through influencing overt behaviour, but also by ideological, symbolic and disciplinary means. The power structure may be seen in terms of the often ambiguous and unstable relations between organizational actors and groups, and is a temporary 'result' of complex processes, which may or may not reproduce the status quo. The theory of numbers is also mechanical. It may misleadingly indicate that there is some causality between a certain percentage of people and influence. Kanter is focusing on women and men as variables and is only dealing with structural forces behind work orientation, which according to her study misleadingly are ascribed to sex.

The gender policies approach does not account for the fact that men and women to a high degree follow different education patterns, which has consequences for the division of labour. In terms of member composition, boys and girls are 50/50 in most schools, but at higher levels, they – as an effect of choices – end up in different careers. This is to a high degree an outcome of occupational preferences. This is not to say that there are no operations of power affecting preferences, but it would be reductionistic to not take sex-specific preferences seriously, at least something countering reasoning like Kanter's mechanistic idea about the role – and rule – of the sex distribution at the workplace. And employers sometimes have an interest in breaking gender segregation. In particular during periods of shortage of labour there have been efforts by employers to get females/males into jobs, which were previously dominated by the other sex. Such efforts have not always been successful, partly due to the reluctance of people to make untraditional choices. One might also question the seriousness of employers with regard to these policies. Even if it could be argued that employers often do not have any great interest in promoting equal opportunities, it is in many cases not clear why they should actively resist this ideal and prevent women from getting certain types of jobs. Arguably, employers will consider what is profitable and may benefit from recruiting the most competent people and also to open up in order to increase the competition for work. The chance of increasing the potential labour force may pay off in terms of better chances of recruiting good workers and of depressing wages because of a more favourable relationship between supply and demand of labour. Although employers do not always act according to this logic, it is hardly absent from playing a role in labour market and employment relations.

Critique of micro

The sex and gender role theory finds it difficult to explain what cannot be categorized in one-dimensional categories. If people were totally fused with their roles

there would be no need to discuss gender divisions. They would be given by nature. But what is on both sides of this dualism is very different and historically specific. Gender roles are normative and historically changeable, being culturally and socially constructed. In sex role theory there is a presupposition that the female and male sex roles are complementary and equal but it has been disregarded that the biological category has been interpreted in gender terms, which have dictated a specific cultural identity, the individual being placed in a world of roles, expectations and social fantasy (Benhabib and Cornell, 1987). Our individualities are dissolved into some role definitions of us, as mothers/fathers, working women/men and so on. However, the language of roles, as typically used, is a problem because it is flattening and homogenizing our social life, but also over-simplifying what could/should be done to alter things. (The role concept can, however, be used also in more dynamic ways, see Simpson and Carroll, 2008.)

Even if the early interaction between parent(s) and child may impact on the psychological orientation of the person, we cannot assume a fixed subjectivity, especially in the context of understanding work organizations and labour market phenomena. The psychoanalytic approach is over-emphasizing the primary socialization at the cost of the secondary and of work history. A large number of factors will influence the child's situation, the social context, background, personality, age of parents, the child's position in the family order, important early separations, the constitution of the child, his/her mother/father working outside the home, their satisfaction with her/his work, and so on. The child' s own participation in the process is also significant but undervalued. Just because a parent and the child are of the same sex it does not follow that this leads to close identification with far-reaching consequences.

Dealing only with the micro level, means disregarding other conditions, like the organization, the societal expectation, the cultural context and the structural factors, which might help or hinder women/men. A micro-approach does then not offer a strong basis for understanding collective patterns. A variety of different forces and processes may well contribute to gender division of labour and to its de-differentiation.

At the 'macro end' of the micro orientation – bordering to meso level approaches – we find the 'doing gender' approach (West and Zimmerman, 1987), focusing on how we accomplish gender in the light of normative conceptions of men and women. This is, we think, an interesting approach that we will relate to, but we agree with Deutsch (2007) that it normally is one-sidedly stressing that people follow gender norms and underestimates that people may resist and undo these.

Summary

During recent decades, there are significant reductions of gender inequality in work in large parts of the world (McCall, 2005). But gender division of labour, rooted in historical circumstances, still prevails, horizontally as well as vertically.

As said in the introduction, gender is a key concept for understanding what is happening to individuals in their working lives. But how does gender, meaning the 'patterned, socially produced, distinctions between female and male, feminine and

masculine' (Acker, 1992: 250) come about in organizational contexts. We have reviewed some different explanations associated with the three standard levels of macro, meso and micro theories and frameworks. We think it is important to bear the entire spectrum of aspects in mind. As Benschop (2006) remarks, 'manifestations of social inequalities in labour markets, individual choices of women and the deconstruction of organizational processes (re)producing gender all add to our understanding of this field' (p. 290). In this book we will emphasize the importance of being aware of the daily 'doing of gender' (West and Zimmerman, 1987) and of gender division, if we are to reduce or weaken rigid gender divisions and the consequences of this construction. We will bear the overall labour market patterns and organizational processes in mind framing and constraining how people do gender, how they gender themselves and others.

Poststructuralism's way of trying to go beyond dichotomy, to deconstruct language use, i.e. discourses where gender is created and recreated forwarding unstable and varied ways offer a good antidote to structuralist explanations but also a certain one-sidedness to the idea of 'doing gender'. The ideas of the 'undoing of gender' here open up, partly the theoretical option of seeing the subject as less integrated and domesticated (Butler, 2004) and partly an empirical interest in active ways of resisting and using resources (communicative skills, knowledge, equal opportunity ideologies) for the creation of egalitarian relationships (Deutsch, 2007). Appreciating this, however, calls for a good understanding of the 'deeper' ways in which gender constructions at the organizational, interactional and subjective (identity) levels work. In particular, it must be appreciated how these constructions tend to prestructure people's lives and work through the cultural guidelines for what is normal and reasonable. To grasp is not a matter of simply pointing at men doing men's work and women doing women's work, but goes much deeper. This is the topic for the next chapter where we deal more thoroughly with the social construction of masculinities, femininities and work and the need to critically interpret these.

Notes

1 However the top is defined.
2 Even within the same industries and organizations there are gender gaps in earnings (Roos and Gatta, 1999).
3 Although clerks were sex-typed as male jobs, it was not considered 'manly' or masculine. On the contrary male clerks, in the early twentieth century viewed their jobs as unmanly (Chalmers, 2001).
4 There also seems to be a connection between fertility rates and parent-friendly policies; in the Nordic countries the fertility rate is higher (1.8) than in East- and South-Europe (1.3) (EUROSTAT, 2008).
5 Of course, from a critical–interpretive perspective this appears as too general. Of interest would be to study how specific groups define and value 'the masculine' in relation to the 'feminine'.
6 They all concern global patterns of inequality between men and women. For example, health and well-being relates to 'differences between women and men in their

access to sufficient nutrition, healthcare and reproductive facilities, and to issues of fundamental safety and integrity of the person' (p. 5).

7 Radical feminists introduced the slogan, 'the personal is political'.

8 Walby (1997) later abandoned the use of the concept patriarchy and introduced the concept gender regime instead.

9 Within industry, employers have long recruited a specific sex to a particular work (Dahlerup, 1988; Brittain, 1989). A number of women have, however, moved into men's jobs, while men seem more reluctant to move into women's jobs.

4
Masculinities, Femininities and Work

In society there exists more or less profound ideas that certain types of education, career choices, work and certain positions are connected with a certain gender. As we saw in Chapter 3, labour markets as well as work organizations are divided up according to gender. Most jobs are sex-typed, defined as feminine or masculine and thus seen as natural for women, respectively, and men to occupy. One could also say that a job has a certain gender symbolism (Billing and Alvesson, 1994). While sex-typing means that some jobs are defined as suitable (only) for men, or women respectively, gender symbolism refers to the cultural and personal beliefs and meanings behind such typing. The concept of gender symbolism then goes a bit deeper than sex-typing, meaning not only that a particular job is openly viewed as women's or men's work, but it refers also to non-explicit meanings, unconscious fantasies and associations. Gender symbolism can connect to a variety of levels, from macro-cultural to more personal and idiosyncratic. Symbolism refers to objects – words, physical things and acts – which are seen as carrying a broader meaning than they 'objectively' do. A symbol is rich in meaning and evokes a subjective response, shared by people who are part of the same culture. Of most interest, in the present context, are the social levels associated with occupations, organizations, etc.

Most work is not gender neutral but is attributed some form of masculinity or femininity, either vaguely or in the shape of more specific ideas about what the work involves and the kind of qualities typically possessed by a 'man' or a 'woman'. Examples of occupations with a strong masculine gender symbolism, at least in some countries and during certain times, are fireman, post-mortem examiner and army officer, while secretary, seamstress, fashion creator, hairdresser and nurse are often connected with different versions of femininity.[1] Jobs perceived as including affirming, beautifying, enhancing and celebrating the well-being and status of others, are typically seen as feminine, while jobs seen as calling for the jobholder to be stern, impassive or cool – as in policing or bank management – are more seen as masculine (Cockburn, 1991). Many technical jobs are constructed as masculine, and thereby as antithetical to women (Burris, 1996). But there are, of course, changes, and these jobs and work areas may be less strongly and less homogenously ascribed masculine meanings today and tomorrow than yesterday.

We believe that masculinity and femininity are useful concepts as they have the advantage of making possible connections to macro as well as micro. They may refer to how broad domains of life are culturally gendered as well as to how people

conform to or transgress the social standards and guidelines for living suggested by what are culturally defined as masculine and feminine. They offer an alternative to a fixation on 'men' and 'women' using the bodies as a firm criterion for classification as well as being an alternative to researchers' tendency to use the female sex as a robust point of departure for ascribing experiences and interests to a unitary and unique half of humanity (or a specific group within this half).

The concepts of masculinities and femininities make it possible to connect on the one hand to the overall societal culture and on the other hand to the feelings, thoughts, self-understandings and values – in short identities (subjectivities) – that characterize individuals. One way then to avoid too strong a focus upon a particular analytical level is to use a social interpretive approach to understand how people construct gender and create and recreate gender patterns (as well as deviations from clear patterns).[2] Apart from being able to throw some light on gender segregation in labour markets and work organizations, the social constructivist use of masculinity and femininity as an interpretive framework is useful for exploring a wide set of aspects of organizations, including organizational culture and leadership. This chapter thus offers some additional illumination to some of the broader gender work patterns dealt with in Chapter 3 and provides some ideas of value for the further study of identity, culture and leadership in organizations (Chapters 5–8). Themes around masculinity and femininity may connect to more broadly shared meanings or to meanings that are group-based or even individual. When a person, for example, reacts very negatively (or positively) to a female manager, it is an expression of idiosyncratic symbolism, while more neutral or conventional meanings are associated with cultural orientations, for example, if a group is sceptical (where the idea of a female manager may lead to expectations that the manager will probably be less devoted to work, career and result) or positive (where 'woman' is associated to 'female qualities' and the expectation that the manager will be people-oriented, less prestigious and interested in coaching). In both cases 'woman' is thought to stand for something, for a specific set of symbolic meanings, in addition to objective characteristics.

We will to some extent say more about masculinity than femininity in this chapter – although the terms presuppose each other. The large majority of all gender research has emphasized women, either in variable terms or through an interest in women's perspectives, interests, values or experiences, typically in the light of male domination (patriarchy). The personal experiences of men have not been seen as very interesting, or perhaps as too unreliable or dubious to serve as a point of departure. Instead the somewhat more distanced and problematizing concept of masculinity has served as a point of entrance for studies of men, perhaps more seldom of 'men as men' but as carriers of a dominating form of masculinity (or patriarchy).[3] Only recently have (some) men started discussing themselves as men. The norms and values by which women's and men's actions have been assessed have been defined in a 'male' way (Simmel, 1985), and it has not been seen as necessary for men to reflect upon or problematize social conditions in relationship to their sex in the same way as women have done. These norms and values have been and are increasingly being questioned and the former unquestionable and 'natural' masculinity is attacked. This has encouraged (some) men to take another stance and be occupied with themselves as a relational category, as a sex, which is one part of the

gender relations (e.g. Kimmel, 1994; Meuser, 1996). Although we to some extent concentrate on masculinity in this chapter we are still interested in gender relations. This should not be read as if we reserve or treat the concept of masculinity as if it belonged to men. On the contrary, we will discuss a range of phenomena in terms of masculinity (and femininity) without connecting them closely to men or women. Our point is only that in order to understand gender relations and masculinity, a nuanced study also of men seems motivated.

Some views on masculinity and femininity

Organizational and occupational structures, processes and practices may be viewed as culturally masculine and, perhaps less often, as feminine. Masculinity and femininity are thus not essential categories but should be seen as 'products' of, or themes in, different discourses. The concept, gendering organizations, usually means paying attention to how organizational structures and processes are dominated by culturally defined masculine meanings. (Feminine meanings dominate less seldom although they may be central in some organizations.) Masculinity is a vague concept, but can be defined as values, experiences and meanings that are culturally interpreted as masculine and typically feel 'natural' to or are ascribed to men more than women in the particular cultural context. (Femininity is then, of course, defined in a similar, although reversed, way.) It makes sense here to recognize the variety of masculinities, avoid single masculine–feminine scales (Connell, 1987) and talk about 'multiple masculinities'. Collinson and Hearn (1994) identify five forms of masculinities in the context of organizations: authoritarianism, paternalism, entrepreneurialism, careerism and informalism (men building networks on the basis of shared masculine interests and excluding women).[4] Variations between differerent classes, nations, occupations, ages, organizations, ethnic groups, etc., are sometimes pronounced when talking about masculinity and femininity. Some forms of working-class masculinity may, for example, be quite antagonistic to management and white-collar work, which is perceived as non-masculine (Collinson, 1988). It is, as we will come back to, always important to consider what is to be characterized as something masculine (or feminine). This is of course a key issue from an interpretive point of view. It is only sometimes the case for 'everybody'. Morgan (1992), while recognizing the diversity of masculinities, suggests that they are not 'like a well-stocked supermarket', but 'are linked to each other, hierarchically, in terms of power' (p. 45). He does not say very much about how or for whom they appear hierarchical. One should not neglect the possibility of various sub-cultures developing different forms of masculinity also in the absence of an overall hierarchy or well-connected pattern.

A typical description of masculinity stresses features such as '… hard, dry, impersonal, objective, explicit, outer-focused, action-oriented, analytic, dualistic, quantitative, linear, rationalist, reductionist and materialist' (Hines, 1992: 328). The concept of masculinity overlaps with what Marshall (1993) views as male values or the male principle: self-assertion, separation, independence, control, competition, focused

perception, rationality, analysis, etc. (p. 124). While recognizing the multiplicity of masculinity, Kerfoot and Knights (1996) view as its core, at least in managerial and organizational work, 'a preoccupation with a particular instrumental form of "rational control"' (p. 79). Femininity is defined in complementing and corresponding terms. For Hines (1992) femininity is a matter of 'the prioritizing of feelings ... the importance of the imaginative and creative ...' (p. 314). Female values or the female principle are characterized by interdependence, cooperation, receptivity, merging, acceptance, awareness of patterns, wholes and contexts, emotional tone, personalistic perception, being, intuition, and synthesizing (Marshall, 1993: 124). Grant (1988) talks about 'nurturance, compassion, sensitivity, empathy'.

Cliff et al. (2005) see the key defining dimensions of gender-stereotypical organizational archetypes, as expressed in the literature, as follows: Feminine organizations are flat (structured as networks or circles), downplay rules and standards, exhibit attentiveness and responsiveness to the needs of others, and they express relational orientations. Masculine organizations are more hierarchical, rely on impersonal rules and standards, adopt an instrumental orientation and view members as means or resources for goal-accomplishment. According to Kimmel (1994: 126) masculinity is viewed as the antithesis of femininity:

> This notion of anti-femininity lies at the heart of contemporary and historical conceptions of manhood, so that masculinity is defined more by who one is not – rather than who one is.

Arguably, the reviewed authors have different, although not always explicit ideas, on the nature of the forms of masculinity and femininity, from seeing these as 'objective' characteristics to trying to balance masculine values with some upgrading of feminine virtues. Irrespective of this, there are considerable problems when talking about and identifying masculinity/masculinities as well as femininity/femininities.[5] One issue concerns how the concepts should be related to physical males/females. Are masculinity and femininity tightly connected to men and women, respectively, or can they be used also to illuminate human phenomena irrespective of sex and 'non-human' phenomena such as artefacts and techniques? A second issue concerns the ontological status of the mentioned ideas. Do they reflect social reality in some way or are they used for analytic purposes by the researchers? Are ideas on masculinity/femininity open to empirical impressions or are they purely in the hands of the researcher to define and use accordingly? Are the definitions cited above valid across culture and history or do they reflect contemporary Western or only contemporary gender researchers' ideas on what is masculine and feminine? Let us address these two concerns.

Masculinity and femininity, bodies and (other) artefacts

Some authors believe that the concept of masculinity 'may be thought of as representing the discourses and practices which indicate that someone is a man, a member of a category' (Collinson and Hearn, 1994: 6), and that it means 'individual signs and

institutional indications that this is a male' (Hearn, 1993: 151).[6] Masculinity is then about the symbolism referring to a man. A problem with this understanding is that masculinity is associated with males, and femininity with females, defined according to biological criteria. Also men rejecting traditional masculinist orientations are defined in terms of 'other forms of masculine identity, such as that of "the new man", the male feminist or the various forms of homosexual male identity' (Bradley, 1993: 22). Linking masculinity tightly with males and femininity with females is unfortunate as it gives priority to biological sex, namely the chromosomes and genitals of people. As pointed out earlier in this book, this is not necessarily the best point of departure for gender research. We just remind the reader of the heavy critique of the variable approach, the idea that women and men can be seen as robust categories. Even if the social constructions of gender proceed from genitals and other body-signs, the enormous variation in these constructions – leading to outcomes for women as varied as striptease dancer, elite swimmer, grandmother and businesswoman – means that care should accompany the researcher before stating that masculinity is definitively related to biological sex. Such a body focus is implied in the statement that 'this is a man' – in contrast to 'this is a masculine woman (style, value …)'.

Another version is to relate the concepts of masculinities and femininities more loosely to physical gender (sex) and apply them to both sexes and also to 'nonsexual' phenomena – e.g. nuclear power may be seen as a masculine technology irrespective of the number of females working with it or politically supporting it. In contrast, solar energy may be viewed as 'feminine' (or at least as less masculine than oil or nuclear power even if the sex ratio of the men and women involved in working with the technologies would be the same). When Collinson and Hearn (1994) talk about the 'highly masculine values of individualism, aggression, competition, sport and drinking' (p. 4) they are clearly referring to values on which males today have no monopoly, unless one defines a male as someone who scores high on these values. Defining a person through specific values would implicate that one disregards anatomy; a person may value individualism, sport and drinking, irrespective of genitals. A person may actually score high on all these dimensions, but still be seen as feminine according to some other dimensions (looks, mothering).

One way of using the concepts of masculinities and femininities without tying them essentialistically to the bodies of men and women is to treat them as traits or forms of subjectivities (orientations in thinking, feeling and valuing) that are present in all persons, men as well as women although to different degrees. Women, biologically defined, are thus typically seen as more characterized by femininities than masculinities, even though there is great variation in terms of the composition of the two (sets of) qualities. This could be called the *cocktail view on gender*. In the average male version, there is typically a lot of gin and not much vermouth while the female prototype includes primarily the latter with just a few drops of the stronger stuff – end of irony.

We believe that it is acceptable and important to use the concepts of masculinities and femininities to describe cultural beliefs without connecting these very closely to men and women. Masculine meaning may therefore be traced also in language, acts and artefacts loosely coupled to sex/human bodies. To explore how people think, feel and make sense in relationship to these categories is vital for understanding gender relations and gender identities. Ideas about what is masculine/feminine and what

is natural/normal for men and women in relationship to these qualities guide, constrain and trap people in all respects from occupational choice to acceptance/ rejection of tasks in everyday working life, although people may be more or less independent in relationship to these guidelines and constraints. Facilitating such independence may be defined as one purpose of gender studies.

Masculinity and femininity: analytic views vs. the natives' point of view

A second topic concerns the extent to which the researcher proceeds from an analytic/ theoretical definition or an empirically grounded, historically and culturally oriented understanding of masculinities and femininities. The first alternative means that the researcher him- or herself decides what is to be defined as masculinity/femininity or follows certain research authorities. The latter version calls for a sensitive listening to and reading of when and how people in a community ascribe a masculine or a feminine meaning to a phenomenon. This is sometimes referred to as 'the native's point of view'. We think that empirical grounding is necessary before labelling/interpreting something as masculine/feminine. Recognizing historical variation is important here. But this may be balanced with a research interest using masculinity/femininity at some distance from, and with some independence in relation to, what is being expressed by the groups being studied. When masculinities and femininities are used as analytical concepts, the researcher analyses the deeper gendered meaning of social phenomena irrespective of what is surfaced in terms of explicit, socially recognized cultural meanings. In other words, the views of those being studied are not directly considered. One may interpret something as masculine even in the absence of empirical indications that natives give a phenomenon such a meaning. Authorities such as Jung for example may offer ideas of what it is to be understood as masculine or feminine. (Jung views these qualities as depth-psychological qualities, a part of human nature.) Masculine and feminine then refer to 'essences', homogeneous core characteristics, basically independent of cultural and historical variation, even though manifestations may vary cross-culturally.

The researcher must be clear about the use of the concept analytically and with little or no grounding in the cultural meanings of the natives. Often researchers choose a middle way, having some feeling for cultural ideas among people in the area studied without carefully investigating what and how they ascribe a gendered meaning to phenomena. Caution is, however, called for before departing too far from, or speculating too wildly about, the level of meaning. A basic problem is that the terms easily incorporate common-sensical notions held by the researcher, who may be an equally strong victim of prejudices as other natives.[7] She or he can simply read in masculinities whenever she or he feels for it. Talk about masculinities easily becomes a bit arbitrary. One can say the same about femininities, but as said there is much less interest in gender studies on this, so we concentrate on masculinities. Let us give some illustrations of this problem.

Connell (1995) claims that the hegemonic ideal of masculinity is a man who is independent, risk-taking, aggressive, heterosexual, and rational. But why are these

characteristics singled out? Why not reliable, breadwinner, sexually attractive, physically strong, placed in a high-status position, wealthy or something else? And are not rational on the one hand and risk-taking and aggressive on the other, rather contradictory ideals? If one of these ideals is hegemonic (culturally dominating), the other may not be? Ideals like independence and aggressiveness may look good on films for adolescents, but are not necessarily embraced in social life. In US corporate life, for example, it is rather the socially sensitive team player that is appreciated (Jackall, 1988), although perhaps blended with other qualities – such as modest aggressiveness and initiative. Connell is aware of the discrepancy between ideals and the possibilities to live up to these, but this does not prevent the claim about hegemonic masculinity from being debatable.

Another example of problems with interpretations of masculinity we found in Tewksbury (1993) who says, in a study of male strippers, that they restructure their work roles 'to emphasize the traditionally masculine ideals of success, admiration, and respect' (p. 168). But are these ideals best understood as masculine? Would many people experience it as unfeminine to strive for these ideals? Ferguson (1984) also seems to talk about femininity in an arbitrary way when she writes that 'Women are not powerless because they are feminine; rather they are feminine because they are powerless, because it is a way of dealing with the requirements of subordination' (p. 95). This equation between feminine and powerlessness fixes a particular view on the feminine that is of uncertain relevance for understanding contemporary cultural meanings of femininities – which do not necessarily include powerlessness. It may freeze the interpretive orientation not only by being culturally insensitive, but may also analytically be too narrow; powerlessness (like power) can take many forms, some of which may be seen as feminine, e.g. a participatory people-oriented soft 'leadership' style may also be seen as feminine (see Chapter 6). Sexual attractiveness may be a significant source of power, as may parenthood, including mothering in relationship with children. One obvious counter-example to understanding subordinates as feminine would be private soldiers in an authoritarian army, operating in a very strict hierarchy and forced to obey. Despite their subordination, they are normally seen as highly masculine. Arguably, there may thus be masculine as well as feminine kinds of subordination, as there may be corresponding forms of superiority and power, although in the feminine case they may be less clearly recognized. There may, of course, be forms of power/subordination that are not easily or productively interpreted in gender terms. Stivers (1993), like Ferguson, thinks that there is a 'prototypical femininity' involved when men in organizations must cater to their superiors and become sensitive to their idiosyncrasies (p. 22), but that their interest in being seen as 'real men' works to prevent them from seeing this feminine quality. That subordinates obey their bosses may, however, be recognized without necessarily calling for labelling in gender terms. Our comments do not, of course, contradict the idea that masculinities often rank higher – in relationship to monetary rewards, social status and symbolic power – than femininities, although there may be changes under way (see Chapter 10). It should be noted, however, that in organizational contexts, both past and present, the majority of all men have been and are subordinates. That subordination in an organizational context should universally have a strong feminine quality is therefore a questionable assumption. To equate subordination and femininity

seems arbitrary and a crude overgeneralization that is insensitive to variation of meaning in different groups and contexts.

A particular problem with the concepts of masculinities and femininities is that they easily draw upon, as well as (re)produce, cultural stereotypes. We cannot take for granted how the values mentioned above by Collinson and Hearn (1994) relate to men and women – even if they, as we tend to do in this book, restrict the discussion to contemporary Western societies. Many women (biologically defined) practise sport, appreciate whisky and may be described as equally individualistic, aggressive and competitive as many men. Many men may be described as social, relaxed, friendly and team players. Studies of all-female shop floors suggest that women often swear and participate in aggressive and sexualized forms of behaviour (Collinson and Hearn, 1994 refer to such research). One may, of course, say that they are 'masculine' or express 'masculine' behaviour, but the point of using this concept is presumably that it is, in a particular cultural context, more typical for and appealing to men than women. Otherwise, these concepts become too one-sidedly researcher-driven and too insensitive to cultural context, given the criteria that the cultural meanings of masculinity and femininity should have some balancing effect of how the researcher uses the terms.

One way of avoiding the researcher imposing his or her understanding on social phenomena would be to adopt a more local, emerging and interpretive approach in which the people in the area being studied may define what is masculine or feminine for them, balancing what the researcher thinks is best seen as masculine or feminine. In a specific organizational context, for example, one may investigate to what extent a particular vocabulary or behaviour is seen by the natives as masculine or feminine or gender-neutral. Such interpretive research tries to avoid imposing pre-structured categories and follows carefully the meanings of the natives. This may be a painstaking enterprise – at least if one wants considerable depth in the meanings being studied. The interpretive powers of the concepts masculine/feminine may be weakened or even lost. It is likely that there is some variety in what people see as masculine/feminine or as neutral in these terms. For most gender researchers the entire area of management may be seen as fused with masculine meanings, but for many blue-collar workers, the polite, tidy and physically safe area of management and white-collar work may appear as feminine or as perhaps rather ungendered. Such confrontations between perspectives are valuable as a counterforce to elitist/a priori researcher ideas, but interesting interpretations often call for the researcher using some core concepts as an aid and not just letting this float and vary with the meanings of various groups an individuals.

As in many other cases, finding a balance between the theoretical/analytical use of the core concepts for the sake of direction and interpretive depth, and being empirically sensitive to cultural meanings of people in the context of the study is important. Such a balance is never contradiction free, as a critical reading of any research on the subject matter will make obvious. We here come close to the poststructuralist (postmodern) critique of dominant research that it assumes and – consequently – finds fixed and coherent meanings. Any attempt to freeze a specific masculine or feminine meaning may be an easy target for a deconstruction, in which the fragile nature of the ascribed meaning is exposed. We will not here go so far, but illustrate briefly problems with using ideas on masculinity/femininity.

Stivers (1993) uses these concepts with respect to US public administration. She argues that its self-understanding, 'as reflected in its images of leadership, expertise and virtue, is culturally masculine (although its masculinity is as yet unacknowledged), but that it also reflects a significant element of femininity (although consciousness of its femininity has yet to dawn)' (p. 122). The approach taken may be said to be rather elitist, in the sense that the voices of the people in the field do not seem to have been considered. (The reader does not encounter any in the entire book text.) People in the area are viewed as ignorant about the cultural meanings gendering their organizational world (within as well as outside US public administration). It is likely that there is great variation among different groups, with regard to their masculine or feminine characteristics. If one continues Stivers's questionable treatment of US public administration as a unitary whole, its masculinity/femininity varies with the yardstick or object of comparison. From a traditional working-class horizon, much of it presumably appears as rather un-masculine. Compared with business life, often seen as more competitive and powerful, the public sector is probably also understood by many as un-masculine. (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1985 refers to the Swedish public sector as the ugly sister, in comparison with the private sector.) Trying to adopt business management rhetoric may strengthen a superficial aura of masculinity, or may also do the opposite – for some groups exposing its hollow character in terms of masculinity. From the viewpoint of a feminist (or an anti-masculinist, namely a critical student of masculinities), wanting to promote radical transformation, masculine domination emerges almost routinely as the most appropriate interpretation. If one considers the enormous variation within not just US public administration, but also most specific organizations, it is likely that one may find many examples of culturally masculine as well as feminine meanings, contingent upon not just how one frames and positions the object being studied but also as a result of the enormous empirical variation.

Consequently, given the problems with the concepts masculinities and femininities, we think that particular caution is motivated when using them. To repeat, they are appealing as a response to the critique of essentialism – discussed in Chapter 2 – and the narrow variable focus on 'men' and 'women', but they are certainly not unproblematic. In particular, the risk of reproducing stereotypes and of arbitrarily imposing masculinity or femininity must be considered. It seems that many if not all jobs may be constructed as male or female, depending on which dimensions one emphasizes, the language used and how one chooses to reason (Leidner, 1991). Researchers may construct jobs and other phenomena quite freely according to what they choose to emphasize. Rather than feeling free to label all sorts of phenomena one believes appeal to men or are more typical for men than women 'masculine', great care and restraint should be exercised. The researcher should be cautious about imposing meaning. There is great variety between social groups – class, ethnicity, occupation, working life sector (business, government, industry, service) – about how people see and negotiate the understanding of phenomena in terms of masculinity/femininity – if they see them in these terms at all. What is masculine for one group or person may not be so for another. Many phenomena are not necessarily best interpreted as masculine or feminine. In addition, the general recommendation emphasized in Chapter 2, that writing should be marked by reflexivity (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000) or irony in Rorty's (1989) sense, namely

doubting the appropriateness of one's framework and way of reasoning and aware-ness about alternative ways of framing discussions and interpreting phenomena, is particularly valid in the use of the concepts of masculinities and femininities. Nevertheless, these concepts are valuable interpretive tools and gender studies could not do without them. A cautious, 'ironic' approach is therefore to be recom-mended. One should be careful in sorting out analytical use of the terms and empir-ical descriptions of cultural meanings among people being studied and seek a balance between analytical definitions and sensitivity for cultural context. When combined with careful listening to the meanings ascribed by the subjects being addressed and followed by cautious interpretative work and careful grounding, an interest in masculinities and femininities as aspects of workplace cultures, social practices and identities may be productive in gender studies.

Sex typing of jobs and gender symbolism

Many socially important jobs have traditionally been given a masculine flavour. Management and leadership are regularly viewed as socially constructed in mascu-line terms in many countries and organizations, making it difficult for a female manager to balance between being seen as a competent manager/leader and as suf-ficiently feminine not to be viewed as breaking with gender expectations. According to Stivers (1993) professional expertise is often described in masculine terms. Professions are often successful in promoting an aura of objectivity, an assertion of autonomy, hierarchicalism and the norm of brotherhood among the members. As we mentioned above, the masculinity of these work areas is not self-evident. In addi-tion, there is variation between the professions. There are also changes over time. Some of the newer professions (semi-professions or 'wanna-be'-professions, that is not really fully accepted as such) – nursing, psychotherapy, physiotherapy – probably do not score so high on the mentioned terms in most people's minds.

The social construction of education and jobs in terms of masculinity and femi-ninity and of the gender categories as oppositional is believed to be crucial for how men and women become located in the labour market and in organizations. Most people conform up to a point to social norms and expectations of engaging in sex-consistent behaviour, e.g. for men to exhibit signs of masculinity and avoid too much feminine behaviour. They also identify with and feel natural about choosing education, forms of employment, job tasks and career moves that are in line with cultural conventions or at least do not break radically with these. The emphasis on masculinities and femininities draws attention to a connected set of social and psy-chological levels and acknowledges life history as well as the power of social forces contingent upon established cultural notions of masculinities and femininities. This approach is quite different from viewing gender segregation as an outcome of abstract macro patterns, as if Mr Patriarchy, himself or in the shape of a prolonged arm in the form of an employer, moved in and ordered men and, in particular, women around. It also differs from psychoanalytic understanding, in which the glimpse in the mother's eye during the first few years of living determines men to do engineering work and women to become nurses some decades later.

This approach argues against the reductionism involved in most explanatory efforts. As we saw in Chapter 3, such reductionism is common, where researchers focus on either external social structures or the levels of psychology. Reskin and Padavic (1994) reject socialization explanations, arguing that 'far more influential than the messages we picked up 20 years earlier as children are the opportunities, rewards, and punishments we encounter as adults' (p. 77). They suggest that women, like men, 'choose among the best opportunities open to them', according to criteria such as good pay, autonomy and prestige. They substantiate the case through referring to several cases indicating that when jobs, such as coal-mining, were opened up for women a large number applied. While it makes sense to argue that gendered socialization does not fully determine occupational choices, it still is of relevance for educational and job choices. Although these choices are not fully free, it would be equally problematic to see an objective opportunity structure, mastered by employers and to some extent male workers, as a sole determinant for women's heavily circumscribed choices. The 'best' job is, of course, evaluated according to subjective and intersubjective criteria. Gender may be highly significant here for the values behind the criteria. Even if high pay has an appeal for most people, other aspects certainly matter, including what is viewed as interesting work and, relatedly, what is meaningful given one's (gender) self-image and identity. One could also add that 'best opportunities' for many also is a matter of consideration in relation to personal life and family. An individual viewing him- or herself as primarily a parent or a spouse will perceive the labour market differently from someone viewing work and career as more important. And of course, here socialization, opportunities, messages picked up early and later in life as well as what is being signalled by employers, colleagues, friends, relatives and family members all still contribute for many people in gendered ways. Identity is not fixed through early socialization, but is certainly not independent of it. It is best seen in the light of early as well as later life history. How we are constituted by and relate to cultural masculinities and femininities must then be related to early and late socialization but also to the present life context and the cultural meanings that permeate it. We will address identity more in the next chapter.

The strong tendency for cultural definitions of masculinities and femininities to guide perceptions and structure the way people live their lives as men and women is not a matter simply of men doing men's work and women doing women's work, but goes much deeper. This is shown by some case study research on the social construction of work.

Service work

Within a particular occupation there may be different expectations and self-understandings for males and females meaning that the gender symbolism is created and/or reproduced in different versions. In the case of waiters and waitresses, there are common ways of doing the job at the same time, as there are gender-specific patterns:

> … Restaurants do gender by defining the smiling, deferring, and flirting scripts in gender terms and by demanding appropriate behaviour, whereas male and female servers do gender by differentially enacting gendered scripts of good service. (Hall, 1993: 458)

Female servers for example see themselves as friendlier than male servers and are also perceived by customers and managers in this way, according to the study.

Adkins (1992) also reports examples of different expectations to women and men regarding appearance. At a hotel and a leisure park, regardless which jobs women applied for, they had to be attractive. For men there were no parallel requirements, (although all had to be well groomed). Gender segregation meant that at the hotel men constituted the majority of the bar staff and women the majority of the waiting staff. The task content was similar, and one could imagine that similar worker qualities were required. This was the case to some extent, but in addition bar staff were required to be 'strong', 'smart', and to have 'good communication skills' whereas waiting staff 'were required to be "attractive" and "caring"' (p. 215). The specifications were not related to occupational requirements but to the gender of the occupants, says Adkins. 'The conditions and controls operating in relation to women workers' appearance and dress acted together to produce a sexually commodified female workforce' (p. 218). Besides being attractive to get the job, women also had to maintain this attractive appearance in order to keep the job.

> Examples of such forms of control included warnings about looking tired, having chipped nail varnish, wearing 'weird' make up, and looking 'sloppy'. In all these cases management reported they had 'no option' but to intervene to attempt to get the women to correct their appearance problems, and if, as was the case for some of the women, they did not respond to the warnings, the managers had 'no choice' but to dismiss them. (p. 216)

According to Adkins, the requirement for men was to wear their uniforms, but their appearance was never subject of intervention. 'Men could look tired, sloppy, or weird without their employment position being under threat' (ibid.).

These different requirements of women and men had the effect that women were sexualized; they were turned into sexual objects for men. Adkins concludes that the sexualizing of women benefited men (as workers, customers, employers). It facilitated the attraction of (male) customers, and the male workers got a superior power position and both groups could 'appropriate sexual servicing' from the women. That some of the interactions with men were enjoyed by the women should not camouflage the subordination of the females. Resistance to the gender regime meant that they risked being disciplined or fired.

Both cases illustrate that also when men and women are in the same type of work, they are met with different expectations and demands associated with their gender. The pressure on the females to express femininity is clear, while the men seem to face less constraint on the displaying of gender in this kind of work.

Marketing masculinity

Gendered ideas and meanings are also implicated in the construction of managerial work, including competitive struggles between managerial specialisms for attaining positions of power and status. In a study of three marketing departments, the managers wanted to establish themselves as a key group for corporate success worthy of

putting their imprints on the company's strategic orientation. They tried to promote their positions, partly through efforts to establish an internal differentiation into strategic (more masculine) and routine/administrative (less masculine) activities and knowledge fields (Chalmers, 2001). Senior actors tried to locate themselves in the former and dissociate themselves from the latter.

Chalmers's focus is on men and, in particular, masculine meanings, while women receive less attention. Her study shows how gender – gendered ideas and meanings – is implicated in the construction of managerial work and in particular in competitive struggles between managerial specialisms for attaining positions of power and status. The study indicates the contested and fragmented nature of management activity and how various groups – engineers, accountants, marketers – try to locate themselves in a position as the superior carriers of knowledge for setting the direction of the company. Chalmers assumes and tries to show how these struggles and the claims of management groups are gendered – they draw upon different notions of masculinity – and as such marginalize most women and some men. It is not so much a matter of men simply discriminating women as constructions of management work involve elements of pro-masculine gender bias, which then make it more difficult for females to find a way in or get encouragement to participate on senior levels.

In the first case, a computer systems company, people in the marketing department tried to distance themselves from promotional activities and change the terminology from marketing language to business language. The senior marketing people tried to divide the marketing department into two parts, one involving promotional and more routine tasks, serving sales, delegated to junior employees and a more active, entrepreneurial part, managing the business part, which they themselves would occupy. This division had, according to Chalmers, strong gendered undertones, where being a marketer in the first version connotated a less valued masculine status. The business manager-marketing version was an active, entrepreneurial and masculine, 'breadwinning' one, characterized by initiative and leadership. This image was clear in their accounts of sales people, being represented as impulsive, loving being flattered and not necessarily rational/profit oriented in their work. This image contrasted with the business/marketing managers being rational, cool and able to master their passions.

This masculine overtone of business/marketing work also meant that women were viewed as having problems of not being entirely fit, even though business and marketing also involved elements seen as compatible with feminine values, such as being caring, constructive, striving for consensus, etc.

The second case also exhibited, as the researcher saw it, gendered ideas to distinguish pure, strategic marketing from marketing services, subordinated to sales. However, an ambition to move marketing into business management and distance the function from sales was unsuccessful. Instead the marketing people developed (were forced to develop) a more accommodative approach, accepting a more feminine position for the department. Here marketing was portrayed, according to the author, in a 'good-wife support role to sales and taking on the sorts of cajoling, friendly, and fun-loving behaviours that signify, for the men at least, more feminine attributes' (p. 157). Still, there were indications that the men felt frustrated and tried to emphasize more masculine features of the work, including the physical demands of their exhibition work, more than the feminine cosy comforts

of office routines. Masculinity was also constructed around the technical background of the male marketers (although the relevance of this for the work was uncertain). These notions provided a counter-image to and a balancing of the overall more service-oriented and feminine positioning of the marketing department, creating and legitimating some internal sexual division of labour.

The third case, an insurance company, circles much around the significance of age and the contrast between young, marketing people and older insurance people. People have identities as both marketers and insurance people, but to various degrees, and related to age. The men are portrayed as engaged in a generational contest between the youthful vitality of a dynamic marketing man and a more experienced, conservative insurance man. The latter men were mainly in control, in the company as a whole, but also to some extent in the marketing group. Their cautiousness associated with a tradition-governed business prevented the representatives of the young, daring and virile marketing specialism from having an impact, such that it was sometimes seen by others in the firm as not much more than a 'glorified clerical section'. The lack of acknowledgement and general conservatism of the company had led senior marketing people, according to their younger colleagues, to lose some of the energy and drive to make things happen, they had become impotent, unable to have any real impact on the market.

According to this study there is great variation in how marketing is defined, what tasks are associated with it and how marketing is internally differentiated. There is no widely established consensus about this matter; the character of marketing functions and departments is the outcome of local struggles and power relations. These struggles circle around marketing's position in relation to other groups and functions, but also around masculinity. Male marketing people invoke gendered discursive strategies to make differentiations and to constitute areas of marketing work that are potentially exclusive to women and some men.

Chalmers finds a common pattern in the three marketing departments of a gendered division between more strategic/business and service/support kinds of marketing.

> Tasks involving making decisions about product and/or market opportunities have been distinguished by a masculine willingness to push ideas forward forcefully, an aggressive entrepreneurship, and a paternalistic authority, where tasks involving promotions, information gathering, and customer service have been equated with feminine images of passivity, deference, sociability, and housekeeping. (p. 160)

Through conferring a strong aura of masculinity on areas of expertise that form the base of marketing's claim to corporate power and status, the identities of male marketers are boosted and women face obstacles in moving beyond supportive functions.

In the study, marketing is chosen as a revealing example of management. It is an aspiring management discipline that has not been clearly sex-typed as men's or women's work and which has an apparent instability in terms of its gender and managerial status. Gender goes far beyond the sex typing of pre-constituted jobs as men or women's jobs.

Jobs can be seen as more or less 'manly', loosely coupled to the exact ratio of the jobholders. The gender meanings of jobs are not fixed but are created and recreated,

loosely coupled to the extent to which jobs are being occupied by a particular sex or a mix of the sexes. This is further illustrated by a study of sales people.

The arbitrary construction of toughness:
the case of insurance salesmen

An important observation then is that it is seldom the inherent character of a particular job that determines its femaleness or maleness. When one gender comprises most or all of the jobholders, people tend to believe that this gender is particularly well suited to do the job and that the one-genderedness is a natural – rather than a cultural/socially constructed – phenomena. Many jobs have over the years been redefined in terms of gender. When the association between a particular job and the biological sex is eroded then there is a more 'open' space for defining the job. We mentioned clerks in the previous chapter. As Leidner (1991) shows, almost any job may be constructed as either male or female, through emphasizing some dimensions and labelling them in a particular way. (The exception is mainly jobs calling for physical strength, although also here the picture is not so self-evident as a lot of health care work involving heavy lifting is done mainly by women.) How jobs are constructed vary in different cultures and different groups.

Leidner has studied insurance sales persons, taking their meanings and constructions of gender and work seriously. These people had the task of visiting potential customers at their homes, establishing contact ('warming up the prospects'), going through the basic sales presentation to counter any objections raised by the prospects and to persuade them to buy as much life insurance as possible. Most people they contacted were motivated to prevent this sequence from being fully materialized, making the work not easy. Despite the fact that this kind of job is interactive and may equally well be said to call for 'feminine' qualities, almost all the sales people in the company were men. The male persons Leidner interviewed felt strongly that women would be unlikely to succeed in the job. The manager said that he 'would never hire a woman' for the job. Leidner notes that this kind of job is done primarily by women in Japan and, also in a US context, requires skills that are not generally viewed as 'manly'. Sales persons must swallow insults, treat people with deference and keep smiling, features hardly congruent with most definitions of masculinity. Of interest therefore is how the American salesmen construct their job through re-interpreting some features and de-emphasizing others. According to Leidner the company's trainers and agents 'assigned a heroic character to the job, framing interactions with customers as contests of will. To succeed, they emphasized, required determination, aggressiveness, persistence, and stoicism' (p. 166). Through stressing toughness as a key quality the job was constructed as manly. Women were felt to be too sensitive, too unaggressive and not able to withstand repeated rejection in sales calls, according to some salesmen. In other sales organizations employing mainly women, qualities such as nurturance, helpfulness and service were viewed as crucial. These qualities were not absent in accounts of work in the insurance company, but they were less clearly pronounced. The conceptualization of work as an arena for enacting masculinity has several consequences. The

salesmen become more inclined to accept conditions that otherwise might have been seen as unacceptable, frustrating and demeaning.

Flying – female work?

While Leidner's case to some extent illustrates cross-societal cultural variation in terms of gendered meanings – where the same task is viewed as calling for masculine qualities in the US and feminine in Japan – the case of airline pilots points at historical variation. While the US pilot is typically associated with masculine qualities interestingly enough it was for a short period around the 1920s advertised in feminine terms (Ashcraft and Mumby, 2004). 'Public talk of gender and aviation converged around a rising star: the 'lady-flier', 'lady-bird', or 'lipstick pilot', as she was commonly called' (ibid.: 137). Besides being skilful at flying, the women pilots were also expected to live up to media and spectators' ideas of femininity, which they did successfully according to mass media. American articles from the period 1928–35 illustrate how female fliers presented themselves,

> The women pilots were very smartly dressed in the late fall styles and colours. Amelia Earhart was lovely in blue with gray fur and gray hat. Mrs. Dorothy Lea, a vivid brunette, was dressed in garnet … I have cited this in detail for the ones who are sceptical as to women pilots lacking in femininity … They, to me, represented the true American woman – women who could do things, the unusual, and yet be all womanly, many women fliers are mothers … who achieve a harmonious fusion of many interests … Our modern women pilots of today meet (sic) any tension with a lipstick or vanity case, or possibly a cigarette. (Alexander, 1932, cited by Ashcraft and Mumby, 2004)

At the time, the public was concerned about the risks of air travelling and there was a business interest in minimizing fear. It was believed to be counter-productive with an extremely heroic image, which is associated with danger, fear, etc. As the pilot was associated with war – the First World War had not been forgotten – and bold circus flying (the dare devils) there was a strong interest in de-masculinizing flying. To hire women and to label pilot work an easy job was part of this: 'if a woman can do it, it must be easy and safe' (Corn, 1979: 560). The connotation changed although the job did not change. After World War II discourses changed. Flying became more common and broadly seen as less hazardous. There was less need for the women and eventually they disappeared from this job. Pilots were again assumed to be male, and the lady-fliers became stewardesses. This occupation became gradually more and more feminized.

Mills's (2002) historical study of the organizational culture in British Airways, which was founded in 1919, showed that this aviation was from the start a male business. Mills refers to how the available accounts focus on warfare, technology, and government.

> Masculinity is embedded in each layer – warfare and technology, for example, reference the activities of specific groups of men. The reader is left with the unassailable impression that commercial aviation is quite naturally a male business. (p. 128)

And it continued to be so although 'there were a number of prominent female flyers in 1919, but none was hired as commercial airline pilots' (ibid.). The Women's Royal Air Force was established in 1918 (on the same day as the RAF) and 'more than twenty-five thousand women – some of them officers, a few of them involved in aircraft maintenance – served in the WRAF between 1918 and 1919; none was employed in commercial aviation' (ibid.). Females were thus excluded from commercial aviation as this was defined as a 'naturally' male activity after the war.

The case of pilot work together with the one on home insurance salespersons show the arbitrariness and social and historical variation involved in gender constructions. Often there are cultural forces beyond anybody's specific control at play, but in other cases we can see the hand of the managers or business interests. In the insurance case, masculinity was emphasized and used to boost the identity of the male employees. In the case of the pilots in the post-World War I US, the business interests in presenting flying as safe and relaxed meant the use of female pilots in communication in order to redefine the job and constructing it as appropriate for the women, thereby de-masculinizing it, although only during a short period.

Fine-grained negotiations of masculinity: a male with a humble personality

So far we have addressed occupational groups and fairly broad patterns. It is important also to consider how gender symbolism can be involved in much more subtle way. We illustrate this with the case of how a person with the 'wrong' sex can be located in a job but then be constructed in such a way so that problems around disruptions and misfits can be 'constructed away'.

Within the advertising area, in Sweden, the job of project assistant is at present regarded as being 'feminine' (Alvesson, 1998). It is seen as a typical women's job. Some decades ago this was not the case. Then project assistants were typically men. It was considered to be a natural start for people who eventually should become project managers. Nevertheless, this gradually changed and at present it is looked upon as a little extraordinary for a man to have this job. A woman interviewed mentioned that at one of her previous workplaces there was 'actually' a male project assistant! According to her he himself wanted to work as such:

> He had a humble personality and wanted to start somewhere to learn the advertising trade. Many were sceptical towards a male project assistant, but it worked out very well.

It can be noted that an extraordinary – and perhaps for a male rather untypical – personality trait explains this successful outcome of a deviant case, according to the (female) interview person. Closely associated with the conceptions that it is 'natural' for women and not for men to be project assistants is the hierarchy regarding positions. In society as a whole men are greatly overrepresented in higher posts. It is interesting to note the changes in the meaning of the genderedness of this work. Earlier project assistant work was seen as apprenticeship – a temporary position on the road upward. An assistant was understood to be a future project manager. The

job was then viewed as typically and properly male. At present the job as assistant is viewed as a more stable position, not necessarily leading anywhere (a dead-end-job) and as typical for women.

This example illustrates the local and fine-grained meaning of a job in terms of masculinity and femininity. Few people would see an assistant gradually to become project leader as a job or trajectory scoring high on masculinity, but linking the job to a career and emphasizing its temporal character means that it becomes 'de-feminized' and not inconsistent with the idea of being a man. (We will come back to this kind of work in Chapter 6.)

Men crossing the gender-divided job lines

A particularly interesting and revealing aspect of gender concerns the transgressions of sharply drawn gender lines. Throughout history there have, in periods, been men working within what has been defined as mainly or solely women's jobs, and women in what is thought of as primarily men's jobs. And today there would hardly be any strict taboos against the other sex working within an area dominated by the 'first' sex in parts of the world. There are male midwives and female soldiers in fighting units in at least some countries. Here we will briefly discuss the different problems men might face when they choose to work within an area, which is not immediately seen as congruent with their sex, and where an identity/work gender misalignment is perceived by people and, partly through the communications of others, experienced by the person crossing the gender lines.

Kanter's research (1977) on token women showed how men reacted to women who were few in numbers within a male-dominated area. They experienced discrimination, were stereotyped into 'fixed' role-expectations. Differences were exaggerated and they did not benefit from their status. Kanter did not differentiate between men and women; she mainly talked about the effect of numbers. There was little interest in the cultural meanings of the masculine or feminine nature of the jobs and areas. Since Kanter, however, there has been more research showing that men in the same token situation may very well benefit from this, partly as they are expected to and encouraged to display signs on masculinity within the feminine context, which involve some benefits, although there are frequently also costs and problems at the same time.

People breaking with established gender patterns are often encouraged today; sometimes seen as pioneers and valued as individualistic and progressive, following their genuine interests rather than being guided by stereotypes. The situation is different from a couple of decades ago, where gender divisions were more rigid. Although there certainly still are examples where persons crossing traditional gender lines face sanctions of a more or less serious nature, probably more frequently problems emerge in more vague, ambivalent and ambiguous ways. At the same time as people breaking gender lines receive some support they still sometimes face scepticism. Male elementary teachers, for example, are sometimes suspected of being 'too masculine' for this kind of work and not sensitive enough to the needs of the children (Allan, 1993).[8] More generally, men in non-traditional occupations are sometimes suspected of being homosexual.

The scepticism that men face may result in them not even considering these kinds of jobs. On the other hand, men are sometimes seen as very attractive candidates for women's jobs, looked upon as someone who could contribute positively. Men might also be seen as an asset in women's jobs because of expectations of higher wages and status for all. Whereas women in men's jobs are not facing the same positive acknowledgement, almost the opposite is expected that status and wages will fall if too many women enter.

In relation to, for example, nursing, studies show that men do not mind the job tasks but are worried about reactions from friends, and families. A European study (Bulgaria, Denmark, Italy, Poland) showed that men sometimes cope with this difficulty by redefining the work functions and masculinizing these, and some times changing the title of the job (Warming and Ussing, 2005). They are not nurses but 'clinical advisers'. This is in line with Pringle's study (1993), which showed that men did not mind the secretarial tasks but the title should be more prestigious, and thereby sound if not more masculine then at least less feminine.

Simpson (2004) notices the advantages men working within teaching and nursing had, that they felt they were 'looked after' much more than their female colleagues and that there were more relaxed rules for them. With regard to a possible conflict between the gender label of the job and their identity, men used different strategies to overcome this 'discomfort'. They re-labelled the job, and recast the content 'to enhance more masculine components and distancing from the female' (p. 359). Librarians referred to their titles as 'information scientists' or 'researchers' and thus by highlighting technical skills distanced themselves from their image of the librarian 'with a bun and a cardigan' (p. 360).

However, although the pressure – external and/or internalized – to re-label and to exhibit masculinity is so strong that men feel inclined to distance themselves from the feminine, it is not necessarily a stable force or orientation. The work may be presented as more masculine and the masculine elements be prioritized, when men in non-traditional occupations are together with men (who work in more traditional ones), while they may engage in more 'feminine' activities during the work-day. Presentations and experiences associated with masculinity may be temporal and situation-specific. Doing masculinity can be quite varied, inconsistent and ambiguous and is, as we see it, not reserved to men, likewise doing femininity, engaging in so-called feminine tasks (nurturing, being empathetic) is not reserved for women.

Another pressure on men in women's jobs is that they are expected to do 'men's tasks' in the kindergarten, etc.; they are supposed to have technical competence and physical strength and expected to masculinize their job, if they do not they are faced with disbelief and non-acceptance. They are supposed to exhibit masculinity, and this is not detrimental to their careers, as they may get rewarded for this, showing off the skills 'necessary' for moving on. A common observation is that men have the possibility of getting up the career ladder much faster than women (the glass escalator effect), not always because of their own will but because they are 'pushed' into this 'elevator' and carried upwards. The above European study (Warming and Ussing, 2005) showed that some men were reluctant to advance and felt pressed into a 'managerial' position they did not really want. Williams (1993) also suggests a mix of advantage and negative effects for men in

female-dominated jobs, like positive attention and suspicion of being too masculine for the job, and that men may be devalued if they do not want the 'managerial' positions.

In the Danish trade union for kindergarten personnel 15 per cent of the members are men, but they hold all posts in the board and are in a majority as trade-union workers. It appears that men are more interested than women in having these 'male' positions in order to escape from being stereotyped as above and to sustain a male identity (Billing, 1995). Similarly, most of the employees in the sectors of cleaning and childcare, who started their own companies (when the Swedish public sector opened up for privatization) were men, despite the fact that they only formed a small minority of all the employees in the sector. This may partly be explained by the masculine appeal of being an entrepreneur (Sundin, 1997).

What are the consequences of all this for gender division of labour? It is obvious that gender segregation is reproduced, if males are pushed upwards the hierarchies (by their female colleagues) and getting special treatment, while women trying to get into a male career are met by glass walls and glass ceilings. Crossing over then has different consequences for men and women. Although the token-situation is similar, exhibiting masculinity in women's jobs will be rewarded for men while we cannot expect the same for women in men's jobs (that exhibiting femininity is rewarded).

Even though the crossing of traditional gender lines and work in an area dominated by and seen as 'natural' for the other sex is still not unproblematic, there are also examples of people doing so without any particular difficulties. According to a Swedish newspaper, a 25-year-old sergeant and tank commander did not experience any particular gender-related problems with the male soldiers, although she thought that it was an advantage, in her private life that her boyfriend was also in the army, as a man in a non-masculine occupation may feel his masculinity threatened by her job.[9] Even though it may be uncommon that a strong misfit between sex and gender-symbolism of an occupation is unproblematic (and we have only the newspaper article to rely upon) the example still may illustrate that not all gender line-crossing moves in work and occupations bring about resistance and/or self-doubt. Arguably, there are also some positive changes during recent decades making it gradually easier to transcend traditional sex-bound job areas. Being a male nurse or kindergarten teacher or a female police officer or priest may, in many countries, be less problematic today than, say 25 years ago. (We remind the reader that this book mainly refers to the Western world.)[10]

Level and gendered meanings

Gender symbolism is not restricted to the work or occupation but refers also to the social field and organization in question as well as to specific activities. Also social positions are sometimes loaded with gender symbolism. Generally, there are cultural meanings associated with levels. Masculinity is associated with higher positions, while assisting work is not just subordinate but also often regarded as feminine. As we mentioned earlier, most men are subordinates so there is hardly a universal or crude link between subordinate position and femininity. But behind and in the

relations between men and women, masculinities and femininities, there are often more or less subtle hints of the normal or appropriate difference in level.

One should note the spatial metaphors used for describing hierarchical social relations: high and low. By seeing these relations in such terms, the particular image of the subject matter is illustrated. That height and position are unconsciously seen as related is illustrated by a study in which a person from England visiting Australia was introduced in various ways to different audiences. Some were led to believe that he was a student, others a laboratory assistant, others a lecturer and a fourth group was told that he was a professor. People were asked to estimate his physical height. Perceptions of height were neatly correlated with academic standing, and the 'professor' was seen as being two-and-a-half inches taller than the 'student' (Wilson, in Johns, 1983). Given that height symbolizes authority – we talk of high positions, senior officers in organizations are typically located on the top floors and, as the experiment shows, we even perceive 'higher' graded persons as physically taller than others – and that men typically are taller than women, we can see how gender becomes trapped in the spatial metaphors of height. The idea of higher/lower position has a masculine/feminine bearing and the relative height of men seems to reinforce notions of authority and high positions/ranks. This phenomenon is reflected in various situations, from the norm that males should be taller than their female partners, to the observation, made by Rosen (1998), that at a corporate party males danced with junior females and females danced with their senior males and colleagues at the same level, but the combination of higher ranking females and lower-ranking males never materialized on the dancing floor. More generally, the norm appears to be that the husband should not have a lower position or lower pay than the wife.

However, as always, we should bear the historical context and the changes in society in mind – and not just accept research results from the 1980s as valid also for understanding the situation of today. For example, in at least some countries, there seems to be a loosening up of the traditional naturalization of the norm that men earn more than women. Wajcmann (1998) showed in a study of managers that one third of the female managers earned much more than their husbands. In Billing's study (2006) some of the women managers were married to men of lower social ranks, and the women earned the double of their husbands, seemingly without creating that much tension. Comparison with a study conducted more than 15 years ago indicates that there are at least examples of this kind of level differentiation playing a reduced role (Billing and Alvesson, 1994).

Critical discussion

When working with the ideas of gendered meanings the difficulties of over-interpretations and biases should be carefully considered. The weaknesses and problems of using masculinities or femininities as interpretive devices are profound. Stivers's (1993) (whose book involuntarily exemplifies problems of imposing a broad brushed concept of masculinity on reality) remarks about the dangers of using

dichotomies are relevant for researchers to consider as much as people 'out there' in everyday life:

> The dichotomous nature of our thinking, the conviction that masculinity and femininity are mutually exclusive, sometimes leads us to leap to one extreme in an effort to avoid or deny the other. (p. 123)

It is also too easy to read masculinities or femininities into everything. Based on an assumption that (almost) nothing is gender-neutral it makes sense to ascribe a gendered meaning to whatever phenomenon. Arbitrary ascriptions are common. Researchers often rely on common sensical or vague impressionistic understandings, sometimes expressing rather than just 'correctly' illuminating stereotypical ideas. We, the authors of this book, cannot claim to stand above this stereotype-reproducing inclination. Sometimes what is seen as masculine may reflect the view of white middle class feminists rather than the cultural meanings of other groups. Feminists sometimes seem to have rather 'weak' criteria for seeing something as masculine, while 'higher' standards may be employed by blue-collar workers as well as by people in business life. This, of course, does not prevent interpreting masculine meanings in settings where these are not socially recognized by one group or another from being potentially productive. But care should guide such enterprises so that they do not get caught up in arbitrary interpretation or cultural and theoretical relativism: where what is masculine for one person or group is not so for another and any opinion is as good or bad as the other. Many of the reviewed studies are unclear about considerations of the views of those being studied. Even though for example the marketing people studied by Chalmers (2001) tried to distinguish between a more 'strategic' business function and a more administrative and service-oriented part, whether the people saw this is in gender terms is not obvious. The ambition must be to go beyond what is viewed as 'masculine' only by a single or even a group of feminists and 'masculinists' and ground this ascription/interpretation in more broadly shared cultural meanings. One should always raise the question 'for whom does something appear as an example of masculinity or femininity'? The question of the tension between native construction and researcher construction and the latter being imposed on the former calls for careful consideration.

If we focus on gender symbolism and the social construction of femininity and masculinity we must consider the risk of reproducing stereotypes and of arbitrarily imposing masculinity/femininity. What is masculine for one group or person may not be for another. The complex interplay between external pressure and internalized subjective orientations must be considered in order to understand gender division. The dichotomous way of thinking about genders, the feminine/masculine is reproducing gender division and is hiding the internal differentiation within each concept and even how they interact with other categories, e.g. ethnicity, age and other forms of distinction that intersect with gender. There is a high risk that stereotypes about what is viewed as masculine and feminine are being reproduced and reinforced. Researchers may invoke and inscribe gendered meanings without a careful study of what meanings that those referred to actually have.

An interesting phenomenon is that while the focus on women in management and organization has concentrated on women – their situation, experiences and voices – without much talk or interest in 'femininities', the work exploring 'the first sex' addresses mainly masculinities and not so much men. We thus have a wealth of gender research on women (as individuals) and masculinities (as socially dominant forms and stereotypes), but still fairly little on men and femininities. This probably reflects the belief that we need to carefully understand the situation, motivations, managerial behavior, etc., of women compared to men and, in the more radical approaches, the experiences, problems of and discriminations against women. In particular many feminists have made ambitious efforts to describe and interpret the work lives of females. It seems to be assumed that the category of men calls less for an empathetic understanding of their situation and experiences than for a more critical exploration of how the work and corporate world is constructed by men, in masculine ways. There is a tendency in gender research to listen to women in organizations in order to bring forward their voices in a respectful way, and to listen less to men and rather to show how they express dominant, constraining and discriminatory ideas and discourses, typically labelled masculinities. This tendency reflects the idea that females are suppressed while men, if not acting as suppressors, at least are benefactors of established constructions of organizations, favouring men in terms of power, wealth and status. Another aspect is the belief that men's voices dominate strongly, in society and organizations and in various reports (research, mass media), and the need to bring forward voices of females is strong.

An interesting aspect here concerns the possibility that men may be less inclined to define themselves as 'victims' and less likely to put forward views about negative emotions and discrimination at work. There is an ideological or cultural norm of men 'taking it like a man' or not exhibiting signs on weaknesses or being harmed. This may make it methodologically more difficult to bring out 'men's voices' in research.[11] This underscores the need for ambitious interpretive work trying to bring out the nuanced aspects around how people – men and women – construct themselves and their work worlds in gendered and sometimes non-gendered ways.

Summary

In this chapter we have addressed the fact that the social construction of masculinities and femininities may be a productive approach to understanding gender division of labour and other organizational phenomena. One advantage is a broad interpretive range – that is if one is not tying the concepts too closely to what are viewed as characteristics of men and women – capable of interpreting a great deal of organizational aspects. Another is that it transcends the reductionism associated with either a macro or micro focus. It avoids 'sociologism' as well as 'psychologism' (it may, however, be accused of 'culturalism' and of missing economic and structural as well as psychological dimensions). Through looking at how we construct, conform to or transcend notions of masculinities and femininities, we can connect to subjectivities, experiences and intentions as well as to cultural wholes, broader patterns and social constraints. There are, however, also great problems with studying gender in terms of masculinities

and femininities. As discussed above, these broad and slippery concepts easily can capture everything and nothing. Gender stereotypes may be produced and reinforced rather than revealed. Sometimes it is the ideas of the researchers – as individuals and/or as inclinations of the gender research community as a collective – about masculinity and/or femininity, rather than those being studied, whose meanings determine the outcome of a study. There is a tendency for researchers to be insensitive to meanings amongst various groups 'out there', amongst those being studied. Care, sensitivity and self-critique should govern gender studies much more than sometimes is the case. For whom is something masculine and feminine is a question that always needs to be asked.

This book probably has its share of questionable inscriptions of gender-stereotypical ideas. We have tried to be aware of this unfortunate tendency in work on gender. In the absence of sufficient good in-depth studies, one is left with informed guesses based on a sense of what gendered meanings there are in circulation. Even if one believes one has a good feeling for this, it is easy to overestimate one's insights and underestimate the heterogeneity of various groups. There may also be generational differences – what was seen as masculine for one generation may lose any such meaning for the next one. We are here just raising the warning flag for the reader – encouraging critical readings also of the claims in this text. Ambitions to be cautious and reflexive and the delivery of complaints about the in- or oversensitivity of others is no guarantee for one's own success. Moving back to our (bold) claims in this chapter, we still argue that although there are exceptions – and it would be wrong to neglect variations and changes reducing the impact of gender in many instances – the reviewed studies show the deep-seated nature of masculine and feminine meanings governing a great deal of working and organizational life. This is sometimes crudely, sometimes more subtly gendered. To understand these dynamics, the interaction between various levels must be considered:

- the macro level of cultural definitions relating masculinity and femininity to certain sectors in life;
- the meso-level in which social interactions and workplace specific conditions bring about constructions which cannot simply be predicted or understood from a macro level (illustrated by Leidner's and Alvesson's studies above), and
- the subjective orientations of people in which established clues for sex-consistent and, thereby, identity-confirming actions and orientations are embraced and reproduced.

We will in the next two chapters relate the last two themes, and develop ideas around masculinity and femininity in the contexts of identity constructions (Chapter 5) and organizational culture (Chapter 6).

Notes

1 These jobs are, of course, also sex-typed. That the jobs are sex-typed according to a male/female dichotomy co-exist with a much more varied gender symbolism. The masculinities, that arguably are typically ascribed to the work of a fireman and a post-mortem examiner, respectively, probably have little in common.

2   Social constructionism refers to a rather broad set of orientations. Some of
    these tend to focus so strongly on the social that psychological consideration is
    excluded. Here we adopt a looser approach, in which the study of subjectivities
    and identities, while seen in the context of social processes and constructions
    also include an individual element that is not best translated into social terms.
    Some versions of social constructionism emphasize the constructedness of
    everything, giving analysis a relativistic orientation, social constructions being
    impossible to evaluate in terms of 'true' or 'false'. Our approach is critical–
    interpretive, implying an effort to understand the meanings developed by indi-
    viduals and groups upon which social constructions are 'built'. With the risk of
    being (or appearing) eclectic or indecisive, we push the constructivist line of
    thinking less far and view social ideas as more or less well founded – e.g. beliefs
    about female managers may be compared with studies of the behaviour of
    female managers – even though the major focus is to investigate how people
    create their social reality, which is something else than 'objectively' testing this
    reality. (We should add that studies of behaviour are also a matter of construc-
    tions, i.e. how the researcher constructs 'data', but there are still differences in
    constructions as general beliefs and of more specific investigated meanings,
    behaviours, practices, etc.)

3   In this sense, it may be argued that the voices of men belong to those neglected
    by dominating trends in gender studies. The critique of mainstream manage-
    ment studies for being male-centred does not seem to consider the difference
    between men as managers and/or as oppressors of women, and men voicing
    more personal experiences. These may concern being breadwinners and feeling
    forced to accept an unpleasant job and working for a bad boss in order to sup-
    port the family. At least these are occasionally more negative and more con-
    straining parts of the male role as traditionally defined.

4   The list gives the impression of being rather unsystematic and the empirical
    grounding of the five forms is not clear. The terms seem to refer to partly dis-
    parate, partly overlapping phenomena.

5   For matters of convenience we sometimes talk about masculinity/
    femininity, which should not obscure our awareness of there being a variety of
    versions of these.

6   Some authors distinguish between masculinity as a set of traits, i.e. a part of per-
    sonality, and masculinity as an ideology, i.e. beliefs that a man should have these
    attributes (Pleck et al., 1993). The view adhered by us is a third one; masculin-
    ity stands for an ascribed meaning to a phenomenon. One may think of a phe-
    nomenon in terms of masculinity without necessarily endorsing or rejecting it.

7   Of course, we realize that we are as vulnerable as other researchers to the risk
    of projecting our views on the phenomena we are studying. We, the authors of
    this book, acknowledge that we also, of course, sometimes may assume too
    much and lack nuanced grounding in the views of those groups we refer to
    when talking about cultural masculinity/femininity.

8   Minority status was a mixed blessing for male kindergarten teachers, according
    to a Finnish study (Kauppinen-Toropainen and Lammi, 1993). They were often
    treated as favourites by the children and their parents, while their female col-
    leagues felt envy and frustration, as they saw this as an effect of maleness and
    greater visibility – not because of their professional superiority.

9 Swedish newspaper *Kristianstadsbladet* 16 May 1994.

10 We should be aware of significant cultural differences in the construction of femininity/masculinity. As we treat mainly the Western world in this book we will just add that the cultural patterns from the home (non-Western) countries of immigrants may influence their choice of job.

A Danish investigation (referred to in the Danish newspaper *Metro Express*, 7 February 2008) showed that one-third of male immigrants want a career within female-dominated areas (nurses, hairdressers, etc.), compared to one fifth of the 'native' males, while 37 per cent of female immigrants want to work in a female-dominated job, compared with 72 per cent of the native females. (In the countries of origin, nurses and hairdressers are men, while these are occupations dominated by women in Denmark.)

11 Of course equal opportunity policies may discriminate against men – politicians and management in publically exposed organizations often want to improve statistics and may promote some women at the expense of men in order to make things look good. But the ideology of men being disinclined to define or express themselves as victims may make them less likely to air complaints about this. (Of course, the historical and in many organizations the ongoing tendency to over-promote men make a victim identity less credible and less well supported.)

5
Gender and Identity

Understanding masculinities and femininities can, as indicated in the previous chapter, be understood at a social level. These meanings then work as organizing principles for the gendering of division of labour and social life in general. It is important also to relate this to how people experience their situations and options, how they think and feel about existence and themselves. This calls for an interest in identity. Identity marks the experienced consistency and distinctiveness of a person. It answers the question 'Who am I?' through referring to characteristics and orientations that a person believes defines him or her, giving some guidelines for existence. Identity is often seen as a matter of continuity, coherence and distinctiveness in self-definition, although there are various views on this. Often identity is addressed as multiple, varied and processual. Without stressing the level of (social) psychology too much, it is vital to appreciate the significance of the self-definitions and self-views of individuals for understanding the role of cultural masculinity and femininity. We will therefore develop this particular aspect at some length in this chapter.

In gender and organization studies, as well as in other social sciences, there has been a rising interest in identity. Organization scholars are increasingly concerned with organizational, managerial, professional and occupational identities, as well as how organizational members negotiate issues surrounding and concerning self in workplace settings.

Studies from a managerial perspective are interested in how identity and identification may hold an important key to a variety of managerial outcomes and thus the potential to improve organizational effectiveness. For instance, much organizational identification research maintains that identification affects decision-making and behaviour, stereotypical perceptions of self and other, group cohesion, commitment, and social support (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Elsbach, 1999; Haslam and Reicher, 2006). From a gender point of view, identity is more of interest as a way of understanding people's experiences at work, how their subjectivities are being shaped and how gender divisions and other gendered phenomena in organizations are being formed. Identity can be seen as a key reference point where cultural masculinities and femininities are being played out 'on' individuals – through expectations and feedback – but also expressed, as people act based on their sense of who they are and what they want. An interest in identity is important to counteract the tendencies to structuralism and determinism in some gender literature. How individuals and groups think, feel, relate and act is crucial, and here identity is a key aspect. It is of course also a crucial dimension to consider in order to

create social changes. Arguably, identity constructions trap people in gender and thus are a major obstacle to the overcoming of rigid and oppressive gender divisions.

Identity

It is broadly agreed, at least among socially oriented researchers, that identities are constructed: they do not exist as an objective set of characteristics, but involve the creation of meaning on the part of the individual persons and others contributing to the definition of identity. Answers to questions 'Who am I?' and 'What kind of person am I?' are thus not answered once and for all, but call for continuing work, sometimes struggles as social interactions and experiences change not only over time, but also during the work day as one encounters a variety of people, and situations in a complex, ambiguous and often fragmented social world. It is important to stress that this fluidity – the processual nature of identity – is contingent upon social relations and language use. Identity is personal but developed, expressed and changed in a social and cultural context. One does not develop and maintain identity in splendid isolation, but in close interaction with other people, who confirm, support or disrupt different identity claims. Language is vital as there is a variety of ways of answering identity questions.

Without denying the significance of the biological basis and early experiences most contemporary researchers and, in particular those of interest in the present context, broaden the net of considerations. Historical and cultural contexts, specific local conditions, social interactions and negotiations and individual construction work – identity is to some extent chosen – are equally, if not much more, important. And of course much more relevant in an organizational context than in for example, child development psychology.

Identities are multiple and contextual. A person may see herself as a result-oriented manager, a devoted bird-watcher as well as a loving mother and a politically conservative voter. Fragmentation and diversity are then counteracted through links showing some mediation and continuity. A high income associated with making a career and being a manager may be seen as securing a materially good home. Pressures from work as well as family or other non-work related commitments can come together in an attitude of 'effectiveness': being well organized, using working time effectively, being impatient with 'nonsense' and red-tape, balancing work and home life.

The fluid, multiple and contextual nature of identity does not mean that it makes sense to see identity as totally without a core or a 'substance'. People may be more or less robust or flexible in their self-understandings, depending on background, context and life trajectory. There are typically 'identity themes' that tend to be salient in an individual's self-view across a rich variety of situations, creating some notion of endurance and integration, co-existing with identity themes that are more situation specific.

Identities are crucial in the regulation of self-esteem and self-perception as well as social interaction and work behaviour. Identities are associated with values,

meanings and logics of action. They govern deeper forms of subjectivities – feelings and thinking – and are thus a highly significant aspect of work organizations.

Identity: work and regulation

Crucial elements in identity are first, individuals engaged in ongoing identity construction and second, the ways in which various actors and institutions exercise power influencing this identity construction. In order to emphasise this Alvesson and Willmott (2002) suggest the use of the concepts of *identity work* and *identity regulation*. This together signals how the individual is an agent doing identity constructions based on interpretations of the world and him/herself in it, but that these interpretations often bear strong imprints of others exercising power over these interpretations. How we define ourselves in terms of masculinities or femininities are partly outcomes of how others – mass media, teachers, managers, politicians and other opinion leaders but also people around ourselves (parents, friends, spouses, neighbours) – provide rewards and sanctions for being. We will therefore use some space exploring these concepts.

Identity work

People in their lives, inside as well as outside organizations, routinely engage in *identity work* – aiming at achieving a feeling of a reasonably coherent and positive sense of self, necessary for coping with the ambiguities of existence, work tasks and social relations.

This concept invites an interest in understanding how individuals deal with their complex and often ambiguous and contradictory experiences of work and organization. Identity work is prompted by social interaction and/or the events and experiences that raise questions of 'Who am I?' and 'Who are we?' In attempting to answer these questions, an individual crafts a self-narrative by drawing on cultural resources as well as memories and desires to reproduce or transform their sense of self (Knights and Willmott, 1989; Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). People can be seen to engage in identity work, therefore, when the routinized reproduction of a self-identity in a stable setting is discontinued. This may be triggered by uncertainty, anxiety, questioning or self-doubt (Knights and Willmott, 1989; Collinson, 2003), but also by more positive or neutral events. As things happen – opportunities arise or boredom is experienced with a job – a person gets input to think through issues like: What should and could I do? What am I interested in? How could I see myself in a few years' time?

Studying identity work means being interested in how an individual creates meaning around the self in the context of some degree of disruption or opening up – which may be positive, negative or simply neutral. It is the fine-grained, personal nuances of this that is important to consider – and this typically calls for a sensitive, interpretive understanding. This needs to incorporate assessments of the broader social and cultural context.

Identity regulation

Identity cannot, however, be solely understood from the studied person's point of view, even if this is put into a broader context. As said previously identities are, at least partly, developed in the context of power relations (Foucault, 1980, 1982; Knights and Willmott, 1985, 1989; Ely and Padavic, 2007). These are not so much a matter of the broader cultural and social context shaping the conditions for identity constructions, but operate more directly on identity through the immediate context. They are thus more visible than, for example, how people are influenced through exposure to mass media or how the reading of more or less gendered child literature forms them during upbringing. The exercise of much of contemporary power depends on the development of subjects tied to particular identities regarding how one should feel, think and act. This aspect of power/subjectivity is crucial for understanding gender identities.[1] In comparison with role theory, this understanding of identity in the context of masculinities/femininities emphasizes how power works through constraining feelings, thoughts and actions. This is accomplished through offering standards for being and discouraging 'abnormal' ways of thinking, feeling and acting. Power here operates through normalization, through defining what is normal, natural and acceptable, and through invoking fear and uncertainty about deviating from this ideal – not through knocking people on their heads or preventing them from doing anything.[2]

One central focus here is the managerial interest in regulating employees through appeals to self-image, feelings, values and identifications (e.g. Kunda, 1992; Willmott, 1993). Managers are increasingly concerned with how organizational control is accomplished through the self-positioning of employees within managerially inspired discourses (Deetz, 1995). An appreciation of these developments prompts the image of *the employee as a managed identity worker* who is enjoined to incorporate the new managerial discourses into narratives of self-identity (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). A commonplace example of this process arises in the repeated invitation – through processes of induction, training and corporate education (e.g. in-house magazines, posters, etc.) – to embrace the notion of 'we' (for example, the organization or team).

Identity regulation can be understood as a critical element of the employment relationship. Through this lens, human resource management techniques that may appear to be functional for both organization and individuals can be read as more suspect. In the aforementioned study of socialization and identity development among young professionals, Ibarra (1999) observes, 'Feedback that is clear, vivid and salient at an emotional level, therefore, may play a critical role in helping the individual to narrow the search for an identity that suits the situation and can be incorporated into a more enduring sense of self' (p. 785). Although framed in positive terms, this excerpt may also be viewed as a form of negative closure, wherein superiors seduce subordinates into calibrating their senses of self with a restricted catalogue of corporate-approved identities bearing strong imprints of managerial power. Although such feedback may be experienced by the subordinate as reassuring and helpful in the quest for personal success, the corporate regulation of self may also be interpreted to constitute a kind of invisible identity cage.

Identity formation operates then as a combination of external and internal processes (Ely and Padavic, 2007: 1131). Through formal policies, reward and sanction arrangements and practices, leadership acts; working habits, language use, and other symbolic expressions of power operate externally on individuals. It operates internally through the need to accommodate or reject these operations. A middle form is the development of the wishes, needs and meaning framing of these power operations. Of course, these operations work in respects other than gender and in many cases power means that men and women are treated in a similar way. This may lead either to a gender-difference reducing effect, for example, if both men and women become more career-oriented. (Of course one and the same identity regulation effort may also lead to gender differentiation, the same message may trigger different and sex-specific responses, e.g. trying to make people more career-minded may lead to some embracing and others rejecting a strong career-oriented self.)

Frequently, however, identity regulation functions in a more direct, although sometimes subtle, gendered way. Idealized masculinity and femininity are being expressed in how careers are supported, parental arrangements are being supported (or not supported), how feedback is provided, how dress codes are encouraged/ discouraged, how vocabularies are used, etc.

Needless to say, much exercise of power is straightforward and does not operate primarily or directly on identity, even though identity is always involved. For advocates of structuralist understandings, it is 'objective' opportunities that matter and it is structural power associated with position and other resources that are significant. Interest and positional power, rather than identity and symbolic use of power regulating identity, is viewed as significant. But from an identity perspective, the objective opportunities matter less, if individuals are being shaped in such ways that their orientations and ambitions are out of tune with the opportunities. So even if there are no specific direct career obstacles for females in an organization, strong socialization and regulation leading to the adoption of a wife, mother-oriented identity may mean that an individual chooses (or 'chooses') to refrain from, for example, applying for a promotion.

The interplay between identity work (constrained voluntarism) and identity regulation (power calling for acceptance of the target) is important. As Butler (2004: 3) expresses it, 'my persistence as an "I" depends upon me being able to do something with what is being done to me' where the agency associated with identity is being dependent on 'the conditions of my constitution'. Identity work is informed by regulation, but the effects of regulation is in the end a matter of what is being done with all the suggestions and pressures for how to define oneself – as a professional, manager, employee, gendered man or woman, etc.

Gender identity

Traditional definitions of gender identity emphasize children's early awareness of body differences and see this as an existential sense of one's maleness or femaleness. It appears almost as a psychological appendix to the biological sex, the identity

responding to the latter in the great majority of all cases. There is a large literature on sex differences assuming highly stable characteristics of men and women, showing little sensitivity to how gender is being shaped in social processes and through experiences. To the extent that this literature considers identity it was – and is – often conceptualized and measured in terms of orientations of masculinity and femininity, defined as fixed, unitary constructs (Ely and Padavic, 2007). This line of thinking suggests that a gender identity is established early and while certainly not telling the entire story of future life, represents a degree of biological determinism – body leads to identity (Deaux and Stewart, 2001). Elements of this can also be found in standpoint feminism, valuing the female experience, as seen in Chapter 2.

Most people probably gender themselves and are gendered by others and strive to keep a sense of masculinity or femininity intact, using gender-appropriate behaviours and meanings to do so in order to confirm a gender identity. Images of masculinity and femininity in a society:

> do not correspond to what most men and women are like, but nevertheless, large number of people support and aspire to these ideals and are judged according to them. (Ely and Padavic, 2007: 1129)

These ideals function as regulatory mechanisms, producing feelings of doubts and failure if one experiences not being able to live up to them, for example, not being the right kind of parent, career-person, sexually attractive and fit, not sufficiently well-dressed and exhibiting signs of success and smartness. But this does not work mechanically. People actively interpret and relate to the ideals, taking some seriously and rejecting others and giving many a particular, more personal twist and meaning. As a constructed phenomenon, gender identity is a fundamentally interpretive project. For a female seeing herself as a feminine person, it is a matter of the meanings and stories of herself as (a particular kind of) female, including what is important for her and what is distinct in relationship to others. (It is of course, the same for a male – and for persons not defining themselves strongly in terms of gender.)

How important is gender identity? Various schools and perspectives would provide different answers. Advocates of psychological sex differences as well as women's standpoint advocates would view gender identity as central and persistent. Sex is seen as robust and crucial for experiences. Identity is seen as heavily gendered, mainly because it seems significant for one's self-definition and especially others' inclination to fix a person in a social category. Ridgeway and Correll (2000b) for example, argue that sex categorization is 'deeply rooted in the socio-cognitive processes for organizing relations' and that 'both men and women have a deep cognitive interest in maintaining a clear-cut, reasonably stable framework of gender beliefs that clearly define (that is, differentiate between) "who" men and women "are"' (p. 111). The persistence of these categorizations would lead to significant effects on identity, e.g. not only guiding how people 'externally' relate to others but also how one sees oneself in terms of gender.

Macro-oriented and structuralist researchers would see identity as less important, or at least less interesting to focus on, as the broader social system would be seen as the key force. Identities are viewed as mainly an effect of structures, systems and

power relations. Other schools like poststructuralism and interpretive-constructionist stances would emphasize variation, perhaps between different situations or even moments. Gender identity would sometimes be salient and significant and sometimes not. Researchers who emphasize the nature of gender as a primary category and identity marker argue that when not in the foreground, gender 'is almost always a *background* identity in interaction' (Ridgeway and Correll, 2000b: 112).

Even if one accepts that sex categories and gendered identity constructions are seldom totally out of the picture, they vary considerably in what role they play, both between individuals and the various social domains they are engaged in and between different life stages and situations. There are situations where other aspects of social identity (race, nationality, occupation, ethnicity, age, group membership, corporate belonging) or personal identity (aggressive, sport-freak, shy, having-been-brought-up-by-unloving-parents) may be more salient. As the idea of intersectionality suggests, it is also frequently the interaction effects of various sources of identity – race, class, sexual orientation – that are important to consider. Sometimes this means 'the simultaneous and shifting nature of identity', as Adib and Guerrier (2003) observed in a study of hotel employees, 'at one point in the narrative women's gender may be in the foreground and at the next point it may be the ethnic identity, which is salient' (p. 430). In many situations at work – and perhaps at least at some workplaces – personal qualities and work tasks may matter most for identity constructions. Personally, we think that we probably experience work life more often as senior academics than as distinctly gendered when lecturing, participating in meetings, writing books, trying to make the photocopier work, etc. Even though one can say that sex (gender) is a master identity (Hughes, referred to by West and Zimmerman, 1987) – that, in opposition to role identities, cuts across situations and roles – in a workplace context the master identity may not always be so central. So even if a person experiences herself and is seen as a woman in a wide set of situations over the week, in the work life, the identity as a PhD student or a sociologist may matter more.

For people heavily into gender-stereotypical areas and relations, gender as a governing/constraining force is very different from those in other life situations and perhaps with other life histories and social networks. One could formulate this as, these stories of being a woman or a man are told more or less frequently and with more or less meaning-attachment. Some people's story telling about themselves – for themselves and to others – is heavily filled with feminine or masculine elements, others not. One would assume that a photo model and an accountant differ in how much and how often gender is present in work life – in how people are addressed, think about and express themselves. The variation also follows lifestages. During a period of a romance or childbirth, gendered identities typically are more pronounced.

Gender identities do not always or normally come through in sharp relief. One interesting approach is to define identity in terms of the intersections between gender and other sources of identities. Race and ethnicity are often mentioned here (but less ready-made 'sociological fact-sheet' categories may also be relevant, e.g. community-membership). From this perspective, gender has no necessary priority but can be considered only in conjunction with other key elements of self. These elements are not just combined or added to each other, but interact and lead to the creation of dynamic effects. It is the emergent properties created by interactions that

are important. This would mean that there are never any pure experiences of gender identities, but the gender elements are interactive ingredients in the forming of the situation-specific senses of self that emerges.

Social change and gender identity

Studying gender means taking an interest in a moving target. How rapid or drastic the changes are can be discussed, but there certainly are changes over the decades. Although some researchers, like Ridgeway and Correll (2000b) emphasize how strong and strict gender distinctions and categories are, one could say that they are increasingly being loosened up.

The trend in modern society is that the material practices – crucial for the identity of the traditional peasant or blacksmith (whose identity was probably seldom at stake or even emerged as a meaningful category as the question 'Who am I?' hardly was raised) – are less significant today. Also fixed social positions and associated markers (dress, consumption) are less salient today, when class differentiation and class inequalities are less obvious. Social-discursive interaction, including talk and narratives, becomes particularly vital for identity (Shotter and Gergen, 1989; Giddens, 1991; Alvesson, 1994). Identity becomes more open and it is more obviously something to be created and worked upon. Through describing oneself in a particular way, one expresses and reinforces a particular identity. The contemporary age tends to produce highly precarious identities as a consequence of rapid changes, a wide set of options and the presence of a broad set of models, not least in terms of gender. Compared with 30–40 years ago, most Western societies today exhibit a much wider set of available gender images, which make gender identifications less simple and less constraining. (Of course, so is the case also for other identifications – nationality, local community, etc., playing another role than for example 50 years ago.) This situation triggers intense efforts for securing identities, including finding a balance between continuity and flexibility.

This means both opportunities and vulnerabilities. In the context of gender, it is clear that modern forms of gender identities are more multifaceted and varied than they were a couple of decades ago. Domesticity, nurturance and sexuality as images of women still exist and facilitate some self-understandings and behaviours and make others, including those that facilitate careers, less viable. But in large sectors of contemporary society they do not dominate any longer. The modern, professional, career-oriented woman is certainly a social legitimate identity – although potentially problematic for women to adopt if it breaks too strongly with traditional ideas of femininities associated with sexual attractiveness and family orientation. Wife and mother hardly hold a monopoly of primary roles and identification positions for most younger or even middle-aged females in most Western societies (and many other countries) of today. For many males there are higher expectations to take more responsibility as a parent, also for very small children, than a couple of decades ago. With the expansion of service and knowledge work, there are also fewer jobs and tasks with a very strong masculine image. Also the permanence of such jobs, such as working on an oil rig, may be changing so that safety values rather

than macho orientations become more salient (Ely and Meyerson, 2006; Ely and Padavic, 2007). In the mass media we encounter a broad set of male and female types: from those one-dimensionally and stereotypically emphasizing looks and appearance to female detectives and other heroines on television and in film to journalists, managers and politicians. There is thus some degree of gender broadening of the publicly available images providing clues about the meanings and possibilities of gender. The role of feminist and other equal opportunity stimulating messages should not be underestimated here. In at least some countries these messages are frequently present in media, in others, of course, less frequently so.

In the Western world, there is an increase of women in high-status public positions, although they are still considerably fewer than men. At the same time, the influence of role models (in the media), ideals and options coexist with opposite features such as the continuing gender division of labour, in and outside work. There are more successful females in the mass media than in the average corporate workplace. This is partly due to the phenomenon that in politics and government it is important to exhibit signs of gender equality and this helps the chances of females attaining top positions. In some Nordic countries for example, every new government is carefully monitored by the press in terms of sex distribution and the norm is a 50/50 mix. This ideal is also formulated in the case of the EU Commission, although this number has not been reached yet. There is also a mass media interest in those few single top females in organizations traditionally dominated by men, as they are seen as novel and are easily identified and therefore grateful for media to focus on. This attention is somewhat mixed in its gendering effects. The interest in these as being unconventional and therefore novel and interesting signals that the norm is a top executive being male. There is also frequently an interest in underscoring the femaleness of the focal person in a half-stereotypical way, through asking questions about family and children. And sometimes executives or other leaders being seen as deviating from feminine ideals are addressed pejoratively (e.g. the Iron Lady). Nevertheless, the frequent highlighting of very successful women contributes to open up the symbolic landscape for other paths and sources of identification than the conventional ones.

This does not mean that the availability of a wider set of gendered models and images allow for free choices or open up truly pluralistic identifications. Men still dominate and also at top levels there is often a division of labour. There are clashes between ideals and realities, the continuing presence of traditional and patriarchal understandings of gender, and conflicts between espoused, progressive and unconscious, conservative understandings of the meaning of being a man or a woman. This means that gender identities are precarious and vulnerable. The fight between opening up and broadening the space for acceptable potentially gendered – and perhaps non-gendered – identities and securing an identity not exposed to social sanctions and self-doubts, is ongoing and very much felt by many younger persons in the more progressive groups. In addition, there is the psychologically internalized rather than externally imposed anxiety concerning being insufficiently masculine or feminine. This creates a messy situation and considerable uncertainty and stress on identity for those engaging in paths that are still seen as gender-inconsistent or a-typical, namely break radically with established sex roles. To choose highly gender-traditional routes is not always fully satisfactory in contemporary society. There is an increasing pressure

to avoid falling into sex roles and also to avoid gender stereotypical behaviour. In some countries (e.g. Sweden), statistics indicating that men do not do their share of the housework and care of the children receive critical attention in the mass media and this situation is seen as unsatisfactory among an increasing number of people. The position of the housewife is increasingly stigmatized. It is broadly viewed as old-fashioned and as a trap for women.

Needless to say, there are considerable variations between and within countries in this respect. In educated middle-class families, with career oriented females, the situation is often different from in working-class families, where the job may be a less attractive aspect of life and source of identification, compared with family and children. Here sometimes traditional gender patterns continue to play a larger role and the feeling of insufficiency for falling partly into traditional sex roles is not a big problem.

Having broadly sketched some aspects of the development and contemporary macro cultural context of identity constructions, we will address identity in more detail, before moving over to identity and gender in work and organizational contexts.

On personal and social identities – and the wider setting

A common distinction in identity theory is between personal and social identity. The former means an emphasis on what is seen as individual, unique and nuanced for a person (hot-tempered, a rebel, having high integrity), while social identity refers to the use of social categories and group belongingness in the construction of one self. The person defines her/himself (defined by others) as a member of a group or a social category. A woman, an engineer and an IBM employee are all possible examples of social identities. However, the crucial element is not the seemingly relevant objective or socially used categorization, but in what way an individual uses a specific social category as a central marker for selfhood. The, objectively speaking, woman, engineer, IBM employee may actually rather see herself as 'not a feminine' person, not an engineer type ('I am not really that fascinated by technology, I do this for a living') and as a professional (rather than one defined by organizational membership).

Ashforth and Mael (1989) define social identification as the 'perception of one-ness with or belongingness to some human aggregate' (p. 135). The social category is then seen as meaningful, important and valued, as something that says something important about the person.

Sometimes it is said that men are more often identified as autonomous persons, with an individual identity, while women are identified as a part of a collective (Sahlin-Andersson, 1994). Some definitions of masculinity and femininity emphasize this: being male is a matter of being autonomous and self-sufficient, while being female is seen as relational. In a study of nurses and doctors, there seemed to be such a tendency. The (male) doctors were defined in terms of a group identity, with clear boundaries between the occupational group and other groups, but also the individual differences in style, preference, etc., were clearly considered at the workplace. The nurses were more treated as members of a collective:

> The nurses as a collective responded to the needs and wants of the individual doctors. The nurses seldom go to just any doctor for information; nearly always they need to give or get information from a specific doctor, and they know how to adjust their own work to the individual doctors. (p. 139)

The gender point should not be overstressed; it presumably overlaps heavily with location in the organizational hierarchy (class). The hierarchy overlaps to some extent with sex distribution, but there are female managers and professionals as well as a lot of male low-level employees so the sex/hierarchy correlation is far from perfect. The higher the position, the more likely that group qualities are weakened and individual features are emphasized in defining a person. Nevertheless, there may still be a tendency that women are seen in terms of social category irrespective of hierarchical position. At least, it is worth considering whether sex-belonging may be seen as more crucial than individuality for women than men – and perhaps for men when relating to women – in many organizational situations.

Feminists emphasize the social identity of women, for example, when they talk about women's experiences and encourage solidarity. To stress belongingness to a social category rather than individuality and individual variation is part of the political project of feminism. Of course, men too – when considered – are seen in terms of a social category, so feminism does not reproduce the tendency to ascribe to men an individual identity and to women a social one.

We think it is important to develop a sharper eye for the diverse and fine-tuned ways in which the inevitable personal-social relation might be configured in identity research. The eye imagined here could see the highly personal in a seemingly impersonal template of social identity, or the social forces at work in the most personalized of identity moves. Defining ourselves as sales executives or Sony employees, for instance, does not entail simply stepping into pre-packaged selves, but always involves negotiating intersections with other simultaneously held identities (e.g. Black male professor and parent) and making individualized meaning in interaction with the people and systems around us (e.g. competent, high-status secretary). Hence, even when people refer to a seemingly shared 'we,' they imbue this depersonalized collective with diverse and personalized meanings (Alvesson et al., 2008).

Some theories consider both personal and social aspects by stressing relational dimensions of identity. As indicated by symbolic interactionists, for example, the relational aspect of self-identity is vital; without devoted followers, it is difficult to experience oneself as a competent and inspiring leader. Social identity theorists also reference relational contexts, though the focus is on group relations; namely, it is through the existence of out-groups that an in-group becomes salient to individual perception and attachment (Haslam, 2004). Other theories connect personal and social identities by recognizing discourse and communication, respectively, as the central material and mechanism of identity production. For example, social construction theorists often argue first, that personal identities are negotiated – created, threatened, bolstered, reproduced, and overhauled – through ongoing, embodied interaction; and second, for both form and substance, personal identities necessarily draw on available social discourses or narratives about who

one can be and how one should act, some of which may enjoy stronger institutional and material support than others (Ashcraft and Mumby, 2004; Thomas and Davies, 2005).

Sometimes identity researchers use highly localized notions of relational context and interactive production. A focus on perceptions and practices in particular organizations may neglect what is not immediately visible from the vantage point of participants and researchers – that which remains silent in interviews or obscured by survey instruments. The broader historical, cultural, institutional, and political influences that inevitably shape local dilemmas and responses thus fade from sight. Ibarra (1999), for instance, notes that women in the firms she studied encountered more problems in finding a secure identity position. While the analysis links this finding to the relative absence of female role models, it does not consider whether and how such demography reflects more profound gendered patterns in and beyond the organizations in question and with an eye on prevailing cultural and historical contexts.

Of course, any area of study is prone to the risk of reductionism. As we pointed out in Chapter 3, it is far too easy to get stuck at only one level of analysis, whether it is macro-structures or a psychological or group-level composition level. It is important to be mindful of the difficulties in considering the full range of relevant influences on any given phenomenal instance. Identity studies face the problem of taking too localized a focus in the empirical analyses of the personal-social relation. How we understand ourselves is shaped by larger cultural and historical formations, which supply much of our identity; vocabularies, norms, pressures, and solutions, yet which do so in indirect and subtle ways. Indeed, some have argued that the current academic interest in identity reflects and reproduces our contemporary situation and its explosion of images and industries portraying who and how to be, as well as its plethora of knowledge agents (e.g. personal coaches, consultants, lifestyle experts, marketers) guiding us in the requisite self-discipline. In a 'culture of narcissism' (Lasch, 1978) and an age marked by the branding of everything from institutions to individuals (Klein, 2000), it is difficult not to be hypersensitive to subjectivity. Under such circumstances, it is no wonder that identity emerges as a problem, opportunity and project, rather than something to take for granted. In other words, there is nothing natural or self-evident about concern with who we are; preoccupation with identity is a cultural, historical formation (Alvesson et al., 2008).[3]

Therefore, even as we take interest in microanalysis of individual identity constructions vis à vis social relations and materials, we suggest that close readings be balanced with consideration of broader contexts and macro developments to avoid myopic pitfalls.

Identity as outcome or producer of gender structures

A conventional view on men and women is that there are sex differences and these account for variations in behaviour and, perhaps, also gender division of labour.

This has been heavily criticized, for black boxing what contributes to measures of sex differences. Critics emphasize structures. Some see any indication of sex differences or variation in attitudes and orientations amongst men and women as an expression of differences in structural positions (e.g. Kanter, 1977).

It seems motivating to indicate how social processes rather than fixed, deeply psychological anchored traits affect what from the surface may appear as simple expressions of sex differences. As Ely and Padavic (2007) argue these manifestations must be traced to the conditions and experiences that produce or at least frame their expression. But to reduce the significance of identity to a simple appendix of structural position, sex ratio or the operations of a power elite controlling opportunities would be to neglect the importance of identity as a key element in people's values, considerations, priorities and actions. Sometimes the worry of feminists to support conservative conclusions and a general suspicion of psychology contributes to favouring mechanistic reasoning, where structures determine attitudes. Political correctness here intervenes. Sometimes claims about females having other priorities or the 'wrong' values or orientations for being promoted to senior positions, having access to power and high wages, lead to the response that these claims are 'blaming the victim'. 'Structures' or men bear full responsibility for any signs of inequality and the acts or prioritizations of females do not matter or are effects of structures.

But the victim identity is not necessarily appropriate to the extent that many females may pursue other concerns than climbing the career ladder – and have good reasons for this. These concerns are often understood as an outcome of a complex mix of different elements, including but not reducible to structural effects. Identities of course also contribute to this. Gendered identities are not just produced in but are also imported into organizations and there is a wealth of gendering institutions and mechanisms of power all the time working on men and women in (as well as outside) organizations, in neighbourhoods, mass media, families, etc.

People in workplaces are frequently doing gender, in the sense that they engage in gendered identity constructions and power operations at workplaces:

> Identity making processes, for example, the choice of appropriate work, use of language, style of clothing and the presentation of self as a gendered member of an organization also contribute to structuring along gender lines. (Calás and Smircich, 2006: 306–7)

So when females and males start working part time or continue to work full time after childbirth, identity is being re-created or revised *and* the meaning of gender is communicated to others at the workplace. And when people during coffee or lunch breaks sit together based on sex and/or based on other divisions, they construct and communicate themselves in gendered or non-gendered ways.

In many cases we see complex interactions between gender lines at work and gender identities, both fuelling the other. Ely and Padavic (2007) write that

> Through organizational structures and practices, culturally available stereotyped images and narratives about gender are – or are not – written into scripts for use by organizational members. Such scripts can be supportive or disruptive of original cultural sensibilities. (p. 1133)

To conclude, people entering organizations bring in their identities – no one starts in a job or organization as a blank sheet – and they also bring with them their images and narratives and affect the scripts in play at the organizational arena at the same time as these scripts provide guidelines and exercise pressure to comply. As script-makers and script-followers – where both can reproduce or change dominant sensibilities – identity construction processes are important elements in the accomplishment of gender at work and the resulting divisions. But they never function as a pure outcome of fixed sex differences or once and for all determined identity orientations. Organizational conditions – structures, cultures, and practices – always play their role in the construction of identities.

Fighting or expressing masculinity? The case of K

Let us consider the case of K, a personnel manager in the UK police force (Thomas and Davies, 2005). According to these researchers, K's self-presentation conveys the picture of 'an effective and empowered manager' emphasizing the 'strategic function' of the work, 'discretion and professional autonomy'. K is very much in control, 'I am definitively manipulating my job to suit me'. The work history involves 'working at a very intensive pace, effectively doing two jobs', involving 'huge pressure' feeding into self-constructions as an effective manager: 'it made me a better personnel manager', K says. However, now having a family made K rethink the relationship between self and organization: 'I've got two little girls and I'm fairly strong-minded about it and I'll not compromise my role as a parent' (pp. 691–2).

K once objected to a meeting with very senior people in the force starting late in the afternoon and continuing into the evening. An ingredient here was that a senior uniformed police officer, being a single parent with a sick child, had been 'desperate to leave at five' but 'had not had the guts to say "I am doing that"'. The person 'was relieved when I made the stance', K says. The self-presentation includes being 'a trail-blazer' and a maverick: 'I mean, I am quite a strong character. I think other people find it more difficult to be different'. 'In fact, I think I've broken a lot of moulds in this place' (pp. 691–2).

One can see these constructions as including all the prototypical elements of masculinity, as the gender literature reviewed in this book presents it. The construction of the work, K as a person, the actions and role played in the organization expresses the heroic, tough, independent and strong-willed masculine character able to take a stand and speak, where weaker people cannot (the uniformed senior police officer 'didn't quite have the nerve'). There is much about being in 'rational control', a key trait of masculinity according to Kerfoot and Knights (1996).

Can we understand K as a macho person, being in a traditionally feminized profession like personnel management (Berglund, 2002), eager to construct himself as a masculine person, having at least as much guts as uniformed senior police officers, doing identity work around constructions like being effective, strong-willed mould-breaker? It might be possible.

One complication here is that K is a female. K stands for Kate. Thomas and Davies (2005) actually write that Kate is challenging the competitive masculine self, and that is in a position outside the mainstream, as a woman in a macho masculine organization, that informs much of her positioning and sense of self. This is, as she sees it, a privileged knowledge position, similar to what the standpoint theorists claim. According to the authors, Kate also draws 'on a particular configuration of a feminized management self, which in the police emphasizes a more tolerant, less autocratic subjectivity' (p. 692).

In the text, the researchers, recognizing the multiplicity and complexity of identity themes, do touch upon the possible interpretation of the strong undertone of masculinity in the identity construction, but they emphasize how Kate's focus on the home/life balance means that she becomes located at the margins of the male-dominated organization. Of course, one can say that this means that the gendering of being a woman and mother takes the upper hand and makes any masculine coloured identity construction non-valid. Being female and children-oriented takes the sting out of the masculinity. But one could argue that the home/life distinction and the given priority to parenthood is not enough to undo masculinity as a main theme in K's story. Home/life and parenthood are not necessarily women specific concerns – the other case in the article from the police force, a male police inspector, also expresses a will to give priority to family life. Many managers, perhaps particularly in parts of the public sector, are not that willing to work more than 40 hours per week. (A recent Swedish study indicated a work week for managers with an average of just above this number (Chef, 2006).)

The case of K could thus very well be interpreted as a case of managerial masculinity, a self-construction in terms of being independent, bold, strategic, taking a stand, etc. And had it been a male manager, we assume that most people with an interest in gender would not have hesitated in using the masculinity vocabulary on the subject, proving how males are constructing themselves and their work as masculine, thereby making it difficult for females to fit in. But as the subject is a female, then these kinds of interpretations are seldom made. If we are correct, then this illustrates the problems of using these constructions and the tendency for a lot of gender thinking to draw upon gendered stereotypes – a man is doing something/ expressing himself in a particular way, then this is masculinity, while if a woman is doing the same then it is perhaps not. Of course, an alternative interpretation is that a lot of behaviours, sentiments and orientations are not gendered in any simple way and there is a range of behaviours and expressions of identity of males and females that neither they nor their surroundings are that inclined to plug into gender stereotypical categories. And perhaps researchers should follow their examples, exhibiting great care before gendering those we study. As pointed out before, it is always easy to reproduce gender stereotypes. And this is what parts of the gender literature are doing.

We should add to the interpretation that we have only focused on discourse, and pointed at possible meanings of K's talk. One could argue that K is a female, with a specific body (sex), and that this may strongly colour the categorizations and reactions of others, as well as K herself. Behind K's story there may be gender-specific interactions and experiences that imply different meanings to the story compared with

if K had been a male. The meaning of e.g. 'trail-blazer' and 'having the guts' may be read in a more 'feminine' way – in the eyes of K and her surroundings – in this case, it is, of course, very difficult to say something certain about this. There is a risk of attributing an 'essentialistic' gender meaning, assuming that sex (body) always matters greatly for the meaning of acts and words. A recipe saying that a female body means femininity (or at least not masculinity) seems mechanistic.

Competing masculinities in a consultancy project – making the Other feminine

Identity is important for understanding processes where people try to create and maintain a positive sense of self. As such it is always involved in interactions and relations, in the shaping of experiences and reactions. Here it needs to be understood as situational and relational. We will below illuminate this, but also a particular kind of professional context.

A case of a consultancy project offers some material on what may be interpreted in terms of masculine meanings in identity constructions of consultants and managers (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008). The case illustrates how people at work try to construct a positive self-image through using a masculine subtext about themselves and a less masculine one about the persons they implicitly compare themselves with. In order to give some deeper flavour of identity in relationship to gendered meanings, we present this case a bit more thoroughly.

The case is about a group of consultants and managers from the client firm trying to carry out changes of administrative systems in a large firm. Consultants and client managers interact at the boundaries of the organizations making the formation of solid working relationships difficult and uncertain (Czarniawska and Mazza, 2003). The boundary relationship seems to be crucial and involves possibilities as well as difficulties in maintaining either an expert-outsider or (closer to) an insider-relationship focused position (Kitay and Wright, 2004). Arguably, consultancy work is ambiguous – it is often difficult to understand what it is doing and what is being done and accomplished (Alvesson, 2004). There are shifting working relationships between consultants and clients. This increases uncertainty and anxiety regarding results, responsibility and self-esteem (Sturdy, 1997). To create and maintain a certain sense of a valued self then becomes especially important. The consultancy project was only partially successful and failed to deliver as much as intended, even though top management seemed satisfied and it was in no way a disaster project. Nevertheless, it appears as if it was very important for those involved to re-create a sense of themselves as highly competent professionals. The senior consultant blamed the client organization, HT, for the project not being entirely successful.

> The client was too cautious, nothing happened, nobody from management pushed. The reason was their history. HT *was* a spoiled organization, a little fat with its 'Star Product'. Everyone working there is more or less a millionaire. […] They were avoiding real pressure and tough decisions and preferred

to walk around and be satisfied with things. It has been unclear what managers wanted to achieve, it has been volatile and people have switched positions, it's been unclear. (Farringdon, senior consultant)

In the subtext being spoilt, fat, and avoiding pressure and tough decisions indicates a lack of masculine force and determination that leads to limited accomplishment. As a contrast, the consultants indirectly appear as having these masculine qualities of being bold, focused, result-oriented and eager to push for real changes.

The client managers involved in the project, on their side, constructed the situation and the various actors involved in opposite ways to the consultant. One of the managers says the consultants were preoccupied with marketing and more interested in finding new sales options than being productive. The consultants are portrayed as slippery, 'conceptual' and that it was vital for this manager to take a firm grip and lead them right. There was a clear need for strong leadership:

A mistake companies make in working with consultants is that their leadership, control and drive are not strong and experienced enough. The theoretical background of the consultants must be related to the actual context. (Hodges)

A second client manager, Rogers, also emphasizes the need to guide and control consultants. He felt like 'a rabbit hunter' and assured that he could have serious and firm discussions with the consultants. These lacked experience and were too theoretical. He claims that not much happened in the project before he took charge. Then delivery of results started.

A third client manager gave some credit to the consultants, emphasizing how he and they complemented each other, but this was framed as if they were good at doing secretarial work:

The strengths of this new generation are that they are so incredibly good with computers. If Rogers and I had done that it would have taken twice as long to write it down and summarize. Farringdon did it in no time. Printed it out in no time. It was finished half an hour after we had discussed it. (Senior client manager Burrows)

The *consultant's* identity construction, in terms of securing a sense of self, seems to be the expression of drive, consistency, knowledge and ability to participate in radical changes. They also indicate that they are clear, professional, active, result- and long-term oriented in contrast to the client that they construct as being unclear, indecisive, passive, weak and unreliable. The construction of the 'fat', 'spoilt and passive' Other, namely the client people, allows for the consultants to view themselves as ambitious, energetic and, efficient. Hence a positive identity and a negative anti-identity are emerging as simultaneous constructions. However, the ideal consultant comes forth more magnificently against the background of the Other, the (typical) manager, here constructed as spoilt, soft, irrational, fat and incapable of running a competitive business. The ideal consultant (me) and 'non-ideal' manager (the Other) here presuppose each other, producing a 'negative symmetry'. We think it is motivated to see

this as gendered in the sense that a hierarchy is created within the masculine. The consultants have masculine qualities – the client people seem less masculine, even feminized. Through the contrast, the masculine orientations of the former become much clearer and more convincing.

But a similar identity construction emerges from the client people. Key elements in the identity work of the client managers were that they took charge in potentially chaotic situations, where inexperienced and unfocused consultants were not doing much good. The construction of the Other as unreliable, 'conceptual' and potentially chaotic supports the managers' constructions of a distinctive self-identity. The idea of the greedy and theoretical consultants invites and frames the realistic managers undertaking straight and firm leadership. Here the 'manager of substance' is being drawn upon. Burrows' construction of self-identity is achieved by referring to the consultants' abilities and complementarities mainly in 'safe' areas such as youthfulness and computer skills; young and IT-skilled consultants make the client project manager come out as a highly experienced person with authority. Being a leader here is about being tough, down-to-earth and acting like 'a rabbit-hunter', namely to exhibit determination and consistent and directive leadership and being senior in charge of junior people. The client managers reassure that they can take a beating and two of them emphasize that they can confront inexperienced, unreliable and confused consultants with serious talk and ensure delivery. The managers thus come forth as 'real leaders' and 'men of substance' in a quite stereotypical and somewhat macho way, against the background of the Other, the (typical) consultant, here by two of the managers constructed as superficial, young, excessively commercial and slick incapable of understanding company specifics. The ideal leader (me) and typical consultant (the Other) here presuppose each other and discursively regulate the identity work of managers. The interplay between a self-construction as masculine and a construction of the Other as feminine, or at least much less masculine, then become important ingredients of how people do identity in this case.

Perhaps we should remind the reader and ourselves about the problems of imposing gender stereotypical meanings on how people construct situations, others and their own identities. We do not claim that this is a crystal clear example of gendered meanings being an important element of the ascriptions and identity work of the consultants and client people. Are we reinforcing stereotypes? That those involved were (in a biological sense) 'men' might, as discussed in Chapter 4, for some people mean that talking about femininity becomes doubtful.

We do believe, however, that the identity work expressed above incorporate elements of masculinity (and implicitly femininity) and that there is a gender undertone in how the people involved do identity work in a situation where success and accomplishment were partial and ambitious. Obvious signs on competence and delivery of results can often function as pillars of identity, but often in ambiguous working life there is not much of that sort of support. Instead there were various opinions and some questioning of what is accomplished and by whom. In highly ambiguous situations like the one described, the masculinization of oneself and – reinforcing this – the de-masculinization of the other can be mobilized in the re-construction of a positive sense of self.

Summary

An important aspect of masculinities and femininities is identity. Historical determinations and restrictions as well as tendencies to transcend these must be considered. We carry with us the traces of generations of gender patterns and symbolism that in various ways impact our identities and our efforts to create and maintain a positive sense of self. For most people this means to some extent living up to norms and ideals containing instances of meanings and symbolism associated with cultural masculinities and femininities. Many students of gender emphasize the 'external' side of institutions and interactions leading to gender effects (e.g. West and Zimmerman, 1987), but we think there is an 'internal' side as well, in the sense that people's constructions of who they are and what is important for them is important and that this is partly related to life history. Fewer and fewer people in most organizations would today claim to be a 'real man' or a 'real woman' fully in line with traditional stereotypes. This is not to deny considerable variation between different groups – classes, ages, ethnic communities and occupations. But being seen as old-fashioned and caught in sex roles strongly contradicts contemporary Western middle class and elite norms and is at odds with efforts to construct valued and socially supported identities. So the embracing of and self-definitions in relationship to cultural masculinities and femininities tend to be more complicated and selective. So are the operations of the institutions and media providing the ideals for men and women. The contemporary female is not just a perfect match with traditional stereotypes, but is also oriented to work and profession and exhibits a certain amount of autonomy and is not obviously subordinated to a man. But the contemporary stereotypical female, bearing the imprints of regulatory ideals, is also often a bit more oriented to family and children, less of a careerist and is interested in clothes and looks, more so than the average (stereotypical) man. This is at least how we read the situation – acknowledging that there are variations across countries, ethnic groups, classes, age groups, etc. Almost any look at mass media representations indicates the strength of forces creating identity regulation in gendered ways. Also among television news reporters – with equal sex distribution – it is not uncommon to face older men and young, attractive women.

Contemporary forms of identities offer a broad set of possible ways of being for men and women, at least in parts of the Western countries. Many of these identities are, however, far from contradiction-free. Choosing unconventional tracks often lead to difficulties securing stable self-identities. These difficulties follow from social sanctions or lack of support as well as internalized conventional ideas about attaining sufficient (but not necessarily too strong) signs of masculinity if one is a 'man', or of femininity if one is a 'woman'. These cultural standards still constrain people in terms of options that work well, socially and psychologically. Contemporary possibilities and life history, including early identifications, e.g. with parents, mass media models, do not necessarily go hand in hand, thus making identities vulnerable.

The social origin and relational character of identities mean that a focus on identity goes beyond the psychological level. It is important to draw attention to the multi-level character of masculine and feminine meanings, to the need for personal reflection and self-transformation as a part of gender changes. It is not only

or mainly structures 'out there' that matter. Most people – including professional students of gender – are at least in some respects stubborn carriers of conservative gender patterns and reproduce these in everyday life as well as in important choices, for example, in education and in choice of partner. Even in a fairly egalitarian country like Sweden, the female is on average three years younger than the man in a relationship, and it is still common for her to take his family name when they marry. Arguably, looking at the interplay between culture – at various levels from the societal level to the workplace level – and subjectivities suggested by the concepts of masculinities and femininities is a fruitful way of avoiding sociological as well as psychological reductionism.

A wish to confirm one's gender identity must be related to the historical and cultural context, as well as the operations of power in which people are rewarded if following cultural guidelines for doing what is defined as appropriate and natural. More or less subtle sanctions may be triggered by resistance to gender norms.[4] Deviations from gender norms call for much more intensive identity work. This combination of subjective, cultural and power aspects may account for the gender-conservative orientation of many people in some respects and the ideological and social support by various institutions and powerful actors for this orientation. The complex interplay between external pressure and internalized, subjective orientations must then be considered for understanding gender division of labour. Explanations then call for the manoeuvring between determinism and voluntarism. Determinism is not just about external forces preventing people from fulfilling their wishes, but also about the forces of power producing certain desires, for example to appear masculine or feminine – or to earn a lot of money for that matter.

Identity is not only of importance in order to understand trajectories and how gender divisions are produced and reproduced. It is also a key aspect of how people do identity work in the sense of constructing and reconstructing a positive sense of self, providing a feeling of security and direction in life. Our cases of the personnel manager K and the consultants and their clients indicate how people, men and women, may use masculine meanings of their work and accomplishments in order to tell a valuable and supportive story of themselves. Through the ascription of a 'less masculine' orientation to others, this story becomes more credible and effective.

In the next chapter we continue this line of inquiry and address organizational culture and gender.

Notes

1 There is a tendency among some Foucault-inspired authors to connect power and identity (subjectivity) very tightly. We have some problems with an all-embracing view of power as something lurking behind any expression or sign of subjectivity. As with all concepts and ideas, hampering the inclination to use the concept of power everywhere and save it for especially productive interpretations may be a good, albeit an imprecise, rule.

2 The reader may recall the critique of role theory for neglecting issues of power, reviewed in Chapter 3, and ask why a connection between role and power

cannot be made. We would not rule out the possibility of using role concepts in a more power-conscious way (Simpson and Carroll, 2008), although most uses of role theory and the associations of roles do not seem to encourage such a move.

3   A more cautious version would be to say that under current social conditions – social variation and change, a multitude of socialization agents and access to a variety of images – identity becomes much more strongly a topic of interest than under less complex and fragmented social circumstances in a more traditional society.

4   The 'rewards and punishments' accounting for gender behaviour are thus not just or even mainly a matter of receiving money or negative sanctions, as Reskin and Padavic (1994) seem to be suggesting, but also a matter of confirming or frustrating one's self-image and self-esteem. While sometimes cruder forms of rewards and punishments may be involved, the most significant ways in which modern power operates in the area of gender is in terms of encouraging and discouraging certain gender standards for being and the production of emotions of uncertainty and anxiety when either oneself and/or people around oneself feel that those standards are not met.

6

Gender, Organizational Culture and Sexuality

In this chapter we continue the investigation of workplace relations from a cultural point of view. We are now focusing on the collective, rather than individual level, and address meso level phenomena. It is organizational level cultures and related issues, such as occupational cultures, that are of interest. In particular, the chapter treats cultural meanings associated with masculinities and femininities and discusses some problems and advantages with the idea of studying organizations and other gendered institutions through this framework. The meaning of, and norms regulating, the expression of sexuality in workplaces is an important element of organizational culture. The chapter shows some of the complexities and unexpected patterns and contradictions of gender in a case study of the openly 'sexualized' workplace culture of an advertising agency.

On organizational culture

As with most areas in social science, there is enormous variation in the definitions and even more so in the use of the term 'culture' in organization theory and then even more so among practitioners. Culture has certainly no fixed or broadly agreed meaning in anthropology (Ortner, 1984) – a discipline that many organizational culture authors draw upon – and a lot of views of culture are pretty vague.

We use the concept of culture to characterize a set of meanings, ideas and symbols that are shared by the members of a collective and that has evolved over time (Alvesson, 2002a). Talking about culture then means 'talking about the importance for people of symbolism – of rituals, myths, stories, and legends – and about the interpretation of events, ideas, and experiences that are influenced and shaped by the groups within which they live' (Frost et al., 1985: 17). Culture then directs attention to first, what is shared by a group and departs from highly individualized ideas and circumstances, second, the ideational level, that is what is on people's minds, their ideas and beliefs rather than how they behave or something else tangible (although the meaning of behaviour or material is a cultural phenomenon) and third the non-rational aspects, the value-laden, partly non-conscious dimensions of social life, including emotional aspects. Culture is thus not measurable, at least not in any simple sense. To understand cultural meanings calls for interpretation, namely unpacking the deeper aspect of a

phenomenon. What surfaces in vocabulary, behaviour, practices and material artefacts must be deciphered. The more interesting cultural meanings are non-conscious and call for considerable depth, including imagination, creativity and tolerance for uncertainty, in interpretative work (Geertz, 1973).

Culture may refer to an entire society or any collective within it, such as a class, a region or a social movement. It may also refer to other entities, for example, an organization, a part of it or an occupation. In the present case, organization-related cultural phenomena are not restricted to issues considered to be unitary and unique for a specific organization, but may refer to much broader cultural phenomena, such as industrial level or Western management culture ideas and meanings, or narrower cultural objects of study, such as group or workplace level cultural issues. A qualified cultural study thus calls for attention to a variety of cultural configurations in an organization. Sometimes a unique and unitary organizational culture may be of interest to focus on, sometimes a variety of sub-cultures will be central in the study. One can also, as a researcher, favour a perspective on organizations as unitary or as differentiated – or emphasize that organizations typically are fragmented in a mosaic of various, sometimes overlapping, sometimes distinctive subcultures and macrocultures (associated with society and industry) (Meyerson and Martin, 1987; Martin, 2002). Before making crucial choices in terms of level and adequate conceptualization of interesting cultural groups a number of different possibilities must be considered. Sometimes conventional organizational divisions may mislead rather than sensitize cultural analysis.

The cultural approach in organization studies proceeds from the assumption that the ideas, the definitions of reality and the meanings, which are, shared in common by a collective (a company, a work group, for example) are a central – perhaps even the central – feature of organizations. This approach draws attention to the question 'How is organization accomplished and what does it mean to be organized' (Smircich, 1983: 353). More or less integrated patterns of common ideas and meanings constitute the core of structures, which denote relative stability in an organization. They have their roots in, and are influenced by, various social and material practices. They do not persist unchanged, but are recreated and reinforced (and sometimes weakened or changed) in a multitude of different situations, in everyday language, in actions and in material structures – and in a multifaceted network of symbols, meanings and significations (Smircich, 1983, Frost et al., 1985, 1991; Alvesson, 2002a; Martin, 2002, etc).

Culture is the framework that guides action and social relations, 'the medium of life' (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1991). It facilitates social life, but also includes elements of constraints and conservatism as it tends to freeze social reality: to subordinate people to dominating ideas, beliefs and taken for granted assumptions. Even though there are also cultural meanings and values in organizations that are pro-equality, in gender studies critical aspects of the gendered subtext of organizational life are often of the greatest interest.

The creation and recreation of meaning is not primarily located in the heads of people, albeit something must happen there too for culture to 'work'. Rather it comes in the form of a traffic in significant symbols, which guides thinking, feeling and social interaction. Meaning, from a cultural point of view, is social and public.

Its natural habitat is the marketplace and the town square, according to Geertz (1973: 45), and, one could add, meetings and other social actions and events in a company. But also stories, vocabularies and artefacts – physical objects such as buildings, equipment and office arrangements embodying meaning – may be seen as cultural expressions. Through investigating such phenomena we can study how selectivity and control in the construction of meaning is accomplished.

As said, our sympathies in this book imply that we do not strongly link a gender perspective specifically to 'men' and 'women' as fixed objects to be counted in organizations. Instead it is conceptions and discourses about men and women, the masculine and the feminine, that are focused upon. As important social phenomena, gender relations thus influence the fundamental functioning of organizations and our general way of thinking about aims, rationality, values, leadership and so on (Calás and Smircich, 1992a, b). This kind of thinking works well with a cultural approach. One may talk of a gendered-organizations perspective rather than a gender-in-organizations approach (Hall, 1993) as a way of illuminating the gendered nature of organizational and occupational cultures. This means that 'gender is not simply imported into the workplace: Gender itself is constructed in part through work' (Leidner, 1991: 170). Gender is thus partly seen as an organizational accomplishment – and not something that is fixed and ready and then the object for certain arrangements and mechanisms in organizations. Workplace culture thus is seen as constructing beliefs about and self-understandings of men and women, what is masculine and feminine, thus shaping gender identities. Organizations can be seen as sites of gender construction – and as sites of the undoing (downplaying) of gender, when equal opportunity is promoted.

Gender can function as a perspective or as an inspiration for a set of metaphors for the understanding of organizations (Billing and Alvesson, 1994; Gherardi, 1995). Gender dimensions can thus be observed also on a more abstract level than simply in relation to the concrete circumstances and relations of men and women, namely gendered meanings can be seen as putting their imprints on a variety of aspects of organizations.

> … Organizations as we know them are inherently gendered. Having been created largely by and for men, organizational systems, work practices, norms and definitions reflect masculine experience, masculine values, and men's life situations … This includes, for example, norms and assumptions in the work culture that value specific types of work and work processes, define competence and excellence of staff, and shape ideas about the best way to get work done. (Meyerson and Kolb, 2000: 563)

Gendering organizational culture theory thus provides an approach for an exploration of cultural meanings of physical objects, actions and verbal expressions loosely coupled to the specific mix of sexes – or even lack of a mix (in one-sex only contexts) – directly involved. All kinds of organizational structures and processes are seen as carriers of cultural meaning, drawing upon and producing gendered ideas, values and assumptions. This does not mean that everything is treated in terms of gender, but that everything is carefully *considered* in these terms before one finally decides if and how to treat a subject matter. Business language and practices such as corporate strategy, campaign, conquests of markets, raiders or takeovers, may, for

example be conceptualized in terms of dominating masculinities (Knights and Morgan, 1991), but the origin of, for example, strategy in the military is not in itself sufficient to say that all corporate strategy talk and practice express masculinity. As 'strategy' talk is increasingly common – nowadays almost everything is presented as strategy (partly to make it appear more remarkable and important) – the strategy discourse becomes normalized and is probably for most people deprived of any clear gender undertone.

The cultural patterns of organizations may be of particular interest to investigate in the following ways: first, how cultural meanings interact with gender division of labour – both in terms of how organizational structure brings about certain meanings (Kanter, 1977; Ely and Padavic, 2007) and how these cultural meanings contribute to a certain sex distribution in the organizational structure; second, how dominating values and beliefs are culturally defined as, or associated with, maleness or – but probably more rarely – femaleness, and thus in different ways guide everyday organizational life and social interaction; third, how organizations play a part in the socializing processes in which people acquire, mould, change, broaden or constrain gender identities (addressed in Chapter 5); finally, how organizational goals, structures and social relations lead to 'external' consequences, for example, for social life outside the core organization, or for the environment, due to their gendered nature. Investigating masculine domination in certain types of organizations may, for example, throw light on control and exploitation of customers and nature.

As mentioned in earlier chapters, the cultural meaning of jobs is highly significant for the division of labour. Many ideas on gender are culturally shared well beyond the individual organization or occupation. Images and self-understandings of women associating them with subordination, domesticity and sexuality are, for example, an integrated part of Western culture and account for the distribution of women in certain types of service jobs. The cultural meaning of a 'woman' may thus include more or less explicit and conscious elements of a service-provider. (The meaning may well be partly non-conscious.) But there is an enormous variation in this aspect between different contexts, associated with wide although uneven and often contradictory changes taking place. Also within a specific industry there may be clear variation between different organizations in the same field in terms of gender meanings, as Blomqvist (1994) shows in a study of 17 Swedish knowledge-intensive companies. Organization culture studies are thus interested in local variation and uniqueness as well as broader cultural phenomena in the context of organization. Specific organizational cultures form fine-tuned nets of meaning that subtly inform and encourage people to play out gender in certain ways and discourage them from doing so in ways that are not socially sanctioned.

Parallel to these differentiations within industries and organizations there are sometimes broader sets of meanings associated with images and expectations of industries and work areas. What is referred to as 'heavy industry' may for example have a masculine image as a whole, while many service industries employing what is sometimes described as 'pink labour' may have a feminine connotation, even though specific work areas, type management control or IT work, may be the same. These overall images may play a role for the (self) selection of employees and also be part of the cultural gendered ideas characterizing organizations within these industries. But on the whole, it is more important to consider the differentiations and

variations and often also the fragmentations of organizations in terms of gendered meanings. It are mainly on an overall and fairly superficial level that organizational cultures are unitary and unique and the same goes for industrial cultures.

Pressure for homogeneity and culturally competent behaviour

The concept of culture implies a certain degree of homogeneity in the ways of relating to reality. Even in a 'liberal culture' in which individualism and variety are celebrated there are shared expectations and understandings of what is identified as 'individualism' and not social incompetence, deviation or psychic problems. The moral pressure for being 'individualistic' may include an expectation that people adopt one of ten or so prefabricated lifestyles and consumption patterns designed and marketed for 'individualists'. The celebration of 'individualism' may be accompanied by intolerance to a person who does not appear to be a 'true' individualist. There are thus shared, conformist ideas defining and prescribing 'individualism'.

In an organizational context, the level of tolerance for deviations is often rather low. The need for smooth communication and the reduction of uncertainty and, relatedly, the importance attached to knowing the rules of the game, means a pressure towards conformity (Kanter, 1977). Especially in the context of management work in large companies, where the level of ambiguity is high and the importance of nurturing one's image, appearing successful and going upward, is vital, the social rules are in favour of 'team playing'. The expectations and norms in this respect are sharply explored by Jackall (1988: 56):

> … a team player is alert to the social cues that he receives from his bosses, his peers, and the intricate pattern of social networks, coteries, and cliques that crisscross the organization. … a team player 'fits in'. He is a role player who plays his part without complaint. He does not threaten others by appearing brilliant, or with his personality, his ability, or his personal values. He masks his ambition and his aggressiveness with blandness. He recognizes trouble and stays clear of it. He protects his boss and his associates from blunders. … In short, he makes other managers feel comfortable, the crucial virtue in an uncertain world, and establishes with others the easy predictable familiarity that comes from sharing taken for granted frameworks about how the world works.[1]

More generally, having the correct, well-targeted cultural competence and skills to master symbolism in appearance and language use is crucial for success in many areas (Bourdieu, 1979; Swidler, 1986). This pressure for similarity in understandings and style acts against outsiders – those people whose characteristics deviate from the established groups. Women may experience feelings of uncertainty, if all or a large majority of the other and especially senior managers are men. Even when negative expectations do not prevail, the mastery of the cues for operating and the skilful mastery of a successful and promising 'team player' role, according to Jackall, may be

more difficult for women. Even though some of the traits behind the ability to be a team player are often associated with women, the idea of a successful team player – and not just a subordinate one – calls for a mix of being part of the group and indications of sticking out. The word team in itself – originating in the sports world – might be seen as more alien for many women than for men, even though the social and cooperative connotations of the term may also be seen as including feminine meanings and sport is perhaps viewed as more gender-neutral today than a few decades ago. Even if a specific female has no problems, the surroundings may give the impression that it is a world that one more easily associates with men than women. More generally, talk, appearance and actions of women may appear as more ambiguous and difficult to read for an established community of men. Women may thus sometimes be in an unfavourable situation in terms of assuring seniors and colleagues of the reliability and predictability so much valued in complex organizational settings.

Of course, it is hardly so that women are the only group which may encounter this level of difficulty in relationship to the world of white, male, middle- and upper-class corporate management. Other, or overlapping, social characteristics may also create problems. Ethnicity, sexual orientation, education, age and class background also matter. Apart from the issue of perceived social similarity as a mainstreaming mechanism making it more difficult for an underrepresented sex (or someone with a 'deviant' class background, looks, ethnicity, occupational background or dialect) to be selected and fully accepted, the qualities called for according to Jackall (1988) are not necessarily alien to feminine cultural meanings. Being able to socially navigate, not to threaten others, mask aggressiveness and ambition; protect the boss … all sound as what is often (stereotypically) ascribed as expectations for women and to meanings associated with femininity. The issue is, of course, that this is far from enough. These somewhat hidden qualities and operations need to be balanced with other, more masculine virtues in order to make it in the managerial world. As Kanter, Jackall and others emphasize social similarity is a key quality, but it is only half the story. The skilful balancing and ability to manipulate the perceptions of others of being reliable and predictable, as well as standing out, having drive, extraordinary skills, and so on and blend this, shifting between exhibiting signs of the former and the other, is crucial. Embracing and exhibiting masculine qualities are then hardly enough, and those (many) gender writers equating masculinity with facilitators of success probably oversimplify what is happening in organizations.

Illustrating culture: rituals, artefacts and metaphors

Culture is often seen as expressed and reproduced in three basic forms: through actions and orchestrated events, material objects and verbal expressions rich in cultural meaning (Pondy et al., 1983; Alvesson and Berg, 1992). Many actions, events, physical objects and language in organizations do not say that much about culture, as they are more technical than rich in symbolism and meaning, but some others do. After briefly addressing rituals and artefacts, we will at some length deal with culturally rich verbal expressions – metaphors.

Rituals

A ritual is an activity including certain repetitive patterns, which contain symbolic and expressive elements. A ritual has a specific form guiding behaviour. In organizations meetings often function as rituals. Instrumental outcomes – decisions, information sharing, problem solving – are less significant than symbolic outcomes, such as sentiments, attitudes, values (Pfeffer, 1981). Meetings are seldom efficiently carried out or lead to rational outcomes, but reflect the messy, ambiguous nature of complex organizations (Schwartzman, 1987). In meetings, the right values and norms are learnt and reproduced. Hierarchical relations may, for example, be expressed and segmented, for example, when a senior manager's authority is underscored by he or she dominating a meeting (Alvesson, 1996a).

A ritual among the top marketing people in Pepsi Cola described by the former vice president John Sculley (1987) illustrates how a (gendered) ritual may work.

> Like other meetings, this one was a ceremonial event. We marked it on our calendars many weeks in advance. Everyone wore the unofficial corporate uniform: a blue pinstriped suit, white shirt, and a sincere red tie. None of us would ever remove the jacket. We dressed and acted as if we were at a meeting of the board of directors. (p. 2)

People entered the room in hierarchical order. First came people from the marketing investigation consultancy company, and then junior and subsequently senior managers arrived in order corresponding to their ranks. Corporate formality dictated where people sat. The company's top officers gravitated to the front of the table, the junior execs towards the back. The core of the meetings was the monitoring results. These were often harsh:

> These sessions weren't always euphoric. Often the tension in the room was suffocating. Eyes would fix on Kendall (the chairman) to capture his response at every gain or drop in every tenth of a market share ... An executive whose share was down had to stand and explain – fully – what he was going to do to fix it fast. Clearly in the dock, he knew that the next time he returned to that room, it had better be fixed. ... Always, there was another executive in the room, ready to take your place. (pp. 4–5)

This example may be contrasted with a ritual in a Swedish industrial company (Alvesson and Björkman, 1992). Men, most of them engineers or marketing people with an engineering background, primarily populate this organization.

> Every third month there is an information meeting for the forty or so managers in the division. (All are men, with the exception of the female personnel manager and the secretary.) Gustaf, the divisional manager stands in the door and welcomes all the participants. During the introductory speech he gives a 'soft' impression, his jacket is unbuttoned. The agenda is characterized by several speakers and the divisional manager holds a low profile. The manager could have made the presentations himself, but chose to let someone else take the centre stage. The atmosphere is informal and

friendly. Sometimes the manager is joking with people and sometimes he is the object of their jokes.

During the break, the divisional manager serves coffee together with his secretary and the personnel manager. The overall impression from the meeting is one of community rather than formalism and hierarchy.

Rituals may contribute to the construction and reproduction of cultural patterns in a variety of ways. Lindgren (1996) identifies in a case study that men engaged in rituals confirming their superiority and women their subordinancy. Often rituals express a rich variety of meanings, some of them heavily gendered, others less so. Consequences in terms of equality or gender segregation may be contradictory, for example when a female manager heads a meeting in an authoritarian way or, as in the case with Gustaf above, a male manager deviates from conventional masculine leadership models.

Cultural artefacts

Cultural artefacts include buildings, offices, furniture, corporate logos, dress and other material objects. In the context of gender, dress is of particular significance. In the case of Pepsi Cola, dress for senior managers is strictly prescribed and appears as a corporate uniform expressing socially shared meanings. In organizational contexts, especially in workplaces and positions where appearance is seen as vital and/or the level of discipline is high, meaning that people are clearly restrained (for example top-level jobs and low-level jobs in which people interact with customers), different norms guiding men and women are pronounced. Managers of both sexes are often strongly constrained. Female managers – as well as many other women in organizations – should neither appear too feminine, nor too masculine. Gherardi (1995) notes that female managers, in Italy at least, typically have medium-length hair. Those asked about it indicated preference for it, but from the outside it seems clear that they respond to a social norm prescribing avoidance of the impression of excessive masculinity signalled by cropped hair and of the sexiness of long hair that clashes with the role and authority of the female manager, a norm which they may have gradually internalized.

Cockburn (1991) noted in a study of a large retail company the strong distinction signalled by the dress and behaviour of the men and the women employed there:

> To sit in the staff canteen at head office and observe the employees deliver their lunch trays before returning to their offices is to witness a kind of ritualized daily ballet in which gender is the organizing principle. The men move together, a solid mess of grey, conversing in deep tones. The women by contrast tap-tap along, chatting and laughing, colourful as a bunch of flowers.

Even corporate financial reports may contribute to the reproduction of specific meanings and ideas of femininity and masculinity, according to Benschop and Meihuizen (2002). They show in their study of annual financial reports of 30 corporations (listed on the Amsterdam Stock Exchange) that stereotypical images still

dominate, for example when women and men are positioned in gender stereotypical roles. Men are more often portrayed as employees and women as clients, and Benschop and Meihuzen summarize, 'They represent organizations as male-dominated sites where men call the shots, and women are distracted from their careers by extra-organizational tasks' (p. 176). Whether the reports mirror or distort reality can be debated. One could also say that this is hard to tell and that this kind of representation creates minor effects rather than mirrors or distorts something.

Buildings and office interiors also carry cultural meanings. Some offices give a strict, impersonal impression. They signal neutrality, objectivity, concentration and the suppression of feelings and personal relations as values – themes often seen as masculine. Other organizational buildings and workplace interiors are more colourful and appeal to the senses. They signal a broader subjective involvement in the workplace environment and give it a more personal touch. In a computer consultancy company, management put much energy and imagination into a new corporate building to express corporate values emphasizing personal involvement, fantasy and creativity (Alvesson, 1995a). Straight lines and corridors were avoided. On the walls, floors and in some interiors there were colourful paintings, e.g. picturing a sky and clouds. On the top floor there were recreation spaces – a kitchen, a piano bar, a Jacuzzi, sauna, etc. The idea was to express communal values. As in so many other cases, there is no self-evident or strong gendered meaning of this that can easily be read off from the arrangements, favoured by both men and women in the firm. Minimally one can say that there is little of masculine ideals and meanings being signalled here, possibly contributing to a non-gendered or even women-friendly work environment.

Gendered organizational metaphors

One interesting feature of organizational cultures is the vocabulary used to make sense of what is going on. Vocabularies facilitate and guide interpretations. They also inform action and shape organizational practices and relations. A specifically powerful kind of vocabulary is metaphors (Lakoff and Johnsson, 1980; Morgan, 1997). Metaphors are verbal symbols: rich in meaning and expressiveness. They appeal to the entire person – intellect as well as feeling and imagination – and are therefore important. We discussed one above: the organizational member as a team player. A metaphor works through invoking a concept originating from another field or level than the one that is to be understood. The former modifies the latter and forms a specific image or gestalt. Through the interaction between the issue to be understood and the alien element, fantasy and imagination are played upon and a particular image is produced. One may for example view a boxer as a tiger in the ring or the female teacher as a mother for her class. Many workplaces are pervaded by game and military metaphors. Riley (1983) for example studied a professional organization, a 'trouble-shooter development and training firm', where the interviewees talked about games and players, wars, teams, battles, armies, pugilistics, and wounds. 'Game (with a particular emphasis on sports) and military (with a vicarious interest in espionage) scenarios repeatedly emerged along with a discerning sense of their use' (p. 427).

Another type of common metaphor is of a completely different type: they portray workplace reality in terms of friends, family and home. The owners and managers in the IT consultancy company mentioned above tried heavily to make this vocabulary and thus a particular kind of social relations and emotions permeate the organization – with a high degree of success. Not only vocabulary, but also social activities and a corporate building partly indicating a home-like atmosphere – including a piano bar, a bubble-pool, sauna and other recreation facilities located at the top floor – aimed to support this image of the company (Alvesson, 1995a).

It may be tempting to see the game and war metaphors as masculine and the family and home metaphors as feminine, thereby supporting the employment, everyday work life and promotion of men in the first case and women in the second. It may even be said that it is self-evident that the first organization discriminates against women, as sport games and, in particular, wars are activities strongly dominated by men and supposedly feel more 'natural' and comfortable for men. We don't learn anything directly about sex composition of the organization or the sex of the people interviewed in Riley's study. One may expect that many more men than women work in the company, at least in senior positions. However, even though the above mentioned vocabulary should be seen as a clue for male domination and as something that may work against the presence, comfort and acceptance of those women – as well as those men – who find military and sport images alien or boring, this is a topic for investigation and not something that one should take for granted. There is no indexical or mechanical gender meaning following from the vocabulary used. We think that one should, first, avoid too rapid and simple ideas about what expresses and reinforces male domination without having a deeper knowledge of the local context and how different people think, feel and react, but second, be prepared to raise the warning flag and thus encourage further critical exploration of the issue. In the case with the military metaphors the masculine meanings are rather obvious, but one should be somewhat cautious in drawing firm conclusions on their gender-discriminating effects without having listened to the people in the organization. It is how they use and respond to words, not any abstract, general meaning of a dictionary nature that account for the gendered impact in an organization.

The second case, the IT consultancy firm, is less clear-cut in its gendered meaning. Even though home and family are typically culturally seen as feminine images it is not likely that they are strongly linked to the orientations of women and are less appreciated by men in an organizational context. In the computer company about three quarters of the work force and all senior managers were men. This probably reflected gender division of education and career choices more than organizational practices discriminating against women, although the management team consisted only of men and was characterized by a tight atmosphere that probably made the entrance of a single woman difficult. Generally, in Sweden the field of computing has traditionally attracted more men than women. The company had a reputation for having developed a personnel-oriented 'corporate culture' and being skilled in dealing with the personnel. Men and women appeared to be equally satisfied with the workplace.

It should be added, that the metaphors mentioned are not exhaustive of telling the cultural stories of the two organizations. Even 'masculinistic' organizations are more than games and wars and also include friendly cooperation. Also organizations

emphasizing friendship and community harbour politics, conflicts and pressures for production and profit. The home-and-family vocabulary sometimes corresponds to other vocabularies and social practices; sometimes it contradicts them in the organization concerned. All organizations exhibit a mix of ideas and language use that may be seen as culturally masculine or feminine, respectively. But masculine or, although less commonly, feminine coloured metaphors and vocabularies may dominate in a specific organization – or unit within it.[2]

One-gendered workplaces

Workplaces occupied by one gender only are of interest in themselves, as significant empirical objects. They are also, however, useful for the illumination of some forms of femininities and masculinities which characterize organizations in general, but which are far from always clearly visible in complex, culturally multifaceted organizations. These patterns may come through more transparently in one-gendered workplaces.

Many women work groups exhibit a tendency to celebrate private life at work (Reskin and Padavic, 1994). In many workplaces female workers hold parties for birthdays, engagements, pregnancies, weddings, and retirements. Albeit such activities take time off from work, they also create a community and bridge gaps between different social groups (ages, ethnicities) through emphasizing common experiences. How should we evaluate such practices in terms of accommodation or resistance? Celebrating domesticity may be conservative, encouraging escapes from unsatisfying work situations to the benefit of family life. It may also, however, strengthen social relations and a sense of identity through group support and belongingness which increase self-esteem and provide a basis for resisting domination both at work and home (ibid.).

In a study of British women in the sewing industry, Young (1989) found similar patterns of collective orientation, including regular meeting in leisure time. Pronounced values of solidarity informed the workforce. This also included the relationship with the company; employees regularly noted their long-standing ties with it.

When estimating these studies – and the general knowledge on all-women work cultures – it must be emphasized that they concern (Anglo-Saxon) blue-collar workers. Professional women are probably less inclined to put a strong emphasis on family issues and other 'private' parts of life at work. Lindgren (1985) found that female nursing aides expressed such orientation but that female nurses and physicians did not. While nursing aides build their relationship on a shared sense of subordination and equality and an absence of competition, nurses have a position in the middle, try to improve their conditions, differ in terms of social background and create a community based more on individuality and in relationship to specific issues rather than on a broader basis. Class and position are consequently crucial for understanding how different groups of women develop work cultures and form their relations.

Health clinics are an example of an all-female type of organization created by women for promoting the interest of women (e.g. Morgen, 1994). This kind of organization is directly founded in ideas about a specific feminist standpoint (Chapter 2). The purpose is not only to achieve pro-female goals, but also to work according to certain principles and values, seen as feminine: workplace democracy, minimum

hierarchy, including rotating people in positions of management, openness for feel-ings, supportive social relations and the integration of private and work life – both in the sense of balancing the demands of the two spheres and in being open about private life at the workplace. The realization of these goals and a high level of com-mitment often characterize life in this kind of organization, but tensions and con-flicts also appear to be common. Financial problems and the existence of an often less-than-positive external environment partly account for that. Involvement of the entire person and close personal relationships also make a lot of issues highly sensi-tive and emotionally charged. The absence of bureaucracy and hierarchy as a 'pro-tective shield' reducing the personal involvement in sensitive issues – e.g. bad performance, the need to dismiss persons due to incompetence or financial reasons – make these often highly charged emotionally and the risk for destructive social processes great (Morgen, 1994). In many cases, elements of bureaucracy and hierar-chy are incorporated making organizations celebrating alternative ideals into hybrid organizations (Ashcraft, 2001).[3] This organization is special in terms of goals, work-ing forms and a high degree of selectivity in recruitment, making it difficult to draw any conclusions valid for more conventional workplaces.

In all-men work groups, gender is active in the creation of their own workplace culture. Beer drinking and talk about women in sexual terms underscore the shared masculinity (for a review of such studies, see Reskin and Padavic, 1994: 138–41). Rough banter between men, for example giving each other insulting nicknames, also fulfils this function. 'Real men' can take a hard conversational tone, it is assumed (Collinson, 1988). Sometimes gender displays highlight masculinity through being physically strong, tough and daring – safety rules may for example be neglected.

When an all-men workplace faces the employment of women workers, reactions of more or less negative character are reported as common (Reskin and Padavic, 1994: 72–4). Female workers may have to face crude sexual jokes or more or less indirect statements that this is not a job/workplace suitable for women. Sometimes even threats of violence intended to drive a female 'intruder' away occur. Possible explanations for such behaviour are that men think that women may not do their share, that men think they have to clean up their language, that wages may be cut or that the presence of women may diminish the prestige of the job or undermine its status as 'real men's' work (Astrachan, in Reskin and Padavic, 1994: 72). We find the last point of greatest interest. Apparently workers in certain sites often construct their work as highly masculine and the presence of women, especially if they show themselves capable of doing the job, may threaten this self-understanding. In particu-lar, persons and groups with a precarious identity and self-esteem associated with social status and repetitive, dirty, boring or dangerous jobs – often compensated for by engaging in hyper-masculine activities, talk and relations – may feel threatened by the weakening of the 'manly' character of the job and workplace by the presence of female workers. In many cases, this negative feeling stops with some unease, which presumably is reduced over time if the female worker(s) continue and the men get used to having a two-gender workplace, but in other cases the woman faces overtly hostile reactions and will probably depart.

As with all social phenomena, there is considerable variation in how formerly one-gendered workplaces encounter a representative of the other sex. Gherardi (1995)

illustrates this through six cases of women entering all-men workplaces. In one case, of forest workers, the men are sceptical, indeed directly hostile, but in most of the other cases, they have no problem in accepting a woman. One woman, just graduated from a school of graphic design, joined a group of 15 technicians, all men, many of them over 50 and all but two had moved up from the bottom and had no diploma. She reports that 'I was welcomed with such enthusiasm; everyone was friendly, ready to teach me and help me. I didn't have any difficulties with the job, or with combining the job and looking after the family' (p. 110). This does not mean that the minority status was totally unproblematic, but the overall impression from this and most of Gherardi's cases is that an all-male group may be quite open to receiving a woman in a friendly and positive way. Gender may, however, similar to differences in age, education, and social background lead to some uncertainties or difficulties in interaction and in fully fitting in. Gherardi's material also includes an illustration of a strongly anti-female orientation. The case of a woman starting as 'the first, and perhaps the last, forestry worker' (p. 120) and who faced a hostile environment, where the men felt strongly that this was not a job for a woman and reacted very primitively.

While reactions of the women-do-not-really-belong-here type probably appear in many types of all-men workplaces, they are probably most common in workplaces that have a strong masculine image, such as the police, the armed forces and certain kinds of blue-collar work. It is likely that those occupations and workplaces attract men very eager to prove their manliness to themselves and others. Pre- or unconscious fantasies about homosexuality (homophobia) may sometimes account for this orientation. Cultural phenomena *cannot* be reduced to simple offspring of psychological processes, but the level of the unconscious may still be significant for the understanding of the logic of excessive masculinities. Psychological processes may fuel certain collective constructions of meaning, for example, stereotypical and pejorative views on women or rigid distinctions between the worlds of men and women. In other cases, a heavy emphasis on masculinity may be more related to the material options of constructing work in terms consistent with the broadly shared values of physical strength and courage – values associated with masculinity. These constructions are challenged by the presence of women. The inclination to construct work in terms of masculinity may also be seen in terms of class conditions. Blue-collar workers, poorly paid, having physically demanding jobs, working in physically unattractive, perhaps noisy and dirty physical environments and having low social status face considerable strains on their self-esteem. To construct the job and workplace as highly masculine – and emphasizing the non-masculine nature of the upper classes, for example managers and white-collar workers, is a way of gaining self-respect.

> The uncompromising banter of the shop-floor, which was permeated by uninhibited swearing, mutual ridicule, displays of sexuality and 'pranks', was contrasted, exaggerated and elevated above the middle class politeness, cleanliness and more restrained demeanour of the offices. (Collinson, 1988: 186)

This kind of workplace culture, documented in studies of British and US factories, may also facilitate resistance against management power and thus increase worker autonomy and solidarity. It may, however, also lock the workers in a fixed subordinate position, where positive participation and influence are absent (Collinson,

1994). An anti-feminine orientation may be provoked and made visible through the presence of women in this kind of workplace, but the cultural orientation is perhaps better understood as a matter of stressing masculinity (including devaluing non-masculine work and groups irrespective of sex) rather than anti-women per se. This does not, however, mean the absence of sexism, only that it is understood in a broader class and status context than as just males devaluing women. The consequences in terms of fixing gender-stereotypical thinking and preventing women from entering or feeling comfortable in this setting may, however, still be strong.[4] That expressions of anti-women sexism as a support for constructing oneself as masculine goes beyond resistance to management and class society is shown by research on military officers (e.g. Barrett, 1996).

It appears as if the workplaces consisting only of men or women often develop values and practices that are in harmony with gender stereotypes – which actually makes one wonder about the border between a stereotype and something that is a roughly fair picture of a group of people. The emphasis on family issues in all-female work groups and the 'manly' behaviour of all-men factory workers and military officers are strongly supportive of gender stereotypes. A comparison between groups of male and female strippers indicated interesting differences in their social orientations (Tewksbury, 1993). While female strippers, according to available (US) studies carried out in the late 1960s (the results are not necessarily valid 25 years later, nor in other contexts), often developed strong friendships within their work groups and were sexually involved with other strippers, it is not the case for their male colleagues. Male gay strippers typically have no relationship with other strippers and male strippers are, in general, friendly yet very competitive with their colleagues, according to Tewksbury.

Having reviewed these studies, some words of caution are called for. As with all research in social science, the results in gender studies are more uncertain than they appear. As stressed earlier in this book, the researcher can not avoid being guided by her or his own stereotypes and taken-for-granted ideas. Also interview (and questionnaire) responses may be an effect of conventions and assumptions about how one should express oneself, thus reproducing stereotypes and scripts about men and women (Silverman, 2001; Alvesson, 2003). Conventional ideas about what are examples of masculinities and femininities often appear to a priori define much of the results of empirical studies. It is also important to bear in mind that what is exhibited in one-sex workplace group culture does not necessarily tell us much about what is characterizing individual persons. Group-level phenomena may follow their own dynamics, including norms and expectations on how women and men should interact with each other. As Gherardi (1995: 144) writes, one may ask 'how many women and men only superficially profess the traditional values of femaleness and maleness, and how many forms of resistance are raised in covert and private form'.

Often it is claimed that work groups composed of a mix of men and women are more satisfying for those involved and even more productive or effective (Blomqvist, 1994). One may argue that learning is facilitated through diversity in a group. It is probably difficult to say something universal on these topics. Sex composition does not involve any mechanics but may mean different things and lead to any outcomes.

Satisfaction, productivity and learning may be accomplished in different ways. The same factors may sometimes facilitate, sometimes obstruct the attainment of a certain value. If a one-sexed work group has developed a workplace culture around gender-stereotypical habits – beer drinking and sex joking or celebrating family matters and sewing – they may feel this is satisfying. It is probably easier to evaluate the level of satisfaction rather than the productivity/effectiveness associated with mixed groups. Issues of effectiveness are often hard to investigate. As with all other gender issues, results of specific studies should not lead to broad generalizations across time, space, class, ethnicity, etc.

Sexuality in organizations

A crucial gender aspect of organizational culture is sexuality. Sexuality is thus not viewed as simple biological drives or individual psychological phenomena, but constituted, expressed/repressed and interpreted in accordance with social norms. Sexuality affects social relations, is a source of pain and pleasure for organizational members and is a vital part of the job in many cases, in particular in interactive service jobs. Sexuality in organizations as a research field has attracted a certain amount of attention in recent years; earlier complaints about it being neglected (Burrell, 1984) are hardly valid today as there is a rapidly growing literature on the subject (e.g. Hearn and Parkin, 1987; Hearn et al., 1989; Hall, 1993; Brewis and Grey, 1994; Gherardi, 1995; Brewis, 2005).

To define sexuality – which comprises a lot more than specific sexual actions – is not easy. Hearn and Parkin (1987: 58) arrive at the following view:

> Sexuality … is the social expression of, and relations to bodily desires, real or imagined, by or for others or for oneself, together with the related bodily states and experiences.

Hearn and Parkin thus say that sexuality in workplaces in this sense is not a marginal phenomenon, but it is central, at least in certain kinds of organizations.

Some authors prefer to talk about sexuality in a wider sense, including broader, more vague aspects signalled by labels such as eroticism, desire, etc. (e.g. Calás and Smircich, 1991; Burrell, 1992). Recognizing the potential value in breaking up conventional meanings and unfixing terms that risk freezing understanding in established ways, such an enterprise is not without drawbacks as it easily becomes a bit arbitrary what one chooses to define as 'sexuality'. The term is easily stretched quite far. A high level of discretion does also characterize authors discussing the 'deeper' meanings of sexuality. In other words, the argumentation appears a bit too idiosyncratic, far-fetched and immune to checking, even to counter-argumentation. We will focus on sexuality in a relatively narrow and empirically accessible sense.

Some research deals with the repressive attitude in organizations towards sexuality in workplaces, etc. which has been looked upon as an element in the general disciplining of the work force (Burrell, 1984). Dominant bureaucratic-rational principles for organizations are antithetical to erotization and sexuality and thus

give little leeway for impulses, ideas and talk to materialize. Many authors, however, advocating a broad view of sexuality, see it 'everywhere' including the undertone in workplace climate, acting and language (Hearn and Parkin, 1987; Martin, 1990; Calás and Smircich, 1991). Sexuality is, according to this view, almost everywhere and permeates workplace culture. Pringle (1989), for example, claims that 'gender and sexuality are central … in all workplace relations' (p. 159). Hearn and Parkin (1987: 3) say that 'enter most organizations and you enter a world of sexuality'. Perhaps this increasingly popular view reflects the inclination of contemporary people to define themselves in relationship to discourses of sexuality – sexuality offers standards for normality and a yardstick against which the modern person assesses herself – more than it mirrors the workplace relations 'out there' (cf. Foucault, 1976). Dominant discourses 'force' us to talk about sexuality, indeed to use it as a basis for the definition of self and identity, Foucault claims. Even though people in general certainly are affected by the popularity of the sexuality discourses, and the talk has its truth effects, those sensitive to trends in poststructuralism, feminism and psychology may push the interest in sexuality rather far. Discourses on the topic may affect social scientists, interested in the subject matter more than conventional organizational participants. It may not be workplaces 'out there' that produce so much sexuality as researchers' eager to inscribe sexuality everywhere. Any kind of emotional work or attractiveness is seen in terms of sexuality. Like other examples of gender studies, there is a risk of over interpretation, namely that the researcher commands the world rather than being open minded and receptive about it. A certain amount of agnosticism about the general interest in sexuality and a tendency to see it everywhere would not prevent us from confirming the relevance of Pringle's and other sexuality-in-organization specialists' claim for understanding some workplaces, in particular certain service companies in which the attractiveness of the personnel is seen as vital for business. Later in this chapter we will treat one organization in which sexuality appears to be central for workplace relations.

Generally, in terms of sexuality there are four areas which are of particular interest to address: (a) sexual harassment, (b) sexuality as a source of pleasure in organizations, (c) sexual attractiveness affecting employment chances and placement and as a vital part of the job, and (d) sexuality in relationship to identity, for example, sexual jokes as a way of showing one's (heterosexual) identity. Of course, the four themes sometimes overlap, as when (c) or (d) may lead to (a) or when a particular act (harassment) is experienced as a source of pleasure for one person and pain for another.

A great body of research has dealt with sexual harassment at work.[5] This term entered language in the mid-1970s and has gained a broad impact. It is normally defined as an offence, as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conduct are experienced as negative. Sometimes sexual harassment may be seen as the work of individual persons; sometimes it is better understood as related to broader collective patterns of sexism and to workplace cultures. In the first instance organizational norms may be more or less restrictive or tolerant to acts of harassment, which are often said to be contingent upon as well as produce asymmetrical relations of power. A superior position increases the likelihood for harassing behaviour (at least for men, but one should also be open for the possibility of women

in senior positions sometimes acting in a similar way). But the act of humiliation also marks and reinforces inequality: the victim learns her or – more seldom – his subordination. Survey studies typically show that sexual harassment is frequent in workplaces. In US public administration, for example, almost half of all women felt that they had been exposed to sexual harassment (according to statistics, referred by Stivers, 1993). British surveys produce similar figures (Thomas and Kitzinger, 1994). Scepticism to the possibilities of surveys mapping this kind of often elusive and ambiguous phenomena is motivated. Problems involve difficulties in defining the phenomena: memory is often unreliable; different people may interpret a specific definition in different ways and the inclination to answer questions about sexual harassment probably varies according to what one feels about the subject matter. Social norms provide clues for sense making and labelling.[6] As Gherardi (1995) notes, 'when sexuality is involved, the distinctions between what is acceptable and what is offensive are very subtle' (p. 57). She mentions that she has carried out research in settings, which she judged to be excessively sexualized, but which were deemed 'fair' by those who worked there and vice versa. All this should not prevent an acknowledgement that sexual harassment – irrespective of how it is defined – is far from infrequent. This does not, of course, mean that harassers are equally frequent. It is possible that a minority of men repeatedly harasses women. Still workplace norms and meanings are important for understanding when and how individual sexualized acts of a harassing character are initiated, accepted or punished by fellow workers or managers. Workplace cultures may be more or less discouraging of acts that may be seen as harassing and be more or less inclined to define acts as harassing (meaning unacceptable).

Sexual harassment may take many forms from subtle to very harsh ones, from verbal comments to physical assaults. It may also take the form of obscene graffiti. Padavic (in Reskin and Padavic, 1994) reports one case where the name of a female coal miner appeared in obscene bathroom graffiti at the workplace – a signal that her presence was not wanted.

Case studies provide a more selective but a more lively, rich and precise picture of the specific phenomena, even though the methodological problems should be borne in mind also in this kind of study. Others, apart from the perpetrator and the victim, seldom observe the actions – if these positions are accepted as good representations – and the perpetrator's story is seldom heard. Even though the victim normally is much more trustworthy, one should not underestimate the methodological problems involved and no accounts can be taken at face value in social science (Silverman, 2001). Victims may also censor themselves in reports. As emphasized in Chapter 2, the difficulties of drawing conclusions are even more pronounced in questionnaires.

Sometimes sexuality in workplaces is one-sidedly associated with power, seduction, sexism and oppression. This is, of course, motivated if and when the focus is on sexual harassment, but this focus may well be somewhat too one-sided and narrow. Sexuality in organizations is not only a matter of sexual harassment or of other issues related to male domination. On the positive side, an 'open' or 'affirmative' attitude to sexuality may mean a less impersonal, boring or bureaucratic workplace culture. Gherardi (1995) notes that some suggestions for minimizing sexual harassment involve excessive rules and constraints that reinforce bureaucratic and management control often experienced as impoverishing working life. A confirmation of

sexuality as something legitimate and potentially positive in organizations may create positive, pleasurable, and more spontaneous and emotionally liberated workplace climates and counteract the dull and bloodless features of bureaucracies (Burrell, 1992; Brewis and Grey, 1994). This would in vital respects be in line with feminist criticism of bureaucracies, even though such critique seldom addresses the issue of, or possible consequences in terms of, sexuality (Ferguson, 1984; Savage and Witz, 1992). Arguably, for the virtues to be realized for both genders radical changes involving the reduction in gender-based power relationships are needed. Otherwise some may feel open and unconstrained while others may experience the opposite as strict norms for proper conduct and 'neutral' social relations are abandoned. The general impression is that males may be overrepresented among the first orientation while females may encounter less constraint on harassment if the repression against sexual impulses is weakened in organizations. Still, acknowledging that work and pleasure are, or at least can be intertwined, and that we all may seek erotic gratification in our work and organizations is important (Gherardi, 1995). Research needs to address not only problems but also possibilities associated with gender and sexuality at work. Pringle (1989) suggests that rather than seeing women as 'pathetic victims of sexual harassment it might be possible to consider the power and pleasure they currently get in their interactions and raise the question how they can get what they want on their own terms' (p. 167).

When looking at sexuality, as with all issues, the enormous variation of 'men' and 'women' must be taken into account. The local environment of course also influences the nature of sexual harassment. Handy (2006) studied three different organizations, located in the same small town (in New Zealand) and she found that sexual harassment took different forms and was responded to differently.

The male-dominated meat works for example seemed to be a place for using sexual harassment as a power demonstration. In the retail store sexual harassment occurred routinely, but 'within the limits of women's tolerance' (p. 13), while in the bank there were fewer problems.

At the meat works women were in a minority (less than 15 per cent) and they found it difficult to develop coping strategies. One woman had however found a way, which also gave her some respect from the males.

> I personally don't get harassed to my face … if a guy comes up and grabs me by the butt, and they do it all the time, I turn round and grab them, but not nicely, you know. You've got to be what they are, which are arseholes. (p. 9)

The women did not contact management as they believed it to be unsupportive and they were not able to resist collectively because of disagreements about whether to act.

At the small retail store there was no collectively perpetrated harassment as at the meat works. Men were in the minority. Employees of other organizations, male customers and the women's colleagues perpetrated the sexual harassment the women experienced. Here, Handy mainly refers to men patronizing women, 'touching them and making frequent comments on their appearance'. Most of what happened in relation to this workplace was however conceptualized by the female workers as 'normal',

although it was described with irritation. Here the women dealt with these men, by trying to avoid them, always having a female colleague present and, 'as they all noted in their interviews, by reminding themselves that these interactions were short-term ones which often were not repeated for several days or a week' (p. 12).

The bank had an official code of conduct for dealing with sexual harassment, however only for employees of the organization. The specific branch was all female, while the majority of customers were male and they had male colleagues in other organizations, like security guards. These last mentioned were identified as harassers by the bank women, but also by the women working at the store.

This study shows that employees may have different ideas of what is acceptable and what is not and how it is dealt with. Class aspects also play a role in this study. In the working class context the harassment was cruder and the females responded in a more varied way.

In terms of class, significant variation must also be considered. Gherardi (1995), who for five years had regular meetings with (Italian) female factory and office workers, observed that the two groups very often found it difficult to understand each other:

> At moments of tension, the office-workers accused the shop-floor workers of colluding with the sexism of their male workmates, and were in turn accused of being bourgeois hypocrites who considered sex to be 'dirty'. (p. 52)

One may interpret this as the view and practice of males on sexuality being taken over by the female factory workers, who are then seen as victims of patriarchy reproducing a cultural style that constrains themselves and, indirectly, women in general. Alternatively, one may understand this phenomenon in terms of working-class culture, in which a workplace characterized by body work in which a more explicit approach is preferred, partly in opposition to the genteel, middle-class and prudish office and managerial middle-class culture (also shared by most students of gender). Finally, and a perhaps more plausible, interpretation is to combine the two. Sexualized expressions of female workers' culture may, similar to that of men, be seen as ways of reducing boredom and resisting the control of superiors and the middle class through the engagement in counter-symbolism (cf. Gherardi, 1995). The form it takes is not independent of male norms and practices, but bears some vestiges of these. As with almost all gender issues, other dimensions – of which we here only touch upon class and occupation – must be considered. There are no pure gender patterns in organizations: Gender is always fused with other social, individual and material circumstances. Gender can never be treated as abstract from other issues.

In a highly different way from factory work, sexuality is visible in organizational contexts not least in occupations, where physical attractiveness is important, for example receptionists, waitresses, air hostesses, guides, a large part of the sales personnel, etc. We can talk here about a large and expanding category of 'aesthetic work', associated with the expansion of some parts of the service sector, where interactions between employees and customers are central (Thompson et al., 2001). Here, sexuality, although less directly addressed and perhaps more adequately labelled attractiveness or appealing appearance, is a matter for management and a

topic of systematic control. Sexuality/attractiveness is an essential part of business and work (see, for example, Hall, 1993). Service work is 'personality intensive' (Normann, 1983) and may be seen as emotional labour (Hoschchild, 1983), which means that the personal image of the service worker and the contact between him/her and the customer is important. In modern society, where so much of the success of organizations depends on the ability to produce the right image, the visual impression that can be given means a great deal. Gender symbolism, including sexuality, is vital here.

Attractive (subordinated) female staff can symbolize power, prestige and success both for the superior person who employs and heads the staff as well as for the organization as a whole. Looks and appearance are vital for the employment prospects of women – and men – in many jobs. Evaluations are often coloured by sexual appearance. Gherardi (1995) reports a case of an Italian university department where the female students felt that if they dressed up before examinations, this had a positive effect on their grades given by a male professor. In a reply to male students complaining about this injustice, the females countered with the example of good-looking male students getting higher grades by a female lecturer. (It is difficult to say something about the 'truth' of the example – what is of interest are the ideas and beliefs it expresses.)

In the next section we will at some length report a case study illustrating some features of sexuality in a workplace culture, as well as broader elements of masculinities and femininities in relation to identity and organizational culture. The case then illustrates some of the ideas of Chapters 4 to 6, including those on identity.

Workplace culture and sexuality at Ludvig's Advertising Agency

Ludvig's Advertising Agency, LAA, is a small Swedish company, employing 20 persons, ten women, all in subordinate positions, and ten men, all but one in professional positions, i.e. working as project managers, art directors and copy writers. The women are below or around 30, on average ten years younger than the men. Both parts seem to be interested in fashion and appearance. The agency has been the target of an in-depth study, more fully reported in Alvesson and Köping (1993) and Alvesson (1998).

The advertising agency appears to be a comparably sexualized environment, in the sense that it is inhabited by people who care about their attractiveness, where the gender role patterns are clear and where the room for expressed emotions and sexual allusions is rather large. In the organization, sexual attractiveness and desire are legitimately shown off and sexually coloured impulses are allowed to be verbally expressed. From the following observation we get an example of this type of environment:

One Friday afternoon the female co-researcher was sitting talking to Boris, one of the male employees. Ludvig, the founder, who had a question for Boris popped in and sat down for a while. It was about 5 p.m., and

Marcia came in to say that she was leaving and wished them a nice week-
end. Her lips were painted bright red and she wore a mini-skirt. When
Marcia had left, Ludvig looks at Boris with a twinkle in his eyes, and
says: 'That one! With butter on!' Boris laughs. It can be noted that in spite
of the presence of the female co-researcher, the two 'gentlemen' had a
'relaxed' attitude to their impulses. (Possibly it can also be seen as a
provocation aimed at the female researcher.)

'Friendly' sexual humour seems to dominate at LAA. There were no signs of dis-
content with the atmosphere at LAA amongst the females. Both these characteristics –
sexually coloured relations and at least as far as we could detect a positive attitude
among female employees – appear to be typical for many agencies in Scandinavia.
Three Danish female advertising professionals, commenting on the Swedish book in
which this study was presented (Alvesson and Köping, 1993) for a Danish profes-
sional journal, reported that they only felt positive about the sexualized environ-
ment. They claimed that 'it is wonderfully liberating to walk around and pinch the
guys in their bottoms (and oneself to get pinched)' and referred to them as 'mother's
little baby'. It is just another way of saying that "I like you and our cooperation"
(*Orientering*, no. 7, 1994: 10). A study of another advertising agency included the
observation of a female assistant pinching male workers' bottoms, seemingly with-
out any immediate earlier provocation. The jokes may also contribute to the cre-
ation of conceptions of sexuality and sexual attractiveness being important, also in
workplaces. This contributes to the production of men and women as sexual beings
and ties their identities accordingly, traditionally with the strongest constraints for
females. As the (hetero) sexual factor[7] brings gender differences and gender dynam-
ics to their extreme – here gender differences are highlighted – it contributes to the
gender structuring of the organization. Through indicating that men and women are
different, different work roles and routes appear to be natural.

Organizational values and practices thus influence the importance of the sexual
attractiveness for gender relations at the agency, among other things by giving pri-
ority to women's appearance in recruitment and selection. Here, male power was
explicit. Control of the point of entrance to the organization means that certain per-
sonal styles and norms are incorporated into and signalled in the organization. But
also self-selection is important. Those women and men who are comparatively unin-
terested in dress and appearance are probably hardly inclined to apply for work and
carry on working at the agency (in the industry).

LAA is an organization led by men, while the women manage routine jobs and
the 'domestic chores'. As reviewed in Chapter 3, gender division of labour is
common in working life, but in LAA it is extreme, at least in the context of the non-
technical professional service sector. If one adds to that the appearance, age and gen-
eral image of the female staff coupled with jokes with sexual allusions, one could
perhaps draw the conclusion, based on conventional wisdom in gender studies, that
this must be an extraordinarily male-chauvinistic organization, where 'masculine
values' are predominant and gender oppression pronounced.

But such an image is misleading at least if masculinity is defined in the ways it usu-
ally is in the gender literature. The organization is much more inconsistent. It is very
'soft' in many regards. Social relations were emphasized. People talked a lot about

personal chemistry. The female employees said that they were satisfied with their workplace.

It is hard to find examples of people constructing their work in masculine terms. The art directors regard themselves as being the 'feelings' in advertising production. They 'feel' whether an advertising product or idea is 'right' or 'wrong'. They do not work analytically and/or rationally but rather emotionally, they say.

> Advertising people are normally very outgoing and they are emotionally loaded. Because feelings and things like that is the basis of creativity, so to speak. They are often very rich in ideas and associative, they can quickly associate with various phenomena. They are normally rather difficult to steer and jump for joy when they become happy or hit the roof when they become mad. The amplitude on their reactions is much higher than for example people companies' accounting departments. Advertising people are seldom very systematic or structured ... (Male advertising worker)

On the whole LAA may be said to have a 'feminine' orientation with regard to the self-understanding, the method of working and customer relations. At least on an overall and cliché-like level it corresponds with the ideals of many feminists around the importance of emotion for thinking, work and organization (Jaggar, 1989; Mumby and Putnam, 1992). Correspondingly, males are conventionally seen as constructed as non-emotional (Hearn, 1993). Hollway (1984: 253) writes that 'in our society, the judgement is a sexist one: expressing feelings is weak, feminine and in contradistinction to men's rationality'.

LLA hardly matches a typical description of masculinity as '... hard, dry, impersonal, objective, explicit, outer-focused, action-oriented, analytic, dualistic, quantitative, linear, rationalist, reductionist and materialist' (Hines, 1992: 328). Not all of these virtues are, of course, totally absent. When one male interviewee stresses that 'we are not just freely floating artists, but work a lot with analysis', one may interpret it as an attempt to construct a masculine element in work, but in order to see this as an expression of dominating 'masculinity' the mentioned set of qualities must be much more pronounced. Arguably, elements of analysis are part of even the most extremely 'feminine' activity. The agency shows very little of the five types of masculinity that Collinson and Hearn (1994) view as typical in organizational context: authoritarianism, paternalism, entrepreneurialism, careerism and informalism. Some elements of entrepreneurialism characterized the company at the beginning, but this was not salient during the time of the study. Of course, the agency is not completely emptied of interaction within gender groups, but some degree of in-group interaction, based on gender, age, ethnicity, ideology, etc., is presumably a characteristic of every workplace. It is far easier to pick elements in characterizations of the 'feminine' as suitable for LAA, e.g. 'the prioritizing of feelings ... the importance of the imaginative and creative ...' (Hines, 1992: 314). More broadly, some new organizations and principles for management – stressing flat hierarchies, team work, open communication and interpersonal competence – reject the principles of masculinities associated with bureaucracies and may be seen to be 'women-friendly' (Blomqvist, 1994; see next chapter). Of course a

great deal of work and organizational conditions and constructions are not best understood in gender terms.

A key feature of the work and – we believe – a crucial aspect behind the almost caricatured gendered division of labour is the high level of ambiguity involved in the work and the scepticism directed at the competence and results of advertising workers (Tunstall, 1964; Alvesson, 1994).

> … everybody has the right to express opinions in this business and everybody's opinion is equally important. Sometimes a client rejects a proposal that you have made because the wife of the manager did not like it. (Male advertising worker)

Advertising is seen as arbitrary and workers face considerable difficulties in developing stable work identities. Conventional resources as formal education, socially sanctioned authority, high social status and substantive work results in which the competence is proved, are, on the whole, not available or are of minor significance. In relationship to clients, the agency is typically weak. The relationship means that the agency adopts a position, low in terms of masculinity. The contributions are constructed in pro-feminine terms: to the bureaucratic-rational client the agency offers feeling, imagination, group work, intuition, playfulness, etc.

Another problem for people in the field concerns the broadly shared view that advertising people should be young. There is an expectation in the field that one should be fashion-minded and sensitive about trends – virtues that may be seen as inconsistent with ageing. As Tunstall (1964: 17) writes, 'this is a business in which youth has a special kind of moral advantage'. It is no coincidence that the men at LAA want to be called the 'lads' (guys) and that they dress in a youthful style. Gender relations may also be helpful here. One female interviewee thinks that the recruitment policy within the agency is largely a matter of the dominating group being on its way into middle age:

> (Q: Most of the art directors here are men, why do you think that is? And all assistants are women!)
>
> They would never take on a lad as assistant, never.
>
> (Q: Why not? Is it more fun with girls?)
>
> They are striving to be 21 again. It must be in order to make them feel younger.

The wish of the men to stay young may be facilitated by the presence of young, good-looking women. One could here add that being fashion-oriented and negative about ageing characterizes our contemporary society in general, but these values also have a feminine undertone and are thus not entirely gender-neutral.

Constructing the work and the agency through a specific set of meanings facilitates identity work, as the difference to clients is highlighted and the particularity of advertising people is underscored, but the identity is not without problems for male workers as it lacks assurance of masculinity. So this is the case because the set of

meanings are generally culturally seen as feminine/low-masculine – even if the constructions are not specifically recognized in gender terms by the people involved.[8] Given the client's as well as the public's doubts of the value and competence of the work and the vulnerability of work results to the client's arbitrary evaluations, there are considerable strains on the identity and self-esteem of advertising workers.

The structuring of the gender relations at the agency can thus be seen as a way of strengthening the identity and compensating for the insecurities regarding identity, which lie in the cultural nature of the business. Clear-cut gender relations can be of help here. They compensate for the strains contingent upon the construction of work in non-male terms. While the femininities at the agency are a question of sexual attractiveness, youth, service functions and subordinated positions, masculinities are characterized by earning money, high status, creative and leading posts and above all, the stress on gender difference in internal social relations. The emphasizing of explicit femininity – when employing, joking and socially interacting in different forms – thus becomes a way for the men to handle the existential and psychological difficulties, which characterize the modern person in general, but which is greatly added to by the material work situation, which distinguishes advertising work. This accounts for the fact that the men at LAA seek gender interaction, not gender isolation, as sometimes is said to be a form of masculinity (Collinson and Hearn, 1994). Being a 'man amongst men' may not be reassuring in a work context weak on (other) signs of masculinity.

Engaging in gender interaction of a seemingly marked heterosexual character, including sexual joking, may be the safest route to achieve feelings and reassurance of masculinity. While the construction of work means the absence of masculinity, the construction of social relations in strongly gendered terms may compensate for that.

Final comments about the case

This case is of interest as it shows that male domination in organizations is not just a matter of cultures impregnated with masculine values and meanings, but indicates more complex interplay between different types of femininities and, much less obvious, masculinities. In a working life to some extent moving from being dominated by employment in industry and bureaucracies, although much less salient, to service industries and more flexible, organic organizational forms, it is vital to be prepared to rethink old conceptions and understand gender dynamics in novel ways. Gherardi (1995) views new forms of productions as different from those following the masculinistic Fordist logic and believes that ideas on quality, service, flat organizations reducing hierarchical career patterns speak a less masculine language 'and increasingly assume values that belong to the symbolic universe of the female but can not be valorised as such as long as the female constitutes the second sex' (pp. 130–1). We should be careful about exaggerating trends in this direction. Bureaucracy still is the dominant organizational form (Alvesson and Thompson, 2005). The interesting point is that the organizational landscape is not solely populated by pyramid-like machine bureaucracies but also by more dynamic and network-like forms of organizing. Some studies

show better career options for women in the latter (Blomqvist, 1994; Kvande and Rasmussen, 1994), although there is no simple or automatic relation between organizational form and possibilities for female employees, as the present case illustrates. What is important, however, is to look carefully at other examples than the high-masculinistic cultures portrayed mostly in older studies (Kanter, 1977; Ferguson, 1984) and look also at organizations in which feminine cultural meanings and values are not marginalized, without necessarily assuming an easy symmetry between such meanings and values and a high promotion rate for women. As suggested by the case, gender is at least sometimes trickier than that.

Without wanting to generalize from the case, it may illustrate some of the complexities of contemporary and future gender dynamics in the context of organizational cultures. There may be subtle tendencies towards de-femininization of certain values, principles and forms earlier explicitly constructed in female terms, changing cultural ideas about what is masculine and feminine, reducing the constraints and prescriptions involved. As the case suggests, this does not mean that simple and unproblematic gender patterns may automatically emerge.

Summary

The very idea of a cultural understanding of organizations is to investigate meanings and symbolism at the local, workplace level. This should be done without neglecting the broader context of local phenomena, e.g. societal, class and other cultural patterns putting their imprints on groups in organizations. The focus on the subtleties of shared meanings, ideas and symbolism means that models, combinations of abstract dimensions and theoretical generalizations are hardly possible or at least not very interesting. Careful studies of workplaces and occupations indicate the variation of meanings attributed to gender, the construction, combinations and interactions of a variety of forms of masculinities and femininities, even though there also are similar patterns across workplaces. In this sense cultural studies contradict variable thinking. Neither does a feminist standpoint position receive full support. There is certainly no lack of studies showing cultural bias in social practices and ideas about women (e.g. Cockburn, 1991; Reskin and Padavic, 1994; Graves, 1999), but there are also others indicating considerable variation in cultural expressions of different groups of women as well as the view of men towards female entrance and presence in different work contexts. In addition, the experiences and values of women differ. Given variation in the valuation of various forms of masculinities and femininities and meanings ascribed to and reception of women in different organizational contexts (Billing and Alvesson, 1994; Blomqvist, 1994; Gherardi, 1995), the case for a specific feminist standpoint with universal aspirations or even to achieve broad generalization is not very strong. A poststructuralist reading would carry themes further, and try to open up the patterns found in for example studies of organizations with homogenous cultural ideas and symbolic practices, showing the fragmented and ambiguous meanings of what is fixed through labels such as 'masculinities' and 'femininities'. We are satisfied here with pointing at this possibility, rather than – following the spirit of poststructuralism – demolishing the more or

less shaky theoretical and empirical constructions that researchers have built on
gendered cultural phenomena in organizations.

Notes

1 Jackall refers to a manager as a 'he'. It is interesting that such a sharp analyst as
   Jackall made this mistake (then) – this is of course less likely to occur today than
   20 years ago when the book was published.
2 In many sectors, masculine cultural values and expressions dominate, but, for
   example, in much human service work feminine language, metaphors and
   principles may be significant, e.g. in nursing, elementary schools, childcare cen-
   tres. As we discuss in Chapter 7, in many modern, progressive companies a 'de-
   masculinization' of organizational practices may be said to take place (Blomqvist,
   1994; Gherardi, 1995). There are presumably also other trends. According to
   Stivers (1993), there is a strong tendency in the US to try 'to make public admin-
   istration masculine by making it "muscular" and businesslike' (p. 8).
3 This is of course not only valid for feminist organizations. Most organizations
   over a certain size tend to have at least elements of hierarchy and bureaucracy
   (division of labour, standards and rules).
4 A study by Pleck et al. (1993) indicates that the adherence to a masculinist ide-
   ology, i.e. beliefs in the value of being masculine, is independent of attitudes to
   women. The efforts to construct oneself in masculine terms may lead to a wish
   to maintain a male-only environment which does not necessarily have anything
   to do with a negative attitude to women.
5 For example Mackinnon (1979); Hearn and Parkin (1987); Gutek and Cohen
   (1992); Sheppard (1992); Earnshaw and Davidson (1994); Thomas and Kitzinger
   (1994); Bowes-Sperry and Tata (1999).
6 A social constructivist position would say that social and discursive processes –
   rather than objective behaviours or genuine experiences – account for what is
   constructed as sexual harassment and what is not.
7 In these examples it is heterosexuality which is assumed. We do not know if this
   is the only acceptable condition. The material does not supply us with informa-
   tion with regard to how this heteronormativity' affects those who do not fulfil
   these expectations.
8 Masculine meanings are here implicit – as often is the case That is, even if for
   example intuition and emotion in general would be viewed as 'feminine', it does
   not mean that one directly associates with this quality in the specific context. A
   man may well be ascribed these qualities without being seen as feminine.

7
Women in Management

Women and management continues to be a subject of popular interest. Sometimes one even gets the impression that the representation and functioning of women in senior managerial jobs is believed to be *the* crucial issue in gender equality, at least in the context of management/organization studies. Women in management is a large and still expanding topic. There has been an expansion of the number of female managers in many countries, and in USA almost half of all managers are women, at least according to statistics. But they are mainly represented on lower and middle managerial levels. In the US only 2 per cent of the Fortune 500 firms CEOs are female (ILO, 2004). The lack of inequality is especially striking in this part of the labour market. The following are some of the questions that are being asked. Why are there still so few female managers at senior levels? Do men and women differ in terms of leadership abilities and style of managing? Is there perhaps a specific female form of leadership, if not actually practised, but preferred by a majority of women? Are prejudices and other obstacles preventing women from attaining and/or occupying managerial positions? Or do women often express other values and orientations than to exercise authority over others?

The interest in raising and answering these questions seem to be part of an international trend, which started in the US, where the theme has been a popular one for at least the last 35–40 years. Early books reflected problems of women getting into management with revealing titles like for example: *Breakthrough: Women into Management* (Loring and Wells, 1972); *Bringing Women into Management* (Gordon and Strober, 1975); *Men and Women of the Corporation* (Kanter, 1977). In the 1980s we found books emphasizing the situation of women in management, like *Management Strategies for Women, or Now that I am the Boss, How Do I Run This Place?* (Thompson and Wood, 1981), *Women Managers: Travellers in a Male World* (Marshall, 1984). Then in the late 1980s and 1990s titles indicated a belief and confidence in a less defensive and more positive view of female managers, for example, *Feminine Leadership, or How to Succeed in Business Without Being One of the Boys* (Loden, 1986), and *The Female Advantage* (Helgesen, 1990). These books were mainly asserting 'female values' as different and better.

There is a wide variety of social science and more popular, practitioner-oriented writings on the topic. They range from careful, measurement-oriented studies to normative writings, based on the convictions, impressions and/or empirical studies of the author, on ways in which women lead or organize. Within these writings, the idea that women and men are robust categories is the most common, and there are also a number of texts on gender and management, which maintain the idea of women's unitary and in relationship to men different ways of being or relating to others, and embracing a positive rather than critical view on male/female compatibility.

This chapter will provide an overview and discussion of empirical research in the field. We will review the state-of-the-art of empirical and other work on the most common themes on women and leadership: explanations for the limited number of women in managerial jobs, including family matters, discrimination and processes of selection, style of leadership of women compared to men, difficulties facing women managers, including stress (level) and encountering negative stereotypes. In Chapter 8, we will continue the treatment of women and leadership, but then focus on the basic positions taken and different ways of making sense of women and leadership against different assumptions about similarity/difference between men and women and different agendas in terms of an interest in effectiveness or political-ethical concerns.

Explanations for the limited number of women in managerial jobs

As already mentioned, even though women are catching up, they are still under-represented in managerial jobs, especially so at higher levels. This means a strong gender gap in terms of formal power and authority, high status and high incomes.[1]

Explanations for the small numbers of women at the top have pointed at a number of different factors or dimensions, similar to those accounting for the segregated labour market (Chapter 3). One may distinguish between those emphasizing differences between men and women in terms of psychological traits and/or socialization background, work orientations or educational/career choices (or constraints) and those pointing at more sociological, structural explanations to the relative absence of women in managerial positions (Billing and Alvesson, 1994; Wilson, 1998), although one cannot really isolate various factors or levels, as they are intertwined and interact.

Individuality-oriented views

Studies of psychological characteristics have, although there are some mixed results, on the whole showed no or only minor differences between males and females, leading most commentators to suggest that psychological abilities do not account for the variation between men and women in managerial jobs (Morrison and Von Glinow, 1990). Many authors stress that there is considerable evidence that women and men

in management roles have similar aspirations, values and other personality traits as well as job-related skills and behaviours (Marshall, 1984; Dobbins and Platz, 1986; Powell, 1999). Some other authors do, however, suggest that women differ from men in terms of some deeper orientations, including being less selfish (Lipman-Blumen, 1992). As we will see below, some recent and more popular literature also emphasizes differences in terms of leadership style, which presumably is grounded in personalities or other more stable ways of relating to the world.

Problems in education: women investing less in and being more dissatisfied with management education?

One type of individually oriented, but non-psychological explanation is called human capital theory. Investments in education, training and other forms of qualifying experiences are seen as the key factor behind careers. Women's disadvantaged position is attributed to less relevant education, and lacking qualified work experience associated with working at different sites, including working abroad. Educational choices still strongly follow gender-stereotypical divisions. According to data on 28 countries, women students accounted for 52.7 per cent of tertiary education. The majority of women studied education (70–80 per cent), humanities and health (60–70 per cent), social sciences (50–60 per cent), science (40–50 per cent) and engineering (20–30 per cent). (ILO, 2004). Although it is generally understood that women have invested less in managerially relevant qualifications it is commonly known that such investments lead to a lower payoff for women, as well as for minority groups, than for white males (Reskin and Padavic, 1994; Simpson, 1996).

A more sociological version of the emphasis on education and training would be not to take gender differences for granted, but to examine the social and cultural aspects on educational choices and experiences. Education relevant to a managerial career such as an MBA may, at least in some places, be said to include a bias against women in terms of what topics and aspects are given priority to in the study as well as the way courses are taught. Sinclair (1995) documents deep frustration regarding content as well as social interaction by female students in an Australian MBA programme. Swedish data, however, indicate that women are satisfied with their business education (Wahl, 1992; Bergvall and Lundquist, 1995). Other studies point at differentiated treatment of male and female employees in terms of qualifying assignments as a crucial factor in those processes disadvantaging women – as well as minority groups (Billing and Alvesson, 1994: Chapter 9; Reskin and Padavic, 1994).

Cultural assumptions about leadership

Such ideas overlap with explanations that point at cultural themes and social practices working against women. The manager and leadership have traditionally been broadly constructed in masculine terms (Schein, 1973, 1975).

> A 'masculine ethic' can be identified as part of the early image of managers. This 'masculine ethic' elevates the traits assumed to belong to some men to necessities for effective management: a tough-minded approach to problems; analytic abilities to abstract and plan; a capacity to set aside personal, emotional considerations in the interests of task accomplishment; and a cognitive superiority in problem-solving and decision-making ... when women tried to enter management jobs, the 'masculine ethic' was invoked as an exclusionary principle. (Kanter, 1977: 22)

Such constructions, although being perceived as increasingly old-fashioned and less strong or clear-cut today, still to some (considerable?) extent prevail (Lipman-Blumen, 1992). It is possible that this tendency is weaker in some other countries (than the US) and that social changes, including new ideas of modern leadership, will involve a de-masculinization of leadership. The proportion of female managers is, however, much higher in the US than in any other country and as the US is normally not seen as scoring low on masculinity, compared to some countries with a much smaller percentage of female managers, the masculinity/de-masculinization theme may not explain that much. (It also, of course, raises some doubts about the values of statistics, including how well it captures e.g. managerial positions – and not title inflation.) Still, there is a historical tradition and deep cultural ideas that give leadership a masculine image in most countries (Collinson and Hearn, 1996; Hearn and Parkin, 1986/87). It works against women and may prevent women from actively trying to get such jobs and mean scepticism and/or biased evaluations of superiors, colleagues and subordinates. As Reskin and Padavic (1994: 96) say, 'most cultures share the social value, often rooted in religious beliefs, that women should not exercise authority over men'.

More fine-grained understandings of cultural assumptions are needed, as these become less crude and simplistic. Difficulties for females may be much more situation-specific and less general. Exercising authority in a 'non-masculine' way for example may be unproblematic, but females perceived as being aggressive, self-assertive or dominant may lead to clashes with cultural ideas on gendered norms. Occasionally females also encounter executive and other subgroups building community around excessive male interests like hunting and fishing and aggressive sports.

Unfair assessments and other HRM practices

There are studies indicating that women are unfavourably evaluated compared to men (Nieva and Gutek, 1980), although according to Eagly et al. (1992) so is the case in terms of leadership only under certain conditions (see below). Some research focuses on procedures for recruitment, assessment and selection of managers (but also other jobs). For example, job advertisements sometimes are believed to disfavour females, as they often call for more qualifications than necessary, which women more than men often seem to take seriously and thus they abstain from even applying for the job (Billing and Alvesson, 1994). To the extent that this is 'true', may reflect a higher degree of uncertainty and limited self-confidence of females (or

exaggerated self-confidence and limited modesty among men). Some research shows gender bias in assessment and selection (Nieva and Gutek, 1980; Forisha, 1981; Davidson and Cooper, 1992; Morrison, 1992), but the evidence is, as always one might be tempted to add, inconclusive, not to say contradictory. A US study of applications for senior executive (highest grade) positions in US federal government showed that female applicants were better evaluated and were offered positions in significantly higher degrees than male applicants (Powell and Butterfield, 1994) – a finding that throws some doubt on the popular, but rather problematic idea of a glass ceiling effect.[2] There is also a gradually increasing gap between men and women across the hierarchical ladder making it misleading to assume that women have it fairly easy up to a point and then it suddenly becomes very difficult (Eagly and Carli, 2007). It is doubtful whether there is any drastic increase in difficulties to get promoted to very senior levels, although in addition to all other ingredients (scepticism and prejudices, token effects, etc.), more women than men may feel discouraged by the sacrifices for family life following from occupying a top position.

Career trajectories

Some would argue that when and if women are appointed managers, they are more likely to be placed in precarious leadership positions than men. In a study of women appointed to leadership positions in top British companies, Ryan and Haslam (2007) use the metaphor 'glass cliff' to capture their findings, that

> Women were more likely than men to be placed in positions already associated with poor company performance [...] and female directors, thus were more likely than male directors to find themselves on a glass cliff. That is, their positions of leadership were more risky and precarious (i.e. at greater risk of being associated with failure) than those in which men found themselves. (p. 56)

The content of this is that either women are seen as better suited for poorly performing companies and perhaps crisis management than men, and then it is implicit that men are not suited for dealing with crises – or women get the precarious (scapegoat) positions and could then be blamed if things did not work out well, according to Ryan and Haslam.

> If and when that failure occurs, it is then women (rather than men) who must face the consequences and who are singled out for criticism and blame. (ibid.: 550)

However, appointing women as crisis-managers might also be seen as an attempt to capitalize on what are believed to be women's 'natural' skills and competences whether these skills are present or not (Fletcher, 2004). It can also be a reflection of an overall weaker position on the labour market – males are more likely to get the most attractive positions and females get the jobs where competition is weaker.

There are, however, also indications of the opposite problems, i.e. of females not being placed in demanding and qualifying jobs. Women often get staff jobs,

which are sometimes less challenging and have limited value compared with line positions.

It is possible that women are more sensitive than men to experiences in the workplace for their long-term career orientations. A Dutch study concluded that women employees in one organization perceived lower self-efficacy and, related to that, a lower intention to apply for a managerial job (van Vianen and Keizer, 1996). This was, the authors argue, a consequence of the women having less experience in managerial tasks and receiving less verbal support in the organization. In another organization studied there were no differences between men and women either in terms of managerial intention or in the dimensions seen as affecting this. The authors conclude that organizations influence the level of intention of their female employees to get managerial jobs. (Similar views are expressed in Billing and Alvesson, 1994 and Ely and Padavic, 2007). The more general social meanings in society are clearly more supportive for men and they may therefore have a stronger work and career orientation prior to entry in a particular organization, making them somewhat less sensitive to degrees of encouragement/discouragement by colleagues and superiors. In a study of an airline, we often found female managers who said that their appointment to managerial positions was more an outcome of chance and encouragement from others to apply than long-term intention. The interplay between the background, the non-organizational life situation of females and their experiences in organizations should be considered in order to understand their prospects in terms of managerial careers (Billing and Alvesson, 1994).

Male interests means political marginalization of women

Other kinds of explanations are more sociological-structural, even though many of the aspects mentioned in these sections mean some combination of structural and individual elements. As mentioned in Chapter 3, macro level and structural explanations do neither refer to individual traits nor the level of meaning and intention, but to social forces at the macro level operating behind the back of individual subjects or micro processes. Some authors, referring to patriarchy and/or brotherhood of men, believe that the interests of males in preventing women from competing for privileged positions make them reluctant to accept females as managers (Cockburn, 1991; Lindgren, 1996). The interests of men dominate and positions of power are reserved for this category, according to this interpretation.

Unfavourable sex ratio leads to minority effect

Another kind of structural explanation (treated in Chapter 3) emphasizes the ratio of men and women and the problems of minorities to have full options to be recognized, feel comfortable and be promoted (Kanter, 1977; Martin, 1985). A critical mass, Kanter says 30 per cent, is necessary for an underrepresented sex to have equal opportunities along with members of a dominating social category. Whether a particular size is important or not may be discussed, but probably it is important that there are more than one or two women in order to avoid or reduce the problem of tokenism.

Earlier in this book we addressed this idea of specific gender mechanics, where numbers do the trick so to speak behind the backs of people and we will not repeat the points here.

(Im) balance work-family connection disfavours women?

Finally, researchers have pointed at the significance of the work-family connection as disfavouring women. Women are often less mobile, as family priorities lead to them abstaining from taking a position meaning longer work days, more travel or moving geographically to a new site of employment. Sometimes the conflict between home and family obligations and male-normative managerial jobs – where the job holders are expected to be able to spend most of their time and energy on the job – is seen as the major problem preventing women from advancing (Martin, 1993).

Lack of time is a major problem for many career and working women, because they tend to take on a double burden or double work (Valdez and Gutek, 1987; Davidson and Burke, 2000; Eagly and Carli, 2007). Even wage earning women still take care of most of the housework. Also in middle and upper class couples women carry out most housework, but they are able to delegate some of the work to paid helpers, at least in some countries.

One problem with women doing most household and childcare work is that they have little time for socializing with colleagues to build up relations and networks plus 'proving' their commitment to the social side of the organization. Women then often 'under invest in social capital' (Eagly and Carli, 2007: 68).

It is relatively common that female managers are single and childless. English, American and Scandinavian studies showed that male managers are more often married than female managers (Bayes, 1987; Nicholson and West, 1988; Billing, 1991; Frankenheuser, 1993; Davidson and Burke, 2000). According to the above investigations most male managers have children; while on average less than half of the married female managers have children. Forty per cent of the women and only a few of the men among the highest paid officers and directors of Fortune 500 companies were childless (Reskin and Padavic, 1994). In a Danish study of business managers, 5 per cent of the men did not have children, compared to 32 per cent of the women (Højgård, 2002).

Family issues work against women making a career. Given that many women in senior positions do not have children, it follows that the under-representation of women with children in these jobs is much higher than the statistics counting only men and women indicate. On the other hand, it is possible that women without children are not too seriously under-represented in managerial positions. This is an interesting issue worth exploring: perhaps it is the combination woman plus children (and behind this conservative household/childcare gendered patterns) rather than woman per se that accounts for many of the difficulties women experience in getting access to senior managerial and other career jobs.

The deeply culturally ingrained assumptions and expectations that women have a primary responsibility for family, in particular for small children, affect men and

women in apparent as well as subtle ways. The relation between career and family might in different ways influence women's attitudes and interests in careers: they might prioritize children above career (or vice versa), or they might feel ambivalence and insecurity in relation to a managerial job – or the family situation might become a stress factor in relation to a career job. Research on stress shows that female managers react with more stress symptoms than male managers (see the discussion later). Even though the increase in the number of female managers, at least up to the middle level, indicates changes and even though most women today are less tightly committed to family work while men are increasingly, but slowly taking more responsibility for children and housework, family concerns are still a significant obstacle for women getting managerial jobs.

A related issue is that, even though women do not have and do not plan to have children or if they have full support of their husbands, women may nevertheless be ascribed this family orientation, which means that in some cases their actual situation and priorities matter less than expectations or stereotypical ideas of the organization. These may then influence selection processes disfavouring female candidates (Billing and Alvesson, 1994). As with stereotypes in general, they contain some 'truth', but they also exaggerate and thus sometimes distort, prevent nuances and lead to misleading generalizations.

Comments on the explanations

Of course, all these explanations are, at best, partial and must be understood in relation to other issues. They never stand on their own. For example, if women have other work orientations or interpersonal styles than men, making some of them less inclined to give priority to and make sacrifices for holding a managerial job, these differences in orientations cannot be taken for granted or seen as the final explanation, but call for further exploration. The masculine constructions of managerial jobs, at least in some organizations, including the norm of very long workdays, need to be critically assessed. Similarly, family matters are not to be taken for granted. Inequality in terms of men being less inclined than women to take responsibility for children and a historical as well as contemporary insensitivity of decision-makers in organizations to consider the entire life situation of employees should be treated as the starting points for questions and inquiries, not final explanations for the limited numbers of women in senior managerial positions. In our opinion, the understanding of the low degree of women in managerial jobs must be understood as an interplay between cultural traditions, relations of power and the identities (work orientations, values) of men and women. Conservative family patterns of course also matter here. As discussed in Chapter 5, identities are clearly affected by organizational experiences, but experiences prior to and outside work must also be considered. Gender identity is clearly more than just a mirror of work and organizational conditions. Focusing solely on structure or seeing psychological traits or attitudes as self-contained and static appears to us to be somewhat narrow-minded and reductionistic.

The changes and dynamics over time also call for consideration on several levels of analysis. As said, conventionally managerial jobs, at least in business and on senior

levels, have been defined as very much a matter of instrumentality, autonomy, result-orientation, etc, something which is not particularly much in line with what is assumed to be typical for females, according to psychologically oriented theorists. That identification with parents is (or used to be) of significance is supported by a US study carried out by Hennig and Jardim (1977) of 25 senior female managers, all of whom identified with their father rather than their mother. Three decades later the picture is not that simple. It is no longer a 'necessary' pre-condition to identify with the father in order to make it to above middle management. Many mothers are equally educated and women are not disadvantaged if they identify with their mothers (Billing, 2006).

As with all issues, those discussed here may very well be radically rethought in terms of what are reasonable assumptions and good research questions. We must avoid taking for granted conservative, constraining questions and reflect on how insightful those commonly raised are. Instead of trying to explain the limited number of female managers one may ask why are there so many (male) managers. This question includes two elements. One concerns the 'naturalness' of males being senior managers. Why do they so often aspire for positions of superiority and why are they favoured in this kind of job? The other element concerns the number of managers and the cultural significance of this kind of work/function. It may be interesting to counter common sense and view it in terms of an ideology of managerialism – glorifying control, technocratization of social and work life, heroization of 'leaders' and devaluation of 'followers' – rather than as a neutral function in service of the common good (Laurent, 1978; Smircich, 1985; Stivers, 1993; Alvesson and Willmott, 1996). This may throw a different light on the sex ratios in this occupation – and perhaps reduce the interest in *body*-counting, i.e. counting and comparing numbers of males and females (Alvesson and Billing, 2002).

Style of leadership – women compared to men

The extensive research on women and leadership can be divided into two groups. One is the no-difference camp. Here it is commonly concluded that 'in general, comparative research indicates that there are few differences in the leadership style of female and male designated leaders' (Bartol and Martin, cited in Eagly and Johnson, 1990). The other is the gender-stereotypic camp.[3] Here, some crucial differences are believed to exist. Feminine leadership is characterized by cooperativeness, collaboration of managers and subordinates and problem solving based on intuition and empathy (e.g. Loden, 1986; Helgesen, 1990). The first camp is typically academic, heavily measurement-oriented and thus adheres to the variable perspective. The second is more strongly made up of practitioner-oriented authors, often journalists or consultants, typically relying on qualitative work, not seldom of an anecdotal character. Some are more academic and derive ideas about women's ways of managing from readings of literature on the psychology of women (e.g. Fletcher, 1994; Grant, 1988).

We start with a few examples of studies and reviews by authors emphasizing similarity. Bayes (1987) has studied female and male managers in public administration.

While some women exhibited a management style which was open and participatory, other women favoured control in their management style. Men, too, varied in their management style in degree of openness and participation. The only area where some male and female respondents agreed that women were different from men was in the area of their dedication to work. Women were perceived to work harder, to take their work more seriously, or even too seriously, and to be less concerned with monetary rewards than with recognition when a good job was done. Bayes concluded that women in public bureaucracies do not manage by using a different leadership style, nor is any different leadership style reflected in the attitudes they express regarding organizational structure. Kovalainen (1990) also found no significant differences in a study of male and female Finnish bank managers, nor did Cliff et al. (2005) in a study of the organizational practices of Canadian entrepreneurs.

Comprehensive research by others has come to the same conclusion. Bartol (1978: 806) summarizes her examination of different investigations as follows: 'In most cases, there are either no differences or relatively minor differences between male and female leaders on leadership style, whether the leaders are describing themselves or being described by their subordinates'. Powell (1988: 165) reaches the conclusion that female and male managers 'differ in some ways and at some times, but, for the most part, they do not differ'.

As opposed to the above mentioned studies, a number of other writers maintain that there are clear differences between women and men in their management style. As a rule, this assumption is based on theoretical considerations and has been derived from assumptions about the character and the importance of the gender socialization (see e.g. Grant, 1988; Lipman-Blumen, 1992).

Eagly and Johnson (1990), in a review of the research, find that available (positivistic) academic studies show another picture rather than the 'no-difference' one that almost all other (academic) commentators have favoured. They refer to research findings indicating that women as a group can be described as friendly, pleasant, interested in other people, expressive and socially sensitive. Even though socialization and selection in organizations may mean that gender differences in managerial jobs are reduced or even non-existent, they believe that some level of sex difference in leadership style may follow from 'gender-role spill over'. In a meta analysis of other studies they find that laboratory studies – mostly with students as research objects – typically show sex differences in leadership style, while studies of leadership in organizations do so to a lower degree. The explanation of the former may be that in laboratory settings, the rules for how one should behave are unclear, which means that people fall back on gender roles to provide guidance and therefore behave more gender-stereotypically than in other situations, or that the subjects are students rather than managers. In organizational settings, namely studies of 'real' managers, those occupying these positions are selectively recruited and have typically adapted norms for appropriate behaviour. As said in earlier chapters, we must bear in mind that structural conditions and positions influence attitudes and behaviour (Kanter, 1977; Ely and Padavic, 2007). Still, however, Eagly and Johnson (1990) found that women had a slightly more democratic leadership style than men. Eagly et al. (1992) also found that women who adopted stereotypically masculine styles were disliked in comparison with men.

In a research review of gender and leadership effectiveness Eagly et al. (1995) found that on an aggregate level there were no differences in the effectiveness of women and men leaders. Scrutinizing the findings they found, however, conditions under which men fared better than women and vice versa, 'leadership roles defined in relatively masculine terms favoured male leaders and leadership roles defined in relatively feminine terms favoured female leaders' (p. 137).[4] They found that sex differences were significantly correlated with the congeniality of these roles for men and women. There were tendencies, albeit weak, for women to be more effective than men in business, education, and government or social service and for men significantly to be favoured leaders in military organizations. Or to put it differently, 'women fared poorly in settings in which leadership was defined in highly masculine terms, especially in military settings. Men fared slightly worse than women in settings in which leadership was defined in less masculine terms' (p. 140).

In a later contribution, Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (in press) emphasize the small, but important, style differences between male and female leaders. They base this on a meta-analysis of 45 studies, comparing male and female managers, in relation to transactional, transformational and laissez-faire leadership. The three categories are established (although far from unproblematic) distinctions. Transactional leaders appeal to subordinates' self-interest by establishing exchange relationships such that desirable behaviour is rewarded and undesirable behaviour is punished. Key ingredients include clarifying responsibilities, rewarding subordinates for attaining objectives, and correcting them for failing to meet these objectives. It thus involves carrot-and-whip psychology. Transformational leaders are more sophisticated; they establish themselves as role models by gaining the trust and confidence of the followers. These leaders clearly state future goals, develop plans for achieving these goals, and are innovative. They rely on mentoring and empowering of followers, and encourage them to reach their full potential and become more effective contributors to the organization. Laissez faire leadership is characterized as virtually non-existent leadership, that the leader is absent as a manager and lets subordinates do more or less what they want. Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt conclude that 'female managers, more than male managers, tend to adopt a transformational style, especially in their mentoring their followers and attending to them as individuals'. Their analysis showed that women were more supportive, more encouraging than men, and rewarded satisfactory behaviour while men displayed more passivity, attended to problems first when they had become serious but attended to mistakes and failures of followers or they displayed laissez faire leadership. As also noticed by Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt some of the leadership style displayed by women (more than men) overlap with gender-stereotypical expectations. They warn against simplifications, one-dimensional generalizations and say that we need some richer understanding of the ways women and men lead.

Transformational leadership is more in line with expectations of the female role, and this style may then be an effect of pressure from the followers that women (should) act more in accordance with their gender. Therefore it is perhaps the followers' expectations – and the response to these – that one should investigate rather than (or only) the leaders.

There is thus a trend also in some academic work to bring forward difference/gender-stereotypical explanations. Earlier there was a strong consensus for the no-difference camp. Butterfield and Powell (1981: 130), for example, concluded, that 'it is now commonly believed that actual (leader sex) differences in the behaviour of real leaders are virtually non-existent'. Some authors, e.g. Eagly and co-authors have been more inclined to favour the idea that there are differences. Fagenson's (1993) summary of the research is that there is evidence suggesting that women managers 'have a transformational, democratic, and/or "web" rather than hierarchical style of leadership and more satisfied subordinates than men managers' (p. 5). Still, the majority of the academic empirical work supports the no-or-little-difference thesis (see references above). As we have stressed earlier in this book, positivistic studies are much less reliable than they appear. It is very likely that measurements of leadership styles or behaviours do not catch the nuances and subtleties of processes and relations of leadership very well (Alvesson, 1996b; Smircich and Morgan, 1982). In order to carefully assess and compare the leadership of women and men one really needs first, a fairly large sample of men and women in similar managerial jobs in similar contexts (organizational situations, types of co-workers) and second, intensive case-studies including both repeated interviews with managers and co-workers plus observations of behaviour. Of course, this is an extremely difficult and resource-demanding enterprise. And in the absence of such research, research only offers studies based on interviews with managers (only) and questionnaires. As said previously, one should not rely too heavily on these.

The change of emphasis in the literature of women and leadership to embrace the different, supposedly superior qualities of women as leaders may reflect certain 'actual' changes in 'objective' reality. Changes may follow from an increase in the number of female managers and a reduction of constraints in terms of expressing their own 'genuine' style – in case people should have a fixed orientation, installed early in life, independent of work experiences, situational conditions and learning. A trend involving de-masculinization of the construction of management may also be significant here. Helgesen (1990) found examples of an interest in feminine leadership also among the US armed forces. But the changed ideas on women and leadership may also reflect the spirit of the time in broader and less obvious regards, affecting research respondents as well as researchers and review authors. Redefinitions of managerial ideals in a more 'pro-female' direction may improve the self-confidence of the female managers. Writers on the topic of women and management may also feel that the case is no longer one of 'proving that women are people too' (Calás and Smircich, 1996), but that there is space for women's voice on the topic. This may mean that what was earlier seen as 'no differences or relatively minor differences' supporting the similarity idea today tends to be expressed as 'some differences' supporting the idea that women manage in a different way. To determine 'objectively' when 'no', 'insignificant', 'minor' or 'some' is the best word to describe a relationship is hardly possible. The choice of phrasing is mainly dependent on what rhetorical effect the author wants to accomplish. It is not so easy to summarize the research in this area. It is tricky to sort out new results, new analysis, and new emphasis in conclusions from the changed use of words.

Of course, ideas and cultural norms do not exist on their own, but also affect the feelings, thoughts and actions of people in organizations – ideas on female

leadership and the practices of women managers may therefore interact. A study by Billing (2006) showed that expectations from the subordinates 'pushed' some women to change their style to being more 'soft'. 'This is what they expect from a woman', a woman manager said. Some of the women managers would even question if they were good enough listeners, or if they cared enough, etc. Other women managers however rejected these expectations and refused to change their style. From this study it was also clear that the leadership style varied, not only between different workplaces, but also sometimes within different settings, during the day. What is more interesting then perhaps than 'measuring' differences is then to ask under what circumstances is it possible – i.e. contingent upon the encouragement or pressure the manager faces – to act masculine or feminine. But as shown, expectations and continuous searching and perhaps finding small differences will also influence workers' further expectations so that they will expect and press for another leadership style.

If one learns from popular books and lectures that women lead in a particular way, female managers may adapt to that norm and subordinates may read the behaviour of the female manager accordingly, including devaluing behaviour perceived to break with the norm. In this way 'knowledge' on female managers creates its own 'truth effects', for example, it does not so much mirror as produce a socially constructed 'reality'. This may not impact on specific behaviours as much as on people's beliefs of what they are doing – and thus responses in questionnaires and interviews.[5] A study of female entrepreneurs indicated that they claimed other values and visions than males, but their organizational structures did not differ from those led by male entrepreneurs (Cliff et al., 2005). The general reservation we expressed in Chapters 1 and 2 about research mirroring objective reality and arriving at robust truths is also valid here, partly because the circulation of 'truths' or beliefs about female values or feminine leadership influence the perceptions and representations of gender differences. Seldom can we just bypass these and inspect naked reality as such. The belief, that females are different and have other values guiding leadership, held not just widely in society but also by many female managers may influence their responses in interviews and questionnaires possibly giving a misleading picture. As Cliff et al. (2005) point out, some researchers focus on 'dissimilarities between men's and women's descriptions of their managerial orientations rather than their actual behaviour, as supporting the existence of sex differences in leadership behaviour' (p. 85).

There are also some more specific problems in sorting out how male and female managers may be compared. Managerial jobs differ tremendously. A complication is that many 'managers' – female as well as male – hold positions of limited authority. The meaning of a 'manager' is often highly ambiguous and the title may tell us rather little – except about norms for classification. Sometimes the title just masks a position as a 'glorified secretary' (Jacobs, 1992), although Jacobs himself found that this does not seem to be common or explain the rapid increase of women in managerial jobs. Survey studies may easily overlook that classification hides diversity – and what 'managers' really do and their 'real' social relationships to 'subordinates' may be very difficult to pinpoint – and thus compare quite different phenomena. Another complication in drawing conclusions about sex and leadership is that the gender congeniality of leadership roles may be accompanied by different patterns. Eagly and Johnson (1990), for example, found that although male leaders were

often more task oriented than females, the latter tended to be more so than males in a leadership role that was more congenial to women (e.g. head nurse).

In a later study they found that females were evaluated as more task oriented than males and they conclude, 'It appears that all factors being equal, men have greater freedom than women to lead in a range of styles without encountering negative reactions' (Eagly et al., 1992). Butterfield and Grinnell (1999) say, 'after reviewing three decades of work on the topic of gender, leadership, and managerial behaviour, it appears that we have not provided conclusive answers.' So maybe as indicated earlier, we are posing the wrong questions.

Establishing general, abstract correlations between sex and leadership may be a misleading or at least a not very informative enterprise.

To *summarize*, the person wanting a clear and simple answer to the question 'do women manage in a different way than men?' is bound to be disappointed not only with the research available, but also with the complexity of the issue. On the whole, male and female managers do not seem to differ very much in leadership behaviour, according to the heavily US dominated research in the area, but also according to a few non-US studies. There may be some, but not significant differences in terms of women being more personnel and democratically oriented. It is possible that many women are more inclined to adopt a democratic style than some men. How can we account for any possible tendency in this direction? It may be 'natural' for them, in the light of childhood experiences, female socialization or later experiences in family or at work. But it may also be an expression of their weaker authority, given the traditional image of leadership as a masculine activity. A related aspect is that it may be a consequence of the stereotypical expectations of other people, assuming that female managers are more 'soft'. Given the unfruitfulness in keeping these aspects fully apart, one should not necessarily aspire for a final answer. If there are cultural stereotypes/understandings that women 'are' in a particular way, these may have truthful effects. The self is not developed in a social vacuum. We become men and women in the context of dominating masculinities and femininities and interactions partly guided by these cultural understandings.

One should also bear in mind that even if there should be some minor or moderate average differences between how male and female managers behave, in a particular historical and cultural situation, this should not obscure that there are wide variations within the two categories: some women managers may very well be seen as autocratic and there are male managers that can be described as democratic (cf. Bayes's study, referred above). This may be obvious, but is ignored by a lot of writings on the subject trying to compare 'men' and 'women' in order to establish if the groups differ or not. The search for interesting differences (or similarities) easily means an over-focus on the fairly small statistical variations and emphasizing this easily means that we come to expect some sex differences between males and females in managerial jobs. But for all practical purposes, given the great variation between people, also *within* the camps of males and females, one cannot predict anything in terms of leadership ideals and behaviour from the sex of a specific person. Male and female managers may exhibit any version of the entire spectrum of leadership and it is best to be quite open-minded about this. Assuming, when facing a female manager or a candidate for a managerial job, 'ah this is a woman, she is

probably a little more relation-oriented or transformational than the male candidates' is *not* necessarily a productive working assumption.

Difficulties for women managers

Do females in managerial jobs face other tensions than their male colleagues? This topic may be summarized under the somewhat universal and broad-brushed concept of 'stress'. There is a vast amount of studies comparing the stress levels of male and female managers, indicating that there are significant differences.

A study of middle managers at Volvo (Swedish car manufacturer) shows that women's stress was at a higher level than men's. They also complained more than men especially about communication problems on the job and about lack of support from superiors. In addition, one third of the women said that they had to perform better than the men in order to be evaluated as equally good (Frankenheuser, 1993). Women were seen as adopting the 'stress profile' of men, meaning that they tended to react in a similar way as men in relation to demands and challenges. They exposed the so-called A-type behaviour: competitive orientation, agressivity, distrust and suspicion towards people around them. And they were even more competitive than their male colleagues. Frankenheuser suggests that this is due to their over-adaptation to male values at the managerial level.

It appears that female managers also show more stress symptoms related to family/domestic issues than males. This tendency is presumably also valid for other groups of female employees, for example, professionals (e.g. Etzioni, 1987), especially, if they have small children (Jick and Mitz, 1985). Schenker et al. (1997) found that women lawyers working more than 45 hours per week were more likely to report stress than those working 35 hours a week. A Danish study (Djøf, 2004) showed that 41 per cent of female middle managers felt that they were suffering from stress daily, compared to 21 per cent of men. At the top-level the number for female and male top managers was the same, 19 per cent. Exactly why it is reported to be less stressful to be a top manager is not answered in the investigation. (It may be a matter of selection; the chosen few may be extraordinarily stress-resistant.) Interestingly, a Swedish study found no differences between male and female managers in terms of experiences of stress and health (Chef, 2006). This was the case despite the fact that half of all the females with children at home said that they had the major responsibility for the children in everyday life, something that only one in 20 of the males claimed. A possibility is that those answering the questionnaire are less stressed than the non-respondents: if you are very busy you are less likely to spend time on filling in a questionnaire.

With exceptions, however, the available research on male and female managers regarding stress appears to be consistent and indicates a higher level among the latter category. As with all empirical results, they are not as unproblematic as they appear to be. According to many students of female psychology, women are socialized into acknowledging vulnerability to a much greater extent than men (Fletcher, 1994). They consult physicians and psychotherapists more often. This could mean that they are simply more prone to respond to questionnaire items in a way emphasizing problems

and suffering. The responses to questions however may not necessarily be seen as a mirror of the 'objective' level of stress or even genuine 'subjective' experiences about it. The responses may be an expression of another inclination to acknowledge or espouse problems than what characterizes men, who may have adopted the norm that one does not acknowledge weaknesses or raise problems in ambiguous cases. The inclinations of women may also be a result of good judgement and acknowledgement of problems. Frankenhaeuser (1993) refers to studies showing that women's own health reports are more congruent with medical diagnosis than men's are. Males may more often deny vulnerabilities. Still, it is possible that different responses to questions of health by men and women reflect different styles regarding denying/acknowledging and underreporting/overreporting problems as much as 'real' differences in 'objective' problems. But it is also likely that women experience more stress around work, in particular if they have children. Frankenheuser's (1993) study showed that women's level of stress – measured through biological indications (blood pressure, etc.) – remained high when they had come home from work, while men's fell significantly. For some women the level of stress even increased after the end of the working-day, being a result of women's higher responsibility for most tasks in the home, including looking after children.

We do not want to discredit the reported results or seriously dispute that many women may well face tensions in jobs calling for the exercise of authority and a high degree of engagement. Thus it may be the case especially in the context of deep and persistent cultural ideas giving women the principal responsibility for home, family and children. In addition, it seems reasonable to assume that cultural traditions may mean that women occupying positions of authority face more difficulties than their male colleagues. Still, we must be open for various ways in which to interpret seemingly robust and consistent empirical material and realize that questionnaire responses seldom simply mirror objective reality in a straightforward and simple way.

Subordinates, superiors and colleagues – and the women themselves for that matter – may evaluate female managers against the background of the traditional understanding that authority is a masculine position. Eagly et al. (1992) conclude that studies showed 'a small overall tendency for subjects to evaluate female leaders less favourably than male leaders' (p. 1). But this tendency varied with different kinds of areas and leadership behaviour. In male-dominated areas, e.g. business and manufacturing, the tendency was more pronounced than in less masculine fields and organizations. When leadership or management was carried out in an autocratic way, i.e. in a way that is stereotypically masculine, females were more strongly devalued. When leadership was exercised in a gender-congruent way, females were not devalued. But males were not devalued when engaging in 'non-masculine' leadership behaviour. In terms of difficulties for female managers, there seems to be a more restricted set of options that are more fully acceptable for female than for male managers. As Eagly et al. (1992: 18) express it; 'they "pay a price" in terms of relative negative evaluation if they intrude on traditionally male domains by adopting male-stereotypic leadership styles or occupying male-dominated leadership positions'.

Many female managers have traditionally been and are still supervising mostly women. Most people would predict that conventional ideas and expectations on the gendered nature of authority should make it sometimes a bit difficult for females to

be managers of males, but the research on the topic does not seem to support this assumption (Eagly et al., 1992; Billing, 2006), at least not in terms of male subordinates being more inclined than females to biased evaluations of a female manager. A non-female style, but not male subordinates, brings about a devaluing of a female leader, at least according to US studies on the matter. We should perhaps add that there is a variety of opinions on how this research should be summarized, from those believing that there are no negative evaluations of women managers to others concluding more far reaching tendencies than Eagly et al. Many authors claim that female managers are caught between contradictory ideals of being feminine and managerial, leading to great risks of negative evaluation for being unfeminine or unmanagerial (Cockburn, 1991; Stivers, 1993; Wahl, 1996). Eagly et al.'s review indicates that this risk may be less serious than sometimes believed, i.e. if they adopt a non-autocratic style.

It should perhaps be added that almost all the research is of US origin and one cannot generalize cross-culturally from these – which, of course, does not prevent Eagly et al., like other neo-positivists, from doing so. Interestingly, a Swedish study indicated that managers in a large R&D based firm emphasized their leadership as supportive, involving listening and other 'non-masculine' elements, without any apparent gender difference (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003).

As always it is very difficult to estimate the relationship between experimental results and what takes place in 'real' organizational sites. The former may underestimate the degree of bias in judgements because in 'real settings', people may feel less constrained by the degree of monitoring (by university people) in research experiments and thereby express more freely, although perhaps in a covert form, their sex-prejudices or other inclinations. Or the experiments may exaggerate biases, because of the lack of broader information and a focus on sex in the research design, while in real settings the sex of a manager may be less central in evaluations, because other people have access to much richer and broader impressions of the person.

To round off this section, the review of the field has pointed at family issues and problems with people around the manager expecting gender-stereotypical behaviour as well as a degree of compliance with a masculine image of leadership as a stress ingredient behind the reported higher level of stress for female than male managers. To this, one can add identity concerns, of course overlapping the other two aspects, but also related to how images of the female over life history may lead to identity effects making it less easy and 'natural' to occupy (senior) managerial positions.

Changing discourses on leadership

As mentioned earlier, it is generally believed that leadership is constructed with a masculine subtext. Dominant views on leadership have been seen as difficult to integrate with femininity (Lipman-Blumen, 1992). There are however changes under way. An interest in moving away from more bureaucratic-technocratic modes of management to more personal-ideological forms means that issues of a more social, subjective and involving nature are increasingly being seen as crucial. It is quite likely that changes in management and organizational practices are grossly exaggerated in

many accounts of the 'post-modern world', the 'knowledge-society', 'post-fordism', post-bureaucracy, etc. (Alvesson and Thompson, 2005) as not only journalists and consultants but also many researchers want to concentrate on what may appear as novel or radically changing – and not pay serious attention to everything that remains pretty much the same. Nevertheless, some changes in social practices take place and even more so at the 'meta level' of mass media, books, conferences, debates and public opinion. During certain periods, rational forms of control are 'out' and normative forms are 'in' (Barley and Kunda, 1992). The popularity of (talk about) adhocracies, corporate culture, flexible forms, decentralization, service management, quality, innovation, empowerment, networks, and so on, provide space for constructions of management and leadership in less masculine ways than has traditionally been the case (Gherardi, 1995). Perhaps the changing nature of work, 'flexibilization' and corporate changes will make it necessary to promote some skills, which are more often attributed to women than to men.

> Being a good manager […] is less about competitiveness, aggression, and task orientation and more about good communication, coaching and people skills, and being intuitive and flexible, all more typically or at least stereotypically associated with women. (Cooper and Lewis, 1993: 41)

Machine bureaucracy may be seen as the extreme example of a masculine organization that has lost some appeal – even though it still dominates (think of airline companies and MacDonalds for example). Emotions are increasingly seen as significant in organizational practice as meaning, involvement and action to some extent replace rationality, cold calculation and separation of decision and execution (Alvesson and Berg, 1992; Fineman, 1993, 2000). Themes like identity, cohesion, teams and social integration also often point in a 'non-masculine' direction. New leadership ideals include new and non-masculine labels like post-heroic, shared and distributed leadership (Fletcher, 2004). Of course, not only much of what is not changing, but also some novel themes, do not necessarily lend themselves that easily to exploitation in 'pro-feminine' terms. Charismatic leadership is one example of what has attained considerable interest during a period and which very much concerned emotions and engagement (Bryman, 1993). Most of the public figures who are fitting into this label are men, often with a clear masculine, even heroic aura. However, several scandals have accompanied some of these 'heroes' and reduced the enthusiasm for heroes and perhaps contributed to the search for new leadership styles.

This general interest in new ideas on leadership appears to have accompanied the interest in feminine leadership and/or women in management. The two streams partly overlap. The image of changing forms of management/leadership issues provides a vehicle (one of many) for considering and facilitating career opportunities for women. If a more participatory, non-hierarchical, flexible and group-oriented style of management is viewed as increasingly appropriate and this is formulated in feminine terms (or androgynous ones, i.e. combining what is culturally/stereotypically defined as characteristics of the two genders), then women can be marketed as carriers of suitable orientations for occupying positions as managers – network orientation, a preference for participation, etc. (Billing and Alvesson, 2000). Lipman-Blumen (1992), for example, believes that female leadership 'contains the seeds of connective leadership, a new

integrative model of leadership more suited to the dramatically changing workplace of the twenty-first century' (p. 183). Alternatively, and minimally, the new criteria for management would at least open up for females better access to senior positions in the organization. The strong 'masculine' nature of traditional management/leadership would then lose some of its appeal and the work field would be a more open terrain in terms of the genderedness of those moving into and within it. This last version does not say anything about women in general being specifically suitable – neither in terms of having a specific 'essence' or a common set of traits, nor that having these is the crucial prerequisite for being a competent manager – but only that a crucial gender obstacle for equal access to such jobs may be removed/weakened.

Fletcher (2004: 651) talks about post heroic leadership, indicating that the traditional heroic leadership and the traits associated with that is surpassed by a new style, which demands traits more 'rooted in feminine-linked images and wisdom about how to "grow people" in the domestic sphere.' The problem for women however is that the enactment of this style of leadership is likely to be different for women than men.

> Because of gender schema, men who do the new leadership, while they may be in danger of being perceived as wimps, might have an easier time being seen as doing something new. Women, on the other hand, may have a harder time distinguishing what they do as something new because it looks like they are just doing what women do. (p. 654)

Therefore women might find it harder to be recognized as doing this 'new leadership'. This will be something which is expected of women anyway and hence they may not benefit from this move from more traditional masculine models to this more 'feminine' style, according to Fletcher.

More generally, there are reasons to be sceptical with regard to much of the talk about radical changes taking place in organizations leading to a large need of 'female skills' or female managers (Calás and Smircich, 1993). There are perhaps only superficial changes behind the rhetoric, which do not prevent some acceleration of the increase of females in low-level and middle-level managerial jobs. And even now, great leaders of a strongly masculine type are popular. Books like *Nelson's Way. Leadership Lessons from the Great Commander* are very much in demand (Jones and Gosling, 2005). (For those assuming that this reflects only a 'male' interest, it can be worth pointing out that the first author of this book is a woman.) On the other hand, the questioning of the symbolic gender of a job 'opens' up for a new way of seeing and constructing it in perhaps less stereotypical ways. Even though leadership still probably often is given a masculine meaning, the overall picture seems to be more varied and less rigid today. We never get tired of reminding the (hopefully) patient reader of bearing in mind the societal and organizational differences.

Summary

The research on women, managerial jobs and leadership is extensive, although – like leadership research in general – rather heavily dominated by North Americans. Most US researchers show little awareness of societal variation. The great majority

of the research is either positivistic or popularly oriented texts written for practition-ers and mainly with references to anecdotal material. There is a shortage of careful qualitative studies in the field.

A review of the research indicates that the accumulation of studies has not so much meant convergence and agreement as increased variation and uncertainty. Until the late 1980s almost all research was interpreted as there being no or only insignificant sex differences in terms of leadership style. Recently, more indications of women adopting a somewhat different leadership style have been put forward (Eagly and Johnson, 1990; Lipman-Blumen, 1992; Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt, 2008). This may be seen as an outcome of scientific progress, but it may also reflect a new ideo-logical emphasis on difference being acceptable and positive (and not a sign of the infe-riority of women in management) or objective changes of the sexes (which may differ today from 20 years ago in values, identities, etc.). This may perhaps best be seen as a response to a certain de-masculinization of traditional leadership ideals in ideology and perhaps also in corporate practice. Still, most academic empirical research appears to support the no or only small difference view. While older studies of the 1970s pointed at evaluation bias against women, more recent work seems to indicate that such bias is more related to circumstances than being general. Only when engaging in leadership behaviour that was inconsistent with sex stereotypes, female leaders were evaluated less favourably than males when acting in the same way (Eagly et al., 1992). Perhaps prejudices and biases against women in managerial positions have decreased over time. In terms of gender, stress and managerial jobs, the research findings are more consistent. Female managers show more stress symptoms than their male col-leagues, which partly seem to be related to them taking more responsibility for children and home.

Children appear to have another meaning and other consequences for women than men. As we will develop in subsequent chapters, many researchers believe that having children leads to experiences and orientations that make women in man-agerial jobs behave in a different way from men. A large number of female man-agers have not, however, so far had children. This is probably changing with an increase in the numbers of female managers. Many women with children seek bal-ance in life between work and family, meaning that they may be less inclined to work more than 40 hours per week (Billing, 2006). Strong cultural norms still play a role here, even though contemporary people have a high degree of choice here. Senior managers and other people may, however, ascribe such a family orientation to women and act as if it was the case. This means that truth effects are accom-plished; if a person is denied promotion or challenging and important tasks because of anticipated motherhood and priority to children, the person will decrease work involvement and look to the family as a source of greater satisfaction.

In the following chapter we will discuss this fragmented and complex area, trying to make some more sense of the different positions within this field.

Notes

1 According to the ILO (2004) women have increased their share of managerial positions (to between 20 and 40 per cent in 2002, in 48 of 63 countries). This

statistics indicate that the US and Lithuania score high with about 45 per cent of all managers being female. Sweden, Poland, the United Kingdom, Australia, Botswana, Colombia and Philippines are all countries where a third of all managers are women, once again according to statistics. In Japan and South Korea, for example, the figures are less than ten. In some countries, e.g. Canada, UK, Ireland and Denmark the percentage rates have declined from 1996–2002. ILO states, 'Even in female-dominated sectors where there are more women managers, a disproportionate number of men rise to the more senior positions' and the ILO concludes: 'The rule of the thumb is still: the higher up an organizations' hierarchy, the fewer the women' (p. 131). It is often quite unclear who is a manager – in particular given contemporary tendencies to exaggerate titles – and one should probably not have too much faith in statistics.

2 The glass ceiling metaphor is used to imply that women may climb some way up the organizational ladder without too many problems, but that invisible barriers prevent them from reaching the top positions so that they reach a plateau at middle management level, often called the sticking floor. Again, we remind the reader that the glass ceiling phenomenon – *to the extent this concept captures females' career trajectories* – is not only a problem for women but also for groups which belong to the categories which are regarded as 'others' in the society.

3 This label may appear pejorative, but we do not intend to give it a negative meaning. The label actually comes from Eagly and Johnson (1990), who found support for this view.

4 Respondents judged a leadership role as feminine if it was believed to require considerable interpersonal ability (cooperation, for example) and masculine if it required considerable task ability (to direct and control people).

5 In other words, the truth effect of theories is often rather weak. It may affect beliefs and espoused theories rather than practices and theories in use. In particular, theories may affect how people account for their own or others' 'leadership' when interviewed or filling in questionnaires in, for example, scientific studies, but have less impact on everyday behaviour.

8
Women in Management II: Four Positions

In this chapter we continue the review of women and management, but will change focus from an overview of empirical material to providing a review and discussion of ways of making sense of the area. As always, empirical results do not speak for themselves, but may be interpreted and evaluated in many different ways. The variation and inconsistencies in empirical findings – especially over time – in the studies of women and leadership (managerial jobs) also point at the need for considering various ways of making sense of the subject matter(s). In this chapter we identify and critically examine four fundamental stances on the subject of women managers that can be found primarily in the research community but also in the area of political and organizational policy-making.

The four positions identified and discussed are associated with various arguments and rationales for the interest in increasing the opportunities for women to attain management jobs and exercise authority in organizations. These rationales correspond to different assumptions about gender and the nature of management/organizations. Rather than trying to find robust, definitive answers to questions about gender and management/leadership, as we doubt that there are any – at least valid over a long time period – and irrespectively of that, we think it is of greater interest to develop a sensitivity for different ways of framing and reasoning about women and managerial jobs or leadership. Being open and reflective about various ways of interpreting and considering empirical results is more important than treating these as absolute truths or trying to determine such.

It should be emphasized that these positions, or perspectives, are not as basic as the concept of paradigm refers to, but are rather lines of argumentation. Often they are motivated as much by tactical concerns – what appears to be important to emphasize – as by variation in worldviews, although the intellectual and political distance between some of the positions is considerable.

The equal opportunities position

The low proportion of women managers is seen by many as a reflection of fundamental inequalities and injustices in society and working life as a whole. In this

perspective women are regarded as a discriminated group, which is denied the same opportunities as men both in a general career context and specifically with regard to the possibility of attaining managerial positions. Conservatism and prejudice prevent women from reaching the higher positions in organizations or in working life in general. Sometimes the interests of some men in keeping women out of the competition are referred to.

The advocates of the equal opportunity position to some extent consider 'legitimate' explanations for a lower degree of females in senior jobs, such as lower investment in a managerially relevant education and other priorities than a managerial career. However, these arguments explain only some reasons for the underrepresentation of women in managerial jobs. Studies comparing men and women with the same background and qualifications, age, experience, time devoted to work, etc., suggest that women's success rates are lower than those of their male colleagues (Devanna, 1987).

The discrepancy between a clear increase in female managers on junior levels and highly modest changes regarding the promotion gap on top levels also shows the problems of advancing above lower managerial levels for females.

The lack of equal treatment of men and women often leads researchers to focus on stereotyping and discrimination as explanatory factors. The emphasis is typically strongly on factors external to women, while all references to their background, socialization, motivations or particularity in relationship to men are downplayed. Reskin and Padavic (1994: 42) for example, say that 'childhood gender-role socialization is actually not very important for explaining women's and men's concentration in different jobs and their different rates of promotion'. They refer to a US survey in which 78 per cent of the women and 74 per cent of the men agreed that they were willing to devote whatever time was necessary to advance in their career. As human subjects, the two sexes are seen as similar and the promotion job is attributed to workplace conditions, particularly to the arrangements and actions of employers and senior managers.

The reasons for taking an interest in the topic are typically of a moral and political character, associated with fairness. Women should have the same options as men to gain privileges. Reskin and Padavic (1994: 85) rhetorically ask if it matters that women are locked out of the higher-level jobs. They answer the question with a yes, for three reasons. This practice is unfair, given the equal interest also of women to be promoted. Absence of women in senior posts depresses their wages. Having authority is a value in its own right, involving freedom, increasing work satisfaction and displaying talents (pp. 85, 95). Reskin and Padavic do not mention any consequences for others than the women concerned – such as other women or organizations as a whole. This is consistent with a downplaying of any kind of sex difference: female and male managers do not differ in leadership style.

A great many studies indicate the widespread existence of stereotyped thinking about women, and make a strong case for the assumption that sexual discrimination reduces women's opportunities for attaining management positions.

Stereotypes do not only influence recruitment and selection to a particular position; they also affect ongoing career development and performance evaluation. Several (older) studies show that assessors who believed that a particular paper

was written by a woman rather than a man judged it to be of a lower professional quality (Dipboye, 1975). Sex bias has also been documented in science teachers' ratings of pupils' work (Spear, 1983) and in a number of other situations (Nieva and Gutek, 1980). As mentioned above, at least more autocratic forms of leadership behaviour are evaluated more negatively when expressed by women than men (Eagly et al., 1992). Most of these results have been obtained in laboratory studies. It is not impossible that in real life situations – where the evaluator has access to broader information of the persons concerned – such a sex bias may be harder to detect (Powell, 1988), although some research indicates that access to broader impressions do not change sex bias (Eagly et al., 1992). It is also possible that the effect of sex in evaluations over time is changing. Still, it is likely that there is a tendency towards biased evaluations of women in working life, especially perhaps in conservative and masculine areas and environments (Eagly et al., 1992). These tendencies of course create barriers to women acquiring high positions in organizations. Even when women have attained management positions, discrimination still prevails. For example, a study of French and Canadian female managers showed that the women felt they were often placed in a role traditionally appropriate to their sex (i.e. secretary) (Symons, 1986).

Other barriers are of a structural type: the gender division of labour means that women are in a minority higher up in the hierarchy; this makes them highly visible as category members, with the risk of being treated as symbols rather than as themselves, as well as making it difficult for them to gain access to important informal settings because of their lack of network contacts (Kanter, 1977).

From an equal opportunities perspective, the fundamental problem is structural conditions, stereotypical cultural ideas and irrational social processes that lead to a bias in favour of male candidates for and occupiers of managerial positions. The lack of equal opportunities could of course be attributed to all social institutions – the family, primary and secondary education, the general labour market, etc. – but when it comes to managerial posts, organizational and managerial practices are of paramount importance. At least equal opportunity advocates often concentrate on this.

The strongest argument in the equal opportunities approach is connected with the assumption – and at best also the evidence – that men and women, at least those with the educational and other qualifications that make them candidates for leadership jobs, are either the same or at any rate very similar to one another. The more differences there are between men and women in terms of personality, work orientations or other personal characteristics of significance for carrying out the job, the more difficult it becomes to assert the equal opportunities argument.[1] Any promotion gap is attributed to discriminatory practices in organizations.

Within the equal opportunities camp, it is sometimes assumed that a certain degree of misfit exists between most women and the current world of management. There may be communication problems and difficulties for females to decipher cultural norms. The domination of men in the latter is not sex-neutral and it creates difficulties, which are hard for women to cope with. In the equal opportunities perspective these differences are perceived as limited and accessible to correction, for instance with the help of equal opportunities committees' monitoring practices, campaigns affecting attitudes, mentor systems, support groups for women managers or other kinds of

arrangements aimed at counteracting obstacles. In other words this formulation of the equal opportunities stance states that 'real' equal opportunity calls for action to counteract the specific disadvantages caused by the historical absence of gender equity. Education of particular relevance for a managerial career, e.g. an MBA, may have to be changed in order not to be biased against women (Sinclair, 1995). Some authors argue for the use of legal procedures to force employers to take action to remove obstacles and increase the number of female managers (Reskin and Padavic, 1994).

Of course, the difference between the two versions is marginal and more a matter of emphasis. The first version also views the removal of biases against women as significant, but complements this with measures aiming to 'empower', train or support women, while the other exclusively emphasizes external constraints and goes beyond the level of the subject in accomplishing change.

The equal opportunities argument for paying attention to the problem of female leaders and their low numbers is basically of a political and moral nature. In modern society there is a strong conviction that everyone should have a fair chance, irrespective of gender, race and so on. It is considered unfair and immoral to prefer men for higher positions just because they are men, and the well-founded reasons for expecting that this is often the case provide a theoretical and – even more – a practical reason for examining the barriers to equal opportunities and leadership positions for women.

The meritocratic position

While the equal opportunities argument looks at obstacles and possibilities from an ethical-political point of view, a meritocratic argument is interested in combating the irrational social forces, which prevent the full utilization of the qualified human resources and thereby to increase effectivity. The fact that only a limited number of women have so far been recruited to management positions indicates that there is a large social group from which many more people should be used to occupy higher positions in business, government, politics and so on. The larger the reservoirs from which bright and highly motivated individuals can be recruited, the better these spheres of society can function. The meritocratic perspective consequently adopts a managerial rather than a moral approach to the subject matter.

In a meritocracy people move freely up and down the occupational hierarchy, according to personal merit and to the contributions they can make to the organization in which they work and to society as a whole. In a meritocratic society organizations will thus look for qualifications and will disregard gender, class, background, race, religion and other characteristics irrelevant to career patterns in this type of society. Historically these characteristics have been the most significant factors in career building, but they are basically outdated in a modern, meritocratic society – at least according to the ideology of such a society. Recruiting women to managerial jobs is a natural result of the changing sexual divisions of labour in post-industrial societies (where women, although slowly, are 'moving' from female to male work, for example) and where female-dominant industries (the service sectors) are growing.

Meritocratic societies will clearly recognize the drawbacks of underutilizing resources, mainly on competitive grounds (i.e. for profit and efficiency motives). Another reason might be a male labour shortage, which would cause companies to look in other untraditional directions for resources (i.e. among women). More generally, people taking this approach view the rational use of female labour also in managerial ranks as a way of increasing management competence in organizations. Many authors relate this to international competition. Martin (1993) refers to competition with German and Japanese corporations. US corporations 'cannot afford to exclude from full participation the talented, intelligent women and minority men' (p. 289). One could add that German and Japanese corporations seemed to be doing well, at least at the time when Martin's comments were made, despite a much lower number of female managers than in the US. This does not, of course, contradict the idea that improved use of talents may strengthen business. Adler (1987) regards a greater number of women managers in US corporations as 'one of America's few remaining competitive advantages' at a time when the global environment has become exceedingly competitive.

> A top-quality human resource system provides strategic advantages, yet companies world-wide draw from a restricted pool of potential managers. Although they represent over fifty per cent of the world's population, in no country do women represent half, or even close to half, of the corporate managers. (Adler, 1987: 3)

Various opinions exist as regards both the nature of modern meritocratic societies in general and the virtues of the ideal of meritocracy. According to French, our society's claim to be a meritocracy is problematic because:

> The very word conceals layers of falsehood; it implies that all members of society have equal access to all doors of development and all avenues of practice; and that those who are most excellent rise to the top. It implies that the unskilled and unsuccessful deserve their fate, that they are less able *by nature*. In addition, our society praises those with power – as gifted when in fact no one develops and uses a talent without assistance from others at every step: from family, friends, and educators; from trainers and coaches; and from a larger community, which accepts a person's exercise of an ability. An ability, like a person, requires nourishment and scope if it is to grow. It reflects not just individuality, independence, and a drive to excellence, but also dependency, interconnection, and the acceptance of society. (French, 1986: 550)

However, the meritocratic argument for taking up the problem of women managers and investigating the obstacles to a full realization of the human resource potential of the female population is not necessarily tied to an abstract individualistic view of social stratification and career patterns in society and working life. It could be argued, for example, that society's and its organizations' effective use of women's qualifications motivates specific attention to circumstances, which prevent women achieving optimal career patterns. Factors such as those indicated by the equal opportunities stance, e.g. discrimination, could be relevant here. Research on gender and mentorship could foster an interest in examining ways of counteracting this type of problem.

The interest of the meritocratically oriented writers in female managers and related processes both inside and outside organizations, in the recruitment (and otherwise) of women to managerial positions has much ground in common with the equal opportunities approach. Both perspectives are interested in what is preventing women's access to managerial jobs on equal terms with men. Both recognize the shortcomings in contemporary practices in equal opportunities and the realization of the meritocratic principle. The approaches differ radically, however, in terms of the underlying interest pursued. While the equal opportunities orientation stresses the interests of women and fairness primarily for women's sake, meritocrats are concerned with the maximum efficiency of social institutions. The meritocratic approach is thus a stance more typical for business schools academics and companies than for sociologists and politicians. Efficiency is something quite different from ethics. While meritocracy is not only a technocratic principle but can also be a component in an explicit political ideology, such espoused concerns are not a key factor in the areas of business and organizations, and our argument here highlights the technocratic motive for fully utilizing the 'human resources' of organizations, irrespective of gender. This means that the whole issue is understood as a matter of 'inefficient human resources management', and not as 'discrimination' (nor, somewhat similarly, as 'immoral'). This can be illustrated by the following concluding comment in an older study of myths about women managers:

> It is recommended, therefore, that organizations begin treating women as equals, not because of moral obligations or pressures from outside interest groups to improve female/male ratios, but because they would more effectively utilize valuable human resources. (Reif et al., 1975: 79)

The rationalization and improvement of recruitment, promotion and leadership in organizations, the counteracting of 'old-fashioned' and irrational cultural patterns, and the launching of organizational socialization processes, can all serve to promote a more efficient and sex-neutral utilization of management candidates as well as other significant employees.

In addition to these means for improving the supply of human resources, two practical implications of the meritocratic perspective can be emphasized, as compared with the equal opportunities approach. One of these concerns the actors involved in the correction of existing problems. According to the meritocratic approach, it is assumed that maximum (or at least a high level of) efficiency in the functioning of an organization is in the interest of top management, and that top management is in the best position to handle the problem. Market competition and the struggle between companies to attract and utilize the best personnel, will provide an incentive to counteract ineffective promotion practices and personnel policies. The equal opportunities position, which is often very sceptical about the abilities and interests of top managers, particularly when it comes to pursuing a gender-neutral promotion policy, normally calls for broader societal involvement in the equality issue, including legislation and bringing cases to courts. Some equal opportunities advocates even think that employers are willing to sacrifice efficiency gains in order to keep women out of top jobs (Cockburn, 1991).

The second practical difference between the equal opportunities and merito-
cratic approaches concerns the tolerance of deviations from the ideal of evaluation
and promotion based purely on merit and qualifications. In an equal opportuni-
ties perspective even the slightest deviation to the disadvantage of women is intol-
erable. From a technocratic point of view, a problem arises if a significantly less
competent person is preferred to a more qualified candidate. In many cases two
or more applicants for a certain job may be roughly equally competent, and it does
not matter very much which of them gets the job. From a managerial point of view
slight discriminatory practices, which means that males are preferred to equally
qualified females are normally not a problem. Getting a sufficiently qualified and
committed person is the priority, not perfect justice. If women are perceived to be
handicapped by having children and as a consequence may be thought to be at the
employers' disposal for overtime or travelling to a reduced degree, a meritocracy
position would see that mainly as a private concern – even though some compa-
nies may be prepared to assist in integrating private and working life for key
employees – while equal opportunities advocates would not tolerate women
falling behind due to a moderate disadvantage in terms of possibility to prioritize
work. Clear differences in terms of policy follow from that with the meritocracy
advocates viewing more women managers as a *means* for organizational func-
tioning, while equal opportunities proponents see this as the *goal* in itself. They
will consider ambiguous cases in very different ways and have rather different lev-
els of tolerance for a promotion gap between men and women. Meritocrats have
less interest in aiming for a 50:50 sex ratio in promotions and also are less inter-
ested in ensuring the long-term increase of promoted female employees.

The special contribution position

The equal opportunities and meritocratic approaches emphasize the common traits
of the two sexes; the problem as they see it is that men and women are not com-
pared on fair and equal terms and thus do not have the same chances (they are not
being evaluated and utilized strictly according to merit). The two approaches treated
in this and the following section, on the other hand, draw attention to the dissimi-
larities between the genders.

In the literature concerned with women's life situations and career patterns, a shift
occurred in the 1980s. During the 1970s the majority of writers on women attempted
to minimize the differences between men and women in order to achieve equal oppor-
tunities. Androgyny was seen as a universally good category, both for men and
women. An increasing number of feminist writers have begun to emphasize the posi-
tion that generally speaking 'the female experience' in childhood, family and commu-
nity, etc. is different from 'the male experience' and that a female perspective may
differ from the dominating, male one.

> This women-centred perspective celebrates and exonerates female differ-
> ence, instead of suggesting that women imitate male agenic features with
> an androgynous sprinkling of communal qualities. (Grant, 1988: 58)

The emphasis can be placed on women's differences in terms of experience, values, and ways of behaving, feeling and thinking with varying force. A moderate position will first be discussed, while a stronger case for far-reaching differences will be examined later in the chapter. According to the approach discussed in the present section, it is suggested that due to moderate but significant differences compared with men, women possess complementary qualifications and, thus, the potential for making new and important contributions to the field of management. This can be referred to as the 'special contribution argument'. Some authors refer to it as 'female leadership' or as 'feminist management' (Martin, 1993). Some even talk about the 'female advantage' (Helgesen, 1990). This approach may be seen as an applied but weak version of the feminist standpoint perspective, treated in Chapter 2. It is adjusted to, and integrated with, the mainstream managerial preoccupations that most hardcore feminist standpoint advocates strongly dislike.

In general in contemporary society, there seems to be a fairly widespread belief that women can contribute something essential to organizations. Women are believed to prefer a people-oriented and democratic leadership-style, to make the social structure less hierarchical, and to change the workplace climate so that empathy and intuition become more significant. An investigation of female and male managers in the private and public sectors in Denmark found that 62 per cent of female managers and 33 per cent of male thought that as managers women could contribute something special, for instance using 'typical' female traits in cooperation and influencing the organizational climate (Carlsen and Toft, 1986). As we have seen from the review of the positivist research on the topic, there is some, but relatively weak, support for it. The rather large body of studies concluding that there are no or only minor gender differences may be interpreted as an outcome of the relative lack of female managers, selective recruitment and the pressure of female managers to adjust to dominating norms and expectations on leadership. With other options to express feminine forms of leadership and expansion of female managers, and an increase in their numbers, women may make a stronger difference in managerial practice. According to Cliff et al. (2005) female entrepreneurs, who have some ability to influence their business, thought that they were different in terms of objectives and values than their male colleagues, but the organizational structures were the same in terms of hierarchy, decision-making, etc., throwing some doubt on the idea of women standing for something special.

The popularity of the special-contribution perspective can be seen as a reflection of a broad societal trend. As mentioned above, changes in society and in organizations are broadly thought as calling for new styles of leadership, which are seen as more congruent with women's orientations. The organizations are changing, it is argued, for business reasons as well as in response to demands of employees. Business reasons are related to call for more flexibility and more rapid reactions, associated with new production and information technology and faster market changes. A possible consequence is that participatory styles of management are seen as increasingly significant. The old authoritarian style does not work, we are repeatedly told. All these changes are reflected in many new theories on leadership (e.g. Fletcher, 2004). Communication, teamwork, cooperation and the creation of meaning are issues that are regarded as important in leadership at

the present time. The leadership ideas and styles popular during recent years are not necessarily pro-women, but they accord ill with traditional ideas of the masculine character of the good manager: technocratically rational, aggressive, competitive, firm and just. At a minimum a masculine bias is reduced. Some organizations indicate that they are actually looking for certain new values which are associated with women, such as flexibility, social skills, team orientation, etc.

Of course, this kind of rhetoric does not stand in a one-to-one relationship to the complexities of organizational conditions and changes. Most likely it exaggerates and idealizes current trends. A high level of competition and a strong pressure on delivering the goods and service in a cost-effective way characterize large parts of business. Most organizations are still bureaucracies and not so different today from a couple of decades ago as mass media and change-(over) focused academics would like us to believe (Alvesson and Thompson, 2005). Of greater interest in the present context than to try to evaluate what is really going on out there – this lies anyway partly in the future – is to *note* the expressed interests in certain themes and assumptions of changes and the relevance for bringing forward ideas of a distinct feminine leadership or a female advantage in organization.

Grant (1988), among others, suggests that women managers may contribute in particular in the following important aspects: communication and cooperation, affiliation and attachment, power, and intimacy and nurturance. She argues, for example, that because women have had a lot of practice from an early age in communicating and caring for others, they are often good at it. From this follows an ability to facilitate cooperative behaviour, which is of course important in terms of consultation, democratic decision-making, work climate, etc. According to Grant and many other female writers, women often have a different attitude to power compared with men. Unlike men, women tend to see power not so much as domination and ability to control, but rather as a capacity, and particularly as a capacity stemming from and directed towards the entire community. Women's view of power is thus more relational and less purely individualistic. Some authors suggest that compared with men, women possess more flexibility, more intuition, and a greater ability to be empathetic and to create a more productive work-climate (e.g. Helgesen, 1990); they could exercise power in a more constructive way, mobilize human resources better, encourage creativity and change the hierarchical structures (Rosener, 1990). A particular aspect here concerns recognition of vulnerability. Unlike men who are socialized to deny such feelings, women are more open to feelings such as self-doubt and inadequacy. This may reduce self-confidence, but also promote self-disclosure, addressing one's own and the work units' weaknesses, establishing contact, building networks, monitoring problems and thus learning and development (Fletcher, 1994). Lipman-Blumen (1992) talks of a 'connective leadership' in which networking and shared responsibilities are central, encouraging people to connect to others and other's goals. Eagly and Carli (2007) argue that female managers tend to act through more transformational leadership (gaining trust, confidence and commitment through being inspirational) and being less laissez-faire than men, meaning that 'women's approaches are the more generally effective' (p. 68).

The special contribution (or female) advantage position was perhaps most strongly pronounced in the early 1990s, when US business had problems, but is still common today, 'while perhaps in a less celebratory tone' (Calás and Smircich, 2006: 299).

Arguably, much of what is said is somewhat imprecise and refers to a rather idealized view of the positive contributions of women. In general, though, it makes sense to stress that women have often been socialized according to different values, norms, orientations and psychological characteristics, which could be seen either as complementary to existing values, etc., or perhaps even as replacing some of them. Female characteristics, according to the authors referred to, indicate certain discrepancies between what they believe are typical women's orientations and common organizational practices. The latter seldom – if they are not in childcare or other human services – promote empathy, attachment, nurturance, etc. It still remains to be seen what difference it would make if women were in senior managerial positions. There is little in the contributions mentioned to seriously question the organizations' (shareholders, top management's) commitment to profit, growth and other traditional goals. Capitalism and market economy, the complexity of large-scale organizations and other constraints may mean that any genuine female orientation may not come through very clearly in most managerial contexts, at least not as long as there are only relatively few female managers. Fierce competition between companies is not abolished by female forms of leadership. The specific qualities ascribed to women may have some importance, but in many corporate contexts it is an open issue whether there is space, within the capitalist economy, to become really significant. Thus women could very well come to provide the necessary oil to make the machinery work better; and/or their motivational and persuasive skills could be exploited as a potential tool for carrying out unpopular rationalizations more smoothly, with women acting as mediators between the top management and the workers (Calás and Smircich, 1993). Kolb (1992), for example, shows how women may be inclined to work with conflicts behind the scene, doing important work, but remaining invisible and potentially preventing conflicts surfacing also in cases where airing these may be positive. The writers arguing for the special contributions that women can make relatively seldom express such points of view. Consistently, women managers seem to get the 'feminine' managerial jobs, such as staff jobs, accounting, and other peripheral jobs seen in relation to the more important decision-making jobs. In these jobs women are supposed to use their so-called feminine qualities and complement men managers (Laufer, 2000). Brewis and Linstead (2000) call human resource management functions for 'female ghettos', and say that women are dominant in these functions 'because they are widely understood to have particularly well-developed people skills, to be more intuitive, more sympathetic and more effective communicators than men' (p. 75). They further make the point that besides limiting women's opportunities, it also limits men – they 'may be considered insufficiently masculine' if they take positions in women's work, and they add that men might even find it difficult to get access to these kinds of jobs.

From a special contribution point of view it could be argued that the presumed different psychologies of men and women will mean different approaches to problems, whereby women coming from the outside will introduce a different set of beliefs; accepted norms may also be questioned, thus promoting a progressive development. The idea that 'the exaggerated male psychology of autonomy and separateness' leads to 'an overvaluing of rationality, objectivity and analysis, and again, to an undervaluing of nurturance, skill in interpersonal relations, and creativity' (Grant, 1988: 62)

may represent a change, bringing complementarity and balance to bear on the managerial practices prevailing hitherto. But it could also be seen as conflicting sharply with these and with the dominating male organizational principles. Whether complementarity or conflict predominates will of course depend on how far the ideas associated with a special contribution are taken. Some degree of complementarity is facilitated by contemporary popular ideas on management, but a peaceful co-existence with concerns for productivity, growth and profits, and reform based on special contributions would presumably call for a relatively careful, tactful and moderate introduction of these.

Above, as we pointed out, we have presented a moderate version typical for writers on feminine leadership, who are more interested in integration and reform than in conflict and the promotion of radical change. The next section will examine a stronger one.

The special-contribution position is not, of course, in total opposition to the two approaches discussed earlier in this chapter – they all share the commitment to facilitate women's options in managerial positions – but the relationship between the equal opportunities and meritocracy perspectives on the one hand, and the special-contribution argument on the other, is not without friction. The former emphasizes the similarity between the sexes and calls for 'gender-neutral' career patterns and managerial recruitment. The special-contribution approach indicates certain aspects that call into question the possibility of 'gender neutrality'. The claimed significant differences between the sexes could make it difficult to evaluate 'typical' males and females according to a single scale. Rather, it appears more reasonable to assume that many women and men have characteristics that make them suitable for different types of positions or jobs. There are different kinds of managerial jobs, calling for different kinds of skills and orientations. The kind of 50:50 norm advocated by equal opportunities proponents is weakened by the special contribution argument. The emphasis on gender difference would mean that gender division of labour appears to some extent natural. The special-contribution stance does of course not suggest that the traditional male hegemony of leadership positions is reproduced; rather it promotes career patterns for women, which helps them to achieve higher positions. (We are not concerned here with the possibility that the special contributions might be unacceptable to dominant groups of managers; if this is so, the contributions must be regarded as alternative, not special.) Of course, it may be likely that the special contribution-idea would legitimate that women are primarily represented in certain kinds of managerial jobs, in which people and human relations are central, while others, such as the more influential ones associated with production, finance and strategic management, are still seen as naturally male work. This kind of thinking would reproduce the current gender division of managerial labour. A positive difference would, however, be to anticipate a general, although unevenly distributed, increase of female managers. Even in the light of a continued absence in certain managerial jobs in which the female characteristics may be seen as less central, such a development would still be considered progressive.

The strategy that follows from the special-contribution argument is not, as in the two earlier cases, that women should compete with men on 'equal' terms; instead it emphasizes that women can contribute something different from what is assumed to

be the typically dominating male characteristics and skills. Rather than special arrangements for integrating women or the modification of human resource management to remove bias, the specific qualifications and orientations of the women should be built upon as the primary vehicles for their attainment of leadership positions. Rather than the same set of criteria, the use of dimensions for assessing women specifically considered for female psychological characteristics and work orientations would be developed.

The alternative values position

The point made here is that the two genders differ substantially. The key assumption is that in general women do not share the interests, priorities and basic attitudes to life that are common among men – or perhaps rather dominating groups of men. This approach has some similarities with the special-contribution view discussed above, but the 'alternative-values' position stresses the differences between typical 'male' and 'female' values more strongly, and also emphasizes conflicts between the two. This approach is a direct offspring from the feminist standpoint perspective (the radical variety) and thus basically critical to male-dominated institutions.

According to this position, traditionally women have been socialized to live by the values of the private sphere, to be nurturing, to serve others, to be emotional, etc., while men have been socialized to live by the values of the public sphere, to deny vulnerability, to compete, to take risks, wanting to control nature, etc. It could be claimed that the cultural norms and values characterizing the socialization of women and men belong to two different and more or less polarized worlds, one feminine and one masculine, one intuitive-communal and one logical-instrumental.

As briefly mentioned in Chapter 3, an important stream here is psychoanalytic feminism, which emphasizes early childhood and the different nature of mother–child interaction for girls and boys. Other authors ground a distinct feminine orientation less in early socialization and psychology than in shared female experiences associated with the historical position as subordinated or an orientation developed as a consequence of experiences of mothering (Cockburn, 1991). While special contribution authors typically view female early socialization as crucial for the gender difference, alternative values advocates more clearly invoke social conditions, including political positioning. It is, in many respects, the marginal position of women that brings about a specific set of orientations. One could also here imagine the significance of general cultural constructions of masculinities and their negations in terms of femininities. The variety of processes tying women to primarily embracing and defining themselves through what is seen as feminine, are crucial for an orientation alternative to the one of dominating masculinities (Fletcher, 1994).

Irrespective of the specific background to gender differences, many writers see women as bearers of a rationality different from that of men (Sørensen, 1982; French, 1986). It involves the capacity for taking care of other people's needs, a morality of responsibility and caring (Gilligan, 1982). That women develop a capacity for need-oriented communication is obviously most visible in the mother/child

relationship. It is also possible to exploit this capacity, however, as when a secretary is supposed to do 'mother-work' (Sokoloff, 1981; Pringle, 1989) for the boss, looking after his (occasionally perhaps also her) needs. Healy and Havens (1987) view the traditional female socialization as antithetical to leadership, at least how this is conventionally understood.

If we accept the idea of different rationalities, it may become easier to understand why women often choose to work in fields that deal with human beings, in the social and humanistic fields, and in the health and service sectors. From the stance discussed here, it could be argued that women work in these areas mainly because they provide a better fit with women's perceived needs and wants, and not so much because women are excluded from other areas or because they make choices regarding education and work based on traditions and internalized stereotypes.

The priorities of women mentioned above imply occupational choices (which are also largely a result of the socialization process) which lead to jobs oriented to human needs. Such jobs seldom offer career opportunities on the same scale as the areas of engineering and business for example. Many women may not generally be attracted to managerial jobs in a company, something that could be seen as a rather passive way of resistance against a managerial career, at least under contemporary conditions. They would be less willing to either make all the personal sacrifices demanded to achieve power, prestige and high wages, nor would they be prepared to give priority to an instrumental orientation, central to the realization of productivity, growth and profit ends.

The notion of instrumentality marks a strong difference between the special contribution and the alternative values approaches. Fletcher (1994) criticizes the former, which she labels 'the female advantage' for pursuing a 'castrated' version of it. She argues that central in the mutual vulnerability, openness and mutual influence of the female orientation is reciprocity. This is 'antithetical to achieving pre-ordained instrumental goals. By its very nature, the outcomes of a mutual interaction are fluid, unknowable – the essence of creativity rather than management by objectives' (p. 79). Fletcher emphasizes the difference between using relational skills to achieve instrumental ends, as characterizing special contributions authors, and using relational skills to relate and then make instrumental decisions based on that interaction. Fletcher views the open, unpredictable nature of women's ways of being as central and does not think that outcomes may be specified. Still, there is a clear radical element in a privileging of connection and openness. Minimizing status differences, recognition of interdependence and an awareness of the costs of doing business for family, society and the natural environment are likely consequences, antithetical to the functioning of most organizations.

If these distinctions are taken seriously, it is obvious that men and women in general will come to the organizations with very different psychological and value orientations. Women will bring the view of the periphery perhaps even threatening existing norms in many organizations. On the other hand, the act of entering a 'male world' such as the corporate world of management, will probably be not so much a challenge as a repeated frustration to most women, as there will often be conflict between the female orientation and male-dominated organizational practices. As most business and government organizations have been designed by men as the bearers of technological

rationality, and as most of them are dominated by males, it is obvious that they will suit many men better than most women – that is to the extent that women differ from men. They will fit masculine work orientations and male interests. (Of course, there is the possibility that the sex of the organizational designers matters less than the contingencies of the organization's task, environment, age, size, but one could argue that even if there is not a simple causal effect of male domination and organizational feature, this male domination may still put some imprints.) The antithetical position in relation to present institutions from a feminine point of view is also expressed by Ressner (1986), who talks of 'the institutionalisation of female interests and rationality' as an overall objective for most women. Such an objective may have great difficulty in co-existing with traditionally dominating male and technological capitalist values and priorities. It may well be that fundamental changes in organizations are needed if more than a minority of women are to fit into higher organizational positions, if their different priorities and interests are taken seriously (Ferguson, 1984).

Similarly, a radical feminist position may see the issue of leadership not as a matter of promoting a female version of it as much as a questioning of the emphasis on leadership. As Stivers (1993: 132) says, (some) feminists raise the question of 'whether female leadership styles simply mask hierarchy more effectively; they would want to explore whether we need leaders at all – in the sense of someone who defines the meaning of situations, shows others the right way to approach problems, and makes them want what the leader wants (motivates them)'.

Ferguson (1984) and other radical feminists reject the exclusive focus on integration in organizations because they regard 'the existing institutional arrangements as fundamentally flawed' (p. 4). They believe that the price of success is to abandon any thought of changing the system. Therefore it is naive to hope that once women have made their way to the top, they will then change the rules. Ferguson asks, 'after internalizing and acting on the rules of bureaucratic discourse for most of their adult lives how many women (or men) will be able to change? After succeeding in the system by using these rules how many would be willing to change?' (p. 192). One could add, that they might already have changed through adapting to the rules.

The empirical results suggesting either that there are no, minor or moderate differences in the leadership style between men and women may seem to indicate similarity but may also be interpreted as supporting the alternative values approach. Females have to adjust to organizational practices and make no real difference, if they get into positions of power. The results of stress research provide perhaps a more distinct support for the thesis that adjustment to organizations is accompanied with women suffering to a higher degree than men. Of course, as with all empirical results they may well be interpreted in accordance with all the approaches treated here.

Authors who lean towards this view suggest that women in organizations, and especially those entering the male-dominated management sphere, should act in accordance with their own needs and wishes without trying to adapt to the dominating values and standards, and that in this way they can try to achieve a radical change. Martin (1993), whose position lies somewhere between the special contribution and alternative values approaches, believes that this could bring about far reaching improvements in almost all respects of corporate functioning, involving everything from democracy and worker safety to protection of the physical environment and

preventing closing factories for tax reasons or moving them to the Third World, where cheap labour may be found (p. 288). This probably appears as far too optimistic and naive for most people, including most alternative values proponents, who typically have few illusions about corporations or the leeway in a capitalist market economy. Even though she, referring to Jackall (1988), correctly points at weaknesses of male-normative management leading to ineffective forms of individualism, self-interest, covering up, suboptimization and short-sightedness it is likely that also feminist management, if put into action, has drawbacks in the context of corporate performance. And a wider set of organizational objectives may easily lead to conflicts between them. Conflict of (legitimate) interests can simply not be defined away with idealistic definitions of management promising harmony and optimization on all accounts. Calás and Smircich (1993: 79) ironically notice the 'unique "all heart, all peace" managerial goodness assumed to come from women's qualities'. A more realistic evaluation of the options for alternative values to make an impact on mainstream organization is less optimistic.

> In this view, women who claim their individuality and difference, and so become more visible to each other and to men, are more likely to impact the deep structure of embedded values and so to contribute to creating organizations, which are at least women-friendly. (Marshall, 1987: 30)

However, also hopes in this regard are typically modest. Most alternative values advocates would view painful personal transformation in a way that minimizes the distinct female as the high price to pay for a 'successful' career or even adaptation in most organizations.

From the perspective on women in managerial jobs discussed here, the barriers to women attaining higher positions are not only a matter of the lack of equal opportunities, of prejudice, of small numbers, etc.; they are also a result of many women's lack of real interest in adapting themselves to the demands made by corporations and management jobs. This emerges from insight and alternative commitment, and is thus not a weakness to repair, through more rational forms of social engineering, such as the use of mentors, training or less biased recruitment procedures.

Alternative values proponents take an anti-management stance and are more interested in developing alternative social institutions than integrating women in the existing ones. Ferguson (1984) argues for alternative organizations that are 'genuinely egalitarian'. Examples may be feminist organizations such as bookstores and health clinics. They are decentralized, and 'they rely on personal, face-to-face relations rather than formal rules' and 'they see skills and information to be shared, not hoarded' (p. 190). There are two profound problems with this solution. The first is that such organizations often are emotionally demanding and frustrating to work in, contingent upon uncertainties, ineffective management, financial difficulties and a tendency to personalize most issues (Morgen, 1994). Often the pure feminist ideals are so difficult to live up to that the organization becomes a hybrid of these ideals and traditional bureaucratic features, including formal rules and a degree of hierarchy (Ashcraft, 2001). The second is that it means that women are concentrated in financially and technically weak and peripheral areas, while the large and powerful organizations are left in the hands of a group of men and a few like-minded women

(Billing, 1994). A more moderate response to alternative values critique in terms of women's career orientations would be to work in organizations that are less anti-thetical to female orientations than large-scale corporations. Some public sector organizations, service companies and knowledge-intensive companies may be less alien to the alternative values, as portrayed by Ferguson and others (Billing and Alvesson, 1994: Chapter 7). A well-known example of a comparatively large firm, which exhibits at least some alternative values of a pro-feminine nature, is the Body Shop (Martin et al., 1998).

A dilemma for the alternative values approach is that it is of great political and social importance that women should attain decision-making positions to a much greater extent than they do at present. The obstacles and informed reluctance to do so lead to a paradoxical situation. The same factor that makes it especially important for women to be represented in decision-making groups, namely the difference between female and male values and priorities, also makes it less likely that women will embrace or feel comfortable with careers leading to top jobs in business and government. Those who succeed are atypical in relation to broader groups of women, either from the start or as a result of organizational socializa-tion and disciplination processes which means that they are not capable of speak-ing with a distinct female voice, at least not so that people in noisy organizational environments can hear it.

Comparing the approaches

Of course, far from all authors', texts can easily be plugged into any of the four alter-native positions on the subject matter discussed here. Some texts represent a combi-nation of arguments and views from these different perspectives. Martin (1993), for example, argues in between the special contribution and alternative values camps but draws also on meritocracy arguments pointing at the significance of using female tal-ent in management. Occasionally writings appear as inconsistent or confused, for example, if they strongly emphasize the existence of cultural beliefs negating women as managers, but still say that there are no sex differences in interest, ability or style (e.g. Reskin and Padavic, 1994). It is as if these beliefs about gender only matter for some decision-makers and other prejudiced men. Given that cultural beliefs also affect the subjectivities of women, the consequences for women's self-confidence, career intentions and self-image – crucial prerequisites for being a manager – may be consid-erable. Taking this seriously may be used in 'politically incorrect' ways, but is on the other hand probably important in order to seriously change the situation.

Related to problems in treating the leadership and gender topic coherently is the impossibility in stressing only similarity or only difference in all or even some pro-found respects. Some would argue against framing the issue in such a way that one has to emphasize either position (Scott, 1991). Most people would probably agree that men and women, of a particular age, ethnic group and class, during a partic-ular historical time, tend to be similar in certain respects and different in others. This does not, of course, prevent us from recognizing the analytical value of iden-tifying the four 'pure' forms. Although doing so inevitably involves the creation of

Ethical/humanistic concern (equality,
workplace humanization)

Equal opportunities	Alternative values
Meritocracy	Special contribution

Emphasis on gender similarity (left)

Emphasis on gender difference (right)

Concern for organizational efficiency
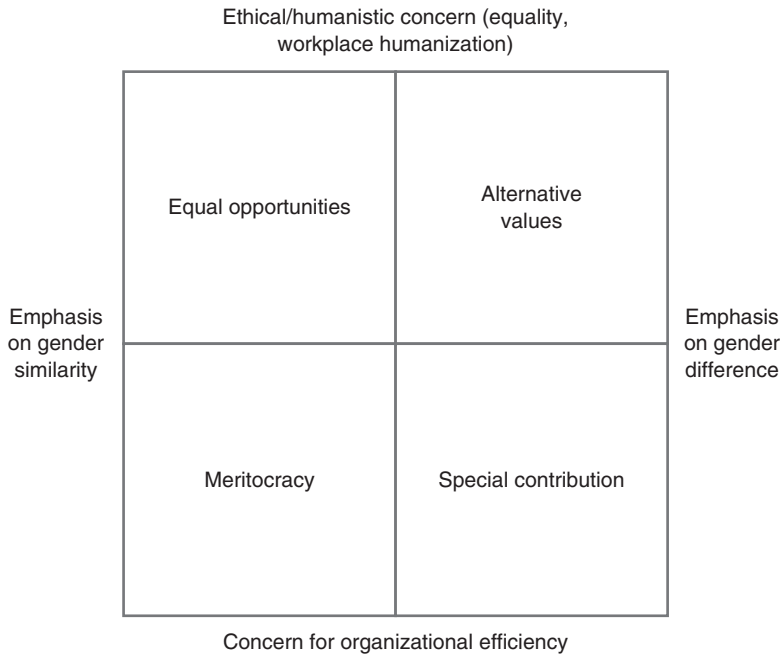
Figure 8.1   Approaches to the understanding of women and leadership

order out of chaos, dominating lines of thinking and the majority of writings in the area lend themselves rather nicely to be mapped with the framework used here. Most authors emphasize either what they think tend to be similar or different, in terms of what is relevant for understanding the phenomenon treated. Also equal opportunities authors recognize that boys and girls experience different socialization, they do not, however, believe that this is very important for understanding gender and leadership.

The four perspectives are summarized in Figure 8.1, which combines the two central dimensions involved: emphasis on similarity/dissimilarity between the two sexes, and focus on ethical or efficiency concerns.

The two dimensions in the model must of course be seen as continua. The (dis)similarity between the sexes can be stressed more or less strongly. Alternative values advocates typically stress it more heavily than special contributions authors, but the specific qualities emphasized are more significant than quantities. But within all the boxes, there are a variety of opinions; some aspects are of course not considered in the model. A mixture of efficiency and moral concern can probably be found in most authors, although some alternative values feminists do not express an interest in efficiency issues.

Various kinds of critique could be, and are to some extent, directed at the different approaches. Much of the critique of the perspectives covered in Chapter 2 is highly valid here, but will not be repeated. Variable researchers would see the special contribution and alternative values approaches as reinforcing stereotypical views on women, which they would feel run against the struggle for gender

equality. If female psychology and feminine values circling around connection, nurturance and vulnerability are seen as central, women may appear as more suitable to be leaders of day care centres or personnel managers than as executives in industrial or financial corporations. The critique the other way around would say that similarity-focusing researchers do not take women's voices seriously and are caught in a defensive battle, trying to prove that 'women are people too' (Calás and Smircich, 1996). Marshall (1993: 125) writes that 'until recently, many researchers have emphasized women's similarities to men to win the former's acceptance' and adds that 'differences now also need recognizing'. Alternative values advocates would criticize special contributions authors for 'castrating the female advantage' (Fletcher, 1994) – to sell out the distinctiveness of feminine orientations for the sake of integration and careers – while special contributions people may counteract arguing that alternative values thinking locates themselves outside any form of realistic practical impact or, if successful, places women on the periphery of society, for example, in marginal institutions, thereby reinforcing male domination in core sectors of society.

A big problem in discussing similarity/difference is that the male has typically been and still is the norm in organization and management, meaning that talk about difference often appears as negative and harmful for women; difference may be read as deviation (Cockburn, 1991; Scott, 1991). Precaution and tactics then appear as necessary. If one changed starting point and looked at what might be typical for men as the interesting issue, things might turn out quite differently. But the general interest and research literature in 'men and management', i.e. where gender is taken seriously, is still meagre. (For exceptions, see Collinson and Hearn, 1996.)

A number of interesting research questions can be formulated, based on the relations and tensions between the four perspectives. The following are some examples.

One question starts from a comparison between the first two and the second two perspectives. Are women and men who represent potential candidates for middle and top leadership jobs on the whole basically similar or dissimilar? Few people claim any general difference in intellectual skills, for example, but as we have seen opinions vary about the socialization background and the psychological characteristics of men and women. This question is naturally a tremendously complex one. It is likely that research will produce a variety of answers depending on what empirical methods are used, what psychological and social dimensions are in focus, what and when groups are investigated, and so on. If we compare women and men in general, for example, we are likely to detect greater differences than if we look at the limited number of women who are managers today and compare them with their male colleagues (Eagly and Johnson, 1990). Selection as well as adaptation matter here and may imply that these are quite different from more 'average' women. The picture could change when it becomes less unusual for women to reach higher positions. Research results on the subject will probably only provide temporary answers.

Another question that we feel is important concerns the significance of an increase in the number of women leaders for organizations and society as a whole; this could lead to a general increase in equality between the sexes in society, or the possibility that women's points of view would be better represented in decision-making circles or, if one accepts the special contribution position, that the subordinates will be more satisfied. But this is not necessarily so. It is only a

small percentage of the population that attains higher management positions, and an equalization of the gender ratio here does not necessarily reflect or affect the situation as regards the majority of a population. It is also a disputed topic whether the sex of a manager has any consequences for subordinates. Some equal opportunities proponents, e.g. Reskin and Padavic (1994), view the closure of the promotion gap as beneficial for those specific women at present disfavoured (managerial candidates), but do not mention any consequences for other women (or subordinate men). Still, one could argue that an increase in the number of female managers may have the positive effect for other women, that they get more role models signalling that 'woman' does not only mean subordinate positioning and more female managers may also reduce sexual harassment. These are, however, minor advantages compared with whether female managers should mean a specific female form of managing. A trend towards more female top managers may be cut off from, or at least loosely related to, other gender issues.

Even if one accepts the idea that female and male managers differ in work orientations, it remains an open question whether this has any significant consequences. Certain factors and mechanisms could neutralize such different orientations and prevent women leaders from having a significant influence on organizations in a way that is representative of broad population groups. Some would argue that the scope for action for many managers is limited, and it does not then matter whether the top boss is a man or a woman. Profit-maximization and external resource dependencies may make the sex distribution in managerial jobs of limited significance, in particular in organizations operating on a highly competitive market. Some researchers downplay the role of managers for results (cf. Pfeffer, 1977; Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978). The general norms and practical constraints – heavy workload, deadlines, personnel skills amount of resources, bureaucratic regulations – on managerial behaviour may also sometimes prevent any possible effects of the sex of the manager.

Of course, it is not unlikely that there are great variations in this respect – as may be the case in all-social issues. Sometimes in organizational contexts there are discretion and options for change that may provide fertile soil for a distinct form of 'female leadership' or 'feminist management'.[2] There may be differences between different organizations or different situations. Some people – due to exceptional qualities and/or specific circumstances – may put specific 'gender imprints' on the work contexts in which they occupy a senior position (e.g. Anita Roddick, the founder of the Body Shop), but the average manager has presumably a limited influence.

Another possibility is that the organizational socialization process associated with management positions, at least up to now, leads to the mainstreaming of candidates, so that women's specific attributes, values and ambitions are lost and gender-neutral or masculine aspects are reinforced. Any sex difference emerging from upbringing or general cultural ideas may not be robust enough to withstand powerful corporate and occupational socialization and the rewards/punishments accompanying the road to senior managerial positions. A related possibility is that women managers are mainly recruited in such a way that only women who do not deviate from traditionally dominating organization and leadership patterns ever attain, or aspire to, management positions. The many studies indicating that

no significant differences exist in leadership style would be consistent with this opinion. But, as said, it is an open question what would happen if women had better access to higher positions or if, which some people claim (e.g. Gherardi, 1995) that many organizations are going through transformations involving 'de-masculinization' (which does not necessarily involve changes in sex composition – de-masculinization does not automatically mean an increase in the proportion of women, only that work principles are not any longer constructed in distinctly masculine ways).

Regardless of whether or not women managers differ from their male colleagues – in their responses to questionnaires or in their everyday actions – either now or in the near future when a larger percentage of all leaders probably will be women, it is important to consider the question of (an increasing number of) women managers in relation to the broader issue of the quality of working life (QWL) and workplace democracy. (Under this heading we address questions of need-orientation, co-operation, integration of the everyday life and the instrumental spheres, participation, etc.) This last can be assumed to be in the interests of most people and perhaps especially of women, since they are often over-represented at the lower levels of organizations. For most female employees the quality of working life is a much more urgent issue than the number of women in higher positions. The latter is of interest mainly insofar as it influences the former. In the private sector, perhaps even more significant is that the company is doing well so that people do not risk losing their jobs. And in this context business skills and an ability to create efficiency is the crucial quality of a management team – also for most female employees.

The four perspectives discussed in this chapter represent very different attitudes to the question of QWL/democracy. The *meritocratic* approach, which is the social-selection aspect of the technocratic view of society and organizations that dominates present-day society (Habermas, 1971), considers QWL/democracy only as a potential means for achieving the smooth functioning of organizations and promoting efficiency. The question of leadership recruitment and gender has no direct bearing on this.

The *equal opportunities* perspective tends to define its basic objective in terms of giving women a fair and just chance to climb the organizational hierarchy ladder. Here we can identify a remote connection with a broader humanistic concern, but the implications of this for the majority of women are rather weak.

The *special-contribution* perspective suggests that a strong link exists between female leadership and the concerns of most employees. Women's greater concern for need fulfilment, empathy, participation and communication is of key importance here.

The *alternative-values* view differs quite radically from this third perspective by playing down the leadership issue and paying attention directly to improving the working conditions of the majority of the women in the workforce. In this perspective the humanistic and democratic questions are crucial and leadership as such is less important. A de-emphasis of the role of the individual leader – which may be seen as a male construct – may encourage maturity in and initiative from others. From this position, the well-being of employees is seen as a primary goal in itself, possibly at the expense of economic success and monetary rewards, although most feminists are pretty vague on how they see these issues.

Poststructuralist and critical–interpretive comments

All theoretical perspectives by definition privilege some aspects and obscure variety. This is not only in the sense that one may easily find empirical examples supporting each of the four approaches, but a perspective easily obscures alternative ways of making sense of an empirical phenomenon. From a poststructural view, central concepts are often used in a totalizing manner, repressing alternative understandings and drawing attention away from the local context in which they may achieve a temporary, if fluid, meaning. When Eagly and Johnson (1990: 249) for example, concluded that 'women's leadership styles were more democratic than men's' there is, from a poststructuralist standpoint, a rich variety of problems worth pointing at. The idea that words (signifiers) like 'women', 'leadership', 'style', 'more', 'democratic' and 'men' stand for some objective, universal, homogenous, robust and easily comparable phenomena out there, mirrored in questionnaire responses or observation protocols, is not accepted. 'Leadership' and 'democracy', for example, may refer to language use, where unstable meanings cannot be lifted out of the specific context in which the act takes place and the words are used. One could also, again from a poststructuralist view, question the assumed coherence and static nature of 'leadership' and, even more so, of 'leadership style' – perhaps human actions are more processual, fragmented, varying, inconsistent and open to alternative interpretations than these concepts, and the statement quoted suggests (cf. Calás and Smircich, 1991; Chia, 1995; Alvesson, 1996b). Talking about democratic leadership may be seen as confusing, as the idea of leadership tends to contradict democracy. One may argue that leadership marks an asymmetrical relation in which the impact of the leader is far-reaching while democracy stands for equality in terms of influence, the more of democratic 'leadership', the less of 'leadership'. The statement cited indicates a crude effort to universalize across history and culture, not to say local context. The law like nature of the statement implies that there is a fixed causal relation between sex and a 'leadership style' called 'democratic'. That research according to Eagly and Johnson (1990) has shown a certain relationship between the variables involved is not proof that is acceptable to the sceptical proponents of poststructuralism. In the first place, there are different opinions also among positivists. Most refute the idea of a clear difference. In the second place, much of the proof is limited to the outcomes of questionnaire-filling responses. All empirical material – including laboratory studies – relies on ratings of individuals that can hardly avoid reflecting fully stereotypical cultural beliefs. Research shows that individuals are referred to in such a way that one social identity – woman, professional, Muslim, corporate employee – becomes salient, and it influences the response accordingly (Haslam, 2004). So if women are aware of themselves as women when asked a question or 'manipulated' in an experiment, it affects the response, which may be somewhat different than if the awareness of self is different. Finally, the efforts to find regulatories means that the opposite – variation and inconsistencies – receives little attention. (For a further critique of positivist leadership studies, see Alvesson, 1996b.)

Despite our sympathy with a lot of the poststructuralist critique, we feel that it perhaps pushes the case a bit too far. Modest generalization and local grounding are to be preferred. Rather than establishing a final truth, variation in the cultural

constructions of what may be referred to as 'leadership' and how females and males act in and give meaning to asymmetrical work relations could be studied. Gender-stereotypic as well as counter-stereotypic actions and relations are both worth examining.

Poststructuralism as well as critical–interpretive thinking would question the attempts to fix and essentialize gender that is inherent in the two difference approaches, but to some extent also in the other two. Rather than saying something definite about the subject matter, it could be argued that gender – like leadership as well as all social phenomena – is discursively and culturally constituted and not given once and for all. Gender as well as leadership must be considered in terms of context. One could point at historical and societal-cultural variation, but also emphasize variety within a society or an organization at a particular time. Emphasizing variety may be more or less extremely local. One version is to point at variation between occupation, ages, classes, industries, etc. Another is to see the individual subjects as discursively constituted and view also the subject as inconsistent and varying with the different discourses addressing her as woman, manager, engineer, middle-aged, mother, organizational employee, etc. For example, sometimes a female manager may act in accordance with 'feminine' ideals, sometimes not contingent upon if other people address her as a female or in other respects. A female manager is then a subject position, not a fixed essence. The latter, strong version of postmodernism goes beyond the four positions reviewed here – all would argue for a certain level of coherence and direction as characterizing subjects – but one may imagine a response to the critique of essentialism saying that the field of inquiry and validity of the position is constrained to the present societal context, i.e. the latest decades and the nearest future. It would then not be the 'nature' of women per se, but the contemporary forms of socialization and value-orientations of women, that the various approaches address. An even less generalized approach could be imagined, in which the researcher studies local beliefs and arguments about gender and leadership, e.g. in an organization or a work group. Having said this, we must emphasize that this is a possible answer from authors adhering to a fixed position on the subject matter. Most do not explicitly treat it. Whether they would actually agree that research ideas and results are historically and culturally situated or if they try to mirror universal or at least broad, long-term conditions, we cannot know.

Summary and final comments

The four positions presented here indicate the variety of ways in which the topic of women and leadership (management) may be considered. Equal opportunity expresses a variable view, while special contribution and alternative values are respectively weak and strong applications of the feminist standpoint perspective. Meritocrats may not be feminists at all – if they are, they are closest to the equal opportunity perspective. The questioning and playing out of all approaches without advocating any 'best one' would be in line with postmodernist thinking. From a critical–interpretive point of view one may also argue for a relaxation of the focus on men and women (as defined according to biological criteria). It would be a benefit to study how gender norms

regulate managerial conduct and how different kinds of leadership actions contribute to the construction of masculinities and femininities in workplace cultures.

The four positions may be summarized through asking the why, where and how of female managers and forms of leadership.

The 'why' (more female managers) question is answered by equal opportunity as a matter of fairness, by meritocracy thinkers for the sake of efficient utilization of human resources, by special contribution for the promotion of new, progressive forms of leadership for the good of companies and all employees, but perhaps in particular women. The alternative values position does not propagate more female managers, but rather fewer managers and more female ways of managing or, and better, organizing, that is mainly in the interest of women.

On the 'where' (should female managers/feminine leadership be located) question the two similarity oriented approaches would answer everywhere – half of all managers should, in principle, be females. Even though special contribution advocates would hesitate to say so, their approach would imply that females might primarily be employed in people-oriented managerial jobs. (All managers deal with people, but in many jobs also technical and practical expertise are important.) Alternative values writers would either say that there should not be many female managers in dominating organizations – as managers are a part of a bureaucratic society based on hierarchy and careerism and particularly exposed to its negative features – or that there could be female 'leaders' primarily in anti-bureaucratic, non-profit oriented organizations.

'How' (is it possible to increase the number of female managers, or in the alternative values case, promote more feminine ways of organizing): most proponents of at least the three conventional approaches (alternative values are more radical) would presumably be open to a variety of different means. However, there is a different emphasis. The equal opportunity approach would rely on feminist struggles within and outside organizations, legislation and, in US at least, bringing cases into court. Meritocrats would argue that effectiveness considerations and competition would provide sufficient incentives for changes. Improved human resource management would be the major vehicle. Special contribution advocates would also rely on competition-induced pressure for effectiveness as well as the demands of particular female (but also male) subordinates, some of them aspiring managers. Rather than gender-neutral HRM, analysis of the appropriateness of various styles of managing and an appreciation of the unique style of women would be seen as the way forward. For alternative values writers, the suggested route would be to develop alternative institutions, rather than try social engineering in the existing capitalist bureaucracies.

Finally, we would add a comment regarding the importance of promoting female managers to senior positions. As long as there are (or were) relatively few women also in junior and middle level managerial jobs, one may argue that obstacles for women comprise a substantial problem. A relatively large number of women may then suffer deprivation in work tasks and a general impression of the woman's natural place as subordinate is re-created. Male domination is thus reproduced. If and when the proportion of females occupying junior and middle level managerial jobs increase and the problem primarily concerns senior management positions, the social significance of the issue becomes debatable. In the absence of clearer indications that the ratio of female top managers makes a difference for their subordinates, more than one level

below them, the relevance for the great majority of all people is low. In US over a couple of decades there has been a rapid increase of women in low- and middle-level manager jobs. The large body of texts on women in management focusing on a glass ceiling (or a 'sticking floor') preventing them reaching the top, strikes us as somewhat narrowly focused, given the limited and privileged group this concerns. Still, the symbolic significance of the absence of women on the highest and most visible positions should not be ignored.

Of course, we do not want to deny that the theme of gender and leadership is of great interest. Of perhaps greatest interest is the critique of dominating ideas on management and leadership (e.g. Lipman-Blumen, 1992; Calás and Smircich, 1993). It would be even more interesting, however, if it moved beyond measuring what is taken for granted as distinct and robust 'styles' of men and women as well as producing positive, often popular texts idealizing feminine leadership or feminist management. Most work in the area falls into these two streams. What is needed, and currently lacking, are in-depth case studies of processes of organizing/leadership in which gendered (masculine/feminine) meanings and their consequences are identified and sensitively theorized. One could, for example, study managers as 'active gendering agents' (Martin, 1993: 281), i.e. to investigate how these subjects contribute to create or reproduce, or perhaps even disrupt and challenge gendered organizational practices, meanings and subjectivities. Such studies, according to our view, would call for an appreciation of the cultural context, of the workplace level as well as the macro level. Relatedly, a weaker interest in 'men' and 'women' as variables or carriers of distinct, homogenous standpoints/voices would be preferred. Also an open orientation to 'leadership' – including a reluctance to nail it and take its existence and usefulness for granted – would do the field good.

Notes

1 One option is to talk about comparable worth rather than equality in the sense of similarity. An emphasis on the latter is seen by many as problematic, as it excludes also consideration of modest differences (e.g. Scott, 1991). A problem with the comparable worth version of equality is that if gender difference is maintained, it becomes more difficult to make strict comparisons and argue for closing of the gender gaps in pay, promotion, etc. In addition, the notion of comparable worth is a bit vague.
2 This is presumably often the case in typical female work organizations, such as kindergarten and social work, but occasionally also organizations not dominated by women may facilitate feminist management, e.g. post-bureaucratic organizations (Fondas, 1997).

9
Broadening the Agenda

In the two final chapters we will relate to the themes of gender sensitivity discussed mainly in the introductory chapter. We argue for an integration of gender and other organizational themes, in the light of the present division within organization and social theory, where gender is defined as a subspeciality still regarded as marginal by many researchers and where the interplay between gender and other themes on the whole is rather poorly developed. An interest in gender relations includes taking men more seriously, not just as beneficiaries of patriarchy, stereotypical carriers of masculinities or as people standing in a harmonious relationship with dominant working life conditions, but also as a broad and divergent category whose members also experience mixed feelings, thoughts and orientations, a variety of interests and preferences and who sometimes are constrained by current gender patterns. We will argue in this chapter for a more nuanced and sensitive approach to men also – without in any way suggesting that gender studies should concentrate on this category only.

We do also argue in a different direction; that categories like men and women, while they should certainly not be neglected, should not be given too much attention. It easily leads to one-eyedness, a focus of attention to what is common for and specific to females and males and possibly an overemphasis on difference. A broader interest in the gendered nature of organizational life may motivate less emphasis on men and women per se to the benefit of paying attention to gendered organizational processes, practices and values. Changing the emphasis from a focus on women to also considering men would be one move, within an overall interest in people; being somewhat less concerned with people (carriers of bodies) per se and direct attention to gendered aspects of values, goals, interests, etc. would be another one. As will be argued here, we feel that both may increase the range and impact of gender studies.

On the problems of drawing firm conclusions

As we pointed out earlier, social science far from always produces empirical results that converge. Gender studies is no exception. There are some areas on which there is agreement in terms of results on how social reality looks like at the descriptive level. It is thus rather clear that women are worse off than men in terms of wages, that they are strongly under-represented in higher level jobs and thus access to

formal power, that they hold more of the lower-level jobs, experience sexual harassment more frequently and take more responsibilities for home and family and that, partly contingent upon the last issue, female managers seem to experience more stress than their male colleagues. The subordination of women and the devaluation of women's work are partly associated with these conditions. That gender is of central importance for social relations and interaction is also agreed upon in the majority of gender studies.

Apart from that, there is not much agreement, neither in terms of basic theoretical approaches nor in consistency of empirical findings. There is also much diversity in terms of attempted explanations; pay and promotion gaps may be seen as pure discrimination, as an expression of cultural inertia (affecting not only those in positions of formal power but women as well), or women prioritizing other values than those of competition, productivity and a wish to become managers. As mentioned in Chapter 3 many see the categories 'women' and 'men' as representing robust, objective reality, as starting points for empirical investigations beyond any need for consideration. Others, drawing upon recent, poststructuralist theorizing, view intellectual inquiry as flawed from the start if these categories are accepted as universal notions and uncritically applied. As Gergen (1994) writes, 'a once obdurate and unquestionable fact of biological life – that there are two sexes, male and female – now moves slowly toward mythology' (cited in Gherardi, 1995: 108). We will return to this point, arguing that gender studies may progress through downplaying the interest in 'women' and 'men' (although we don't aim for consistency on this issue and don't propose that these categories should be totally abandoned).

In terms of less philosophical matters, what may misleadingly be seen as down-to-earth empirical studies – many of these trading in the rather abstract and remote level of questionnaire-response counting – do not score much better in terms of unity and consistency. Take the area of women and leadership for example. As we have seen, a large body of literature suggests that women and men do 'lead' in basically similar ways. In the same area another, somewhat smaller, but still substantial and increasing, stream, argues that there certainly are minor to moderate differences and that women managers are more network-oriented, skilled in dealing with relations, democratic and so on. Similar diversity is produced by the literature on the effects of changed sex composition on pay. As mentioned in Chapter 3, while Pfeffer and Davis-Blake (1987) found that an increase in the number of women in the field of college administrators was followed by a decrease of wages, Jacobs (1992) and Wright and Jacobs (1995) found no such effect in managerial jobs and computer work respectively. (All these three studies are from the US.)

This may be very frustrating for those who value agreement, straight accumulation of knowledge, order, predictability and 'truths'. For the believer in the opposite – the value of productive conflict, disruption of a common world view, the appreciation of ambiguity, variation and the evanescence and uncertainty even of well-argued or in other ways supported positions of validity claims – the state of the art is more positive. It is as one could expect. As we argued in Chapter 1, there are no reasons to expect strong convergence in this field – or in any other field in social studies, for that matter. This reflects diversity of researchers' frameworks and political interests, but also complexities, variations and changes in social reality.

Rather than viewing the individual researcher – or (social) science as a whole – as an authority, offering theoretical and empirical knowledge to experts and lay-persons as guides to how to think and act, social science may be seen as offering a broad set of insights and impulses for reflective thinking. Reflective thinking is something quite different from adaptation to the truth claims of authorities. We see several advantages following from plurality in development of knowledge. The major job of making sense of gender aspects in the specific organizational context must be carried out by the thinker/actor him- or herself. Variation in the input of viewpoints and empirical results offered may inspire thoughtfulness and critical reflection, and also perhaps creativity. It may also counteract people taking certain assumptions and frameworks for granted. Most importantly, while gender is socially constructed and varies not only over history and between macro social cultural configurations such as nation, class, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, occupation and organization, but also *within* these, any understanding of a specific empirical context must draw upon a body of vocabularies, ideas, theoretical explanations and relevant – parallel or contrasting – empirical illustrations in a context-sensitive way. Of course, delimitation and focus is necessary, but concentration should be balanced against careful consideration of alternative perspectives and interpretations and the problems of reductionism.

Rather than viewing theories to be validated or falsified – as true or false – in an abstract or universal sense, it is better to see them as, in the best case, offering partially valid insights and explanations. Most theories are sometimes true and sometimes false or, better, sometimes a theory may offer an improved understanding of a particular situation, and sometimes it does not work in this way. Even the most committed adherent to patriarchy theory may have problems accounting for the rise and success of a small, but increasing number of women in politics, public administration and, although to a lower degree, business, and very few psychoanalytic feminists would try to explain why female workers moved over to previously male-dominated jobs such as coal mining when the jobs became available in relatively large numbers, which happens at least once in a while (Reskin and Padavic, 1994). The appeal of higher wages seems to offer a better explanation than the psychodynamics of early mother–child interaction in the case of the female coal-miners. But in order to understand the huge amount of females going into childcare and nursing, we need to consider aspects other than wages and lack of alternatives on the labour market. Females are not forbidden to study engineering and few people these days resist them doing so. Perhaps psychoanalytic theory here has something to offer?

In terms of leadership behaviour, it is rather obvious that irrespective of the degree of support to the hypothesis and theory of a specific female leadership style, there are women who act in autocratic and task-oriented ways and men who do the opposite. Of course, it is of interest to find out if there are tendencies to specific gender-leadership behaviour patterns – perhaps in a certain cultural and historical context rather than in terms of an eternal law – but the limits of such abstract variable-correlations must be considered, otherwise they reinforce stereotypes, rigid expectations and may bring about category mistakes, such as the automatic association of a woman with a democratic leadership style. According to Eagly et al. (1992) it is in particular when female managers deviate from a 'soft' style that they are evaluated in a biased way.

A problem is that *if* the women-in-management literature suggests that women's leadership 'is' a bit more democratic and relational than men's, this may be defined as 'natural' and 'normal' for women and may thus reinforce tendencies to evaluate women behaving in other ways more negatively and further constrain their possibilities in adapting a range of leadership behaviours (which are viewed as acceptable for men). The gender literature sets norms for being which, despite the positive intention, may create gender traps for females, both because they try to subjectify themselves (construct their own identities) in line with the norm and because they may receive sanctions by others if deviating. As Deetz (1996) points out, looking for regularities and averages often leads to the establishing of a norm, meaning that the knowledge becomes normative, e.g. regulating the social through establishing standards and expectations.

There are several good reasons for adopting a 'non-fundamentalist' position on this subject matter.[1] Besides the arguments for variation mentioned above connected to historical and social variation, the significance of paradigmatic assumptions for the results produced and the fusion of social studies and what we are studying, all speak for non-fundamentalism. In particular the internal relationship between social science and gender phenomena shows the impossibility of establishing how 'it is' in any universal, a-historical sense. The massive amount of gender studies – distributed to the public through mass media and education – is an integral and productive part of the culture that constructs gender. All the writings and talk about female managers, most of it promoting women in management, affect the numbers of this category – which is steadily increasing in most countries. The writings and talk also affect the self-understanding of female managers and the scripts they follow as well as the expectations and interpretations of people around them. But more profound changes are also likely to have happened. 'Female leadership' is socially constructed in different ways over time, affecting not only talk and expectations but also, integrated herewith, cognitions, values and actions.

The historical nature of gender does not mean that everything changes rapidly – some things do. Others change slowly, though others tend to be more persistent. An a-historical approach is, however, totally misleading in the area of gender and organizations. We have mentioned this before, but this point is worth repeating. But also within a given historical period, it is important to be open for variation. Why should one expect a uniform pattern regarding, for example, possible negative effects on pay of an increased representation of women in an occupation? Rather than any law-like relationship, variation seems more likely.

There is a strong social pressure in mainstream social science for emphasizing patterns, regularities and unity at the expense of fragmentation, variation and ambiguity. The latter qualities are to some extent recognized also by mainstream researchers, but mainly on the way to the discovery of patterns or mechanisms that explain surface level variation and inconsistencies. A valuable counterforce is poststructuralism, which stresses aspects such as multiplicity, pluralism, multiple voices, fragmentation, etc. (Rosenau, 1992; Linstead, 1993; Chia, 1995; Butler, 2004). These qualities are, however, often viewed as values and ends in themselves. Often this approach emphasizes language and texts as the focus of attention, i.e. it is the disclosure and differentiation of language (discourse) that is aspired to rather than in social reality 'beyond' language: feelings, actions, social practices, etc. As said,

the approach taken in this book is only modestly inspired by poststructuralism/ postmodernism (and in a way that takes variation and fragmentation of a socially constructed and discourse-sensitive reality seriously, without reducing everything to text or overemphasizing the power of language, see Alvesson, 2002b). It is not so much a philosophical/linguistic position as an interpretive/empirical interest that motivates taking variation seriously. Rather than one-sidedly pushing for multiplicity, we think that it is important to balance between the two extremes of seeking pattern-unity-result and celebrating diversity-fragmentation-pluralism.

This view on the nature of knowledge – less of robust truth than a framework for reflection and interpretation – is of course close to the ideal of intellectually and practically conducting sensitive readings of gender in organizations and avoiding the pitfalls of one-eyedly reducing everything to gender or to miss gender aspects.

Integrating gender and organization

The problem of isolation in gender studies

Despite its increasing significance in social science, education and politics during recent years, at least in many Western countries, feminism does not appear to be very popular among broader groups (Barnard, 1989). Cockburn (1991) and Stivers (1993) refer to a number of women in the organizations they studied or in other ways interacted with and almost all of them distanced themselves from the label. We share the impression that feminism has an 'image problem'. Cockburn attributes this unfavourable evaluation to patriarchy. But it is also possible that the entire blame should not be ascribed to an abstract system that has managed to produce a negative image of its enemy, feminism. The women expressing a negative view on feminism in Cockburn's study still embraced many of the ideals of gender equality, suggesting that 'patriarchy' is not very successful in affecting the attitudes of these women. Therefore there may be drawbacks in the feminist projects, partly responsible for this 'image problem'.

From a more academic perspective, feminism appears rather isolated. Acker (1989: 65) thinks that 'feminist thought has been co-opted and ghettoized'.[2] To the extent gender has received any broader attraction, it is as a variable rather than as a central theoretical concept. Feminism has faced difficulties in transcending the gender subtext of central theoretical categories and concerns.

> To talk about gender, too often meaning women, is to take the theorizing from the general to the specific, and this appears to undermine the theorizing about the abstract and general. Consequently, talking about gender and women can be seen as trivializing serious theoretical questions, or it can be seen as beside the point. All of this rests upon obscuring of the gendered nature of fundamental concepts under the cloak of gender neutrality. (p. 74)

This evaluation of the limited success of feminism, outside its core area, may not be shared by others. We also think that during recent years gender studies in

organization theory have made progress and include more and more interesting contributions (Martin, 2003). But there is a problem in that feminist authors are often reluctant to take non-feminist work seriously (and vice versa), at least in terms of acknowledgement, references and explicit dialogue. For example, in a review article of feminism and qualitative research (Olesen, 1994), about 200 works are referred to. Of these less than 10 are non-feminist and nothing is said about the distinctiveness of feminist methodologies in comparison to other methodologies and their contributions to development of method more generally.

Many other areas of feminism are also characterized by a somewhat one-sided interest in gender and feminist work. Other areas and theoretical orientations receive little attention – except as objects of critique. Ferguson's (1984) critique of bureaucracy, for example, takes only a moderate interest in the extensive existing bureaucracy-critique, from radical Weberians, critical theorists and human relations-people, arguing that her approach differs through using the experiences of women as the point of departure. Ramsey and Calvert (1994) offer a feminist critique of organizational humanism, in which the extensive earlier critical work which has made the same or similar points, is hardly mentioned and is not drawn upon (e.g. Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Perrow, 1979; Alvesson, 1987).

The lack of interest in feminist or gender issues is obvious in most 'mainstream' research areas. We mentioned the general neglect of gender in organization studies in Chapter 1, apart from the obligatory textbook or handbook chapter on gender. Advocates of gender studies sometimes exhibit a similar disinterest in moving outside their domain. Some feminists appear almost only to be interested in gender (and then mainly women) and not referring much to other themes of organizations, apart from those seen as disadvantaging women. The interplay between feminism (or gender studies, more broadly) and other academic streams consequently appears to be far from successful. A mutual disinterest characterizes many gender studies and other areas, especially in management studies.

There are thus reasons to agree with Acker (1989) when she describes feminism as ghettoized in certain respects. Gender is marginalized in, for example, organizational analysis (J. Martin, 1994), even though (other) critical organizational theorists typically take it into account, at least during recent years. Although ideas on equal opportunities are increasingly shared by large parts of the population and backed up by governmental politics in many countries (at least at a superficial level), this is associated with the variable view and does not mean that feminism as a theoretical project – going beyond body-counting and an interest in improving the numbers through recruiting and promoting more women – is very influential. Let us explore the ghetto metaphor a bit more systematically.

Counteracting ghettoization in gender studies

In the present context, a ghetto may be seen as an intellectual domain that is isolated, self-contained, holds a socially subordinate or low-status, position, and is

well demarcated. This characteristic appears to fit nicely with dominant views on feminist studies, both within and outside the domain.

There are advantages and disadvantages with such a position. The former includes relative safety, feelings of community and a clear identity. It is possible to develop one's own norms and values and identity diffusion is avoided. Some protection from the broader academic community may also be offered. Also the (self) image of an outcast or victim may be positive in some ways, as it offers a kind of moral authority and indication of authenticity (cf. Elshtain, 1981). The problems include intellectual isolation, limited influence, power and prestige within the academic community. The lack of debate and mutual influence across gender studies and other areas may also lead to quality problems. (This is not typical only for feminism. Most areas are characterized by paradigm isolation and a lack of interest in different orientations.)

Labelling the current position a ghetto is, of course, to indicate that its position vis-à-vis other intellectual territories is unsatisfactory. The limited impact of gender studies on most other areas in social science, including organization studies, calls for rethinking. This is to a high degree something that the mainstream authors, unwilling or unable to take gender seriously, may be blamed for. From the point of view of gender studies, critique of this neglect must be complemented with constructive proposals for how to bridge the gap between gender and conventional concerns.

One option is to advocate here that any book or curriculum includes a specific part on gender or women. But that would be to continue the ghettoization or at least compartmentalization of the topic. A more radical proposal would be to suggest that the artificial separation of gender issues from other issues should be dropped. Instead of treating gender or women as something that is the theme for specific courses, parts of courses or even parts of books or research projects, gender could be treated as an integrated part of the knowledge developed and taught. When for example treating management one may discuss a variety of different aspects in terms of gendered meanings and not reduce these to a particular part of women in management.

The research strategy of Calás and Smircich (1992a) of using 'gender' in order to rewrite 'organization' may be called upon here. This strategy is interesting. It does not necessarily mean a total rewriting of any history of organization in terms of gender. Such an enterprise may lead to important aspects being lost. There are considerable problems with an undiscriminating approach to gender concepts. Masculinities may easily be stretched or multiplied so that they cover everything and nothing. As with all metaphors, there is the risk of them commanding over the world. Wherever the gender researcher directs attention, he or she sees masculinities and – although less frequently addressed – femininities appearing.[3] Alternatively a great deal of significant aspects are lost out of sight because they are not easy to plug into a gender-theoretical interpretation. It is hardly possible, at least not given the knowledge so far produced, to imagine that management/organization or any of the subdisciplines could be well understood solely through gender concepts and ideas. That would mean a great risk of gender reductionism.

Combining gender and other perspectives

How can we avoid these problems of compartmentalization or one-sided gender focus? The problem may be formulated as a matter of trying to go beyond a rigid division between gender-blind and gender-one-eyed knowledge development and transmission. The ideal is to be able to see gender also where one does not expect it (avoiding blindness and developing sensitivity), at the same time as one resists seeing it everywhere (avoiding one-eyedness and over-sensitivity). We think that a move in such a direction may be taken through the close cooperation of gender and other ways of interpreting phenomena. Through integrating – or perhaps rather paralleling – a gender perspective with some other perspective(s) or bodies of knowledge, themes may be treated where gender sometimes is central, sometimes is less so. Through the development of a sufficiently broad interpretive repertoire – a set of theories, vocabularies and some meta-theoretical principles for regulating the diversities are involved (Alvesson, 1996a; Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000) – gender theory and other forms of understandings guide the approach.

This would mean that interpretations in gender terms – for example masculine cultural meanings, homosocial reproduction, sex boundary heightening, female ways of organizing – would move back and forth in terms of centrality and explicitness in research projects, in texts and in education (in for example research and teaching of organizational culture, strategic management, business ethics or whatever). Arguably, the study of organizational culture would be greatly improved through the application of a gender perspective, but there are certainly aspects of any organizational culture that are lost or treated in a highly reductionistic way if gender is the only perspective used. It only marginally helps if class and race are added to gender. A well-functioning cooperation between gender and other perspectives may be hard to achieve, but if and when successful it may come to terms with the three crucial problems of gender/organization studies: the gender-blind mainstream, the tendencies to one-eyed gender reductionism in parts of feminist studies and, partly as a result of these two problems, the ghettoized nature of the latter. In terms of the problems we addressed in the introductory chapter of this book, we believe that the approach suggested here means increased possibilities in manoeuvring between gender under- and oversensitivity, between denial and totalization in approaching issues of gender, between blindness and one-eyedness.

We will come back to how this may look. A possible effect – which some people may see as negative – of bringing gender issues out of their somewhat isolated existence in education and research would be to loosen up the identity of gender studies (and gender scholars). Given the scepticism and sometimes hostility of a great part of the academic (and non-academic also, for that matter) to gender studies this may be problematic for individual researchers and thereby weaken the presence and development of gender aspects. Another possibility is that gender is an integrated part of research frameworks and parts of the results are gender-informed. This partiality of gender-imprinting in empirical projects and theoretical work may satisfy neither those interested in gender (too little of it) nor those guided by conventional concerns (why is this funny stuff included here?). A third drawback would be the high demands on

the researcher, working with a broader frame of reference and moving beyond the reductionism, allowing one to neglect all but one set of aspects is not easy. It is often easier for the researcher to focus on a narrow aspect. Contemporary highly specialized 'scholarship' puts a premium on specialization.

The move suggested here would break with the commitments of many feminisms, oriented to developing knowledge by women about women for the sake of women. This would call for a rather distinct, hardcore approach different from the integrative, boundary-crossing one suggested here. With the increased recognition of diversity, the negative image of feminism also among those supporting equal opportunity (reported above), the unitary and unique view of women and their interests, has lost space. It is increasingly realized that gender cannot be seen in isolation. It never appears in a pure form, except perhaps as an outcome of the manipulations of an experimental study. In the context of organizations not only class and ethnicity must be considered, but also issues such as economic context and competition, performances, technology, occupations, demands of clients and customers, etc. The ideal is, of course, not that every study tries to address many aspects, but that the entire research field does and that the individual researcher is careful about what he or she chooses to not address. To reduce gender to only or mainly being about women is highly unsatisfactory, as Acker also notes in the citation above. Still, it is common.

Claims about the situation, experiences and preferences of women – treated as a specific group – call for careful comparisons, although we would suggest a greater interest in relations than comparisons. Rather than treating women as if they developed and lived in relative isolation from men, and vice versa, gender relations are crucial to investigate in order to understand the context and processes behind the presumably gender-specific. We therefore advocate gender relations rather than women or men as the principal target of study, especially in the context of work and organization studies.

Gender as the fundamental organizing principle?

Most feminists claim that gender is still the fundamental organizing principle, either in the sense of a rigid and pervasive distinction between men and women as social categories (Ridgeway and Correll, 2000a) and the privileging of the former, or the tendency to divide the social world into masculine and feminine meanings and viewing the former as superior.

A less universal approach would be to say that the centrality of gender is also a matter of the particular domain addressed. One may also argue that a person's gender is crucial for his or her identity, although a person's self-understanding may be more or less consistent and stereotypical in terms of maleness/femaleness (see Chapter 5). Gender is also, as we have seen in this book, highly significant in very large parts of the labour market. The picture is, however, often not that simple.

In the world of organizations, it is easy to produce empirical evidence for the view that gender is a central organizing principle, although one can always dispute

whether it is fundamental or not. Despite this, one must also recognize the possibility of gender not being very central in specific sites. One option is to use the following two criteria for evaluating the significance of gender as an organizing principle: sexual division of labour and variety in the statements of experiences expressed by male and female organizational members. If one uses these criteria it appears that sometimes gender is a central organizing principle (e.g. Cockburn, 1991; Reskin and Padavic, 1994 and some of our own studies, e.g. Alvesson, 1998; Billing and Alvesson, 1994: Chapter 9 point in this direction), but sometimes it is not (Billing and Alvesson, 1994: Chapter 7; Bergvall and Lundquist, 1995). Often it is far from evident how one should evaluate the significance of gender as an organizing principle at the level of workplaces (e.g., Sundin, 1993; Billing and Alvesson, 1994: Chapter 8; Powell and Butterfield, 1994). A study of workplace bullying indicated no significant differences in experiences and process, illustrating that parts of organizational life and workplace experiences are outcomes of individual and interpersonal issues not easily divided up according to gender (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008). Another study of female and male engineers showed some differences, but also considerable similarities in career patterns (Ranson, 2003). And most research on leadership indicates that men and women do not differ that much.

Some of the gender lines exhibited in workplaces may not be an effect of gender as organizing principle being in operation at the organizational level. Sometimes gender may be organized *before* the entrance to the workplace, e.g. through gender-stereotypical educations and career choices. Occupational segregation can be reinforced or disrupted at the organizational level, but often organizations are mainly recipients of earlier gender divisions. The import of people to hospitals are for example heavily structured by the sex ratios of those graduating from nursing and medical schools.

This would suggest that gender as an organizing principle is not seen as a paradigmatic point of departure for understanding organizations, but as a theme for exploration, as something 'we do' in a process. It is not a simple matter of testing whether gender is a central organizing principle or not – the significance of assumptions and theoretical commitments as well as the constructed nature of all empirical material prevent a separation of 'theory' and empirical material and thus testing in the strict sense of the word. But the ideal may be embraced of being as open and reflective about the relative centrality of gender as an organizing principle in specific empirical sites as well as being prepared to acknowledge the centrality of other organizing principles (class, race, meritocracy, professionalization, education, etc.), which may be intertwined with, but cannot be reduced to, gender. This is now much more acknowledged and integrated in the term inter-sectionality.

It would be interesting to study gender less as a pre-structured, essential or fundamental organizing principle controlled by the world as an overall mechanism, but to look at – and ask ourselves – when, by whom and how is gender invoked as a mode of structuring our worlds, our fellow beings, various practices and ourselves. Seeing gender and gendered divisions and distinctions as *process* should, minimally, complement the ideas of gender as structures and principle.

Such an openness calls for gender studies not being the sole point of departure for making up the entire interpretive repertoire. The capacity of and approach to social

phenomena involving the sensitive readings of gender as well as non-gender aspects would mean a more nuanced view on the diversity and diverse intensiveness/salience of gendered meanings, as well as an appreciation of other kinds of aspects.

On interests

Related to the issue of the centrality of gender as an organizing principle and the associated segregation and subordination of women is the issue of women's interest. Although social science in general tends to be somewhat sceptical in talking too much about interests, seeing the issue as contradictory and complex, and refraining from authoritative statements about 'real interests', most feminists do not suffer from lack of conviction when addressing gender and interests. Even poststructuralists such as Weedon (1987) – generally sceptical to claims of 'truths' – appear to view the subordination of the interests of women to those of men as an unquestionable fact (pp. 2, 3, 12). Cockburn (1991: 220) evaluates contemporary society as rather one-sidedly benefiting men:

> Women do win some advantages from their position in patriarchy. For example, they are not called on to be prepared to kill other people to prove their femininity, as men are their masculinity. Men, however, gain hugely from patriarchy.[4]

Most students of gender also emphasize the strong interest of men in guarding their access to good jobs, promotions and high pay and their generally higher status (Chafetz, 1989; Stivers, 1993; Reskin and Padavic, 1994; Ridgeway and Correll, 2000b).

The issue of interest may, however, be questioned in several ways. Is interest the same as what is espoused or conscious or is it the 'real' interests, determined in an objective way by the elitist researcher?[5] Women's interests – as with all interest – may be an area of ambiguity, disagreement and dispute.[6] Variation is often acknowledged, but those few women undertaking successful careers, having a conservative lifestyle or benefiting from their looks and sexual appearance tend to be seen as exceptions and the idea of shared interest is thus saved. Different interests may collude not only between but also *within* a group or even a person. There is also variety between people. Some are more concerned about trying to minimize suffering associated with workplace sexuality while others consider sexuality a positive element at the workplace and see harassment as a minor problem (for themselves or at their workplace).

If we take the example of sexual harassment and the wish to minimize this somewhat further, the common means is through policy, rules and procedures carefully regulating conduct and how to deal with deviations. This involves, of course and by definition, bureaucracy, which according to many feminists is against women's interests. Actually a large part of equal opportunity measures means a lot of bureaucracy – for rule-governed recruitment, promotion, wage-setting, etc. – indicating that women's interests are not a simple and straightforward matter in relationship to bureaucracy (Billing, 1994).

There may also be variations in interest with regard to work load for managers. Women, and men also for that matter, may for example want higher pay and promotion but not want to work long hours or travel in the job very much. Some feminists argue that managerial jobs should be changed so that they should not be adapted to the norm of a person, normally a man, who can devote most of the time and energy to the job, and that such a change would be in the interest of women (e.g. Cockburn, 1991; Wahl, 1996). Of course, reducing the costs and retaining the benefits of work would be in anybody's individual interest, but it is difficult to get this equation to go together. If compensation, power and status would fall with the reduction of work time and sacrifices such as frequent travelling and performance pressure, there would be much disagreement regarding whether the change is in the interest of a majority of women, in the group of potential and actual managers, as well as women in general.[7] In addition, many women without young children and with jobs they are highly engaged in do not want to restrict their work week.

Another issue concerns the assumption of a kind of collective interest shared by men. It is often assumed that men as a group guard their interests against women as a group. It could be argued that men normally are not organized in such a way, but compete with each other for positions and status. A group may of course close ranks and act against outsiders – such examples are not uncommon (Reskin and Padavic, 1994). For those men in a direct competitive situation with women, it is a benefit if the chances of the latter group – as with all competitors – are weakened. For most men, including top-level managers, there is nothing of direct interest at stake. Different generations and levels of managers do not compete with each other (Kvande and Rasmussen, 1994). Top level managers have no self-evident interest in supporting junior male employees just because of their sex. More broadly, executives have little to gain from supporting the status quo in terms of gender division of labour – except from an interest in having labour power with low expectations and being prepared to accept low-paid jobs. It is not uncommon that higher level managers support improved promotion chances for women (Sundin, 1993; Billing and Alvesson, 1994). Arguably, they often have a clear interest in promoting women to senior positions in order to comply with current norms advocating meritocracy and equal opportunity, thereby attaining legitimacy – an important goal for contemporary organizations (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). Today, in most parts of the Western world, men do not want to be charged for discriminating against women and most men probably feel that they do not, and they may be inclined to take certain actions to show others and themselves that they are pro-equality. In particular in public organizations there may be a strong political pressure to recruit and promote a number of females to managerial jobs.

But the issue of interest is complex. Senior managers may want to interact only with members of their own sex. To be working in a male-dominated field may support a masculine identity. This may be weakened if more females enter. Senior managers may support equality at a general level, but in specific cases involving them personally favour a person with the same sex. Roper (1996), using the concept 'homosocial desire', believes that 'intimacies between male managers are crucially important ... because it is through them that "exclusionary circles" are formed and maintained' (p. 224). But often preferences for sex-mixed groups are being

espoused. Many people believe that they lead to a better atmosphere and more varied experiences and viewpoints. Of course, male managers – and female also, for that matter – may act on the basis of preferences, prejudices, a want to minimize the uncertainty involved in interacting with people expected to be different, or on other non-rational guidelines, but this is not the same as men's shared interest. It is certainly not so in the sense of guarding economic and status privileges. Men may want to minimize uncertainty or enjoy the fruits of homosocial desire, but learning to interact with and enjoying the company of others than those similar to oneself may also be in one's 'interest'. Of course, we can only here point at aspects important to consider before freezing a standpoint on men's shared interests and we make no substantive statements. Such statements may only be made in relationship to local, empirical settings and then in terms of perceived wants and preferences rather than 'objective' interests. There is no reason to expect uniformity in this regard (cf. Blomqvist, 1994). In particular younger people, being accustomed to interact cross-sexually throughout education, may for example not experience worry or uncertainty in interaction with people of the opposite sex. In terms of uncertainty and discomfort, differences in age, cultural and professional background may matter as much as gender, but it makes little sense to talk about shared interests based on age as an important explanation behind significant organization phenomena.

A perhaps more profound issue concerns what men gain from gender arrangements in present society. That many more men than women benefit from higher pay and high-level positions is beyond doubt, but it is not the whole story. There are other values and criteria for a good life. As mentioned in Chapter 1 men score worse than women on some crucial issues, for example life expectancy. In the Western countries women live longer than men. In Denmark the increase in life expectancy of women with higher education and professional jobs has actually dropped, coming closer to that of men in the same social category (SFI, 1994). A possible interpretation could be that these women experience not only the privileges but also some of the strains that men encounter in working life.[8] Contrary to what most students of gender emphasize, the prestigious jobs in which men greatly outnumber women are not only characterized by privileges but also by burdens, including a great risk of being dismissed if results are bad, if one loses in corporate politics or due to re-organization. In a situation of strong competition for a higher position – where the supply is much stronger than the demand – it is not easily reconcilable with positive social relations, at least not within the corporate context. Relationships with children may suffer and there may also be little time for leisure and to maintain friendship relations. A UK study of middle managers concluded that these 'are more careful, perhaps, than in the past about becoming completely "psychologically" immersed in their occupations and seek, instead, to obtain a balance between their work and private lives. They are reluctant to strive for career success if this can be gained only at the expense of personal and family relationships' (Scase and Goffe, cited in Watson, 1994: 63). On the other hand, most people would probably think that the advantages are stronger than the costs, at least for some men and especially so in senior positions. In a Swedish study of top managers the respondents indicated a high degree of job satisfaction and a relatively low degree of stress (Olsson and Törnqvist, 1995). The costs of managerial jobs seem to be higher for women

according to most studies on stress as reviewed in Chapter 7. Anyway, also for many women, there is a strong attraction in career advancement, particularly if the conditions are less one-sidedly adapted to persons with no or limited family obligations.

There are some indications that the values of money, a high-status job and formal power do not play such a determining role for experiences of life satisfaction for many people, at least not in parts of Europe, as the focus on these issues in some feminist studies on work and organization may indicate. In a Danish study more women than men thought of themselves as 'winners' rather than 'losers' (*Politiken*, 1996). Family issues were broadly seen as much more significant than money and power as sources of satisfaction in life, also by men. These results can hardly be accepted at face value. To the extent that they say something else than how people put X's in questionnaires, it may be about expectations. Given low expectations, it is difficult to see oneself as a loser. Still, the results question whether women really are so badly off in contemporary (Western) society as suggested by many feminists. The emphasis on family relationships rather than money and formal power also indicates that the criteria for what is important for the good life and what is in the interest of women and men should be given a broader consideration than is the case in many writings on gender, work and organization.

The appeal of money, status and formally based power is strong in our Western culture (and in many other societies also, for that matter). Consumerist ideals fuel hedonism and egoism. The career-oriented values around pay and promotion appear to be more pronounced in the US than European texts on women at work and in management. That these values are broadly embraced should of course not discourage a sceptical view on the centrality of these values. Gender studies should not just promote the possibility of increased access of women to such cherished goods but also critically examine the social and cultural processes affecting the significance of these values. Gender bias is perhaps not restricted to equal access to these benefits, but is inherent in the cultural values attached to these. An important aspect of power is that it does not only or even mainly operate through preventing people from getting the good things in life, but through identity regulation affecting what they do want, i.e. their motives, intentions and goals (Lukes, 1978; Foucault, 1980; Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). The entire capitalist economic system, based on drives such as competition and efforts to eliminate competitors, profit-seeking, expansion and circling around the prioritizing of the cold, objective, seemingly neutral medium of money for regulation of social relations, may be seen in terms of masculine domination.[9] The capitalist economic system and the cultural values it produces and is supported by, brings about a strong orientation to maximum pay and managerial careers. The grip of this orientation may actually be reinforced if also women in great numbers are encouraged to be heavily committed to these values. There are various opinions of how women relate to these values. For example, according to Reskin and Padavic (1994) there are no differences between men and women in terms of wishes to have a career. Jacobs (1992) found no differences between US male and female managers in terms of ranking the most important things in work even though women scored meaningful work slightly higher and income slightly lower than men. Other authors say that there are differences between men and women. Often feminists emphasize that values such as good personal relationships

for life fulfilment, work done well for its own sake, helpfulness to others and the like are significant for women. Markus (1987), for example, found in a study of Hungarian women, that the experiences of success for the large majority were connected to some form of concrete achievement rather than social recognition. Traditional 'external' success criteria of career achievement only surfaced among a few women in professional and managerial careers. Gender studies supporting an 'external success' orientation may actually reinforce masculine domination, even if the pay and promotion gaps between men and women should be reduced or even vanish. Gender equality and masculine domination – if masculine refers to social meanings and values and not to the positions of men – are thus not necessarily mutually exclusive phenomena. There is a strong irony that feminists in work and organization studies (as well as in other areas) often bring forward values whose salience may be an effect of male domination, as the ultimate yardstick of what is worth striving for.

Of course, this is not to say that women should be satisfied with work organizations and labour markets operating against them in terms of pay and promotion. The well-documented devaluation of women's work certainly runs against women's interests. There is every reason for women to demand the same wages as men for the same or similar work. A struggle for equality should, however, be conducted with a critical eye on the values involved. Changing organizations in a non-hierarchical direction and reduction of pay gaps in general could be equally important objectives as increasing the percentage and number of female managers and reducing pay gap only between people at a certain level, e.g. male and female executives or between male and female unskilled blue-collar workers.[10] There is, however, no reason to assume fixed interests or goals associated with gender. What is important is to be open for historical and cultural variation of interests and values. Gender studies should neither take current values and priorities for granted nor impose a standard solution from above, but combine sensitive attention to the voices, experiences and espoused interests of people (men and women) being studied at the same time as the cultural meanings and mechanisms of power should be critically evaluated.

An important contribution to gender studies could be to produce qualified input to critical reflection and debates about interests and values.

On alternative agendas

The issue of women's interests is of course closely related to what is on the agenda for feminist and gender studies.

Feminist demands on organizations and organizational changes may be described in terms of different agendas, for example a *short* and a *long* one (Cockburn, 1991). Liberal feminists advocate the first one. Equal opportunity means that women should share the same privileges as men and be spared sex-specific sufferings. Equal pay, equal access to positions of formal power and liberation from sexual harassment would then be the major demands. A longer agenda would call for changes so that women's self-confidence and positions are strengthened in many ways. Cockburn writes (p. 159), for example that women

could express their specific circumstances in terms of bodily needs around pregnancy, menstruation, etc. and be unconstrained by conventional norms dictating when a woman should express her femaleness and when to hide it. It would also address the sharing of home and family obligations and, more relevant in the organizational context, develop arrangements for facilitating the integration of work and family, namely day care and parental leave possibilities, flexible work hours, working at home and so on.

While the short and the long agenda emerge from ideas about the specific interests of women, one may also talk about a *broad* agenda, linking a radical interpretation of women's interests with broader concerns. Such broader concerns may more or less clearly emphasize 'feminine values' or transcend the connection to women's distinct interests/voices/experiences/perspectives and instead relate to more universal concerns. While acknowledging the diversity within the women's movement, Benhabib and Cornell (1987) nevertheless claim that there is a 'minimal utopia of social life characterized by nurturant, caring, expressive and non-repressive relations between self and others, self and nature' (p. 4). Ferguson's critique of bureaucracy is women-focused in the sense that it claims to draw upon the experiences of women but it illuminates injuries also, although perhaps less pronounced, affecting men. Calás and Smircich (1993) criticize the current ideas about the feminine-in-management and argue for social considerations, which are hardly exclusively beneficial for women, such as concern for the third world and ecological consciousness, considerations that do not surface much in the mainstream gender literature on organizations and management. This broad agenda is thus quite different from the focused one targeted primarily at pay and promotion equality and some other women's issues.

Broadening the agenda for gender studies of organizations may be seen as risking losing any foundation in broadly shared interests or experiences of women – although the idea of such a foundation is rather shaky. The position taken may be viewed as masquerading as feminist, but decoupled from broadly agreed concerns and perhaps best motivated and labelled in other terms (anti-capitalist, ecological). On the other hand, it may also be argued that the purpose of feminism is to question dominating, masculinistic ideals, goals and ways of relating to the world, rather than to focus only on issues easily recognized as 'women's'. Rather than taking for granted the most apparent effects of centuries of male domination, institutionalized in social practices and goals, as liberal feminism and variable-thinking tend to do, a broadened agenda would mean a less constrained scrutinizing of masculine domination. This would increase the risk of missing crucial but hidden forms of such domination. Here it makes sense to refer back to Acker (1989) who argues that a significant problem in feminism is the tendency to take for granted major theoretical concepts and the implicit ideas they carry and thus compartmentalize gender studies as a subfield addressing women-only concerns. Both the short and the long agenda contribute to such a marginalization.[11] They focus on certain issues, but may suffer from and reproduce gender undersensitivity in other issues. Their advantages are, of course, a clear identity and a focused politics. The broad agenda may easily be seen as too diffuse and over-ambitious, reducing the chances of doing something about what many people see as the core issues (pay, promotion, harassment) and

increasing diversity of opinion and conflict within people engaged in gender studies and gender politics.

When considering the benefits of broadening the agenda the issue of interest in relationship to men and women must be considered. Not only women-specific issues and experiences would be in focus, but also social relations between men and women and the gendered nature of social institutions would be investigated. But such a broadened view would call for a careful consideration. It would call for a balance between gender-sensitive readings of social reality and avoiding that the masculine domination metaphor commands the understanding, ordering everything under the regime of gender studies.

To conclude, it seems problematic to assume that gender is a fundamental organizing principle and that there are broadly shared and distinct women's interests in a specific society. Openness about the significance of gender as an organizing principle and acknowledging the complex nature of interests, and problems in substantiating a set of interests shared by all or most women and the reasons for addressing gender issues also from the viewpoint of men, throw doubt on the need for an exclusive, women-focused stream. The necessity of gender studies as a distinct field of inquiry isolated from other streams may thus be questioned. With the increasing awareness of diversity and conflict not only between groups of women, but also within feminism, the old ideal of a unitary and unique womanhood is discredited and an opening up of the intellectual agenda for interaction between different streams is encouraged. In addition, understanding the complexity of organizational life calls for an approach where gender thinking can enrich other streams and gender studies be enriched by these other orientations.

Some problems in 'anti-male' and 'anti-masculine' gender and organization studies

Some features in large parts of gender and organization studies run against integrating gender concerns with other aspects of management and organization. One is a bias for hypercritique, in which men are viewed as bad and women as good or innocent. This is often complemented by men being seen as active, doing things to/against women, while the latter in most cases are passive – things are done to them. Here one significant effect is the potential alienation of a large audience. A second is an adaptation of the intellectual agenda and ways of doing research to political-tactical concerns associated with beliefs about what may serve women's interest (partly captured by the expression political correctness).

Bad men and innocent women

The vicious nature of men and innocence of women are moral themes in some writings. This fits also with the ghetto metaphor and legitimizes its existence. Of course, many gender texts are very careful and nuanced and critique of forms of domination

often calls for unflattering accounts. But sometimes critique is taken a bit too far or is insufficiently grounded. Rather extreme examples may be used and a 'negative' vocabulary favoured. For example Collinson and Hearn (1996) refer to an odd figure, the American entrepreneur Howard Hughes, and one might ask what this example tells us of male managers in general. Less atypical examples may be more informative to explore. Kerfoot and Knights (1996) view the core of masculinity as 'a compulsive desire to be in control and thereby, to act instrumentally with respect to everything, including the self' (p. 80). Masculinity seems thus equated with a kind of compulsory neuroticism, which is far less pathological than the one that characterized Hughes, but to indicate that people in management subordinate personal life, family, and even physical and mental health 'to the greater goal of control or mastery' (p. 80) may be somewhat harsh and lack nuances. Some studies actually indicate that managers do not want to interfere very much and dislike 'micro management' (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003). As we concluded in Chapter 7, there is not much difference between men and women in managerial jobs. In Reskin and Padavic's texts men come through with few exceptions as narrow-minded, prejudiced, anti-women and sometimes rather brutal creatures (pp. 72–4). Cockburn's text (1991) also portrays men in consistently unsympathetic ways. For example, she summarizes reactions to positive action for equal opportunity in UK organizations as follows:

> Many women may write this off as 'mere' liberal feminism, women buying into the system. Men nonetheless often respond as though the end of the world were at hand. (Cockburn, 1991: 47)

> Men define 'women's difference' in terms that suit themselves. They play off one woman against another. Women are in a cleft stick. They do prefer what they call 'women's values' and share an idea of what they mean by that. 'I like to see a softer approach, less self-oriented', a women professional in the Service said. And in High Retail a woman distanced herself from men who treated their secretaries like dirt, 'It's just do it!' Most women do not much like masculinity and do not want to emulate it. (p. 70)[12]

The impression is that men are as unsympathetic as women are the opposite. When women appear authoritarian or in other ways masculine and negative, it is often seen as the effect of male structures and cultural norms:

> The environment they have joined, which is that of men of power, has threatened to repel them if they do not adopt to its culture. Life experiences makes us what we are and, one woman said, 'look what you have to do to get there'. Once such women have made a decision to compete with men there is a tendency for them gradually to take on masculine traits. (Cockburn, 1991: 69)

Stivers (1993: 22) says something similar when, referring to Kanter, she asserts that 'the bossiness of women supervisors about which both male and female employees complain is not a feminine trait but the behaviour of someone who has significant responsibility but little real power'. Alternatively, the perceptions are explained through references to prejudiced expectations of femaleness, making women in

managerial positions appear as either too female, soft and insufficiently authoritative or as too unfeminine, bossy and too authoritative (Cockburn, 1991: 69).

Bias in method: trust in females and distrust in men?

Another type of 'anti-male' negativity can be found in the treatment of empirical material. It happens that highly pejorative statements about men are accepted as valid. Reskin and Padavic (1994: 138) for example refer to Segura, who cites a Hispanic woman who, with irony, listed some stereotypes that disqualified her from promotion:

> That we like to be pregnant. We don't like to take birth control. We're 'man-aña' (tomorrow) oriented. We're easy. We're all overweight, and I guess we're hot (she laughed) and submissive.

Reskin and Padavic then comment that 'stereotypes like these seriously undermine women's authority on the job, as well as their chances for advancement'. It is, of course, hard to deny the negative effects of such stereotypes, but it is not easy to say how much the statement informs us about the stereotypes of other people in the workplace. It may be a bit stereotyped about stereotypes.

Let us add a more nuanced example. In Martin (2006) eight interviewed people – one female and seven males – are reported. The female interviewee provides an account of men behaving badly, which is accepted as proof of the lack of insight of the men referred to, while the seven other cases are interpreted in terms of the lack of or partiality of insightfulness of these males. The accounts seem reasonable and the interpretations fairly nuanced, but there is still selectivity in the sense that the female's account is viewed as true and the males' as indicative of their shortcomings.

At present there is a tendency, in some research, to use different interpretive rules. Statements by males are seen as indicating dominant forms of masculinity being at play (subjectifying the person) or, when referring to the other sex, as showing stereotypes of women. These are targeted for doubt and turned into ammunition for critique directed at the category of which the statements originate.

Statements by females are often seen as expressing insights and truths. They are addressed as mirrors of the experienced reality of those being studied and as valid indicators of the wrongdoings and imperfections of the other sex and/or arrangements and practices associated with their domination. We have provided illustrations in previous chapters. One illustration is Cockburn's (1991) report about 'a woman (who) distanced herself from men who treated their secretaries like dirt' (p. 70). The statement is presented as if it expresses the truth about first the woman being very different (and morally superior), and second, 'the men' being really bad people. Of course, this may be perfectly true, but the ground for saying this seems fragile. And it would be inconceivable in gender studies to take a male person producing a similar statement about females as anything other than an example of stupidity and prejudice.

In these cases pejorative statements about men are taken at face value while negative or non-nuanced statements about women are seen as indicating the prejudices

of the spokesperson and/or ascribed to male-dominated culture, social structure or a gender-biased mind. The descriptions easily reinforce stereotypes. That some or many men are prejudiced and even nasty to women does not justify that often when some research texts mention men it is done in a negative way, often in pejorative terms (e.g. Cockburn, 1991; Hearn, 1993; Reskin and Padavic, 1994; Martin, 2006). We do not claim that these authors and the informants they refer to are not right, but are uncertain about the support for these claims. A problem is that there is often a weak empirical base and the inclination to interpret data in a selective way. Standpoint feminism legitimizes this through arguing for the special insights of females, contingent upon their position. Harding, for example, states that the personal experiences of women are a 'significant indicator of the "reality" against which hypotheses are tested' (1987: 7). Even though this perspective can be seen 'to be a product of its time' (Skeggs, 1997: 26) traces of it still play a role. Feminists sometimes appear to think they have a licence to express also weakly grounded views about males and masculinities. The implication of this is of course not to refrain from critique but make sure that it is well grounded. The rules in hermeneutics for the critique of sources are, for example, helpful here (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009).

Wild critique?

Some gender studies engage in what may be called hypercritique, i.e. a one-sided and exaggerated focus on the negative features of a social order. (Here it is not human subjects but the 'system' that is in focus.) Almost all work on doing gender for example implies that people have to comply with norms and assumptions about gender or face sanctions or other problems (Deutsch, 2007). This may be to overstate constraints and undermine possibilities to improvise and undo gender (Butler, 2004; Hall et al., 2007). Many other critical theories (including some of our own work), namely those that do not deal specifically with gender, suffer from a negativity bias (Alvesson, 2008). In certain Marxist texts capitalism is viewed as nothing but the exploitation of workers. Critical theory sometimes views management as solely a matter of exercising domination and mind control, while radical feminism conceptualizes society as a patriarchy in which the suppression of women is the principal quality. In some gender studies, organizations seem to be understood solely as sites for the segregation, subordination and sexual harassment of women, not as institutions (also) producing goods and services. In these accounts people don't seem to work or accomplish anything useful, but to be preoccupied with reproducing patriarchy. Masculinities are seldom considered as integral with or as crucial for technical, scientific or economic progress. Arguably, orientations and ideals said to be masculine such as being impersonal, objective, explicit, outer-focused, action-oriented and analytic (Hines, 1992: 328) are necessary for carrying out many valuable, indeed indispensable tasks, from plumbing to bridge construction and surgery. In some gender studies it appears as if technical and scientific developments and productive work take place irrespective of, or even despite, masculine orientations being central in engineering, sciences and companies or that only harmful development

and production may be ascribed to masculinity. When (male) managers and professionals work a lot, in gender studies this is typically not evaluated in terms of contribution to organizational performance or any other socially legitimate outcome, but as expressing and promoting a male norm preventing women from being promoted to and functioning in managerial and professionals jobs or as an effect of a neurotic obsession with control (Kerfoot and Knights, 1996; Thomas, 1996). If, for example, physicians, executives and researchers work hard and for long hours, it may simultaneously put up a (masculine) norm – which may work against some women – *and* lead to positive outcomes on health, consumer satisfaction and knowledge production. As Elshtain (1981: 136) notes, over-inflated descriptions may backfire, and may lead to the reader being suspicious and the researcher loosing credibility or, if the description is accepted, the female reader may define herself as 'the victim' or 'the exploited', which means rather constrained and powerless identities. Here often more nuanced and complex accounts are motivated (Jeanes, 2007).

Apart from the general problems of hypercritique, the emphasis on bad men (male-dominated institutions) and good and innocent women leads to the closure of the agenda in terms of women's issues. There appears to be little need to listen to the voices of those characters who are favoured over women and 'enjoy the benefits of being male without doing anything special to obtain these benefits' (Reskin and Padavic, 1994: 5). Why care about the opinions of men on positive action for equal opportunity if most of them are so crude and immature that they 'respond as though the end of the world were at hand' (Cockburn, 1991: 47)? In addition to, and more significant than, this marginalization of men from gender issues, the brute-victim categorization draws attention away from highly significant areas of technological capitalist society and its constraints for companies and pressure on working life. The sex of power holders is not the only important aspect. Market logic, pressure for competition, profit, wage and consumption increases means that many managers and other employees – male as well as female – enjoy little autonomy; status, and options for participation, creativity and job satisfaction in contemporary working life. Market competition is in many cases a strong controlling force reducing the scope for men – and women – to put strong gender imprints on organizations, at least in the short and medium perspective.

On the tactics of gender studies

A related problematic feature in gender studies concerns tactics. Many of the examples of bringing forward harsh critique, either of masculine domination as part of an abstract system (rather than related to men or women per se) or specific men populating workplaces as employers, managers and workers, may emerge from tactical considerations regarding an effective critique. At least for those parts of feminism emphasizing political commitment and the contribution to social change it is important not only how informative a particular study or text is, but even more so how it can be used.

Within the literature on women and management the themes pursued may be understood in terms of promoting possibilities for women being managers; the principle message being that women are as good or better managers than men. In the 1960s up to the 1980s researchers and other authors emphasized similarity, whereas it is now more common to indicate that women's style of leadership is superior – more democratic, flexible, etc. – than men's. Both messages – in the time periods when they were communicated – may contribute to the reduction of male domination in management and thereby have constructive effects. It seems rather obvious that many of those pushing for a specifically female form of management and leadership (e.g. Helgesen, 1990) do so in an overclear way in order to promote the cause. The message is simple and persuasive. It is difficult to evaluate whether those taking a hard-nosed similarity view (such as Reskin and Padavic, 1994, who view socialization as almost irrelevant for what takes place in working life and regard external constraints imposed and biased treatment by employers and men as the obstacle for gender equality) 'really' believe in it or that it is adapted to tactical considerations for accomplishing change in an effective way. Mobilizing legislation and bringing cases to court may be an effective way of forcing employers to take measures, thus bypassing the conservative orientations of not only men but also many women in general.[13] Policies and changes from the above are best initiated through powerful and clear-cut arguments emphasizing similarity (cf. Scott, 1991). Some commentators, like Marshall (1993: 125), think that 'many researchers have emphasized women's similarities to men to win the former's acceptance'.

Tactical considerations lead to a rather selective approach to the illumination of gender issues. Important aspects of gender relations remain obscured, for example conservative, anti-equality orientations of women. It could be argued that a history involving rigid gender divisions and the subordination of women has substantive effects on subjective orientations in terms of self-confidence, family orientation, ascribed significance to work and career for identity and life satisfaction, etc. Such subjective orientations, contingent upon cultural traditions and not any female essence, may sometimes be as important as employers' and men's discriminatory attitudes and actions for women's problems in working life. Of course, few would deny the significance of identity, and how efforts to secure it often lead people to reproduce traditional gendered ways of being. But such aspects are relatively seldom addressed in gender studies, perhaps less because they are not important or relevant than because they may be used against efforts to promote gender equality. Given the widely spread stereotypical ideas and arguments used against women in working life – such as they don't want a career, are more oriented to children and family, are too sensitive for managerial jobs, etc. – it is understandable that researchers carefully consider the risk of their results being misused (Scott, 1991). A problem is, however, the risk that we get an agenda and an intellectual style that are too strongly adapted to what is politically correct or informed by political-tactical concerns, while vital issues remain unexamined in research texts and are only aired in private conversations (Hirsch and Kellner, 1991). Gender studies risk being seen as compartmentalized domains of knowledge viewed as disjointed from the experiences and perceptions of what gender actually means in practice. It is no secret that many

people see feminists and other students of gender as very political and ideological and view the knowledge as biased or irrelevant. Parts of these marginalization efforts are grounded in conservative and mainstream thinking, but there may also be fuel for self-critique within gender studies circles.

Especially if one views the change of gender relations as emerging from below, through development of new ideas and orientations among women and men, rather than as imposed from above through effects of the pressures put on employers, legislators and policy makers (proposed by, for example, Reskin and Padavic, 1994: 177), investigations of forms of subjectivities that run against equality projects are important. Cultural norms preventing the progress of women do not just exist out there, among male bosses and workers, but are also internalized and expressed by women (Chafetz, 1989). As everybody knows, but which remains unexplored in many gender studies, the orientations and actions of women do far from always support equality. Gender studies facilitating the re-negotiating and reduction of constraints in how we think, feel, value and act associated with gendered beliefs and norms call for attention to the complex interplay of structures, cultures and subjectivities. Here, we think, lies the potential for individual and collective learning and qualitative changes going beyond a redistribution of bodies in various work and activity fields. Policies focusing on body-counting may enforce the latter, but they leave most aspects of gendered organizational cultures intact and they may accomplish little of qualitative change.

Summary

A move from a focus on women (or men) to a broader consideration of gender relations seems motivated for gender studies to have a broader appeal and also to get better empirical indications on the experiences, conditions and preferences of women, i.e. to the extent these differ from men. The latter calls for some kind of comparison or listening to and incorporating a broader set of aspects than only those produced by an emphasis on women. The claim that one is describing and drawing conclusions on women as women – and not as people – means that one claims that they clearly differ from non-women, i.e. men. This should not be assumed (apart from when biological difference is crucial) but needs to be continuously re-thought, empirically investigated or supported with convincing arguments.

It is also important to take an interest in men and masculinities. Gender does not mean only or mainly women. Also, this sub-field risks becoming a bit narrow not taking gender relations and dynamics seriously enough. Masculinities only make sense in relationship to femininities, men in relationship to women. It is in particular, as discussed earlier in the book, relevant to ask the question: for whom is something holding a masculine or a feminine meaning? Understanding the meaning and significance of masculinity calls for carefully – and critically – considering the voices of men on the topic. The risk of stereotype-reinforcement should not be neglected. This is partly an ethical problem. Sometimes anti-male expressions and claims border on the unethical. This suggestion for change of emphasis of course does not preclude critique of (certain forms and celebrations of) masculinities nor that the interests and voices of the

unprivileged group are taken more seriously – although one cannot always equate women and unprivileged or men and dominant group. A certain emphasis on women's issues may co-exist with a certain, albeit less salient, interest in the voices and experiences of men. The views of the latter on issues of gender discrimination and domination can, for example, be considered.

An important question is whether gender studies should cooperate closely with other streams and theories or maintain an independent status, claiming to be *the* framework for understanding social phenomena. This is contingent upon how fundamental gender is as an organizing principle: either in terms of a strong dualistic division between cultural masculine and feminine meanings or a strong segregation of men and women (and the subordination of the latter). It is wise to be careful with too strong and unchecked assumptions. Rather than assuming that gender is (always) a fundamental organizing principle in work organizations and then carry out problem solving in which this is proved/illustrated or a specific version of it discovered, one may treat the possible fundamentality of this organizing principle as a theme for exploration. This means assessing it against other organizing principles (age, professionalization, organizational forms, class, ethnicity), of course bearing in mind that these other principles may be fused with, although not being reducible to, gender.

Having pointed at some problems by focusing solely on gender raised questions about the uniformity and uniqueness of women's interests and experiences and argued for empirical assessment of the significance of gender as an organizing principle, calling for the consideration of other organizing principles as well, we think we have a case for integrating organization and gender studies, i.e. not treating gender and organization as a specific subfield, divorced from mainstream organizational concerns. This may reduce the risk for one-eyedness in gender studies and encourage a broader sensitivity for gender aspects also among those not being specialists on gender. The next chapter will continue this line.

Notes

1 Fundamentalist here means that there is a firm basis in terms of valid core concepts, methodological procedures, unquestionable points of departures – such as men and women, essentialist definitions of the masculine and the feminine or women's interests – and a common road towards accumulated knowledge and truth achieved through the assembling of a body of sound intellectual efforts and empirical studies. Non-fundamentalists doubt the robustness of the fundamentals of the knowledge building.
2 Acker talks about sociology, but the situation is hardly better within other areas of social science such as management and organization studies (J. Martin, 1994).
3 For example in a reader on men as managers, managers as men (Collinson and Hearn, 1996), masculinity is the key word, and not much else in the connection of men and management appears to be described or analysed. One could argue that sometimes men do not manage or try to develop and sustain an identity in

ways that are best described as masculine. Often managers devote much time to administration. Male managers may also, for example, be relationship oriented or adopt a 'soft', non-autocratic, relatedness-oriented style. According to our observations of Scandinavian managers, this is not uncommon (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003).

4   There may be different opinions whether the example shows an advantage or not. Reskin and Padavic (1994) view the fact that women in the US army do not have access to combat positions as discrimination and as a disadvantage as it means that they can't get experiences counting as a merit for promotion.

5   See for example Clegg (1989: Chapter 5) for a critique of the notion of interests in critical research.

6   For example some women say that they prefer male managers (Billing, 2006). The 2007 presidential election in France showed that 52 per cent of the women voted for the male candidate. Of course, politics matter more than the sex of the candidate; our point is only that there is not necessarily any strong preference among females for a female leader.

7   Among the group of women in general in a company, one could argue that most would have some interest in changes leading to 'women' also being associated with prestige and power. On the other hand, it is possible that the company may perform better, that pay increases and safe employment for workers are more likely to be accomplished, if people in key jobs such as higher level managers, do work many hours. At least in high-competitive sectors, the interest in high performance would probably be weighted more heavily for most people. Having said this, it must be realized that a long working week does not stand in a one-to-one relationship to good performance. Long working weeks may symbolize commitment rather than stand for strong contributions (Jackall, 1988). It is also possible that utilizing more female talent, even if women should work less than male colleagues during the time when they have children at home, may have qualitative advantages (e.g. better delegation), compensating for a shorter work week. Still, it is far from obvious that the majority of women in an organization have a simple interest in key people working no more than 40 hours per week.

8   Other interpretations are also possible, e.g. that women in male-dominated jobs suffer from being outsiders and face demands and constraints originating from male-dominated traditions.

9   Some of the warnings about overusing the masculinity concept that we discussed in Chapter 4 may be directed at our own argument here. Despite ambivalence, we still feel that the points we are making are valid and, above all, important to address.

10 The gender and class interest may clash here. Even though women are, on average, paid less than men there is a significant number of professional women earning more than the average man.

11 These agendas are reasonable and one may see feminist organization studies as addressing a limited set of women-specific concerns. As such this stream has its place in the academic division of labour. Our reason for talking about 'marginalization' is that we are concerned about the possibilities of a broader impact.

12 A very small minority of the men interviewed in the study was evaluated more positively. In one of the organizations studied, Cockburn (1991: 66) 'met a few

men – very few it has to be said – who were supportive not only of women's progress in the Service, but also of the aims of the equality policy and the women's movement, society-wide'.

13 Public institutions such as companies and other organizations are much more accessible for government-induced change efforts than families. Employers may be obliged to demonstrate equality; men and women, in the context of their private and family life, cannot be forced to develop policies for reducing gender division of labour and sex discrimination.

10

Reconstructing Gender and Organization Studies

We argue for an integration of gender and other organizational themes, in the light of the present marginalization, even 'ghettoization' of gender theory (Acker, 1989). We will connect to the problems of under- and oversensitivity addressed in Chapter 1 as well as, more or less, explicitly in many of the other chapters. We also provide some suggestions for how a critical–interpretive version of a social constructivist understanding of gender can be developed through the avoidance of a focus on men and women defined through biological criteria. We thus suggest a move away from 'body counting' as a basis for gender studies. In order to develop gender studies, ways of de-familiarizing conventional assumptions, ideas and ways of making distinctions must be explored. Through this, we can sensitize gender thinking in new ways.

Let us briefly repeat that the purpose of this book is to advocate a critical, problematizing approach. That we direct critique at some salient ideas and lines of inquiry in gender studies should not be read as if we are saying that the area is particularly problematic compared to other fields. With political commitment perhaps a sense of moral superiority follows, and then lack of (self)critical thinking easily creeps in, leading to a failure to check one's assumptions and sometimes to jump to premature conclusions. But basically all areas in social and behavioural science include much that deserves critical questioning and it is through ongoing questioning, progress is made (to the extent we can talk about progress). A positive development is heavily dependent on raising critical questions and challenging established truths and points of departure. It is inherent in a more reflective approach to social science that one points to problems, blind spots, how certain lines of thinking and vocabularies draw attention to some aspects, but away from others, etc. In this final chapter we continue this approach, but perhaps with an increasing emphasis on constructive proposals.

We start this chapter by relating gender issues more clearly to other concerns in organizations, like management, strategy and results as a way of moving gender studies out of a ghetto existence and to encourage a broader interest in both gender and non-gender issues. We continue our efforts to encourage more reflexive gender/organization thinking with ideas on how to avoid being caught in categories and distinctions like men and women and refrain from using the body as a self-evident focus point. Alternative representations with a capacity to disrupt conventional thinking are discussed. We also briefly address the theme of the 'when' of gender,

drawing attention to context, situation and process. Finally, we briefly discuss ideas on intentional changes of gender relations before rounding off this text.

Gendering organizational analysis and making gender studies sensitive for organizational issues

We suggest that researchers develop a sufficiently broad interpretive repertoire to make them capable of making interpretations in gender terms as well as in other terms. Interpretive repertoire here refers to the set of theories, concepts, metaphors and perspectives that one masters and is willing to consider using. To be able to read gender aspects sensitively into phenomena when this is productive is balanced by the capacity to see other aspects. For gender 'experts' this would mean that gender-oriented interpretations are sometimes or regularly produced while bearing in mind the possibility of making other interpretations. From another angle, for those seeing themselves as not primarily in the gender field this would mean that other kinds of organization theory readings run less risk of being gender blind. Gender theory may be mobilized to bring forward significant dimensions that remain hidden through other perspectives and to add to the understanding of phenomena partially high-lighted in other ways. Hereby the dangers of under- as well as oversensitivity of gender issues may be coped with.

Gender may thus be integrated with other ideas in studies of for example organizational culture and leadership. In Chapter 6 we showed how gender concepts may inform and enrich cultural analysis in the study of rituals, vocabularies, artefacts, etc. without necessarily focusing on men or women. Rather than what specifically concerns these two categories in terms of discrimination/bias, the entire cultural subtext of organizational life may be exposed in terms of how it creates certain meanings and orientation. Arguably, it is more often subtle, partly unconscious networks of meanings and symbols rather than crude 'women do not belong here' attitudes that are important themes to develop knowledge about. Eagly and Carli (2007) suggest that the situation of female managers on their route to promotion can be seen through the metaphor of a labyrinth. This seems to capture at least some key aspects of gendered problems for many females and some people belonging to minority groups or in other ways being socially and culturally disadvantaged in work–life settings. Learning how to read organizational cultures broadly rather than just around what is claimed to be women's unitary and unique experiences of biases against them is therefore important. Gender is all the time fused with age, occupation, level, class, department, task requirements, etc., and one should be very careful not to disregard other culturally meaningful distinctions, especially if one wants to say something important about gender. One can here add that women may benefit also from an understanding of cultural themes following other lines than gender. For example, studies of managerial cultures, uncovering implicit rules and symbolism (e.g. Jackall, 1988; Watson, 1994), may be valuable also for all groups that are underrepresented in, but aspire to managerial positions (including women), if they do not focus on gender. We thus recommend gender-sensitive but not gender-exclusive cultural studies.

A case study of an advertising agency by Alvesson and Köping (1993), to a minor extent presented in the final part of Chapter 6, illustrates this approach. The original intention was neither to study nor disregard gender. Gender was a part of the interpretative repertoire – together with cultural, linguistic and critical theories used by the senior author in earlier research projects. The approach was open: in an ethnography the key theme may emerge with increasing familiarity with the case. The extremely gendered division of labour, the heavy sexualized nature of the workplace and the inconsistency between domination of men and the salience of what may described as cultural feminine orientations led to an interest in gender issues. Gender is, however, only one of three key themes in the study. The other two are (occupational) identity and discourses (field-specific talk). The three themes interact and support each other in various ways. Different papers based on the project treat different themes (e.g. Alvesson, 1994, 1998).

An interesting possibility of broadening the impact of gender reflection in the study of leadership would be to go beyond (or beside) the somewhat unproductive comparisons of male and female leadership and the slightly repetitive and stereotypical complaints about the man being the norm in management, and instead study specific examples of leadership processes.[1] Such processes could be investigated in terms of how gendered constructions are accomplished and expressed, rather than through a focus on the biology of the people involved. The actions and interactions of manager X could then be read sensitively in terms of gendered subtexts, a variety of masculinities and femininities, which hopefully at the same time would add to knowledge about leadership (superior-subordinate interaction) and to gender processes in organizations.

We will at some length use strategic management as another example of how gender theory may be a resource for enriching 'conventional' subfields in organization theory. Mintzberg (1990), among others, has contributed to the critique of the design school, the dominant approach in strategic management. Its essence is 'the intellectual processes of ascertaining what a company might do in terms of environmental opportunity, of deciding what it can do in terms of ability and power, and of bringing these two considerations together in optimal equilibrium' (Andrews, cited in Mintzberg, 1990: 173). In the critique of the school, Mintzberg does not mention gender. As we see it, this is not directly a weakness. One can contribute to de-masculinization without necessarily waving the gender flag. We could imagine, however, that exploring this theme of gender also may add insights. Many of the premises of corporate strategies may be interpreted as expressing masculine meanings holding a firm grip over management thinking. Arguably, this is also the case with the premise that 'strategy formation should be a controlled, conscious process of thought', being in the hands of the chief executive officer, 'that person is THE strategist' (p. 176). Another example is the idea that full-blown and explicit strategics should first be thought out and formulated before they are implemented. Mintzberg criticizes this kind of approach for overemphasizing strategy, viewing it as something that can control organizational resources (rather than being affected by these in simultaneous interaction and mutual influence), promoting inflexibility and separating thinking from acting. He also suggests that people in a company differ in evaluations of strengths and weaknesses, and such assessments may be bound up with feelings, aspirations, biases and hopes. Implicit is a critique of the notion of the lonely, strong

corporate leader, being in command of an organizational hierarchy, which obeys. The ideal of proceeding through the sequence diagnosis, prescription, and then action is consistent with the classical notion of rationality, but stands in opposition to a more gradual and flexible approach, in which trial and error and learning are more significant than thinking out the major steps and routes in advance, assuming that the plan is correct and the world stands still for it to be implemented. This kind of highly rationalistic, detached, commander-oriented thinking fits military notions well and the masculine nature of it is worth expressing. Perhaps the school's assumptions, as well as its success, are rooted in the appeal of strong masculinity? Perhaps masculinistic orientations among the corporate actors responsible for what is called 'strategy' may encourage them to act in specific ways in terms of organizational development and change?[2]

Mintzberg also discusses the effects of case study methods in business education (in which the design approach to strategic management is taught) and finds some disturbing features. The idea is that students, through reading short résumés of companies, may analyse their situation, assess strengths and weaknesses in relationship to the environment and then formulate strategies. Here thinking and formulation are privileged while action, implementation and learning are not. An effect of this pedagogy, according to Mintzberg, is that people develop a belief that they can manage companies through using strategic management models with little and remote knowledge about the companies which are the objects for new plans, e.g. involving mergers or acquisitions. The case study method in combination with the design model has promoted a mentality of 'you give me a synopsis and I'll give you a strategy' (ibid., p. 189). This mentality, encouraging managers to give priority to abstract thinking and analysis, remain in their offices rather than getting into factories and talk to customers 'where the real information is to be dug out' (p. 190), is seen by Mintzberg as a cause of problems of US contemporary organizations, which rely on short-term financial information at the expense of long-term development. The mentality expresses a model of the analytic, remote, socially isolated individual, imposing rationality, plans and order on the external world, denying feelings, intimacy, interaction and social responsibility. The strong masculine undertone may account for the appeal and spread of this model, despite, according to Mintzberg and many other commentators (Whittington, 1993), its profound weaknesses.

We thus feel that gender interpretations – here only briefly indicated – could enrich the critique and understanding of the design school and its impact. This does not mean that we would necessarily recommend a paper specifically on gender and strategic management. In the light of the ghetto problems mentioned earlier, and the inclination that such a focus and labelling appeals to the 'right-minded' and scares all those uninterested in – and in need of – knowledge on gender away. In addition, gender concepts are only partially productive in interpreting the problems Mintzberg is addressing. Better therefore is to integrate the gender interpretations with other aspects (see for example Knights and Morgan, 1991).

Of course, the point made here is not only of relevance in an academic context. In organizational practice, actors may benefit from self-awareness, critical reflection and open discussions of how techniques and forms of knowledge may have a seductive appeal through a masculinity-reinforcing image at the expense of more thoughtful

considerations and lines of action. Insights on gender among managers and others may reduce a few of the sources of irrationality behind actions in organizations.

On the social construction and deconstruction of gender: beyond women and men

Perhaps the most crucial issue for gender studies is how to conceptualize women and men. Most authors in gender studies say that they reject a biology-based concept of sex, refuse to use the latter term and claim that they are interested in gender as a social construction. We think that in a basic respect most are not addressing gender in a social constructivist perspective, at least not in a consistent and elaborated way.[3] Biology (body-characteristics) is central for most authors' ways of dealing with gender. Men and women are identified through bodily criteria. That variable research/body-counting studies do so is not surprising. All statistics on gender rely on the ability to easily identify subjects as men and women and here body and not social being is what counts. But even more sophisticated social constructionist gender studies appear to proceed from body-criteria when talking about men and women, for example male and female waiters/waitresses (Hall, 1993, which we referred to in Chapter 4). The social constructions of these males and females enter in the next phase, where the 'fact' that some are men and some are women lead to certain social processes in which these two sexes are turned into genders, for example friendly wait-resses and less friendly waiters, according to the views of those involved. The prob-lem is that body-criteria are easily used in a self-evident way and too strongly impose on how one interprets social constructions. Empirical material is easily an outcome of the unreflective nature of the distinction of men and women shared by both the researcher and the 'natives', e.g. the self-evident, body-based distinction between waitresses and waiters. That this distinction is also a social construction and that gen-der orientations may be uncoupled from bodies is normally not considered, although sometimes addressed in discussions of, for example, masculinity (e.g. Connell, 1995).[4] It is, of course, possible that the subjects of Hall's study, for example, are very categorical in making distinctions between men and women (carriers of male and female bodies, respectively) but we don't feel convinced that the research material could not be read as more ambiguous in terms of how the subjects construct their words. Perhaps some statements were less clear in the constructions of people as belong-ing primarily to the categories as 'men' and 'women' – rather than as experienced/ inexperienced, outgoing/reserved, and relaxed/energetic/lazy.

   A problem with most of the gender research is that it has as an in-built assump-tion and part of the design is privileging the men/women distinction and there is rather little chance of discovering if the people being studied divide up the social world in ways where the sex distinction is not that crucial (Ridgeway and Correll, 2000b). There appears often to be little space in for example gender qualitative research for findings in which the distinction 'men' and 'women' is not crucial. In one Danish organization that we have studied, however, despite the interest of the researchers to address gender, the interviewees downplayed gender as significant and

emphasized the A- and B-teams, instead. The distinction was based on the common perception of whether people were suitable and had the potential for demanding tasks or not, and was, according to interviewees, unrelated to sex (Billing and Alvesson, 1994: Chapter 7). In another study, the management of some Swedish hospitals took the initiative of forming networks for female physicians. The initiative was met by mixed feelings among those concerned. Many of the women felt that it was not easy to define something specifically associated with being a female doctor. Some did not recognize themselves in the picture of women's problems that provided the rationale for the network: women as subordinated, as a unitary collective, as less individual, weaker and more burdened with difficulties than men. They were worried that the organized networks could reinforce stereotypical ideas about women as a very specific group (Sahlin-Andersson, 1997). Others were more positive about networks, although informal rather than organized and public, and it is possible that some downplayed the specificity of being a female physician or head physician and denied the significance of gender (sex). Nevertheless, this case also illustrates that the use of the distinction men/women as central in an organizational context may not reflect the understandings of those concerned and may have unfortunate effects. A considerable amount of openness about the meaning and significance of gender in a specific empirical context is therefore motivated – which of course does not prevent an anticipation that the men/women distinction as well as forms of masculinities/femininities may well be worth examining in most organizational settings.

Of course, the issue of the importance of men and women is not a question of yes or no (black or white), but often a matter of how much does it matter, in what way and from which perspective. One should not, however, proceed from a self-evident assumption that it always matters and that openness is confined to finding out exactly how. Balancing the idea 'Gender matters, how?' with 'Does gender matter, and if and when so is the case, how?' is an option.

Brief note on method

One possibility here is to try to take an open stance and investigate if and when social categorizations such as man, woman, masculine, feminine appear in the speech of those being studied – in everyday life and in research interviews. Here – in opposition to when the researcher makes subjects talk about gender – the focus should be on when and how the categorizations appear unobtrusively. This would allow a better empirical picture of the constructions of gender in the setting being studied. A considerable problem is of course that gender constructions may not be made explicit in talk. Not all communication is verbal and explicit. Gendered meanings may also be hidden and hard to interpret. A related problem is that detecting social construction processes through the study of everyday life or listening to very open or only weakly directed interview accounts may be very uneconomical for the researcher. It may take long time before interesting empirical material appears. This is, of course, in itself of some interest as it may indicate that gender construction processes are not very salient compared with other ways of constructing subjects,

social relations and organizational practices. The frequency of gender categories and identities in relationship to other membership categorizations (age, profession, organizational, etc.) may be studied. One option in interviews would be to start with relatively open questions, which permit checking the frequency of gender categorizations and then, in the second half of an interview, address more clearly gender-relevant issues.

One may for example start by asking 'How do you experience your workplace?' (interactions with others, ideal job etc.) and 'How do you think people feel about working in this organization?' Later more specific questions could be asked, e.g. 'How do you as a woman/man experience …?' One could then see if and when gender – in terms of statements about men and women or male and female values, orientations, etc. – emerges and then evaluate its significance. The latter, more directive question may be used in the final part of an interview in order to compare answers or get additional information. Of course, asking relatively open questions does not mean that there is no interviewer effect. Even if the researcher tries to be open and does not reveal much about interest there will be an interviewer effect. A feminist researcher will by her (or his) very presence probably trigger partly different responses than a non-feminist even if the same questions are asked, as the interviewee may respond to the interests and anticipations of the interviewer about gender themes involving female subordination and suffering being central.

These remarks only concern the production of empirical material. Even more crucial than thinking through this is of course the critical and reflexive interpretation of interviews. Interview accounts can never be taken at face value, as simple expressions of the 'truth', not even 'subjective' or personal truths.

Defamiliarization of 'men' and 'women'

Few would argue against the view that men and women differ in terms of chromosomes, sex organs and a few other bodily respects. What is to be disputed is whether these differences are a particular relevant starting point or focus for social analysis. The biology-based distinction may be more relevant for the gynaecologist than the student of gender. As Coser (1989) says, without going in the direction that we are heading for here:

> There is a tendency in feminist theorizing to extol one experience that women have in common: the experience of the female body and female sexuality. I believe that this is a variant of sociobiology, namely, the notion that women must be different because their body is different. Such an assumption, while being based on truth, is neither original nor helpful. (p. 203)

It can, of course, be argued that the female biology is ascribed a particular set of psychological and social meanings, bringing about the social construction of women. Sex (biology) leads to gender (a specific social version of men and women). But the very idea of separating sex and gender is that there is clear distance between them. Gender is not a distinct and uniform sex role imposed on the body through

some form of a standardized cultural mechanics. Nor is the distinction very meaningful if one assumes that there is a specific psychology being developed on the basis of biological sex differences, only marginally affected by cultural conditions. The social construction processes are complex, multifaceted, and heterogeneous. They vary over time and with class, race, occupation, organization, age, etc. The social construction of gender does not prevent some women from becoming tank commanders, janitors and suicide bombers, some men from becoming kindergarten teachers and strippers and both male and female managers showing a spectrum of different kinds of leadership behaviour. (Perhaps female managers are, in their work contexts, at least sometimes constructed as managers rather than women.) There are good reasons for agreeing with poststructuralists when they point at the problems with the use of universal concepts of men and women (Fraser and Nicholson, 1988; Scott, 1991).

Referring less to men and women

Almost every time signifiers such as man and woman are used, they impose a taken-for-granted unity. Normally it is assumed that identifying a subject in these terms is highly informative: 'Who has written this book? A man and a woman. Aha!' The assumption is shared by the public as well as most students of gender.

That there are strong cultural beliefs that the man/woman signifiers are crucial for creating order and understanding among human subjects does not require that gender studies should follow this perhaps culturally prejudiced assumption. Through doing so the researcher does not so much analyse cultural beliefs as reproduce them. A research focus on 'men' and 'women' may actually exaggerate or reinforce such beliefs through the tendency to assume and impose a fundamental division of human subjects into two sexes. As Ranson (2003) notes, in general 'even the more qualitative studies tend to mute differences among women, and among men if men are included'. The implicit focus continues to be the comparison between 'the women' and 'the men' (p. 25). When critically attacking the effects of the basic distinction between men and women, researchers sometimes reproduce or even reinforce the seemingly self-evident and inevitable nature of the distinction itself. One could, to continue the approach sketched briefly above, imagine gender studies in which any strong inclination to divide people into men and women is viewed as something worth systematically exploring. This is different from only looking at the negative effects of the distinction. When, how and why do the natives (not) refer to 'men' and 'women' is then not the point of departure but the object of study. The signifiers are the vocabulary of the natives, but not theoretical concepts used by the researcher in the efforts to accomplish an epistemological break and move beyond common sense knowledge.

The very idea of gender studies would be to contribute to reducing the significance or even, in some (and perhaps more) social situations and contexts, abolishing the identities of man and woman. As Deetz (1992b) expresses it, to make the 'gender distinction irrelevant at the place of work so that the identity of people constituted as women, as well as pay and routine treatment practices, would be based on other

dimensions of distinctions and other constituted identities' (p. 30). This would call for not using this kind of identification. Individuality would not be sacrificed to the definition of a person as a 'woman' – whether produced by others or by the person herself. On the other hand, the distinction men–women is a historical fact and effects such as sex segregation and pay discrimination have materialized in most organizations. In order to work against them, the woman identity is necessary for women to organize themselves and express their distinct group processes in a gendered society (p. 30). The woman label contributes to socially separate women and men, marginalizes women's experiences, denies personal complexity but also forms a basis for resistance and productive conflict, Deetz says. When feminists try to accomplish the latter, there are sometimes unintended effects in the direction of the former.

Such ideas may be controversial for advocates of specific women's experiences or of the idea that differences should be celebrated and that the challenge is to reduce gender inequality, not gender difference. However, there is an ongoing production of gender (sex) categorizations that probably exaggerates an expectation and sense of difference. When people are referred to as 'man' and 'woman' there is a constitutive effect on cognitive maps and identities. Minimally, researchers should not reinforce this without having thought this through carefully. Even – or perhaps even in particular – gender researchers with the best of intentions should be aware of this and be careful of not acting in a conservative way through dividing up the world in men and women.

One possibility in gender studies would be to minimize or at least reduce the use of the labels man and woman, except when used by the 'natives'. This may be done through the concepts of masculinities and femininities, which may be employed without noticing the sex of the subjects involved. We have warned of the problems involved in the use of these notions: they may reflect one's own (group) idiosyncrasies (what is masculine for one person or group may not be for another) and may easily be overused (almost everything in organizations may be seen as expressing masculine meanings). In the worst case, we get a gender student's 'truth' about gendered meanings quite different from other groups of people. A lot of the gender literature is sometimes inclined to practise what may be called an 'indexical approach' to gender. When interviewees utter certain words or the researcher wants to produce a particular representation these words are compared with a fixed set of masculine and – more seldom – feminine meanings and then plugged into a ready-made interpretive answer. Words or notions like hierarchy, rational, competitive, productive, penetrate, analytical, entrepreneurial, etc. are routinely viewed as instances and indications of masculinity. Gender students frequently use broad and ready-made categories of masculinities that sometimes reproduce predictable results, without critically examining the assumptions behind these.

There is a risk of gender studies producing (inscribing) gender stereotypes rather than revealing them through an excessive and insensitive theory-governed interpretation of the gendered meanings of everything in management, organization, work and society at large. One may therefore also try other vocabularies for labelling what is conventionally, but unreflectively, ascribed to man and woman. If one is interested in identifying bodies through conventional criteria, one may talk about the bio-man and the bio-woman. One may also focus the

perhaps most salient bodily differences, different sex organs, thus referring to them as a P-person and a V-person. P- and V-persons figure in all gender statistics and in the majority of all gender research, taking some (biological) criteria as the crucial issue for addressing gender (or rather sex). Of course, male, bio-man and P-person refers to the same 'object' (body-carrier), but the connotation and the effect of the language use vary – and this is crucial.

Many feminists have understood the specific female in terms of sets of 'motherly' experiences with children and nurturance bringing about a specific set of values or a leadership style, the interesting quality is the one of having been a primary care-taker (of infants/children) (Hartsock, 1987; Grant, 1988; Cockburn, 1991). Hartsock, for example, emphasizes the significance of a 'deep unity with another through the many-levelled and changing connections mothers experience with growing children' (p. 167). This experience of reproduction is routinely equated with 'women', but our point here is that we in research work should be very care-ful in using this imprecise term, overburdened with unexplored meanings and ambiguously referring to biological and socio-cultural aspects at the same time. We should also hesitate to talk about 'mothers' for the same reason (Fraser and Nicholson, 1988). The primary caregiver may be a P-person (the P-parent rather than the V-parent). There may also be two, in such cases often perhaps one P- and one V-person. Any naturalization of it being a V-person should be avoided. The P-person (conventionally defined as 'the father') may do a lot of nurturing ('mothering') – but this sometimes becomes hidden through the labels 'father' and 'mother'. That this has been the case historically and still is, does not require that one reproduces it. The present vocabulary works in this way. (Sometimes psychoan-alytic writers addressing the early mothering of the child realize that it may not nec-essarily be the biological mother and then use the mother label irrespective of the sex of the primary caregiver. This is not so good as the message that sticks is that the primary caregiver is 'naturally' the mother, namely the V-person.) Childbirth and breastfeeding are, of course, linked to V-persons but what happens after this short period in terms of division of labour between P- and V-persons is not self-evident. One should also be careful about not equating primary caregiving with V-persons and seeing this as the source of women's (V-persons) specific orienta-tions. Far from all V-persons have had these experiences. Some V-persons never get any children, many have not had any at a particular time, for example, at the time when they are studied.[5] *If* these experiences were central for the formation of a woman's 'essence' (a set of qualities associated with being a woman), then perhaps 25 per cent of the V-population in a typical organization (where some V-people have not had children yet and some of these never will) should not qualify for the label 'woman' (or, better, child bearer and primary caregiver), while a few men may do so.

There are, of course, other possible sources behind the construction of 'men' and 'women' (or how we label subjects) than those addressed here, e.g. early psychosex-ual and object relations' development, general socialization and/or role learning. One could argue that gender categorizations are 'everywhere' and there is no partic-ular master source behind gender effects apart from the all-present patriarchy. We here follow the claims made by gender students emphasizing the primary caregiving experiences. It should take us too far to discuss all the versions of how the possible

men- and women-specific may be understood. Also in these, there is not an auto-
matic relationship between body, specific processes of social constructions and a set
of characteristics/orientations. And while internationalization, identification, learn-
ing, etc., do not stand in a one-to-one relationship to biology, emphasizing the lat-
ter criteria and defining people through their bodies is, at least occasionally,
misleading. As cultural signifiers 'women' and 'men' are also often ambiguous and
multifaceted: a 'woman' may mean highly different things in different contexts and
for different groups (cf. woman as sex object, professional and mother). For many
feminists (Chodorow, Gilligan and Cockburn) 'woman' signifies something radically
different from 'man' in terms of subjectivity and orientation. For others (Kanter,
Reskin and Padavic) 'woman' is not different from 'man' apart from being
unfavourably located in organizations and an object of discrimination – an outcome
of a minority effect. What 'woman' (and 'man') refers to, except certain biological
equipment, is thus notoriously ambiguous and, in social science, it often means
a problematic tight linking of biological, psychological and social characteristics.
We need to work much more with unpacking and recognizing undecide-abilities
(cf. Alvesson, 2002b; Butler, 2004).

   An interesting example may illustrate that social practice may be given more
weight than body in how a subject is socially constructed. An American female
director of a public relations organization, who was sent to Sudan was invited for
a meal at a businessman's house. He treated her as he would treat a man, 'brought
her a cushion, served her food and washed her arms with rose water'. The female
director asked him if this was not a violation of the cultural norms in Sudan. To
this he replied, 'Oh, it's no problem, women do not do business, therefore, you are
not a woman' (Solomon, cited by Fagenson and Jackson, 1993: 311). Here we see
an example of the Western social construction of the subject as a female manager –
here the female/she categorization is salient – while the Sudanese constructs the
subject as a 'non-female' manager. Of course, within Western society too there are
variations in terms of when and how the subject is constructed as a female man-
ager. The case also illustrates other aspects, for example, that being a business per-
son and a foreigner might wipe out or marginalize signs of femininity/womanhood
and neutralize gender.

Male and female as poles

Let us continue our explorations of how one may address gender without privileg-
ing biology as the *ultimate* characteristic or essence – viewing the body as the focal
point of uniform social constructions – from which social analysis proceeds.
We will then move over to qualities associated with P- and V-persons of greater
relevance in organizations. In Chapter 4 we addressed masculine/male and feminine/
female values and cited, among others, Marshall (1993). She describes the relation-
ship between these and the two sexes as follows:

   I see male and female values as qualities to which both sexes have access,
   rather than the exclusive properties of men and women, respectively.

I believe that through biological and physical makeup, socialization, and social role, contemporary women are more often grounded in the female pole and men in the male pole. This patterning may well be contradicted or unclear for women with a strong patriarchal education. (p. 125)

Although we would perhaps have expressed ourselves a bit differently, we accept this account. If we continue to refrain from using the conventional men and women labels, we could investigate the grounding of subjects in terms of male- and female poling. It is possible to, for example, divide the human population into five categories: strong male-polers, weak male-polers, mixed (or neutral), weak female-polers and strong female-polers.[6] One could assume that more men/P-persons typically belong to the first two categories and women/V-persons to the last two. A limited number of individuals with an equal opportunity oriented up-bringing or working in mixed sex work areas may end up closer to the middle. One could, however, imagine the possibility, at present or in the near future, that P- and V-persons are not very clearly clustered around the first and the second pole, respectively. Sex (body) may say little about a person's orientations – and also what meaning that other people ascribe to a person with a particular sex (body). The trend seems to be that the body tells us less and less. Compared to 50 years ago, we can predict very little of a person's life trajectory or set of values based solely on sex. The divisional manager Gustaf and the advertising P-persons mentioned in Chapter 6, for example, appeared to express female rather than male pole-orientations, at least in terms of certain work values and social relations. The 'bossy' female (V-person) managers, even though according to commentators cited in Chapter 9 (e.g. Cockburn) they are not 'really' authoritarian but forced by male norms or structural problems, may have ended up at the male pole. (Alternatively, if one rejects efforts to 'explain away' this deviation from the norm of the good female, the orientations may have been there from the start of the career.) It is an open question how much the P/V distinction says about male/female poling. In a work and organization context – for example in relationship to leadership – how people are poled may be of more interest than their P- or V-identities, at least in some situations. But this may vary. Different distinctions may matter in different situations. V-persons may be a relevant category for understanding those exposed to sexual harassment. But perhaps male-poled V-persons are less exposed. (Presumably risks for being sexually harassed are related to looks and appearance. Might V-persons perceived as masculine be less at risk? They may, of course, receive sanctions for not 'doing gender' according to norms, but maybe in forms other than sexual harassment.)

Making the well-known strange

If the reader thinks that all this sounds strange and unfamiliar it does not mean that we as authors have failed. Defamilarization is an important part of critical research (Marcus and Fischer, 1986; Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). Rather than to adapt to and confirm established ideas and beliefs, these are disrupted. Taken-for-granted, common sensical ideas are challenged. The well known, natural and self-evident should be approached in a manner making it appear strange, arbitrary and unfamiliar. There are, as Deetz (1992b) points out, some reasons for sticking to the established category

of woman, but it is equally if not more important to disrupt ongoing discourses fix-ing human identities and social relations in 'men' and 'women', thereby weakening the impact of this organizing principle. Access to an alternative vocabulary, such as the one suggested here, may be a way forward. One may argue that it is not vocabu-lary that matters as much as the reasoning and understanding of the words used. That is true, but what is important here is the discourse – the combination of the vocabulary and line of thinking. Words like 'woman' and 'man' hold a strong grip on thinking and that contributes easily to conservatism and muddled thinking, including the strong tendency to privilege biology even if one is interested in social construc-tion. Experimenting with words, including using a de-familiarizing vocabulary facil-itates questioning established frameworks and is a part of the development of new discourses.

Our purpose is not, however, to claim that the vocabulary suggested here is neces-sarily the best or that 'conservative' signifiers such as 'man' and 'woman' should be skipped altogether.[7] We are more interested in challenging some established ideas, suggesting rethinking and illustrating how this can be done. We realize that talk about 'man' and 'woman' also has some virtues, as Deetz (cited above) mentions. We can hardly completely avoid using them. One possibility is the use of alternative and varied vocabularies. One could imagine texts alternating between the familiar and the defamiliarizing vocabularies, between (cautiously) using the word 'women' to encourage women-oriented demands and to use other vocabularies (bio-women, V-persons) to encourage liberation from conventional wisdom and the conserving and stereotyping tendencies of privileging biology and the identities so forcefully imposed by it.

It is important to deal with the tension between challenging and reproducing the dominant ideas and attitudes. We would argue that in virtually every aspect of research work, researchers are either preserving or challenging concepts and ideas, by taking things for granted and reproducing status quo or by de-familiarizing their material, that is regarding the state of affairs not as 'natural' but as remarkable, exotic and changeable (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). Equally within this area it is motivated to pay special attention to how the area is handled. Otherwise there is a risk that preservation of the status quo is encouraged.

Defamiliarization may, of course, be accomplished in other ways. The use of cross-cultural examples is one possibility, underutilized in this book. The case with the American businesswoman in Sudan is, for example, instructive. Placing men and women in the 'wrong' settings may also be useful. Studies of men in 'women's occupa-tions' and vice versa have gone some way along the road, but they do not always accomplish the effect of defamiliarizing the reader. The story sometimes appears as pre-dictable, based on ingredients such as scepticism, resistance and problems facing the person crossing gender lines. Through paying attention to detail in ethnographic studies of specific processes – rather than summarizing interview responses – a better effect may be accomplished. A good example of this is Finder (cited in Mumby, 1988), a man who worked as a secretary for a time. His fellow workers were unable to accept that he 'was just a secretary'. His accounts of their reactions are revealing. Another example is provided by Pringle (1993), who reports from the setting of a university committee:

At each meeting Pat, the secretary, not only took minutes but frequently left the room to make telephone calls and send faxes. Pat's role was clearly to do the bidding of the chair. Pat did all this cheerfully and was warmly thanked by members of the committee at the end for taking care of them. The work was secretarial in the broadest sense, including organizing lunches and daily travel arrangements, and helping to clear the cups away from morning tea. But Pat was a man. And nobody thought it at all odd that he should be doing this work. It was, after all, a high-level, confidential committee chaired by the Vice-Chancellor. Pat was a besuited, slightly swarted man in his late forties, not in any way effeminate. He was doing work that was clearly defined as appropriate to a man, and he was formally classified, not as a secretary but as an administrative officer. (p. 128)

Another possibility would be to write studies in such a way so that the sexual physical characteristics of the subjects involved are not focused. Signifiers such as he, she, man and woman, P-person and V-person may just be left out. Our case K in Chapter 5 is one example. Gendered meanings and experiences may be addressed in other ways, e.g. through describing and interpreting masculine and feminine meanings in talk, action and practices.

To round off, we make two overall suggestions in this and the previous sections: avoid privileging the body as the ultimate criterion for making distinctions between subjects and aim for the de-familiarization of established lines of thinking. The first point may facilitate the latter, but there are, as briefly indicated above and explored further below, other ways of accomplishing defamiliarization.

The social deconstruction of gender

If our interest goes beyond focusing on body differences and the accompanying law-like significance of the men–women distinction, it is important to ask where does gender – a set of regulatory ideas dividing up the social world in men and women, the masculine and the feminine – come from? Why is it so important? What are the effects? These are questions sometimes addressed by students of gender, although many look only at the effects. How gender may disappear (as a master sign or category) is less clearly addressed or analysed. As a social phenomenon gender does not just exist, but is created. According to most students of gender, the creations are grounded in two types of division of labour, in the household, including primary caregiving, and in the labour market.[8] Crucial for the former is that household work has traditionally been seen as primarily women's responsibility while labour markets are characterized by the segregation and subordination of women. Gender is then created through women/V-persons being constructed as mothers and family-oriented, being located in 'female' jobs, in particular service jobs (including paid caregivers of children, the old and the sick) and in subordinated positions. In other words, the more V-persons being primary (and secondary) caregivers, (unpaid) household workers, gather in female jobs and in positions of relative subordination, the more gender – as a distinct, socially significant category. The less of these divisions between V- and P-persons and other

kinds of sex-specific positioning – the less gender. Gender may even vanish – as of social interest in relationship to a range of work/organization issues – with social changes that radically alter divisions in households and labour markets. This would mean that, at least in these contexts, 'the code of sexual marks would no longer be discriminating' (Cornell and Turschwell, 1987). It loses social significance. We certainly are far from that, and some would argue that biological or biology-based psychological differences may always create some consequences upholding the significance of gender (sex), but there may still be radical changes on the way. This is what equality policies try to accomplish, although often in a rather contradictory manner.

In Sweden, the policy of equality has two elements, one quantitative and one qualitative. The first says that there should be an equal distribution between men and women within all areas in society, including educations and occupations. This means around 50:50 (no less than 40 per cent of the underrepresented sex). The second element means that women's and men's knowledge, experiences and values are to be used and have an equal impact within all areas of society. The problem is that the first element contradicts the latter, if (which is normally the case) it is read as saying that men and women have different knowledge, experiences, etc. (If they don't, there is little point in raising the issue.) Different knowledge, experiences and so on are outcomes of participation in various areas in a society and if a 50:50 distribution were accomplished, very little of knowledge and experiences would be gender specific.[9] Gender as an organizing principle would actually not be present (in the areas referred to), and there would be little point in bothering about and studying gender, in most work and organizational contexts. Sex would be relevant in the contexts of sexuality, childbirth and a few sex-specific diseases. The idea of addressing a feminine style of leadership or women's values in work would make little sense, except in history.[10]

All this may sound as rather remote, perhaps for some, a utopian dream, a nightmare for others, and pretty confusing for most. Nevertheless, the relationship between the degree of segregation and the construction of gender may be of interest in a much more immediate context, for example to understand women and leadership. As has been said, a lot of talk about V-persons having certain values and orientations in work is based on the idea that these are rooted in experiences from the family sphere, in particular with children, and from secondary socialization. Writers on women and leadership say that skills developed in the private sphere are not only transferable, but are also an advantage in managing organizations. Bringing up children and managing home and family leads to the endurance of stress, the ability to manage diverse tasks, intuition, problem-solving and skills in communication and coping with relations (Helgesen, 1990; Sharma, 1990, cited in Townley, 1994). Leaving aside the issue whether all or even most people are affected that positively in home and family life in terms of development of qualities – family life appears as rather neurotic sometimes – the idea of a connection between these experiences and a particular set of work orientations is interesting. Let us explore this line of reasoning in terms of tendencies to obscure gender and, relatedly, the meaningfulness of identifying people as 'men' and 'women'.

The social reconstruction of gender – from women to primary caregivers

Rather than assuming that there exists some democratic leadership gene in the biological set-up of women, the *specific experiences* associated with the location of V-persons in the gender division of labour, in particular in the household/labour market divide and being primary caregivers for children, may account for the tendencies of there being a distinct female orientation, for example, in leadership.[11] At least this is what is claimed by most believers in women being inclined to lead in a particular way or favouring a set of values more generally. As should be clear from previous chapters, this is an assumption that is not necessarily valid, but let us leave doubts aside and see how this can be conceptualized.

These experiences should not, however, be equated with women (V-persons) as a group. The aforementioned qualities, or other family-grounded values or skills, may be viewed as outcomes of the profoundness and intensiveness of experiences with 'family work', including childrearing and household work. A career woman, childless or with one child, having hired help to assist with caregiving and household work, and sharing the responsibility with the husband hardly develops any substantial skills as those mentioned above, at least not in the same way as a woman, with several children, spending much time with them, managing the entire household with little or no help. In this last case specific female experiences are profound and the chance of developing skills contingent thereupon large. Of course, general socialization effects may also matter for the development of female skills, but if not materialized in gender-specific behaviour in relation to family work the effect may be weak, especially in terms of skills learning. As argued by Markus (1987: 96) it is 'real life-activities through which the typical and determinant experiences of different groups are being formed'. We could here make a distinction between primary caregivers (PCG) (as a present or past major experience) and other people with less of such experiences or resulting qualities. Within a family (and we have in mind here a unit with up to two adults/parents) there may be two primary caregivers, namely if both are intensively involved in taking care of children and the household. If one parent takes on most of this job, then he or she is the PCG. The world can then be divided into PCGs and others (and perhaps a middle group, recognizing that some are in between PCGs and others, having some caregiving experience, but not so much). At least this division could be seen as relevant in some contexts, for example, when assessing leadership ideas as expressed by most of those advocating a female values approach.

Given the far from perfect correlation between family work experiences and biological sex, emphasis on the former for leadership style, for example, would motivate that the focus is not on women (V-persons) but on the intensiveness of the family work associated with being a PCG. Perhaps a better focus than 'woman' or V-person would be PCG person, and this is not defined by sex or body but by a high degree of family work and childcare experience. (Such work experience may have been gained in family work or as paid labour, for example, by employment in a day-care centre.) Traditionally, and still today, there is a strong overlap between V and PCG-persons, but the two categories are not identical. At a particular point a large group

of all the V persons on the labour market may not be (or have been) PCGs: some Vs never have children; some have not yet had them at the time of a study and some Vs with children may not be PCGs (as the spouse may be the PCG or they may have 'servants', send the children to a boarding school at an early age, etc.). So the gap between V and PCG qualities may be significant in many cases.

According to the argument, it is really the orientations and quality that follow from PCG work rather than anything inherently female (connected to the female body) that accounts for a particular leadership style, if now the believers in feminine leadership have got it (partly) right. It is possible that the insignificant or weak sex differences in leadership reported by academic research, treating bio-women and bio-men en bloc, to some extent may be explained by the fact that a rather large group of female managers are not PCGs. At least many do not have children and therefore may not have developed the orientation and skills seen as so central for 'women' by authors on female leadership (according to a large group of authors, addressed earlier). It is possible that a comparison between PCGs (most of these V-people) and non-PCGs (some of these V-persons) would show clearer differences in leadership than a body-based comparison of V- and P-persons. It is not unlikely that the pay and promotion gaps between males and females may look differently if one would choose PCG and non-PCG (or add medium-level PCG) as key distinctions. One would at least expect V/non-PCG persons doing better on the labour market in terms of pay and promotion than V/PCGs. Interesting questions would be how V/non-PCGs (females with no children and not much family work experience) would score compared with P/PCGs (males that are primary caregivers).[12]

Claims are made by advocates of female leadership that 'the full potential of feminine leadership will only be realized when a large number of women managers begin to assert their true identity and use their special talents' (Sharma, 1990, cited by Townley, 1994: 151). We doubt that it would work in this way, because the full utilization of any women-specific orientations in managerial labour would undermine the basis for developing these orientations. If women moved into managerial jobs in great numbers they would have limited possibilities in sustaining or reproducing these special skills and talents. Their 'true identities' would change or be diffused, i.e. be made 'untrue'. Extensive family work and managerial work are hard to combine, not only at the same time, but also in terms of transformations over time. In principle, one may imagine a woman (V-person) being strongly immersed in family work for significant time periods and then embarking on a managerial career. Such a development is presumably not so common (as those doing much family work over a long periods are seldom promoted to senior positions), even if authors celebrating the value of female skills for managerial work were successful in their rhetoric. The problem is that the female-specific orientations and skills are contingent upon the sex-based household/employment division of labour. As Calás and Smircich (1993), Meyerson and Kolb (2000) and others note, the idea of introducing the feminine-in-management is grounded in the feminine defined by patriarchy. If an increasing number of women should occupy senior positions in organizations, it is likely that fewer younger women – at least among those who may be judged as having managerial talents – would be prepared to take primary responsibility for home and family to the extent needed in order to develop

substantial female skills and orientations.[13] The very inclination of women to do major parts of family work is contingent upon a general division of labour in which women's 'natural' place is to primarily be responsible to the family and children and, contingent thereupon, on relatively subordinate positions in organizations.

To summarize, most views on gender-specific orientations see these as an effect of men and women doing radically different things in family work and on the labour market. If the division of labour associated with sex segregation was to be weakened, for example through more women occupying senior managerial jobs, the material basis for the development of gender-specific orientations would vanish. There may be a basis for 'female leadership', a distinct 'style' of female managers as long as women's (V-persons') more significant experiences follow from them not being or becoming managers (in great numbers or at a senior level, at least). To the extent that V-persons were promoted to senior jobs, it would presuppose as well as lead to V-persons being less engaged in family work – which would for these V-persons become less sex-specific and gendered – leading to a reduction of gender-specific experiences, orientations and skills.[14] The social importance of gender would then be weakened, as an organizing principle and a source of different orientations. Even though we are very far from it, gender – in the sense of a socially significant category accounting for division of labour and variation in values and styles in organizational and other social contexts – may even fade away over time. In a few organizations the significance of gender is not very great and one could say that gender here, compared with most other contexts, is deconstructed (or never constructed) rather than constructed (cf. Billing and Alvesson, 1994: Chapter 7; Blomqvist, 1994). To support the opportunities of human beings to decide how they want to live their lives – without norms about sex and cultural definitions of what is 'masculine' and 'feminine' directing them – makes it important not to naturalize gender. Rather than privileging the biology-based distinction between men and women, one could aim for an open perspective on the processes constructing as well as deconstructing it. A possible outcome would be to make the distinction not only less rigidly but also less frequently used.

The situational qualities of gender

Understanding gender calls for a much more process and situation-specific view than is common. Ideas about static forms of gender divisions, masculinity and femininity as expressed in cultures and identities may seriously underestimate the situation-bounded and varied nature of ways of doing – or not doing – gender. We have in this book argued for a process-sensitive and interpretive approach, in some ways similar to the idea that we 'do' gender (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Gender is not just a mechanical effect of numbers or structures or a matter of socialization or care-giving practices (or absence of such) equipping people with a fixed set of orientations, although institutionalized practices tend to make us do gender in particular ways (Martin, 2006) and to engage in ongoing identity construction work.

Although many or perhaps almost all people still frequently and sometimes even consistently live in line with gendered cultural meanings and identities, more and perhaps most people are less fettered by rigid gender lines than previous generations

(Deutsch, 2007; Hall et al., 2007). It is at least the case in the Western world that we mainly have in mind in this book. It would be going too far to say that gender as a strong imprinting mechanism on people has been replaced by a wide set of available lifestyles making it possible to choose more or less heavily gendered or ungendered versions of how to think, feel, value and act. Still, gendered meanings, distinctions and guidelines for being and striving are key features of society and organizations. But they must be understood as ambiguous, complex, varied, inconsistent and fragmented. This leads to an interest not only in how and with what effects gender is constructed, but also to *if* and *when* gender is constructed.

One interesting illustration of this is a case study of female and male entrepreneurs in Canada. In the study (referred to at a couple of places in the book), Cliff et al. (2005) show that male and female-headed firms do not differ in terms of organizational practices. The sex of the owner had no effect on the degree of bureaucracy (hierarchy and formality) or femininity (attentiveness and responsiveness to the needs of others and relational orientations). This contradicts the gender-stereotypical idea of specific female values or preferences playing a big role. As the people studied were the owners of their firms, this is not easily explained by organizational conditions beyond the control of managers (most working at the middle level), preventing female orientations from coming through and forcing female managers to adapt to male norms. Even if owners face external constraints – available models, expectations from the environment – they should have considerable discretion. So the study supports the no-difference view of sex and leadership. But most interesting was that there was significant difference between male and female entrepreneurs in how they expressed their values and motives. The female owners were more inclined to describe their values and ambitions in stereotypically feminine terms, emphasizing how leaders should be responsive to and empower the growth of subordinates. The male owners more often used masculine terms to describe their values and ideals.

This illustrates a discrepancy between what is being said and what is being done. One can imagine a separation between the three levels or domains of talk, identity and practice. Talk may follow gender scripts, namely broadly available rules and recipes for how one talks about things in a specific setting (Alvesson, 2003), while practices may follow business imperatives. Identity may circle somewhere in the middle, probably contingent upon context and in which capacity the person is being called upon. In specific, work-oriented settings, gender may be less salient and other identities (supplier, expert, owner, manager) are more central. In other settings, when more in general asked to describe one's ideals, gender identity may be more salient and trigger responses. This points at gender being a much more temporal quality in life and in perhaps especially work and organization. People fluctuate between gender and non-gender awareness and identity, doing gender part of the time, but as a business owner probably not that frequently. At least gender identity did not seem to put imprints on the ways in which these organizations were designed and how they worked.[15]

Another, although much smaller case, also illustrates how gender is being done in organization in a more situation-specific way (Billing, 2006). A female manager returned to work after maternity leave. According to advocates of the feminine

values and a special female leadership style, one would assume that she would bring with her a strong inclination to be attentive to the needs of others, being strongly relation-oriented and express and use these qualities in relation to her subordinates. But she did not. Instead her work became more instrumental and effective, with little patience for unnecessary time-consuming interactions. The explanation was very simple. With a small child, the female manager was very eager not to work too long hours and felt it important to be effective at work. Those experiences with a small child that according to many feminists should lead to strong feminine orientations and skills had the opposite effect of making the person in a sense more 'masculine' at work (although the relevance of the term 'masculine' is debateable here). In this and in many other cases, it is not a uniform and consistent 'essence-like' set of qualities summarized as femininity or masculinity that guide people – through culture or identity.

The doing, undoing and non-doing of gender must be born in mind, and a considerable part of all gender studies seems to have taken this insufficiently into account. One problem is that gender students often face the people they study in their capacity as gendered beings. The topic is often women or – less frequently – men. When addressed as such, a particular identity becomes temporarily frozen and viewpoints, assessments and truths following from this become produced in interview statements and perhaps also questionnaire responses and behaviour in experiments. Whether the responses cover a broader set of experiences or valid facts about other situations than the site of the study or as associated with the specific social identity (as woman, or man) invoked in the situation, can sometimes be debated. A more variation and process sensitive approach would be less convinced that we can generalize across situations and be open to the possibility that when people talk to researchers about gender (or clearly gendered themes), what is being communicated may have little bearing on what is being experienced and communicated in other situations.

A few comments on planned change

The reader may wonder what should one then be doing in order to change gender relations and create equal opportunities. Despite our scepticism to a large part of feminist literature for painting social reality in unnuanced dark colours (over a generation or so there have been radical changes in at least most Western countries) we agree about the need for change. Far too frequently people still put others and themselves in gender roles and gender as a regulatory system for being and acting is too dominant. Reducing gender as a regulation mechanism in work and organizational life – 'undoing gender' – is important. Proceeding from Butler's (2004: 1) view of gender 'as a practice of improvisation within the scene of constraint' one could see this as widening the scene and reducing (perhaps even abolishing) the constraints.

There are plenty of ideas for how to accomplish gender changes in organizations. Some focus on how to increase the options for women to get and function in leadership positions (e.g. Eagly and Carli, 2007) while others offer ideas on how to improve their situation more generally (e.g. Ridgeway and Correll, 2000b). Meyerson and

Kolb (2000) suggest four 'frames' in an overall framework for broadly oriented interventions for gender changes in organizations:

1 Equip the woman or liberal individualism

Here the assumption is that many women lag behind men in qualifications, due to shortcomings in the right education, experiences or network contacts. The idea is to strengthen the qualifications of females so that they can compete as equals with men on the labour market. Not only technical skills, but also social and political aspects are considered in various interventions aiming to reduce females' disadvantages.

2 Create equal opportunity or liberal structuralism

Also within this frame, women's disadvantages are seen as the crucial issue, but these are viewed as not related to individual women but to structural conditions that disfavour them, for example, biased recruitment procedures, flawed sexual harassment policies, lack of flexible work arrangements in relation to childbirth and childcare. The solution is revision of structural arrangements.

3 Value difference or women's standpoint/advantage

This frame shifts focus from conditions that are seen as reducing the chances of women through creating (negative) differences to seeing these differences as a potential advantage. This is the 'special contribution' view of female leadership as addressed in Chapter 8. Rather than seeing females' differences as the problem they are the solution, a source of added value. The obstacle is that the attributes, values and skills associated with women are devalued. The way forward is then to upgrade them.

4 Resisting and revising the dominant discourse or 'post equity'

The fourth frame means a more complex and comprehensive approach to change. Here organizations – objectives, strategies, structures, cultures, interaction patterns – are viewed as inherently gendered. They reflect in various ways the historical domination of men and their experiences are built into the various arrangements, practices and lines of thinking. But institutionalized sex differences are not just fixed. They are active, ongoing social construction processes. Gender patterns are not essentially given but are open for the reinterpretation and renegotiation of meaning. The challenge then is to critically scrutinize formal and informal work practices, symbols and interactions and open them for discussion and reconsideration. This can mean a 'de-masculinization' of for example, views of

strategy, team or leadership. This would open up positions and practices for both sexes and reduce masculine domination in organizations.

Meyerson and Kolb (2000) argue that all four frames need to be considered but emphasize the fourth one. This is fully in line with our thinking, drawing attention to the qualitative, interpretive nature of gender change.

This framing means that we see the situation a bit differently from those believing in the power of numbers and increasing the number of females in senior positions. Many see equal opportunity as a matter of getting the statistics right. Ironically, this can be referred to as body-counting (Alvesson and Billing, 2002). The ideal of getting as close as possible to 50 per cent representation of the earlier under-represented sex in an attractive category (executives, board members, high income earners) seems mechanistic. It easily encourages crude measures. It mainly concerns a relatively small group of people. Symbolically it is bad that only 2 per cent of all CEOs of the largest 500 US firms are females, but the very large majority of all females are still not candidates for the 240 extra positions if half of these should be reserved for women. For all those outside this very tiny elite group the proportion of females at the very top is of limited concern. Reducing heavily gendered orientations and practices may lead to other divisions of labour and other sex ratios in the labour market and in organizations, but as we see it number changes are not a primary value in itself. These are secondary to changes of structures, cultures and practices. Making people aware of problematic arrangements and opening up to new choices and reducing the pressure to comply to sex roles and the forcing of others into these would be a key issue. This can to some extent be facilitated by a changed sex ratio, so we are not denying that numbers matter, but we don't see it as the central concern and not as an end-value in itself. Equal opportunity is not the same as men and women following the same career tracks and ending up in the same positions.

The three levels of institutions, interactions and identities need to be considered in change projects. Let us briefly repeat. Institutions relate to objectives, structures and cultural norms. Interactions capture how relations, expectations and ways of producing and co-producing gendered and non-gendered ways of being look like. Identities refer to the self-understanding, feelings and cognitions of people. All three can bear stronger or weaker imprints of gender and of ideas working towards gender symmetry or asymmetry. Needless to say, the three levels interact and are also intertwined. Working only on one level is seldom productive.

This is acknowledged by most people, although some focus on institutional change and argue for the use of quotas and positive discrimination as a way forward. This has the advantage of being specific and measurable and fits into bureaucratic and mass medial logics. As we see it, strong reliance on this is far too mechanistic to work. To the extent there is a strong gendering in society it influences at the depth the orientations of men and women.

Apart from the historical effects of organizations and working life, we have extra-organizational conditions making it easier for men and more difficult for females in their occupational career trajectories. In families, consumption and mass media, there are strong gender-stereotypical pressures, often difficult not only for individuals but also for organizations to fully counteract. The reconstruction of gender in organizations can not entirely undo the sometimes much stronger effects

of advertising and mass media encouraging sex-stereotypical orientations. Gendered educational and occupational choices are still significant and not so few females appear to give (or are pressed to give) a higher priority to family and private life. Sometimes the bonding with in particular small children appears to profoundly affect females (more than men) (Fearfull and Haynes, 2006). One should not exaggerate this – and also be aware that this is easily used as an excuse. It is nevertheless tricky to push for a strong improvement in the numerical representation of females – motivations, qualification processes and identity constructions need to be in line with the changes. Going one or two steps back from quick fixes increasing the number of females – and resisting number-crunching body-counters eager to exhibit improved figures – is a good idea.

A specific problem here is the tendency for people assessing those believed to be selected or promoted as part of a quota system more negatively than otherwise (Heilman et al., 1997). Suspicions that a person is promoted less because of good merits and due more to improving sex ratio or political correctness may harm interactions and identities of the persons promoted. Policies focusing on a higher proportion of females may therefore backfire easily if improved numbers are followed by increasing scepticism of the promoted females.[16]

Final words

In this and the previous chapter we have argued for trying to avoid gender and organization being reduced to a sub-speciality for the truly committed. Instead we have advocated the close interaction between gender and other perspectives. It is claimed that most areas of organization, management and working life studies may be enriched through considering gender aspects – at the same time as only focusing on gender, or exclusively using a gender vocabulary one may lose sight of important aspects. Not only class and race, often mentioned in gender research, but also organizational performance and survival need to be considered. It is seldom the case. Also when researchers try to avoid 'gender reductionism' and stress a variety of considerations, issues of effectiveness and production are neglected. Collinson and Hearn (1996) for example, in an introduction to a reader on men, masculinities and management, stress that the chapters 'do not suggest that management or indeed organizations are simply the product of gender relations – hence the interrelated focus on other questions such as class, culture, hierarchy and sexuality' (p. 18). Apparently, management and organization are not seen as products of the tasks they are supposed to carry out or competition and/or subject to other economic constraints and performance pressures. In particular, those more radical versions of gender and organization studies that challenge current forms of masculine domination and offer an important counterpicture to prevalent norms should benefit from considering more seriously organizational accomplishments not only in terms of oppression of low-level employees, the turning of citizens into consumers and exploitation of nature, but also contributions to a high material standard of living. This material orientation and the contemporary belief that a capitalist market economy is best capable of achieving it, may well be the major constraint to radical transformations of gender

relations. Competition between companies means strong incentives for employers and managers to prefer employees that can give priority to work performances (although, of course, less rational considerations also affect recruitment and promotion choices). A person having responsibility for small children will be disadvantageous to somebody that does not have this constraint. This is not necessarily a matter of prejudice or ill will from an employer – although prejudices and other forms of biases may exaggerate the significance of this disadvantage – but is inherent in a market economy. The sex of the employer may be of little significance here.

Such issues need to be critically examined in gender studies, where many at present pursue a too narrow and selective view on organizational matters. Only the negative side of dominant forms of management and organizational practices associated with inequality and subordination of women is highlighted. Transformations going beyond the more effective use of females in organizations governed by the same goals and technologies under the performance pressures of market economy, may well call for a radical change in which qualitative values such as balance between family and work life and ecological sustainable development are upgraded at the expense of affluent consumption. This seems to be implied in the more progressive feminists ideas, for example, alternative values, but the costs and conflicts associated with such a development are seldom sufficiently addressed. Ramsey and Calvert (1994), for example, argue for non-hierarchical organizational structures, a new balance of organizational-individual relationships so that the needs of individuals are better served and so on, but there is no awareness or discussion that the realization of these principles may lead to some problems or call for a lower priority of other values, for example, organizational competitiveness and performances, which of course are crucial for wages. Some of the other critical organization theorists, drawing on the Frankfurt tradition (e.g. Horkheimer and Adorno, 1947; Marcuse, 1964; Habermas, 1971, 1984) are more explicit on this account (e.g. Deetz, 1992a; Alvesson and Willmott, 1996), but this literature is seldom utilized by feminists not inclined to draw upon non-feminist literature, despite its apparent relevance (Martin, 2003).[17] If one comes from the critical theory tradition, some of the more radical feminist ideas feel similar, but less novel than they appear.

A development towards integrating gender ideas with other critical strands as well as more conventional approaches to organizational culture, leadership, strategic management and service management, may weaken the project of improving the conditions of women in core respects such as closing the gender gap in pay and promotion and counteracting sexual harassment and devaluation of women. This is a significant risk that needs to be taken seriously. But a heavy emphasis on these qualities may run against a broader consideration of forms of masculine domination that actually may have led to the strong significance of values such as pay and promotion. A strong pro-women orientation and an emphasis on V-persons' issues and interests may also – apart from neglecting the enormous diversity among women and the complexity and inconsistency of interests – one-sidedly reinforce the image of V-persons as powerless victims and men as, if not oppressors, then at least benefiting from and reproducing structures of oppression and inequality. Arguably, even though many men's better access to positions of privilege is beyond doubt and is a powerful source of gender conservatism, P-persons' interests in reproducing the presently dominating gender

regimes (and the distribution of privileges/disadvantages attached to these) are far from clear-cut. Strains leading to shorter lives and less fulfilling contacts with children are substantive losses. Many gender studies come close to being as blind and deaf when it comes to these issues as mainstream social science. Rules for living gendered lives also constrain many men. To the extent that dominating masculinities play a role in developing money and consumption-oriented social institutions with severe effects on the environment and also on social relations, it is an open question whether most men (P-persons) will necessarily want to reproduce these institutions without any form of hesitation or ambivalence.

We have pointed earlier at an inclination in gender studies to address women's situation, experiences and voices and masculinities, but less so men's situation and viewpoints and femininities. Women's voices are treated sensitively and taken seriously. In the case of many standpoint theorists the situation and experiences of females are even seen as a source of superior knowledge, almost being viewed as a matter of being means knowing, a rather problematic assumption (Skeggs, 1997). A focus on women's situation and experiences is often motivated and to the extent males can be said to belong to and be representative for a privileged category exercising domination, a less empathetic approach seems to be called for.

Not all men are only or mainly into the field of producing, reproducing or benefiting from unequal gender relations. Also when males get senior positions, have high wages, spend limited time with children and are busy working with management, strategies and try to accomplish organizational effectiveness there are gendered aspects around this situation that are worth studying and taking seriously. This seems worthwhile partly in order to get more in-depth knowledge of how gender patterns associated with male privilege work, but also in order to get a less one-sided and less predictable understanding of how the 'human side' of this is experienced. For some feminists, being male is just a privilege (e.g. Reskin and Padavic, 1994), but there is probably another side to this as well. In one sense, given values such as freedom, independence, privacy, good social relations, spare time, one could see many men as 'victims' of careerist ideas, of harsh regimes associated with market competition, shareholder pressure, expectations of family and social networks to uphold a certain position and standard of living, making top people quite vulnerable and having much to lose. Privileges and sacrifices sometimes go together and dominant forms of masculinity means discipline and subordination to norms and standards. An interesting option could be to view these people as not just privileged men but as 'privileged victims' or an 'imprisoned elite' where the darker side of existence could also be explored from a gendered point of view.

At the same time, females should not only be considered as the second sex, as a combination of victims of oppressive gender structures and as carriers of insights about gender relations whose voices should be taken seriously. Of course, most versions of feminist analysis are not guilty of naive assumptions or one-sided outlooks and, as said, there is often reason to upgrade women's points of view, given the traditional neglect in their asking research questions and underrepresentation in accounts and stories about work, organization and management.

The understanding of gender would benefit from first, listening carefully to a variety of subjects (of both sexes) and second, doing so critically, for example,

assessing what they are saying and how one can use their accounts (as 'truths', indicators of dominating discourses, signs of problematic forms of consciousness, self-serving stories, etc.).

In a similar way, when there are accounts indicating problematic features, like authoritarian leadership behaviour, this is often interpreted quite differently if associated with men or women. For men this is indicated to be a reflection of their essence, how they really are. But for women, when examples of such orientations or behaviour are spotted, it is seen as a reflection of a need to adapt to a situation. So when men behave in a masculine way, it is how they are, while a woman doing the same does so because she has to adapt or be repelled, as Cockburn (1991) says about females exhibiting 'non-female' orientations: 'Once such women have made a decision to compete with men there is a tendency for them gradually to take on masculine traits' (p. 69).

One could of course also suggest here that both men and women exhibit behaviour at work that is a complex mix of orientations, values and styles that is part of their personality, that they have learnt over the years during upbringing and socialization plus early work experiences in addition to a pressure to adapt to the structures and contingencies under which they work. This may be different in vital respects for women and men. An asymmetrical reasoning saying that for men it is their essence and for women it is the force to adapt that are the major mechanisms in operation seems to work with double standards for explaining – and explaining away – the experiences, values and behaviours of men and women (or P-persons and V-persons).

Gender organization theory should therefore be careful about expressing anti-male orientations that may well be one-sided and unfair and alienate men. This does not mean, of course, that we want to discourage critical studies of men, masculinities and oppression. On the contrary, this is a crucial task for gender studies and call for well thought through and credible research. Needless to say, many men bear a very large responsibility for a range of problems in contemporary society and are advocates and carriers of highly questionable values and objectives, including those leading to exploitation of people and nature. But there are also other tasks and aspects to consider. As said, gender too often means women, although masculinities are fairly often targeted also for critical analysis. Both sexes need to be invoked in developing capacities to reflect critically about the gendered nature of society – and how dominant forms of masculinities and femininities constrain our identities and prestructure our orientations behind our backs.

Notes

1 Openness if and when 'leadership' is the best interpretation for what goes on is to be recommended here (Alvesson, 1996b). It is actually rather few actions or interactions that are self-evidently best understood as 'leadership'. As mentioned in Chapter 7, the inclination to focus on leadership may be an expression of dominant masculine ideas.

2 See Ross-Smith and Kornberger's (2004) discussion of the discourse of strategic management.

3   Inconsistencies are, of course, hard to avoid. Too much rigour may lead to reductionism. We do not claim to have avoided inconsistencies either. Sometimes they are, however, important to address critically.

4   To repeat, that there are biological differences between 'men' and 'women' is beyond dispute, even though most of the criteria used are less robust than they appear (Lorber, 1993). What is of interest in a social context is the meaning and consequence of certain differences. Constructions are partly a matter of picking out and privileging a particular distinction. That the physical distinction strong/weak or being large or small in terms of body size is a less salient theme in social construction processes than the penis/vagina or chromosome related distinction – at least in most contemporary work/organization contexts – tells us that 'objective', natural distinctions are in themselves of little significance.

5   In addition, it is possible that the imprints of bearing and rearing children may differ considerably between persons.

6   We use this example, as to some extent the entire section, for pedagogical purposes rather than as a definite suggestion for developments in the field. We have little sympathy for one-dimensional masculinity/femininity scales. Masculinities/femininities (male/female values) are perhaps better seen as dynamic, interactive orientations, that social processes invoke, rather than fixed attitudes or traits. In addition, the assumption that there is one male pole and one female pole is problematic. A person may be described as male-poled in some respects (orientations or actions), female-poled in others and as hard to tell with others (most?).

7   To repeat, there is no automatic relationship between a certain biological (sex) equipment and the social construction of it. That this is not the case is evident if we consider cultural, class, racial, etc. variation but also in a specific social group a particular body is not accompanied by being an object of standardized social construction processes. Not all carriers of female bodies become secretaries, nurses or kindergarten teachers, become subordinated to men or are understood by others and/or see themselves as oriented towards relatedness, empathy and nurturance. There may be tendencies that a female body triggers processes of this nature, but a specific person, having a female body, may well depart strongly from this path and be encouraged by others to do so.

8   Psychoanalytic feminisms would see gender division of labour as only of indirect significance. They, as treated earlier, emphasize early childhood–parent (mother) interaction. Changes in division of labour would slowly affect and change early development. Our discussion here is more sociological and social psychological than psychoanalytic and we discuss the standpoint taken by the majority of students of gender.

9   Of course, some body-related differences remain and affect some experiences, e.g. about childbirth and menstruation. Sex-differences in these respects would probably lead to rather insignificant effects on knowledge, experiences and values in most respects, compared to the sex-similar experiences in education, work and other social areas.

10 In a developmental perspective, i.e. before the 50:50 representation of the two sexes is achieved (if ever), there still would be sex-different experiences and knowledge (if we accept that there are such) meaning that the second, qualitative part of the two goals of the gender quality policy would be relevant. In a

development perspective, the qualitative differences may be crucial to incorporate on an equal basis for a period, although they would be of diminishing importance to the extent that the quantitative goal comes closer to realization. The problem is that the more that diverging experiences, knowledge are seen as characterizing men and women, the stronger reason for considering these in various areas of everyday life and politics, but the less likelihood that equal representation in quantitative terms appears, as diverging experiences are an outcome of, at the same time as determinant of, gender division.

11   We don't say that such an orientation does exist although women may sometimes exhibit a slightly more democratic and relationship-oriented style. Of course, there are many ways of accounting for a specific female orientation or psychology. We are here discussing the possible linkages between a possible female leadership style and a set of experiences through which it may be developed.

12   A study of Canadian engineers indicated a mix of differences and similarities between men and women in terms of employment and career. The gender overlap was substantial, but females showing difference referred mainly to family-related considerations, e.g. the benefits of flexibility and/or possibility to work part-time motivated by domestic and child-care issues (Ranson, 2003).

13   The assumption is here that such development takes considerable time. One could perhaps imagine a fast-track version, where a few months at home with the baby, supervising a domestic helper or spending some hours per week doing housework would do, but the skills mentioned by Helgesen and other special contribution advocates call for considerable experience and also challenges in family work. Many modern men presumably have some experiences of the fast-track version of child-care and household work experiences.

Of course, an appreciation of any women-specific skills contingent upon child-rearing and family work may to some extent compensate for a lower degree of involvement on the labour market for some years. But it is likely that having been home with children, full- or part time, for several years will harm career possibilities. From the other angle, women with good career prospects are inclined to share child-rearing and family work with the husband and/or others (relatives, paid labour), thus there will be less of sex-specific development of skills and orientations. Realizing that there are exceptions, a strong connection of V-persons with children/family work will be the factor behind as well as an outcome of them moving ahead and attaining managerial positions to a significant lower degree than men.

14   To repeat, we are focusing here on what most students of gender see as the most significant aspect of gender relations, i.e. the relationship between the division of labour in the household and in paid labour (Chafetz, 1989; Coser, 1989, etc.). Other phenomena, such as early child-primary caregiver interaction, general sex stereotypes, etc. are not directly considered here. Arguably, many of these other phenomena are contingent upon – as well as influence – gender division of labour in paid work and at home. Also feminist psychoanalysts agree that changes in childrearing affect the psychosexual development (Chodorow, 1978). A shake-up of gender division of labour in organizations and at home would also affect early parent–child interaction (the P-parent would be more central) and neutralize general gender stereotypes and sex-role oriented socialization.

15 According to the researchers both male and female owners on the whole orga-
    nized their businesses in fairly feminine ways, possibly reflecting a contempo-
    rary de-masculinization of organization and management (Cliff et al., 2005).

16 The sceptical reader would perhaps argue that there was never the same con-
    cern about the more or less systematic prioritizing of males. This was never con-
    sidered to be a system of quota.

17 Some feminists outside organization studies draw upon critical theory, some-
    times partly critical (e.g. Fraser, 1987), sometimes more positively (Elshtain,
    1981; Benhabib and Cornwell, 1987). As mentioned earlier, the lack of interest
    in non-gender literature by many feminists is accompanied with a similar,
    if not even more profound, lack of interest in gender aspects by mainstream
    but also critical theory-oriented authors (Martin, 2003). Our purpose here,
    however, is not to discuss the latter, but reflect upon how gender studies may
    be developed.

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